

Tribute to working women's lives in print

Book and exhibition recall life inside famous old firm

By **GAVIN JONES**

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"THERE was a saying in West Brom, for a long, long time: If you didn't work at K&J, you knew someone that did." - Karen Radburn, former employee at Kenrick & Jefferson.

Proof, if it were needed, that there will be many, many West Bromwich folk who should find something of interest in a new arts project that has launched in the town.

OUTWORK is its name, and it tells the stories of women employed at the famous Kenrick and Jefferson print works which for so many years was a key feature of West Bromwich High Street.

Funded by Historic England's Everyday Heritage Grants, the project seeks to share the often-overlooked histories of women's work, at home as well as in the workplace.

Artist **Sophie Huckfield**, who is from Walsall and whose family have worked in industries across the



The former Kenrick & Jefferson office building on West Bromwich High Street

Black Country for generations, spent the last year interviewing women who worked at K&J, along with family members who have memories of their mothers, grandmothers, aunts and friends who worked there.

K&J was an expansive printing factory and office supply company that was established in 1883 and remained in business for more than a hundred years. It was one of the largest local employers in West Bromwich and the surrounding regions, employing generations of families, and the building which housed it remains an important landmark to local people today.

As part of the project, Sophie met women who had been employed in a variety of roles at K&J, and brought them together to discuss their experiences and stories of their time there.

Sophie's work has resulted in a book, which is now available as a free PDF from the website of Black Country-based community arts group Multistory, and an outdoor exhibition of images from the women's personal archives. It includes



K&J workers Patricia, Wendy, Caron, Janet and Nim at a collage workshop



Caron in the "tub" at K&J just before her wedding day

quotes from their interviews and the creative results of workshops they participated in, charting the history of their working lives.

"Whilst both men and women worked at K&J, the print works employed a large number of women in the factory, offices and as casualised 'outworkers' from home," Multi-

story's **Jess Piette** told the Bugle.

The outdoor exhibition is now on display on the hoardings opposite the former K&J building in West Bromwich High Street.

■ You can download a free PDF copy of the book from the website: www.multistory.org.uk

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