[00:00:00] **Interviewer:** Uh, OK this is The Community Brain's, um, industrial estates project. Um, today is the 30th, isn't it? Yes. The, the 30th of January, 2023. Um, I am with Helen Belttell-Higgins, is that right? Yeah. Um, uh, at her home in Ewell. Um, Helen is a former employee of the Gala Factory, um, on the industrial estate. Helen, do you mind, uh, just stating your name for the tape as well as your date and place of birth?

[00:00:32] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yes. I'm, um, Helen Bettell-Higgins, and I was born in Kingston on the ninth of the fourth, 1960.

[00:00:40] **Interviewer:** Lovely. Um, okay. So before we sort of get into the, the Gala side of things, um, I wonder if you could just talk a little bit about your background, um, your relationship to, to, to this area. Is, is this where you were brought up? Is this, is this home for you?

[00:00:54] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah, well, I was born in Kingston on the top of Kingston Hill in the Kingsnympton estate. [00:01:00] Um, so I lived there until, 1975 when we move 76, when we moved to new houses, moved my parents that were built on part of the old Kingstonian football ground. And I lived there until I married and came to New Malden, and then I've moved to here in Ewell.

[00:01:22] **Interviewer:** Uh, and what do you sort of associate with, with the area? Is it, is it, is it home for you? Is it

[00:01:27] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I've always, Kingston I. I've always lived and traveled to Kingston and around here in Ewell. It's the sort of place that you just feel think of as home, especially places like the river. My father worked in the power station and we used to walk along the river there, meet him from work and where I lived, backed onto Richmond Park and we used to go over to Richmond Park as kids climb over the wall into the park. And when I went to school in Kingston, we used to travel [00:02:00] cross country to the park. So. It is just all my memories are sort of tied up with the Kingston area more than here in Yu, which is really when I had the children. We moved here.

[00:02:13] **Interviewer:** And I wonder if you could just talk a little bit about, you know, in your time in the area, how have you seen it change over the years? I mean, how, what would you say the Kingston of now compares to the Kingston of, of, of your childhood?

[00:02:24] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Kingston now? Well, it's mainly, it's just so much more built up, much more traffic. The. , I mean like when I was a child and old Bentalls Centre I think is one of the things, it was much more of a proper department store. When you went in there, everything was really all Bentalls and now it's just like a conglomeration of shops. So it's become much more sprawling and whatever. And of course along the river where the power station dominated everything now the all the flats and housing. But I do feel the, the river between [00:03:00] Surbiton and Kingston has been greatly improved in recent years and it's a really lovely place to walk along. We often go on a Sunday and walk along there. So there's been good and bad as there is in most places, but I think the bad is mainly the same, bad as everywhere, which is too much traffic and too many shops.

[00:03:18] **Interviewer:** Yeah, sure, sure. Yeah. That, that, that walk is something, a walk. I do very regularly myself between Kingston and Surbiton and so I might, might, might see on the river one day.

[00:03:25] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah.

[00:03:26] **Interviewer:** Um, Yeah. So let's, uh, talk about, uh, Gala, Gala Cosmetics and, and how you came to, to work there. I mean, before you started working there, were you aware of its presence, the factory and, and its presence on the industrial estate?

[00:03:39] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** I was aware of it, not particularly, um, but I did know it was there and what it was. Um, when I left school I was just looking for a job. I was interested in science and, um, I'd applied for a couple of other ones. And that one came up at the Job Centre and it said they needed. You didn't have to have any qualifications, but you [00:04:00] know, and so I went along. I had absolutely no idea what a colour technician was, but I thought, well, you know, you're 16, you've gotta have a go at something. So I went along and had the interview. Um, they just had a chat. You had to do a colour blindness test to make sure that you weren't colour blind. And then they offered me the job straight away and I thought the money, which didn't, doesn't seem a lot now, £2,200 a year, I went home and said, perhaps I got it wrong. Perhaps it was only £1,200 because it seems so much money. I remember that because it was more than the other jobs I'd gone for. But, um, yeah, I, I felt at the time that I, you know, I was lucky to get a job so quickly when I left school, and it was a good place.

[00:04:43] **Interviewer:** Yeah. So, um, did you say you were, you were interested in the science side of things?

[00:04:48] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah, I was. I wa I was good at science at school, so I was looking to do science. I mean, the job didn't really involve science. Um, but it was in a laboratory base, so that was why the Job Centre sent me. You see. [00:05:00]

[00:05:00] **Interviewer:** Got you, got you. Yeah. I was gonna ask, so how did you, you, you, you became aware of the job through the Job Centre essentially?

[00:05:06] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah,

[00:05:06] **Interviewer:** Yeah. Mm-hmm. , yeah. Yeah. Um, yeah. And so was that full-time work five days a week or?

[00:05:10] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yes, yes. I worked full-time and it was, I didn't work in the factory. I worked in the laboratory design developing the colours for the brand managers so that when new colour, were asked for a new season, they would ask me to create the colours or another colour technician, and then when that was all finalised, it would go into production.

[00:05:31] **Interviewer:** Right.

[00:05:31] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** So I, it was sort of laboratory based, but not scientific .

[00:05:35] **Interviewer:** Sure. And, and where was the, the laboratory? Um, cuz I know Gala, I think they had a couple of sites.

[00:05:41] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah. It was on the, um, main site. That is on the actual A3 slip road.

[00:05:46] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:05:47] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Um, so that was like, it was on the second or third floor there and the, the main manufacturing was downstairs. The other site, which was around the back Jubilee way, I think it was, that mainly did. [00:06:00] Um, Medi Pack when we were there, which was medical swabbing and things like that because although it was Gala Cosmetics previously, it then became Smith and Nephew Cosmetics. Smith and Nephew is a medical company as well, so they brought in other things, which was before I started, I think.

[00:06:17] **Interviewer:** Yeah.

[00:06:18] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Or just after.

[00:06:19] **Interviewer:** Remind me what year it was that you, you started?

[00:06:21] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Uh, 1978.

[00:06:22] **Interviewer:** 1978. Okay. Um, and so you said you had no idea what a colour technician did . Um, uh, what did, what you, presumably you found out what does a colour technician do?

[00:06:33] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Um, you worked with the brand managers. And they would come to you and say, my, so for the spring collection, we are bringing out a collection of new green eyeshadows. So, and then they would bring you something, it could be somebody else's eyeshadow or it could be a paint swatch, or it could be a bit of clothing or something in a magazine. And they'd say, I want an eyeshadow that looks this colour. And then we would make them up in [00:07:00] a small batch using a, um, just a household coffee grinder. And you just put the pigments and the talc which, and, and mix it up there in just a set way and all to the colours that you put in until you got a colour that you thought would be right. And you'd go and see them and they'd change, say, oh no yellow or a bluer or whatever. And then you'd develop that with them. Um, we dealt with Miners, Mary Quant, Outdoor Girl mainly. And so each of those had set formulas that they could afford. So they would be different products, couldn't go into one or could go into another depending on costing. So you'd work within those parameters to produce something that the brand wanted. And then when that was done, you'd produce the formula to go to pilot testing, and then after pilot testing it would go into manufacture.

[00:07:52] **Interviewer:** Right. Okay. Yeah. Yeah, that's it. Uh, sorry. Just one, one minor thing. If we just, uh, if you can just avoid, uh, hitting your hand [00:08:00] on the thing. Yeah, it's just these mic, these mics pick up on that, so, um, yeah. But yeah, don't worry. It's not a, not a big thing. That's okay. Um, yeah, and, and, and did you enjoy that work?

[00:08:09] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Oh yeah. It was really great cuz at 16, makeup and things like that. And fashion was much more, you know, was really great. So, and also because we did that, we were allowed to develop what we wanted. So if you went and bought a new outfit, you can make your own makeup to match, which was always a good laugh. And yeah, it was. And I worked with another couple of girls who were same age as me, so, and it was interesting as well, we used to not just the eyes shadow, but nail polishes, lipsticks. And within the same lab there was a couple of other people who were chemists, who worked on the skincare ranges, so that was more scientific based. And, um, the people there, your managers were very nice and approachable, so it was a good place to work then it was much more friendly.

[00:08:53] **Interviewer:** How, how many would be in the lab?

[00:08:55] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Uh, about six,

[00:08:56] **Interviewer:** Right.

[00:08:56] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** In my end of the lab. And then there was a couple of other [00:09:00] research and development people, and then the pilot plant was adjacent as well, which was just one person, with a very big mixer.

[00:09:07] **Interviewer:** But in the, so in the Gala building of all, there'd be a lot more people.

[00:09:10] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Oh yes. Cuz you had all the um,

[00:09:11] **Interviewer:** Factory staff.

[00:09:12] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Factory staff. I don't know. I know there was a lot. I mean, we had. a large canteen and so that was often quite full of people. In fact, we had a canteen and a, a special silver service canteen where you could pay an extra 10 pence and have waitress service. So we used to do that for birthdays and things.

[00:09:32] **Interviewer:** Yeah. Very nice. Yeah. Yeah. Um, yes, but, so Yeah. But within the lab you've got a much sort of Tighter, tighter smaller team.

[00:09:37] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yes. There was only about six of us. Yeah.

[00:09:39] **Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah. So, but you say, you say you, you got on with your colleagues. Well, it was a, it was a good atmosphere among, among,

[00:09:44] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yes, it was yeah. Yeah, it was. Everybody got on well and there was never any reason not to, if you know what I mean. Everybody was very friendly.

[00:09:51] **Interviewer:** I mean, prior to working with these brand names, were you a consumer of them? Were you wearing this makeup already? And [00:10:00] so was it exciting for you to work with it?

[00:10:02] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah, yeah. It was really exciting because you know, and also your friends were like, oh, right, what you doing? You know, and you could bring them samples. Also, the staff shop would sell big bags of makeup that were either end of line for really cheap, so you could buy them and give them to your family and you know, give them to your friends and whatever. So they, they made it seem like a big family place to work.

[00:10:23] **Interviewer:** Yeah. I mean, in terms of, you know, wider society, was makeup becoming more popular around that time, do you think? Or had it already kind of Oh,

[00:10:31] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** I think makeup was always popular, but yes, I think makeup, it was seen as quite a, yeah, I think people had their favorite brands and like certain things. Every, as you say, every season they would, we would bring out new colours and new type of things, and they were developing new sorts of eyeshadow and new sorts of lipstick, and so I think it, it, yeah, within society it been was quite an important thing.

[00:10:58] **Interviewer:** And at the, [00:11:00] um, Gala site, did you, did you mix with people from other departments or were you very much sort of in your own lab world as it were?

[00:11:06] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** We were mainly in our own world. Yeah. Because, um, the hours were different. So, um, the factory staff started earlier, finished earlier, and then, um, you used to, so it was mainly just in us and then the brand managers you used to go and see, but you didn't really mix that much unless you had to go and see somebody. In the canteen, sometimes you'd have a word with people, but you didn't really know the people and I wasn't there that many years so,

[00:11:35] **Interviewer:** And how about the, the leadership? Was that Stanley picker around at this time

[00:11:39] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** or, I don't remember. No, I don't think so. I don't really see anybody. I only knew my manager really.

[00:11:44] **Interviewer:** Sure. Yeah. So you wouldn't have known about the Yeah. The people actually running the, the whole operation. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, we've also heard that Mary Quant visited herself, but I think, would that have been

[00:11:54] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** I think that was probably a bit before.

[00:11:56] **Interviewer:** Yeah. Yeah. That would've been 60 or sixties or early seventies.

[00:11:59] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah, I think [00:12:00] so.

[00:12:00] **Interviewer:** Yeah. Um, but yeah, I mean, I've interviewed a couple of other Gala workers and people who did work in the factory and, and the goodie bags, which I think you've alluded to there Yeah. Is, is like one of the first things that anyone mentions. Um, I, I think it was really, uh, exciting I think for people to get their hands on this stuff. For, for, for, for quite cheap, right?

[00:12:19] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yes. That's right. It was very cheap. Yeah. And at Christmas, after straight after Christmas, um, in the makeup industry, then Christmas was really big and they used to produce. What, um, like packages, like different makeup in a special bag or in a special, some of them were like, um, wicker work baskets and things. And so after Christmas, the ones that were left were sold off really cheap and people really enjoyed being able to buy those birth birthdays throughout the year or whatever. So,

[00:12:48] **Interviewer:** Did you have a particular favorite in terms of a brand or a product or anything?

[00:12:52] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Um, well, I was quite lucky because I worked in the laboratory. I just made my own with the best ingredients. But Mary Quant [00:13:00] did have the highest quality because they, it was a, a premium brand. So, um, with the makeup, the things that make it shiny and glittery are the most expensive.. And so they could afford those and Miners being the cheapest, couldn't really afford those. So Mary Quant was probably everybody's favorite.

[00:13:20] **Interviewer:** Yeah. Yeah. Um, and yeah. So, uh, was it 78 you said you started? Yeah. And, and, and when did the factory close?

[00:13:31] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** I was trying to work this out. I was, I think it's, it's not, I think it's about 82. Right. Okay. Okay. Because I think. . Yeah. I got married in 84 and I was definitely buying products then .

[00:13:43] **Interviewer:** Yeah. And, and, and you were there, uh, till the end?

[00:13:46] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah.

[00:13:46] **Interviewer:** Um, I mean, uh, when did you first get words that the, it was going to close?

[00:13:53] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** I think it must have been about nine months before that it last days. We were told I was one of the last to leave. There was [00:14:00] a small skeleton staff left. To do the marketing. The factory last days and I moved over to the small factory for about three months. I was also offered to go to, I think it was Bourmouth, with the company that took it over the makeup, which may have been, I can't quite remember if it was Revlon, but one of those. And um, so I could have gone there and become a colour matcher down there, but decided not to. So I was one of the last people out, but it was about nine months, I think, from when we were told to when I was actually made redundant.

[00:14:39] **Interviewer:** So the reason for the closure was that it would, uh, Gala essentially been bought out, is that right?

[00:14:43] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** I think Smith and Nephew being mainly medical, wanted to ditch the makeup side. Okay. And they kept the medical bits. So yes, the makeup side was sold off rather than bought out. I think.

[00:14:56] **Interviewer:** Yeah. Yep. Yep. So, um, those, the [00:15:00] tho those last few months, I mean, what do you remember about them? Was it was, it was, it was, was there a sad atmosphere around the place? Um, was there much activity going on? Because presumably you are all winding, winding down, essentially.

[00:15:11] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Well, the factory wound down and I think that was, yeah, I mean, one of the things was. When you start, when I started there and right up until it was closing, there was a free coach. You used to be able to, if you went to Surbiton at a certain time in the morning, you got free coach to the factory and home. But of course once there was so few people left, then you had to get your own way there. So that was it. Every, a bit of a bug bear with everybody having to walk up the, from the Broadway to the factory every day. So yeah, I think for those of us that were young and didn't really have any ties. It wasn't so bad. We got quite a nice redundancy package and I think, although it was sad, we weren't too worried, but of course, those people that had families or older, it was [00:16:00] quite stressful. Some people did go down to the coast and work at, um, the other, the new company.

[00:16:08] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:16:09] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Which I did keep in touch with for a little while, and they seemed to settle in okay there. But overall it wasn't people didn't seem to be too upset. I think maybe at that time, jobs weren't so hard to get.

[00:16:20] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm. , um, I mean where, where, where were you living at this time?

[00:16:24] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Uh, I was living at, um, just off the Richmond Road in Kingston.

[00:16:29] **Interviewer:** Uh, yes. Yes, yes. Yeah. Yeah. So the, yeah, I guess that's a, that's a, that's a reasonable commute. Uh, yes.

[00:16:34] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yes. , get the 65 bus to Surbiton and then catch the works coach. And the other way you'd have to , I can't remember how I got there once you, yeah. 65 to Hook and then walk down from there.

[00:16:48] **Interviewer:** And you said you were one of the, the la the last to leave

[00:16:51] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Mm-hmm. .

[00:16:51] **Interviewer:** Um, do you, do you remember the, the final day? Do you

[00:16:54] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** No, I don't really, I, I don't remember the final day, which seems strange, but just,

[00:16:59] **Interviewer:** Yeah.

[00:16:59] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** I think [00:17:00] everybody just sort of drifted off and it was just,

[00:17:02] **Interviewer:** Sure. Yeah. You just have in your head this image of someone switching the lights

[00:17:05] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah. Know. Yeah. Last person.

[00:17:07] **Interviewer:** Yeah. Um, and, and how about yourself, uh, after that, where, what did you go on to do? Did you stay in that, in that industry, in that world, or did you go off and do something else inside?

[00:17:18] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Well, that's when I, um, got the job at Vine Products and White Ways, which is the produced Sherry and British wine in Kingston and I worked in the laboratory there testing the wine and um, so it was in a laboratory again, but not, but again, a sort of niche, odd sort of job and. That last days and I was made redundant again, hopeful.

[00:17:43] **Interviewer:** Hopefully it's,

[00:17:43] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** I enjoyed working there as well. .

[00:17:45] **Interviewer:** Yeah. Yeah. And I'm sure it's a, I'm sure it's nothing, not your fault, that both these places last days.

[00:17:50] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Both my schools last days and were built with houses. So I've got this thing about everything. Yeah, . But where, where I've just given up there. Still there.

[00:17:58] **Interviewer:** and, and your later [00:18:00] career, did you stay in the sort of testing world and,

[00:18:02] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Well, when I , when I left Vine Products and White Ways, I was made redundant, but at that time I just had my first child and I wasn't gonna go back to work anyway. So that worked out fine and um, I got, so that was great. And then once the children bit older, I did, worked in a couple of shops, which was like C&As in Kingston, that last days, and Boots. Um, then I worked, I got a job at Nonsuch High School for Girls.

[00:18:27] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:18:28] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Which, um, I've worked in. Since 2001. Um, I worked there in the canteen and then transferred over into an office job. So that, so that's all I've done. Yeah. Yeah. So, yeah. So yeah, the science bit took a .

[00:18:45] **Interviewer:** Yes. Um, I actually meant to, meant to ask about your time, uh, your time there. The, the canteen is something that a few people have mentioned as having some, some good food. Was the, was the food generally good there?

[00:18:56] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah, the food was really good. It was really reasonably priced and [00:19:00] as I said, they had the, the separate one where you could have a waitress, um, for, and the managers used to eat there as well, so that, you know, it was very inclusive and they used to do, they used to invite people in to sell things like, um, a company that would sell books or pictures or crafts or things. So there was usually something going on as well quite often. And people used to use it as a gathering place for friends and whatever. And you'd meet up for lunch and cuz because of where it was, it wasn't easy to get anywhere else at lunch times, so everybody did stay on site except for once a week they laid on a coach to take you to Tolworth Broadway to go and get your money out of the bank.

[00:19:38] **Interviewer:** Oh, right.

[00:19:38] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Which was the incentive when they, I mean, they always paid into the bank when I was there, but I think previously where it'd gone from cash to being paid into the bank, the incentive was that they would lay on a coach once a week so people could get, so once a week you could get the coach into Tolworth Broadway to the bank to get your money out and come back on the coach.

[00:19:57] **Interviewer:** And so, so ev everyone would sort of go en mass to [00:20:00] collect their earnings.

[00:20:00] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah. More or less. I think it was, I think it was only once a week. It may have been more, it might have been one for the office staff and different, one for the, because. The, um, coaches for the factory. There was lots of coaches and they came from much further afield. The office coach only came from Surbiton, but the, um, factory coaches came from much further into London. I think they came as far as Brixton and whatever they used to pe bring people in. So they may have had, uh, other coaches for lunchtimes.

[00:20:28] **Interviewer:** Was there much of a, a social element between you and your colleagues? You mentioned there were a couple of girls that were your age. Would you, would you, would you socialize with them outside of work or, or was it

[00:20:36] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah, we, we, I used to go out the pictures of cinema or whatever, and then when they had a boyfriend and I had a boyfriend, we'd all go out together. And then they, the, at the second, the smaller site, there was a social club. So they used to put on discos and things like that, that people used to, you know, was, was quite nice. So you'd meet up with other people there, canteen, pe, you know, people from the factory floor. And so that was, everybody used to go to those.

[00:20:58] **Interviewer:** So that was a social club within the Gala? [00:21:00] Yeah. Mm-hmm. building, right?

[00:21:01] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah.

[00:21:01] **Interviewer:** Okay. Oh right, that's the first, first, first time actually. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[00:21:05] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** They had a social,

[00:21:06] **Interviewer:** Yeah. And what was that open every day and you could just pop in.

[00:21:09] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** I think it was open in the evenings every day. I'm not sure, cuz I not living right on the doorstep. You know, I hadn't been there so many years. It wasn't something I did so often, but, um, I do remember going there for the odd disco or event, so, yeah.

[00:21:24] **Interviewer:** Yeah, yeah. And you know, this project is looking at. Not just Gala, but the wider industrial estate.

[00:21:31] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Right.

[00:21:31] **Interviewer:** And Davis Road and Cox Lane and all of these places. And one of the reasons we wanna look at it is cuz we think it's, you know, you get a real interesting diversity of activity going on in these places, you know, from, uh, from medical stuff to engineering to, you know, now it's cloud computing and whatnot. But I think there's a sense that a lot of these companies aren't really aware. Each other and Right. Yeah. And, um, I mean, when you were working gala, did you know about any of the other [00:22:00] companies on the estate? Were you, were you aware, were, did you feel like you were part of the estate or did you just feel like you were accompanied by, by yourself?

[00:22:06] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** I think we just went into work. Yeah. You know what I mean? I, I don't think it had that much to do with the wider estate again, because you didn't really walk around the estate. It was just, and I, I must admit, my memories of the estate, , I know so much about it cuz my sister lives just up the road from there, I go through that estate a lot. I wouldn't be able to pinpoint what, what I remember from then and how I remember it from now. And my son worked, uh, a little factory there a few years ago. So, yeah, I, I'm aware of the estate quite a lot, but I don't remember how much I moved around there at the time.

[00:22:40] **Interviewer:** Who did your son work for? Out of interest?

[00:22:42] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** He just worked for a little company called Flooring Sales. Sorry. That's now moved into Epsom just for a Ah, right.

[00:22:47] **Interviewer:** Okay. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, no. Yeah. We're trying to sort of, yeah, piece together a picture of the estate over the years and the businesses that have come and gone, so, yeah. No, it's just interesting to know. I know there was. A pub there called the [00:23:00] Port of Call.

[00:23:00] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Oh yeah. That's now the Tescos.

[00:23:01] **Interviewer:** That's right. Yeah. Did you ever, ever frequent there?

[00:23:03] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Um, yeah, a couple of times, but it wasn't that regular, but I have been in there a few times.

[00:23:08] **Interviewer:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah. What was it, what was it like as a pub? Do you remember? It was

[00:23:12] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Fairly Ordinary. Yeah. Just, yeah, I don't remember anything specific about it. Yeah. As I say, it was only 16 then, so it wasn't supposed to be in there with everybody for that long.

[00:23:25] **Interviewer:** Yeah. Um, and you've very, uh, kindly, uh, dug out some old, some some items. Uh, do, do you mind sort of if we, if we just sort of look through them and, and talk through them a little bit? Um, yeah, if you don't mind bringing them over. [00:24:00] So, uh, why don't we start with the radio. Uh, where, where does the radio come from and, and what's the story behind that?

[00:24:08] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** The, the Mary Quant radio was of, um, a sort of gift or you, I, I'm not quite sure whether it was a promotional gift or you could buy them, but I got it from the staff shop when they were selling them off and it was like, it's made to look like a Mary Quant lipstick and it was just a novelty. I think novelty radios and things like that were quite popular in those days, , because radios were very popular, unlike now where you sort of listen to streaming and whatever.

[00:24:33] **Interviewer:** Yeah. And it's an AM/FM radio, is it?

[00:24:35] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** It is, yeah.

[00:24:36] **Interviewer:** Yeah. , yeah. Yeah. And still working?

[00:24:39] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Well, I did try a battery in it. It did make a crackling noise, but that's about all it did. Yeah. . And I don't think I ever used it as a radio to be sure, and it just seemed they, they were so cheap when they sold things off, it seemed like something you couldn't really Yeah. Pass up.

[00:24:53] **Interviewer:** Well, yeah, if you, if you, if you loan that to us, we'll see if we can get it going maybe, but, um, but yeah. Yeah. Brilliant. Um, and yeah, some of these, some of these [00:25:00] little boxes, uh, why don't you talk us through what, what you got here,

[00:25:02] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** These, um, the different eyeshadow, these are all eyeshadow boxes.

[00:25:05] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:25:06] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** And, um, they were, Each one had different boxes that they would put their eyeshadows in and their products with their logo on, and you'd have ones for blushes and eyeshadows, um, whatever. And that would be the way they marketed their, um, these were all over about the 19, beginning of 1980, apart from the Mary Quant face powder, which was, is a much older style, one of the more original. colour schemes.

[00:25:35] **Interviewer:** Yeah. So, so the eyeshadow is Mary Quant as well as it?

[00:25:37] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah, that's Mary Quant That's, uh, 1980s. Yeah, but that's, I have found that in a, a cupboard so when we were clearing out right at the factory,

[00:25:47] **Interviewer:** I see. I see. So, yeah, so, so this wasn't from your time at the factory?

[00:25:50] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** No, no.

[00:25:51] **Interviewer:** It was just something you found? Um, yeah. Sort of lying around. Yeah. I mean, yeah. It's very, it's very evocative. The old, the old design, isn't it?

[00:25:57] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah. That's very much Mary Quant of her [00:26:00] original time.

[00:26:00] **Interviewer:** Yeah. Guaranteed. Pure. Was that the sort of strap line ? Yeah. Yeah. Interesting

[00:26:05] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Special recipe. Yeah, the special recipe was,

[00:26:08] **Interviewer:** And uh, and are these all eye shadows? Are they,

[00:26:11] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Um, um, that's a blusher. You can't tell cause they've got no labels on, cause

[00:26:14] **Interviewer:** uhhuh

[00:26:15] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Mainly, they're. The just spare boxes that I had.

[00:26:18] **Interviewer:** Yeah.

[00:26:19] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** And that was a blusher. And then those are all eyeshadows.

[00:26:22] **Interviewer:** Yeah. And the, is this a, is this a ring?

[00:26:24] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** This is a, uh, again, it's an older Mary Quant item that I found in the cupboard. And it's a, a very seventies or sixties ring that you can lift the flap and it would have had, um, cream perfume in it so you could put it on.

[00:26:40] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** But this one had obviously never been used, butit was in the cupboard.

[00:26:43] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm.

[00:26:44] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** And I thought, oh, it's something worth picking up when the factory last days and we were clearing everything out.

[00:26:49] **Interviewer:** Yeah. I mean, when the factory did was was there sort of. , is it a sort of free for all for people to grab any, um, any any items they, they could or, yeah,

[00:26:57] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** I think if once everything had been [00:27:00] taken out, it was just a whole load of stuff, just sort of load of rubbish. And we were sort of sort, especially because it was going down to some stuff was going down to the other new place, so you were sorting out stuff and then anything that was left, if you wanted it, you could take it, you know?

[00:27:16] **Interviewer:** And then we've got some paperwork and some literature. I think we've got the, your letter of employment.

[00:27:20] **Interviewer:** Is that right? Or?

[00:27:21] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** That's right. Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

[00:27:22] **Interviewer:** So, um, yeah.

[00:27:24] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** And the contract there as well.

[00:27:26] **Interviewer:** So the, what's the date on the, on the letter?

[00:27:28] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Um, the 10th of August, 1978 was when they sent the letter.

[00:27:35] **Interviewer:** and that's just, that's confirming your, your wage and

[00:27:38] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah. And then it said it would be 37 and a half hours per week from nine till five 15, Monday to Friday, and to start on the 29th of August, 1978.

[00:27:48] **Interviewer:** Yeah. Incredible.

[00:27:49] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Mm-hmm.

[00:27:50] **Interviewer:** Um, yes. Excellent, excellent filing to keep, to keep hold of that as well. . And who, who is the letter signed by out of interest? Is it, is it, oh, yeah. Is is it signed by the [00:28:00] chief exec or

[00:28:01] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** No, just by the recruitment office. Uhhuh . Denise Etheridge.

[00:28:04] **Interviewer:** Okay. Okay.

[00:28:05] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** So that was all, yeah.

[00:28:06] **Interviewer:** Interesting. Um, did you, did you have an interview by the way or was it

[00:28:10] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yes, I did have an interview, yes. Yeah, with, um, just. Um, if you see in this the, um, girl guide annual, there's a chap called Dr. Juliette, and he was the, the overarching manager of the, um, laboratory and research side. So, um, the director of that. So I had an interview with him and my immediate manager and, um, It was just a very short interview. You know, like 20 minutes in those days. so much easier. Yes. And then, yeah, as I said, we just had a quick interview. Do your colour blindness test and uh, then if that was okay, they seemed to like me, so they said I could start.

[00:28:49] **Interviewer:** It's, uh, it's interesting that they give you a colour blindness test. You'd have thought if you were colourblind, you wouldn't be applying for the job of colour technician . Well, they said this, but I guess maybe people, some, sometimes people aren't aware.

[00:28:58] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah, you aren't aware and [00:29:00] it can be very mild.

[00:29:01] **Interviewer:** Mm-hmm. .

[00:29:01] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** So they had to check that, um, you had good colour vision rather than, you might not be totally colourblind, but you had to have better colour vision than just a, you know, not average, but average colour vision, but,

[00:29:14] **Interviewer:** Below average. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. That makes sense. That makes sense. Yep. Um, and then we've got, um, a book which, uh, excitingly features your, your image. Um, so what, what, what is the, what is the book? Is it a Gala promotional thing?

[00:29:27] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** No, no, no. This is the Girl Guide Annual 1982. Ah, so this was the Official Girl Guide Annual. They came, um, journalists from the Girl Guide came and interviewed us, us on absolutely no notice, which is why I hadn't even brushed my hair. And, um, we had to set up a little display and they came and took notes and spoke to Dr. Juliette May mainly, and they were, as we were saying about the makeup of, you know, this was of great interest to, to that age teenagers then, you know, Girl Guides and whatever they fax. [00:30:00] So there's, um, four pages of, um, four pages of, uh, about the manufacturing process and the, the factory and how it's made.

[00:30:13] **Interviewer:** Sure. So, so, so did they interview you or did they just take a photograph or, uh,

[00:30:17] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah, they did. They quote me in there.

[00:30:18] **Interviewer:** They quote, I'm . Yeah, yeah, yeah. How interested. So, so, so essentially they, they, you were a Girl Guide and they were just into

[00:30:26] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** No, no, I wasn't, no.

[00:30:27] **Interviewer:** Oh, right. Okay.

[00:30:28] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** They, they were just the annual obviously do lots of. Like you are doing now?

[00:30:32] **Interviewer:** Yes.

[00:30:32] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** They, you know, they, they find things that they think their, their Guides will be interested in and they go around and put them together to make a yearly annual

[00:30:40] **Interviewer:** I see.

[00:30:41] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** On things that they're in, you know, they think their readership will be interested in. And that was one that year.

[00:30:46] **Interviewer:** I see. Yeah. Yeah, yeah. They just calculated that, that, that young girls would be interested in in makeup. In makeup and the, and the production of it. Yeah. Yeah. Oh, fascinating. Yeah. Um, excellent. Well, I think that covers most of the, the, the [00:31:00] things that I want to talk about. I mean, are there any other memories or things you remember about the Gala times that, that you, you don't think you've mentioned?

[00:31:08] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Uh, no, I don't think so. As I said, I wasn't there that long really. So it was just, I think the difference between, Then and now was that everywhere had that much more of a family orientated feeling. You did get that feeling. It did feel like a big family that you were, you were interested in. Like you would go to the social club and you know, you were interested in other people's lives. Like your manager, you felt like you'd go and just chat about your life. You know, it wasn't all work. You'd just go in and have a chat and you know, even like some of them. Um, one of the younger managers, you'd go and talk about your boyfriend trouble or whatever, and it would, you know, they'd give you advice or not, or whatever.

[00:31:47] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** And y yeah, it was a very friendly place.

[00:31:51] **Interviewer:** Were your managers then to be men or women, or, or, or Mixture?

[00:31:54] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** The ma my managers were men. Yeah. Yeah. And I think, . That probably was the way

[00:31:59] **Interviewer:** and [00:32:00] uh, yeah, you just, you just reminded me actually. Were there things like Christmas parties and sort of companies

[00:32:05] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah.

[00:32:05] **Interviewer:** Social sort of things that happened on a regular basis?

[00:32:08] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** Yeah. There was Christmas parties at the social club and whatever, so they went on and then, I don't remember when it, but there were other parties and you, I think you could hire the social club for your own sort of events if you wanted to hire it. But, uh, but. Yeah. So yeah, you did feel that everybody was more friendly.

[00:32:28] **Interviewer:** And did you say in those days, and did you stay in touch with anybody from, from

[00:32:31] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** I did for a few years. Some of the ones that went down to, um, the coast with the other company, the, the chap that run the pilot plant and the manager. and um, we'd exchanged Christmas cards with little updates and when they got married and had kids. And when you Right. But then you know what it is, like gradually one year you forget and then . Yeah, that's that .

[00:32:54] **Interviewer:** Yeah. Yeah. But that, that was the sort of medical side of things that moved down to Bourmouth. Is that No, no, no.

[00:32:59] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** It was the [00:33:00] makeup. Uh, was the makeup. Makeup, right. Makeup, yeah. I dunno whether the medical moved in the end.

[00:33:04] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** I know Smith and Nephew have a place in Hull.

[00:33:07] **Interviewer:** Right.

[00:33:07] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** So cuz , when I went to see my son, oh look, Smith and Nephew's there, so I think that may have all moved to there. Yeah.

[00:33:14] **Interviewer:** Yeah. Great. Well, um, yeah, if, if, if there's nothing else, Helen, um, yeah. Thank you. Mm-hmm. , thank you so much for your time.

[00:33:19] **Helen Bettell-Higgins:** That's okay.

[00:33:20] **Interviewer:** Lovely.