

Memories of Escrick Laundry by Irene Burton

Mabel Irene Hampshire, Irene to her friends and family left school in 1943 aged 14.

'I was lucky to leave that year' Irene recalls as it was around the time that the leaving age was raised to 15. (In 1944, Rab Butler introduced the Education Act 1944, which raised the school leaving age to 15.)

From a financial point of view the Laundry was the best option. To go to work in York would have meant paying bus fares. Some girls from Riccall used to get the train direct to Rowntree's, but for me to go there I would have needed to get to Escrick station for the train and then wouldn't have got home until late.

I did have a chance to work for Ricky Richardson. It would though have been 'in service' and living in but I thought I would be 'tied', so decided working for the laundry was a better option.

In 1943, 2 years before the end of the war, I began work at the Laundry working from 8am until 6pm with an hour for lunch Monday to Friday. I can't remember how much I earned but recalls that 2 weeks work paid for my holiday each year.

The laundry was at the Hall and next to the fire station. There was a row of Poplar trees nearby.

At the time I was living in Deighton next door to Streetly's and would ride to work with Dorothy on our bikes. I remember Dorothy's mother (Mary?) going to the Empire, having bought a new alarm clock. Embarrassingly the alarm went off during the show, not unlike today's mobile phones!

I also remember having to have a white overall for work and it had to be paid for out of my own money. Around the same time I paid £3 for a bike from Sylvia Dennis's mother so I could ride to work, a bike which I had until I was 18, when I bought a bike from Benson's Bike Shop in Goodramgate and paid weekly for it.

I remember the following people working at the Laundry when I started, 18 in total

Manager Miss Greenwood
She always looked smart with either a pink or blue linen dress with a brooch on it. Latterly she lived in the Laundry cottage which is where my Aunt Betty Drury and her husband Len were living in 1977 when Betty died.

Men Frank Gledhill Fred Odgers Don Hampshire Little Jimmy Powell

Women Rose Rochester
Sadie,
Barbara White
Kath Wood,
Dorothy Streetly who lived in Deighton next door to me
Mrs Powell and daughter
Nancy Powell, her son little Jimmy also worked there
Rose Storr
Madge Golton
Edie Storr
Celia Dixon
Nora Cooper, whose brother played the church organ

I remember a very small room to hang your coats, 2 toilets and a room where you could eat the dinner you had brought with you.

It was the men who went in the van to pick up and deliver the laundry. In addition, Fred Odgers and Frank Gledhill worked in the wash house. The driver went around local villages as well as to York hotels.

When the washing arrived everything from one village was kept together. It was my job to mark each piece with an ink pen and price it. This information went in the cash books, then in the office so they could calculate the cost of each order.

There was one big room which housed the washer, calender*, press and irons. In a separate area was the sorting room and the packing room.

The laundry was sorted into piles such as bedding sheets, towels, pillowcases, overalls, shirts etc then put into the washer.

From there they went into trolleys and the large items like sheets were fed through the Calender which was really big and by the time they came out they were dry and sort of pressed. From there they went into the packing room where the numbers were checked and all the same number placed together in pigeon holes with other items of same number.

It was at this stage that the laundry was checked against the book that had returned from the office to ensure everything was there from the same order.

Items such as shirts would go on the Press, (Rose Rochester worked on the Press) then to one of the 4 ironers to finish off.

We did the RAF laundry from Riccall. There would be socks, shirt and underpants wrapped in their towel. I don't think we ironed their shirts though.

The laundry was returned to customers in their own containers or we wrapped them in brown paper.

When the school eventually opened we used to do laundry for them as well. I can remember doing the Watson's, they lived in a flat at the hall before the school moved in.

I remember once I had to go out in the laundry van with 'our' Don and he let me have a go at driving down Naburn Lane. A cyclist came other way and I panicked! I did though later pass my driving test!

Overalls could be very dirty but they got washed more rigorously. My future sister in law lost her son through a similar situation. They had a laundry in Leicestershire and had dirty overalls to wash. Unknown to Gordon, her son, there was some sort of spirit on the overalls which ignited when they were washed and he suffered severe burns from which he subsequently died.

I didn't get paid much money at the laundry. When we wanted a holiday, we had to stay with someone we knew. My brother Don Hampshire, who'd worked at Laundry, was stationed in Essex and I went to stay with his girlfriend Betty Frost at Southend on Sea. She'd meet me at Kings Cross and we'd get another train to Southend on Sea. Her father was a fisherman. She came to York and stayed with us as well.

I seem to remember once getting a huge bonus at Christmas, £5 rings a bell but in today's money that would be equivalent to £350. If it was £5 it shows how generous they could be.

When I got married I left the laundry as I was going to live in Huntington Road, York. At that time when you got married, you left work and had a family.

**A calender is a series of hard pressure rollers used to finish or smooth*