



Recording Work Memories: the 60 Voices Project

Interviewee: Janice Wood

In 1967, Janice was unemployed and looking for work. On a visit to the Salford Labour Exchange, she was recommended to apply for the Civil Service. She then attended an interview in Manchester which she subsequently passed. Janice was then allocated to the Department of Employment and Productivity.

Janice entered the Civil Service at Clerical Officer grade and was assigned to the benefits section of the Aytoun Street Employment Exchange in Manchester. Her first job was in taking and recording the details of claimants before moving on to rating and calculating the benefits claims. Janice worked at the Manchester office until she left the civil service in 1970.

Upon leaving the Civil Service, Janice worked as a cashier/sales assistant in an electricity showroom in Manchester. Whilst working there, she heard of the large pay increases awarded to Civil Servants. As a result of the pay increases, she decided to rejoin the Civil Service, which provided her with much better working conditions and career prospects. She subsequently rejoined the former staff team at the Aytoun Street office in 1972, resuming her duties in rating benefits claims.

Later in the year, Janice moved house from Manchester to a smaller office in Royton. By moving to a smaller office, Janice found her duties were less compartmentalised, so she expanded her experience and knowledge as she was working. She did this across all facets of the work carried out by the Manpower Services Commission Office. This included rating benefits claims, overlooking weekly benefits, interviewing jobseekers, issuing travel warrants, issuing 12-month British Visitor Passports, and checking documents for Full British Passports. She was also the cashier.

During Janice's time at Royton the Employment Act was revised, covering The Equal Pay Act, Employment Rights Act, The Equality Act, Employment Protection Act and Employment Rights Act. Janice found a great deal of satisfaction working at Royton, as she enjoyed the challenges faced via the different aspects of her work. Also, with Royton being a small town, she got to know the individual claimants and members of their families quite well. It felt to Janice, a tight knit friendly environment.

In 1975, the Royton Manpower Services Commission Office was split into two sections, with Benefits one side and Employment on the other. With this change, Janice now dealt solely with Employment. Royton also covered the Shaw office, which Janice would attend once a week, primarily to check the employment details of claimants.

By 1976, the office now was closed and relocated to a new site. The office has now become a Job Centre, the smallest in England. This change expanded Janice's duties. She began to type out the job vacancies for display in the window of the Job Centre. She also began arranging training for jobseekers, whilst continuing with the many roles she had before.

Looking to advance and develop her knowledge, Janice began to look for openings at other Job Centres and later in the year she moved up to a temporary Executive Officer position at the Denton office in Greater Manchester, this was on a temporary work experience program. Two years later in 1978, Janice joined the Birmingham Office as a Visiting Executive Officer.

The office expanded her experience further, as she was involved in the Youth Opportunities Programme by the setting up of Work Experience Schemes for 16–18-year-olds, dealing with Job Creation, Job Training Programmes and Workplace Experience Courses. During her time in Birmingham, she was interviewed by the Shortages Panel Board for positions in London, the South East and Sheffield. She passed the interview and applied for a move to the Department of Employment headquarters in London and the South East.

Janice joined the team in Watford in 1984 as a Higher Executive Officer. She was engaged in surveys dealing with statistics and calculating the number of people employed across different areas of the UK. With her experience based on working extensively with jobseekers and their issues, statistics-based work was not playing to her strengths as she was primarily more of a people person. Therefore, she began to look for work that was more people orientated.

In 1987, Janice moved from Watford and joined the Runcorn staff team, in the Department of Employment headquarters, working in the Staff Salaries section. Working within this section required Janice to attend frequent meetings at the Treasury in London. She worked there until retirement in 1998.

Throughout her career in the Civil Service, Janice had many stories. The funniest of them all being during her time at the old Royton Manpower Services Commission before the relocation to the new Job Centre. Along with another member of staff, Janice was detailed to sort out and organise the stationary cupboard prior to the move. During the task, they found stationery dating back to the Second World War, but the greatest find was a sealed envelope dating from the war. On the front of the envelope read the words: "ONLY TO BE OPENED IN A STATE OF EMERGENCY". Curiosity got the better of them and they opened the envelope. The envelope revealed a sheet of paper. On it was written: "All unemployed citizens must be called in to clear snow from the road".

Janice retired in 1998 due to ill health. Since retiring she has spent time with her family, reading and walking the family's various pet dogs. She is also an active member of the Women's Institute and is involved in the CRSF Phone Buddy Scheme.

Janice felt she could make a difference to jobseekers, matching them up to job vacancies and arranging their interviews. This is what gave her the most job satisfaction whilst working for the Department of Employment.

Janice says to look back on your career at the things you enjoyed rather than the things you didn't.