

Flame Keepers: life and work at the Ronson lighter factory

Newport, Isle of Wight, 1961 to 1984

Big question: Why was the Ronson factory in Newport so successful, and why did it close?

This pack was produced by the Flame Keepers project to help Island children understand how people worked in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, through the voices of people who were there. It supports the local history study that every Key Stage 2 pupil completes, using a factory where hundreds of Islanders once worked but which has almost vanished from local memory. It is built on the recorded memories of five women who worked there: Patricia Kennedy, Sue Tout, Gillian Cocker, Julie Cocker and Sheree Ash.

It is best suited to Years 5 and 6, with notes for adapting activities for Years 3 and 4.



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About this pack

For more than 20 years, hundreds of Islanders, most of them women, worked at the Ronson factory on Forest Road, Newport. Today few people on the Island know it existed. In 2026 the Flame Keepers project recorded former workers talking about their lives there. This pack uses their voices, photographs lent by former workers and their families, old newspaper reports and a debate in Parliament to help pupils find out about it.

What's inside

- A plan for five sessions, background notes, a timeline, a map and curriculum links
- Short introductions to the five women whose memories are used
- A vocabulary sheet
- Ten historic images with questions
- Fifteen short audio clips, with start and end times, to play from the Flame Keepers website
- Five activities with printable sheets, and a teacher guide for Activity 4

Which year groups?

Activities 1 to 4 work across Key Stage 2. Each has a short note for Years 3 and 4. Activity 5, on why the factory closed, is written for Years 5 and 6. The Activity 3 maths challenge is for Years 5 and 6, with a Year 6 ratio question.

Before you teach

- The factory made cigarette lighters, and smoking at work was normal then. The pack treats this as “then and now”: no image shows smoking.
- The full interviews on the website were recorded for adults and are unedited. Please listen to each clip before playing it, and stop at the end time shown.
- Pupils must never handle real lighters. Activity 3 uses paper models.

Inclusion and SEND

The pack is designed to be easy to adapt:

- The PDF works with screen readers, every image has a text description, the font was chosen for readability, and all sheets enlarge to A3.
- The pack prints the key words from every clip, and full transcripts are on the website, so pupils can read along or use the words instead of the audio.
- Activities 1 to 4 each have a simpler version for Years 3 and 4, which also suits pupils who need a lighter load.
- In Activity 3, pupils who find small movements hard can be the inspector or timekeeper.

You might also pre-teach a few vocabulary words with pictures, offer sentence starters, talk partners or drawing instead of writing, use fewer images or clips, and prepare pupils for the timed rounds in Activity 3, which can be noisy. We'd welcome advice from teachers and SENCos through the feedback form.

Printing and adapting

You may print, copy and share this pack freely for non-commercial teaching, with credit (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). Discover More CIC also gives you permission to adapt the activity sheets for your own pupils, for example by enlarging them or simplifying the wording. Please don't publish or share adapted versions, and don't change the interview extracts or photographs. All sheets enlarge well to A3.

Curriculum links

Quoted from the national curriculum in England (2014), the statutory curriculum at the time of writing (October 2026). A revised curriculum is due for first teaching from September 2028. Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

Subject	Programme of study	Where in this pack
History KS2 (statutory)	“a local history study”, for example “a study of an aspect of history ... that is significant in the locality” (non-statutory example)	The whole pack
History KS2 (statutory)	“a study of an aspect or theme in British history that extends pupils’ chronological knowledge beyond 1066”, for example changes in work, leisure and entertainment in the 20th century	Timeline, Activities 3 and 4
History KS2	Pupils “should understand how our knowledge of the past is constructed from a range of sources”	Images, clips, Activities 1, 2 and 5
History aims	“continuity and change, cause and consequence, similarity, difference and significance”	Activities 4 and 5
English, spoken language (Years 1 to 6, statutory)	“ask relevant questions to extend their understanding and knowledge”; “participate in discussions, presentations, performances, role play, improvisations and debates”	Clips, Activity 2, Activity 4 extension
Mathematics, Year 6 ratio and proportion (statutory)	“solve problems involving the relative sizes of two quantities where missing values can be found by using integer multiplication and division facts”	Activity 3 maths, question 1
Geography KS2 (statutory)	“human geography, including: types of settlement and land use, economic activity including trade links ...”	Map, background, Activity 5 (cards E and F)
Design and technology KS2 (statutory)	“understand how key events and individuals in design and technology have helped shape the world”	Supporting link only: Activity 3 (how a production line works)
PSHE and citizenship (non-statutory now)	Jobs and work, challenging stereotypes, community, and including people with disabilities. Citizenship is due to become statutory in primary schools under the revised curriculum.	Clips, Activity 4

Planning the unit

Each session also works on its own. Times are a guide.

#	Session	Learning objective	Resources	Quick check
1	What was Ronson? Looking at photographs Years 3 to 6 60 min	Pupils can tell the difference between something they can see in a photograph and something they think about it.	Map, background, Images 1 to 10 (projected), Activity 1	Each pupil gives one “I can see” and one “I think... because” about an image.
2	Voices from the factory: oral history as evidence Years 3 to 6 45 to 60 min	Pupils can explain one thing a memory tells us that a photograph or newspaper might not.	Meet the voices, clips (played from flamekeepers.uk), Activity 2, clip 15	Pupils name a detail they could check in another source, and something the speaker’s memory helps us understand.
3	Working on the line Years 3 to 6 (maths: 5 to 6) 45 min	Pupils can describe how a production line works and suggest more than one reason why output changed.	Activity 3, card, stickers, timer, clips 4, 6 and 14	Pupils give two possible reasons for the change between rounds, including practice.
4	Then and now Years 3 to 6 45 min	Pupils can identify one change and one thing that has stayed the same in working life.	Activity 4 and its teacher guide, clips 1, 5, 9 and 10	Each pupil completes at least two rows and explains one choice.
5	Why did the factory close? Years 5 to 6 60 min	Pupils can tell a possible cause from other kinds of evidence, and use two sources to explain a closure.	Timeline, background, Activity 5 cards	The written answer uses two pieces of evidence and says which closure, 1981 or 1984, it explains.

Meet the voices

Patricia Kennedy	Left school on a Friday aged 16 in 1977 and started at Ronson the next Monday. She worked in the valve department and was made redundant in May 1981.
Sue Tout	Joined Ronson in the mid-1970s. She worked on the lighter production line and in rectification, fixing faulty lighters.
Gillian Cocker	Moved to the Island from Rochdale with her family in 1966. Her mum worked at Ronson, and Gillian started there in 1970. She worked in rectification.
Julie Cocker	Gillian’s younger sister. She started at Ronson in 1976, aged 16, became a “float girl” who could do every job on the line, and at 18 became the training instructor, teaching new workers. She left at around the age of 20.
Sheree Ash	Started at Ronson in 1974, aged 17, after working as a nanny. She found the production lines too fast and worked in the ancillary department, where machines did different jobs. She stayed a couple of years.

All five are women who worked at Ronson in the 1970s and early 1980s. The project tried to interview men who worked there but could not, so men’s jobs appear only through their colleagues’ memories. Whose experiences are missing is a good question for pupils.

Background for teachers

From shavers to lighters

In the late 1950s the Government cancelled a combined jet-and-rocket interceptor aircraft being built by the aircraft maker Saunders-Roe, and many Islanders lost their jobs. The Government offered grants to bring new firms to the Island. Ronson, an American company famous for its lighters, was one of them. Production began on 20 February 1961 in former Saunders-Roe buildings at Forest Road, Newport, on the edge of Parkhurst Forest. At first the factory made electric shavers, hairdryers and shoe polishers. In 1966 Ronson announced that Newport would switch to lighters, and in 1967 its shaver work moved to a new factory in the North-East of England.

Who worked there?

The factory opened with 35 workers. There were about 300 by 1965 and 430 by 1979. In 1981 the County Press said nearly 600 had worked there at one time. Most production-line workers were women, many of them teenagers, some straight from school at 16. In 1974 Ronson advertised different starting pay for women on assembly or inspection work and for men in semi-skilled jobs (Image 1). Men mostly worked in the tool room, die-casting, maintenance and the stores, or as “time and motion” men. People with disabilities, including blind workers and a wheelchair user, worked there too. Coaches collected workers from towns across the Island.

What was the work like?

Workers built lighters such as the Comet on production lines. Each lighter was made from many small parts, and each worker did one job before the conveyor belt carried it on. New workers learned one job at a time in a training school beside the line, and “float girls” who knew every job stepped in when needed. Julie Cocker remembers an ideas box that paid about £100 for an idea that was used. Lighters were filled with butane gas, tested for leaks in a water tank, set to the right flame height by “flame setters”, polished and inspected. Many workers were paid by piecework, and “time and motion” men timed the jobs and set targets. The work was fast and repetitive, but what former workers remember most is the friendship: helping each other reach targets, the canteen, the carnival float and Christmas parties.

Why did it close?

The factory closed twice. In July 1979, 320 of the 430 workers took part in a one-day strike over pay. In January 1981 Ronson, whose British business was in financial trouble, announced that the Newport factory would close. Workers were made redundant in batches from March, and the factory closed in July 1981. More than 320 jobs were lost. This is the closure the workers in our interviews lived through.

In November 1981 a new owner reopened the factory on a much smaller scale, with about 80 workers. In December 1982 the Island’s MP, Stephen Ross, told the House of Commons that the loss of the Ronson factory was “the greatest tragedy” facing the Island. He said its productivity was “the highest anywhere”, with three and a half lighters made for every one and a half made elsewhere, and he feared a buyer would move the work to the North-East, where nearly £1 million of help was on offer. The Government minister replied that smokers had switched to cheaper and disposable lighters. Another owner took over in 1983, but in June 1984 the factory closed for good and lighter making moved to North Shields, in the North-East.

Like any source, these speeches need questioning. Ross was making the case for the Island, and the minister was replying to him. Neither gave a full explanation. Activity 5 asks pupils to weigh up the evidence.

Where was the factory?

Where is the Isle of Wight?



The Isle of Wight



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Forest Road, Newport



Map © [OpenStreetMap contributors](#). The factory buildings were demolished after it closed.

Talk about it

- Find the factory site on Forest Road. Which direction is Newport town centre from the factory? What is on the other side of the road?
- The factory was in the middle of the Island. How might workers from Ryde or Ventnor get there? (Coaches collected them.)
- In 1984 lighter making moved to North Shields. Find it on the first map. Why might a company choose to move?

Timeline

Late 1950s	The Government cancels a combined jet-and-rocket interceptor aircraft being built by Saunders-Roe, and many Islanders lose their jobs. The Government offers grants to bring new firms to the Island.
20 February 1961	Ronson starts production in former Saunders-Roe buildings at Forest Road, Newport. Its 35 workers, mostly women, make electric shavers, hairdryers and shoe polishers.
1964	A new worker is taken on as a pieceworker (Image 2).
1965	About 300 people work at the factory. A new £75,000 production line makes parts for shavers sold around the world.
1966	Ronson announces that Newport will switch to making lighters. An advert asks for “women and girls” for assembly work. Gillian and Julie Cocker’s family moves to the Island from Rochdale.
1967	Shaver making moves to a new Ronson factory in the North-East of England, and Newport turns to lighters.
1970	Gillian starts work at Ronson.
1974	An advert says “600 Islanders can’t be wrong”, and offers women and men different pay (Image 1). Sheree Ash starts at Ronson aged 17.
1975 to 1976	Gillian is a Newport Carnival Queen’s attendant, and Ronson enters a float (Image 9). Sue Tout joins Ronson.
1976	Julie Cocker starts at Ronson aged 16, in a very hot summer. At 18 she becomes the training instructor.
1977	Patricia Kennedy leaves school at 16 and starts work the next Monday. The factory has just made lighters for the Queen’s Silver Jubilee.
July 1979	430 people work at the factory. 320 of them stay away for a one-day strike over pay (Image 10).
January 1981	Ronson says the factory will close, with the loss of 327 jobs. Workers leave in batches from March. Patricia leaves in May.
July 1981	The factory closes. The last workers leave in early August. More than 320 jobs have gone.
November 1981	A new owner reopens the factory on a much smaller scale. By spring 1982 about 80 people work there.
December 1982	In Parliament, the Island’s MP calls the loss of the Ronson factory “the greatest tragedy” facing the Island.
April 1983	Another new owner takes over and promises to keep at least 75 jobs.
June 1984	The factory closes for good, with 39 jobs lost. Lighter making moves to North Shields in the North-East. The buildings are later demolished.
2026	Flame Keepers records former workers’ memories.

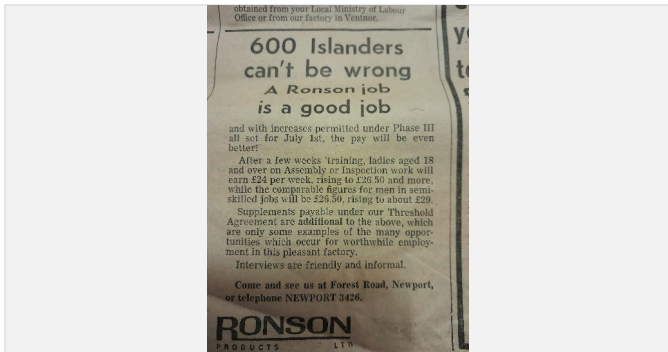
Dates come from newspaper reports, Parliament and the workers’ own memories. Dates remembered many years later sometimes differ from records made at the time, which is something pupils can investigate.

Vocabulary

Word	What it means
Production line	A row of workers, each doing one job, so that a product is built step by step.
Conveyor belt	A moving belt that carries things from one worker to the next.
Shell	The outside case of the lighter.
Valve	A small part that lets gas in or out. Workers set the valves so the flame was the right height.
Butane	The gas inside the lighter. It is kept as a liquid under pressure.
Flint and flint wheel	Turning the little wheel against the flint makes a spark that lights the gas.
Flame setter	A worker who tested each lighter and set its flame to the right height.
Fork and chimney	Two tiny tools flame setters used to adjust the valve.
Water tank	Lighters were pushed through water. Bubbles showed a leak.
Rectification	Fixing faulty lighters.
Inspection	Checking that every finished lighter is right.
Float girl	A worker who knew every job on the line. She stepped in when someone needed a break or fell behind.
Training school	A small line beside the main line where new workers learned one job at a time.
Time and motion	Experts who timed each job to see how much faster it could be done.
Piecework	Being paid for how many items you make, not just for the hours you work.
Wage packet	A small brown envelope with your weekly pay inside, in cash.
Canteen	The factory's own café, where workers bought meals and drinks.
Trade union	A group of workers who join together to ask for fair pay and conditions.
Strike, picket line	A strike is when workers stop working as a protest. A picket line is where strikers stand outside.
Redundancy	Losing your job because the work is no longer needed.
Receivership	When a company cannot pay its debts and someone is brought in to run it or sell it.
Productivity	How much is made in a set time, or by each worker.
Profit	The money a business has left after paying all its costs.
Competition	Other businesses trying to sell similar things to the same customers.
Mainland	Great Britain, across the sea from the Isle of Wight.
Parliament	Where MPs meet to make laws and debate. The House of Commons is part of it.
Source	Anything that tells us about the past: a photo, a newspaper, a memory, a document.
Evidence	Information from sources that helps us answer a question.
Oral history	History collected by recording people talking about their own memories.

Ten images from the factory

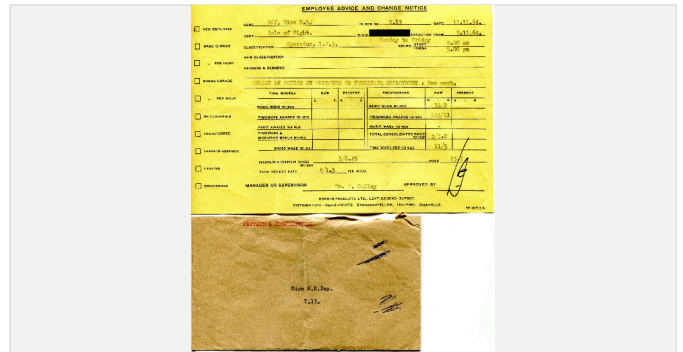
Lent by former workers and their families. Each image remains the copyright of its owner. Images 1 and 2 are enlarged on the next pages. Full-size versions of all ten are on flamekeepers.uk.



1. Ronson job advert, 1974

© Isle of Wight County Press. From the collection of Jim Wollwebber

Which part is a fact we could check, and which part is an opinion? Find the weekly pay for women and for men. What else would we need to know about these jobs before comparing their pay fairly?



2. A new worker's pay card, 1964

© Mary Messenger

This new worker was a "piecemaker". What do you think that means? Her pay is in shillings and pence. Before decimalisation in 1971, Britain used pounds, shillings and pence. Afterwards, each pound contained 100 new pence.



3. Operating a press, 1965 or 1966

© Mary Messenger

At this time the factory made shaver parts, not lighters. Who do you think the man in the background is? What clues help you decide?



4. At the machine

© Catherine Hodges

This worker is smiling for the camera. What can't a photo tell us about doing this job all day?



5. On the shop floor

© Sue Tout

What jobs might these workers be doing? What are the red trays for?



6. In the workshop

© Derrick Saines

Most production-line workers were women. What jobs do you think men like this one did?



7. The canteen kitchen

© Valerie Sainsbury

Why might a good canteen matter to a factory and the people who work there?



8. Break time

© Lyn Webb Baker

What does this photo tell us about friendships at the factory? What doesn't it tell us?



9. Ronson's carnival float, Newport High Street

© Patricia Kennedy

Why would a factory enter a float in the town carnival?



10. On the picket line, 1979

© Isle of Wight County Press. From the collection of Andrew Dore

These workers are on strike. What do you think they wanted? Listen to clip 11 to hear what one worker remembers.

Image 1, enlarged: Ronson job advert, 1974

obtained from your Local Ministry of Labour
Office or from our factory in Ventnor.

600 Islanders can't be wrong

A Ronson job is a good job

and with increases permitted under Phase III
all set for July 1st, the pay will be even
better!

After a few weeks 'training, ladies aged 18
and over on Assembly or Inspection work will
earn £24 per week, rising to £26.50 and more,
while the comparable figures for men in semi-
skilled jobs will be £26.50, rising to about £29.

Supplements payable under our Threshold
Agreement are **additional** to the above, which
are only some examples of the many oppor-
tunities which occur for worthwhile employ-
ment in this pleasant factory.

Interviews are friendly and informal.

Come and see us at Forest Road, Newport,
or telephone NEWPORT 3426.

RONSON

PRODUCTS LTD

© Isle of Wight County Press. From the collection of Jim Wollwebber

Image 2, enlarged: a new worker's pay card, 1964

EMPLOYEE ADVICE AND CHANGE NOTICE												
☒ NEW EMPLOYEE	NAME	DAY, Miss M.R.			CLOCK No.	T.13		DATE	12.11.64.			
☐ WAGE CHANGE	DEPT.	Isle of Wight.			D.O.B.	[REDACTED]		EFFECTIVE FROM	9.11.64.			
☐ .. PER HOUR	CLASSIFICATION	Operator. 1.P.3.			HOURS	Monday to Friday		START	8.00 am			
☐ BONUS CHANGE	NEW CLASSIFICATION				FINISH				5.00 pm			
☐ .. PER HOUR	REASONS & REMARKS											
PERIOD OF NOTICE BY EMPLOYEE TO TERMINATE EMPLOYMENT : One week.												
☐ RE-CLASSIFIED	TIME WORKER		NEW		PRESENT		PIECEWORKER		NEW		PRESENT	
☐ TRANSFERRED			s. : d.		s. : d.				s. : d.		s. : d.	
☐ LEAVE OF ABSENCE	BASIC WAGE PER WEEK						BASIC WAGE PER WEEK		33/2			
☐ LEAVING	TIMEWORK AWARDS PER WEEK						PIECEWORK AWARDS PER WEEK		103/11			
☐ DISCHARGED	MERIT AWARDS PER WEEK						MERIT WAGE PER WEEK		-			
	TIMEWORK & INCENTIVE BONUS PER WEEK						TOTAL CONSOLIDATED BASIC PER HOUR		3/3.2			
	GROSS WAGE PER HOUR						TIME WORK ADD PER WEEK		11/5			
	MINIMUM & PREMIUM WAGE PER HOUR		3/6.45				WEEK		83.2			
	BANK HOLIDAY RATE		4/1.5		PER HOUR.							
	MANAGER OR SUPERVISOR		Mr. W. Hailey				APPROVED BY		[Signature]			
RONSON PRODUCTS LTD., LEATHERHEAD, SURREY.												
DISTRIBUTION: - Payroll=WHITE, Employee=YELLOW, File=PINK, Cost=BLUE.												
RP 1079/3/61												



© Mary Messenger

Voices from the factory: fifteen short clips

Recorded by Flame Keepers in 2026. Play each clip from the full interview on flamekeepers.uk, starting and stopping at the times shown. Times come from the interview transcripts, so please listen first. Words are transcribed as spoken, including local speech.

Clip, speaker and time	What they say	Talk about it
1. Leaving school on Friday, starting work on Monday Patricia Kennedy 5:59 to 7:26 (1 min 27 s)	“you went from school one day, and over the weekend, you had to transfer to doing a 40 hour a week job with older women that you’d never had anything to do with”	Patricia was 16. How would you feel starting a full-time job at 16?
2. The moving belt Sue Tout 13:29 to 14:05 (36 s)	“when I first sat by it, it felt like it was you that was moving, and not the conveyor belt”	What does a conveyor belt do? Why might it feel strange at first?
3. Lighting the lighters Patricia Kennedy 18:06 to 18:44 (38 s)	“You lift the fork up to get the stem so the gas would come out. You put it against the light and it would fire it up.”	Find “fork and chimney” and “flame setter” on the vocabulary sheet. Why was Patricia behind a perspex screen?
4. Time and motion Gillian Cocker 31:13 to 31:42 (29 s)	“they don’t speed up the belt, they move the little dots on the line a bit nearer”	Why would moving the dots closer make people work faster?
5. Sore fingers Sue Tout 31:12 to 31:36 (24 s)	“some of the jobs really hurt your fingers because you’re not used to doing the repetition.”	What does “repetition” mean? Which jobs today involve doing the same thing again and again?
6. Helping each other Gillian Cocker 1:15:50 to 1:17:02 (1 min 12 s)	“if you could see by 3 o’clock that your number is going to be down, they would help you. ... if ever you were on an off day, they’d all club together and help you.”	Why would workers help each other reach their targets?

Clip, speaker and time	What they say	Talk about it
7. Like a family Sue Tout 46:48 to 47:34 (46 s)	“very much more, like a huge family type ... thing.”	What makes a workplace feel like a family?
8. Pay day Sheree Ash 36:18 to 36:39 (21 s)	“I felt rich because I’d never earned that much.”	Sheree earned £7 a week as a nanny before Ronson. Why might factory work have paid more?
9. School then Sheree Ash 3:35 to 4:06 (31 s)	“in them days you didn’t have any help. If you can’t see, copy somebody or sit in the back and do nothing, and that is how it was.”	Sheree has poor eyesight. This is her memory of her own school. What help might a pupil like Sheree get today?
10. Jobs for girls Patricia Kennedy 1:18:59 to 1:19:34 (35 s)	“no point if you’re a girl, because you should end up getting married and have kids anyway.”	Patricia is describing what people used to think. Do people still think this? Is it fair?
11. Paid less than the mainland Sue Tout 38:52 to 39:19 (27 s)	“there was always a bit of a bone of contention that we got paid a lot less than those factories on the mainland.”	“A bone of contention” means something people argue about. Why might the workers go on strike?
12. A forgotten factory Patricia Kennedy 1:22:46 to 1:23:19 (33 s)	“if I said I worked in a factory called Ronsons they’d be like, where was that? I’ve not heard of that.”	Why do you think such a big factory has been forgotten?
13. The float girl Julie Cocker 20:26 to 21:20 (54 s)	“a float girl used to do every job. The float girl used to come and help you out.”	What did a float girl do? What would happen to the line without her?
14. Going slow for the time and motion man Julie Cocker 1:04:02 to 1:05:08 (1 min 6 s)	“So they wouldn’t have to speed up the line because that’s what they did. ... no, the line did go quicker.”	Julie remembers workers slowing down when they were being watched. Gillian (clip 4) remembers the dots moving closer, not the belt speeding up. Why might two sisters remember it differently?
15. Teamwork Julie Cocker 1:22:18 to 1:24:06 (1 min 48 s)	“That it’s teamwork. You work in teams. You don’t work in silos.”	Julie was asked what children today should know about Ronson. Working “in silos” means working alone, cut off from others. Do you agree with her?

Activity 1: Photo detective

Years 3 to 6

Name: _____ Image number: _____

I can see...

(people, objects, clothes, writing)

I think... because...

(What is happening? When might it be?)

I wonder...

(What would you ask the person who took it?)

What can't this photo tell us?

Teacher note. "I can see" is observation; "I think" is inference. Pupils should be able to point to what in the photo makes them think it. Remind them that most of these photos were posed for the camera.

For Years 3 and 4: use Images 3, 7 and 8. Work in pairs and talk rather than write, using the sentence starters "I can see..." and "I think... because...".

Activity 2: Listening to a memory

Years 3 to 6

Name: _____ Clip number: _____

Who is speaking? When did they work at Ronson?
(Use “Meet the voices”.)

One thing I learned

One feeling I noticed. How could I tell?
(Listen to their voice, not just their words.)

One question I have

Which detail could we check using another source? Which source?

What does this memory tell us that a photograph or newspaper might not?

Teacher note. Memories are especially good evidence for feelings, friendships, routines and what work meant to people. Dates and numbers are worth checking against other sources. Two memories can disagree: compare clips 4 and 14, from two sisters. Other sources need questioning too: an advert wants to recruit workers, and an MP may be trying to persuade the Government.

For Years 3 and 4: use clips 2, 7, 8 and 13. Pupils draw the speaker’s memory and label it with one thing they learned and one feeling.

Activity 3: Production line challenge

Years 3 to 6

For the teacher. Groups of five make paper “lighters” on a production line. Each group has five roles: three **makers** (steps 1 to 3), one **quality inspector** (step 4) and one **timekeeper**, who plays the “time and motion” man by timing each round and setting the target. Before you start, make one sample lighter for inspectors to check against. Swap roles between rounds so that pupils try different jobs. Pupils who find small movements hard can be the inspector or timekeeper, or use cards that are already folded.

You need: rectangles of card (about 6 cm by 4 cm), pencils, small stickers, a timer.

Step	Job
1. Shell (maker)	Fold the card in half and draw one stripe across the front.
2. Valve (maker)	Put a sticker at the top for the valve.
3. Flint wheel (maker)	Draw a small circle beside the sticker.
4. Inspection (quality inspector)	Pass a lighter only if the edges of the fold meet, the sticker is at the top and the wheel is drawn. Put any others in the rejects pile.

Round (3 minutes each)	Lighters passed	Rejects
1. Work at your own pace		
2. Target: five more passed lighters than your group made in round 1 (“moving the dots closer”)		
3. Same target as round 2, but you may help anyone who falls behind		

Talk about it: Which round made the most good lighters? Was it the target, helping each other, getting more practice, or having different people in each role? How could you find out? Which job was slowest, and what happened to the line behind it? What can nine minutes in a classroom not tell us about doing one job for 40 hours a week? Listen to clips 4, 6 and 14.

Maths challenge

Years 5 and 6

These numbers come from memories and a speech, so they are approximate.

1. **Year 6 extension:** in 1982 the Island’s MP said Newport made $3\frac{1}{2}$ lighters for every $1\frac{1}{2}$ made elsewhere. Double both numbers. If another factory made 30 lighters, how many would Newport make?
2. Gillian remembers a Comet lighter cost about £5 and a throwaway lighter 99p. About how many throwaways could you buy for the price of one Comet?
3. Patricia remembers her first weekly wage was about £16 for 40 hours. About how much was that an hour?

Answers: 1. 70 (the ratio 7:3). 2. About 5. 3. About 40p an hour.

For Years 3 and 4: run two rounds. Round 1: work at your own pace. Round 2: no target, but pupils may help anyone who falls behind. Compare the two totals, and skip the maths challenge.

Activity 4: Then and now

Years 3 to 6

Name: _____

Topic	Then: what the sources tell us	Now	Changed or the same? Better, worse or a bit of both?
Leaving school	Patricia left school at 16 and started full-time work the next Monday.		
Getting paid	Pay came in cash, in a little brown envelope, brought round on a trolley every week.		
Pay for women and men	A 1974 Ronson advert offered women £24 a week for assembly or inspection work, and men £26.50 for semi-skilled jobs (Image 1).		
Help at school	Sheree, who has poor eyesight, remembers: "in them days you didn't have any help."		
Jobs for girls	A 1966 advert asked for "women and girls". Patricia remembers being told there was "no point" studying if you were a girl.		
Safety at work	New workers taped up their sore fingers. Flame setters worked behind a perspex screen. Workers by the loud machines wore ear protectors and goggles.		
Smoking	Patricia remembers that "everybody sit there smoking", even near the gas.		
Workers with disabilities	Sue remembers a co-worker who used a wheelchair or crutches: "there were jobs that they couldn't do ... but there was plenty of jobs that they could do."		

For Years 3 and 4: choose four rows, such as leaving school, getting paid, safety and smoking, and complete them together as a class.

Activity 4: teacher guide

Pupils may not know how work is organised today. These notes help with the “Now” column. Encourage pupils to look for what has stayed the same as well as what has changed, and for changes that have both good and bad sides.

Topic	Now
Leaving school	In England young people must stay in education or training until 18. Some start apprenticeships at 16.
Getting paid	Most people are paid into a bank account, often monthly, with a payslip.
Pay for women and men	The Equal Pay Act 1970 came into force at the end of 1975, after this advert. The law now says women and men must get equal pay for equal work, which can include different jobs of equal value. The advert compares different jobs, so we would need to know more about them before calling it unequal pay. On average, women still earn less than men.
Help at school	Schools must support pupils with special educational needs and disabilities, for example with large print, seating near the board or adult help.
Jobs for girls	Anyone can study any subject or do any job, but ideas about “girls’ jobs” and “boys’ jobs” have not disappeared.
Safety at work	Employers must assess risks and protect workers. Repetitive work can still cause injuries today.
Smoking	Smoking in enclosed workplaces has been banned in England since 2007.
Workers with disabilities	Employers must make reasonable adjustments so that disabled people can do their jobs. Sue’s memory shows a kind of adjustment: matching people to jobs they could do.

Extension: be an oral historian

Interview an older relative, neighbour or member of school staff about their first job. Ask:

- How old were you when you started work?
- How did you get the job?
- What did a normal day look like?
- How were you paid, and what did you spend it on?
- Who were your friends at work?
- What has changed most since then?

Teacher note: pupils without an older relative or neighbour to ask can interview a member of staff, a governor or an invited visitor in school. Before any interview, the person should agree to take part and know how the notes or recording will be used, for example only in class. A parent, carer or member of staff should know about it, and an adult should be present for interviews in school. The person can choose not to answer any question, and can stop at any time. Don’t share recordings outside the class without written permission. The Oral History Society publishes guidance for schools at [ohs.org.uk](https://www.ohs.org.uk).

Activity 5: Why did the factory close?

Years 5 and 6

Key dates. The factory closed twice. **July 1981:** Ronson closes it and more than 320 jobs are lost. **November 1981:** a new owner reopens it with about 80 workers. **December 1982:** the MP and a minister discuss it in Parliament. **June 1984:** it closes for good and the work moves to North Shields.

Cut out the cards. With a partner:

- Sort the cards into three piles: **a possible reason for closing, what working there was like, and something that makes closing surprising.** If a card doesn't fit any pile, put it to one side and explain why.
- Look at your "possible reason" pile. Is each one about **changing demand, company finances, or location and investment**?
- Which closure might each reason help explain: 1981, 1984, or both? Remember that the speeches in Parliament came before 1984.
- Who said each one? Why might a minister, the Island's MP and a former worker explain things differently?

A

"smokers have changed to cheaper and in some cases disposable lighters"

Government minister, replying to the MP in Parliament, December 1982

B

"our little Comet lighter at the time were about a fiver, and these things were 99p."

Gillian Cocker, former worker

C

The factory had been through two receiverships. Workers had gone from about 400 to 80.

Stephen Ross, Isle of Wight MP, in Parliament, December 1982

D

The factory's productivity was "the highest anywhere", and it was "always profitable".

Stephen Ross, Isle of Wight MP, in Parliament, December 1982

E

A buyer could get nearly £1 million of help to move the factory to the North-East of England. The Island had no money to match that.

Stephen Ross, Isle of Wight MP, in Parliament, December 1982

F

Being cut off by the sea makes things hard for Island factories. Ferries cost a lot.

Stephen Ross, Isle of Wight MP, in Parliament, December 1982

G

"there was always a bit of a bone of contention that we got paid a lot less than those factories on the mainland."

Sue Tout, former worker

H

The factory will close in June, with 39 jobs lost. Lighter making is moving to North Shields in the North-East.

Isle of Wight County Press, April 1984

The big question:

Why was the Ronson factory so successful, and why did it close? Use at least two pieces of evidence, and say which closure you are explaining.

Activity 5: teacher guide

There is no single right answer. These notes suggest one reasonable sort.

Card	Suggested pile	Notes
A	Possible reason: changing demand	The minister was replying to the MP. Cheaper lighters may explain falling sales, but he did not give it as the whole story.
B	Possible reason: changing demand	A worker's memory supports card A. The prices are remembered, not recorded.
C	Possible reason: company finances	Mainly the 1981 closure, when Ronson's British business was in trouble. This doesn't contradict card D: a factory can make a profit while the company that owns it is in financial trouble.
D	Makes closing surprising	Ross used this to show what the Island was losing. It challenges the idea that the factory closed because it was doing badly.
E	Possible reason: location and investment	About a possible move to the North-East. Card H shows that production did move to North Shields in 1984, but the sources don't say whether the buyer received the help Ross described.
F	Possible reason: location and investment	Ross was talking about Island factories in general, not only Ronson.
G	What working there was like	Sue remembers the strike as "the beginning of the end" (clip 11), but the sources don't show that pay caused either closure. Good for discussing interpretation.
H	Doesn't fit the three piles	It tells us what happened in 1984, not why. It is evidence that something happened, not an explanation. That distinction is the main point of the activity.

Both halves of the big question

The cards are mostly about closing. For "Why was it so successful?", send pupils back to the evidence on productivity (card D, maths question 1), teamwork and training (clips 4, 6, 13 and 15, the training school and ideas box in the background notes), jobs (the background and timeline) and community life (clip 7, Images 7 to 9). Ask what "successful" means: making lots of lighters efficiently, giving people jobs they valued, making money, or being part of Island life?

Example answer (Year 6)

"The factory was successful because it made lots of lighters. The MP said its productivity was 'the highest anywhere', and Gillian remembers workers helping each other reach their targets. It gave hundreds of Islanders jobs. It first closed in 1981 because Ronson's British company was in financial trouble, even though the MP said the factory was always profitable. People were also buying cheap throwaway lighters instead of lighters like the Comet."

This answer uses evidence from three sources, says which closure it explains, and separates success from closure. Other conclusions are possible.

Card wording for Ross and the minister is summarised or quoted from Hansard, House of Commons debate "Isle of Wight (Economy)", 14 December 1982.

Find out more

Website: flamekeepers.uk has the full interviews, transcripts, portraits and photo archive.



Tell us how you used this pack. Our short feedback form helps us understand how the pack is used and how to improve it: <https://flamekeepers.uk/teachers/>

Sources

- Flame Keepers oral history interviews with Patricia Kennedy, Sue Tout, Gillian Cocker, Julie Cocker and Sheree Ash, 2026.
- Isle of Wight County Press: production starts with 35 staff (25 February 1961); £75,000 production line, about 300 staff (4 December 1965); switch to lighters announced (27 August 1966); “women and girls” advert (5 November 1966); shaver work moves to the North-East (25 February 1967); one-day strike (7 July 1979); closure announced (9 and 16 January 1981); closure, and nearly 600 at one time (7 August 1981); new owner and promise of 75 jobs (29 April 1983); reopening in 1981 and final closure (6 April 1984).
- Hansard, House of Commons debate “Isle of Wight (Economy)”, 14 December 1982, at api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard (Open Parliament Licence).
- Photographs and documents lent by former workers and their families.

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