

WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION

WOMEN IN FACTORIES

Women in industry worked on everything from the production of aircraft and barrage balloons, ammunition, and weapons to domestic goods.

The confrontation of a female war worker and her machine was a situation dear to comedians and song-writers. One affectionate verse went like this:

*She's the girl that makes the thing that drills the hole that holds the spring
That drives the rod that turns the knob that works the thingumbob.
She's the girl that makes the thing that holds the oil that oils the ring
that makes the shank that moves the crank that works the thingumbob.
It's a ticklish sort of job,
Making a thingumbob,
Especially when you don't know what it's for!
And it's the girl that makes the thing that holds the oil that oils the ring
that works the thingumbob*

THAT'S GOING TO WIN THE WAR.



Within months the Army's clothing factories were hard pressed to equip the flood of conscripts. This photo shows machines at work on garments for the approaching winter.



Women also worked on railways, on canal boats transporting important cargo such as metal, servicing and driving lorries, in demolition gangs, as pipe layers and household equipment installation engineers - in fact, practically anything.



LAND GIRLS

The Women's Land Army was set up in June 1939.

They were sent to live, often in very poor billets, and work long hours on farms and market gardens, for which they were paid 32 shillings (£1 - 60) per week.

The uniform consisted of 2 aertex shirts, 2 pairs of knee length socks, 1 pair of boots, 2 pairs of khaki dungarees or breeches, 1 dark green jumper, a green tie and 1 overcoat.



No underwear was supplied. The arm band had half diamonds attached to it for every 6 months of service.

The Women's Land Army finally numbered some 80,000 women.



A bus conductress turned farm-hand

The illustrations which every volunteer signed on being recruited as a member of the Women's Land Army show her in supply to her County Secretary for permission to accept. If circumstances arise which make it difficult for her to keep her promise of service, the County Secretary will be notified and when it is decided the woman should be employed and badge to the County Land Army office.

Land Girls in a 1939 parade of National Service volunteers that was reviewed by the King and Queen.



WOMEN'S TIMBER CORPS - TIMBER JILLS

Women who worked in woods and forests from 1942 to 1946 to help maintain critical supplies of timber for the mines and war effort.

The Women's Voluntary Service

The WVS was begun in 1938, as part of the lead-up to war, in the hope that women could be integrated into ARP work from the outset.

It was dramatically successful and the WVS badge became as familiar as the ARP badge in the Home Front. The women ran rest centres, mobile canteens, bomb-site field kitchens, nurseries and even mobile laundries.



The WVS, founded in 1938 with 5 members, had attracted almost a million by 1941; its mobile canteens brought an oasis to many a bomb-battered street.

THE AUXILIARY TERRITORIAL SERVICE

The ATS was the women's branch of the British Army. It was formed on September 9th 1938, initially as a women's voluntary service, and existed until 1st February 1949.

The first recruits were employed as cooks, clerks and store-keepers. Later they took over many support tasks such as radar operators, anti-aircraft crew members, military police and lorry drivers.

By VE Day there were over 190,000 members of the WATS, including our Queen when Princess Elizabeth and Mary Churchill, youngest daughter of the Prime Minister.

The ATS was succeeded by the WRAC, formed on February 1st 1949



September 1938: the call goes out for women to join the newly formed ATS - and so free men for combat duties in the event of war

EVACUATION

Evacuation started in June 1939, seen as the practical solution to protecting children from bombs. Parents suffered a form of bereavement when their children left, while the children found themselves propelled into the unknown. Some had wonderful times, but others experienced utter misery.

Evacuation was voluntary, but having evacuees billeted on one was compulsory.

Normally, evacuated children travelled with their school-teachers or women who responded to posters seeking volunteers to help shepherd the children into trains and see them to their new homes, often in remote places.

Many suffered the humiliation of standing in church halls clutching their belongings while local people selected children they liked the look of. The cruelty of this reached its climax when brothers and sisters were split up - some people preferring to choose demure little girls and reject their older brothers. Once the children had been billeted, cards were filled in with their new address and sent to their parents.

In other cases, boarding schools were evacuated en masse which at least allowed some stability.

By January 1940, long before the Blitz began, many children had been returned to their homes, though some were sent away again.

In June 1940, overseas evacuation to British dominions was arranged, but tragically an evacuee ship was sunk by a U-boat torpedo and 70 children lost their lives. This episode caused the scheme to be abandoned.

Evacuation did not guarantee safety from the war. In May 1942, for example, an air raid destroyed houses in Exeter, to which children had been evacuated.



Evacuees and their teachers settle down to disciplinary life in the country

