

Wartime West Sussex 1939 - 1945

WOMEN AT WAR - LAND ARMY

Land Girls in South Harting

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By Pat Richardson

I left school just before the war started and went to work at East Harting Farmhouse for Mrs Hosking. I worked for a while in the house but then Mr Hosking asked if I would like to work on the farm as some of his men had been called up. This I did but shortly afterwards I got my calling up papers. I wanted to join the WAAF but as mother was very ill I joined the Land Army instead so that I could work locally.

Just before I was eighteen I went to work at Marden Farm and did general farmwork including milking the cows and feeding the chickens.

During the summer months I worked with Jack Glue who was one of the main farming contractors in the village and received orders for contracts. He employed Alf Prior who drove the engine and four land girls to do the threshing on different farms. The other girls were the forelady, Joan Elderton, Rose Bagshaw and Irene Jones, both from London and then there was Joe Pook the drum feeder who had a withered arm due to injuries in World War 1.

Our job was to take down the ricks which the farm labourers had built. The ricks had to be built properly upright because of their weight and with a thatched roof to prevent rain getting in. My brother, Bubbles, was a very good thatcher. Before threshing started, all the thatch had to be removed and many a time the rats would jump down on us – the city girls were so afraid of them. To build a rick the sheaves were layered, each one downwards and crossways. Each was about 12-14 feet high and 10-16 feet wide. The size depended on the size of the field and if the field was large there would be two ricks close together so the drum could go through easily. A drum was a massive box on four wheels with a two foot square hole on top. The girls would pitch up the sheaves to the man by the hole and he would cut the bonds so the sheaves would scatter to go down the drum on shakers. The wheat or barley was shaken from the ears of corn then through a sieve and into sacks. A full sack weighed 4 cwt. (hundredweight – no metric system then). The straw was used for winter feed or bedding and all the rubbish left over after sieving either went for chicken feed or was ploughed back into the ground – there was no wastage in those days. The engine was positioned with the wheels blocked up and the huge leather belt went round the fly wheel of the engine and the drive wheel of the drum.

During the summer, I also worked at Elsted Manor Farm. One week I did days and the next, night duty and for an eighty hour week I earned £2 14s 6d after stoppages.

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