

Wartime West Sussex 1939 - 1945

WOMEN AT WAR - VOLUNTEER WORK

Volunteer work in Worthing [four pages]

Extracts from *Despatches from the Home Front, The War Diaries of Joan Strange 1939-1945* (Monarch Publications, 1989)

1939

January 30th While all Germany was listening to Hitler's broadcast on the sixth anniversary of the Third Reich, Worthing held a most interesting meeting in connection with the Jews. A Mr Davidson from Woburn House, London gave a talk on the work of the refugee problem and a committee was formed to co-ordinate efforts being made here in Worthing – I got on!

May 19th Welfare Committee meeting but I had to meet the other four refugees for 72 Canterbury Road.

May 25th Nora Howden and I played second couple in tennis match against Bognor and won all three. Club won eight matches to one – good. Then to Refugees Committee meeting 8.15 to 10.40!

December 22nd Very 'seasonable' weather! I called round on the three refugee hostels and delivered a cake each, made by Mother. All very pleased.

1940

April 18th Helped with the new refugee hostel for the Einhouses and Steinharts in Guildford Road. This is Worthing Committee's sixth hostel.

May 30th I signed on for a month's Land Army work in August.

July 30th To ARP Report Centre at the Town Hall at 5.30pm – I'm one of the volunteers who receive and pass on telephone messages when the enemy aircraft are in the vicinity.

October 25th I started my YMCA canteen duty this evening six to ten and was awfully busy frying bacon, sausages, chips etc and washing up. There are many Scottish and Lancashire soldiers in Worthing now.

1941

August 14th I got up early and cycled to the allotment to get some vegetables for our 'Bring and Buy' Sale in aid of the Mayor's Rest Centre. I brought some lovely carrots, lettuces, beetroots and marrows. The sale was a wonderful success - we got over £42! Harold Frampton brought us tomatoes, onions, beans and grapes from his greenhouses - grapes are fetching 12/6d a pound nowadays! Mrs Claff sent us two chickens and we got over £4 for them at an auction and weight guessing. The Mills' oranges brought in 10/6d.

August 22nd I drove the mobile YMCA canteen to Shoreham beach this evening. I felt a bit scared as it is all heavily landmined these days and there have been a

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few fatal accidents. However all went well and we did brisk trade for about an hour.

August 25th Mother and I went to a garden party in aid of Mrs Sangster's Working Party for bombed cities. It brought in £40. Since February 21st the party has actually made over 1,500 garments and twenty big parcels have been sent off.

1942

June 21st 'Allied Youth Week' has started in Worthing and our Luncheon Club entertained about fifteen young women from Russia, Poland, France, Holland, Czechoslovakia and Belgium.

November 30th It is 'Prisoners of War Week' and it started today with a 'Bring and Buy' Sale in the Assembly Hall. Mother found it impossible even to force a way in. It raised over £2,300. The target is £5,000.

December 10th Our 'Prisoners of War Week' realised £8,500.

1943

February 27th Mr Churchill has had pneumonia but is on the mend. Hurray! Interest and excitement grows, the town is packed with troops. The flat-bottomed boats to be seen are pontoons for bridge building. Very busy at the YMCA canteen but the men say there may not be a single customer tomorrow! We had to do up large parcels of cakes and sandwiches for men travelling through in convoy. Ken and I gave a pint of blood which was used on a special case at Southlands Hospital, Shoreham - there are a lot of tip and run raid victims there.

July 13th To the Report Centre as usual - it is my third anniversary there.

August 17th Important talks are going on in Quebec between Mr Churchill and Allied leaders. Norway is declared to be in a state of siege - all sorts of ugly happenings are going on between Nazis, Quislings and loyal Norwegians. It's been such a rush this week getting ready for my holiday on the land. The government calls them Volunteer Agricultural Camps and the type of work includes hoeing, planting, weeding, harvesting and picking vegetables. Volunteers are accommodated at the camp but their engagements are with the farmers who accept their services and pay them the agreed rate at the end of the day: all males 1/- per hour; all females 10d. The cost of living at the camp is 4/- per day or 28/- per week and the minimum period for a worker is four days. A farmer cannot employ people in wet weather. Volunteers take a mug, plates, cutlery, tea towel, soap and a pillow slip. Bedding is supplied. Volunteers should wear their oldest clothes and thickest footwear. Volunteers of sixteen and over will be welcome. According to their information leaflet 'there are no irksome regulations and volunteers will have every evening entirely free to do exactly as they like. Avoid all forms of waste. Every hour that you give to the land brings us nearer to the day of Victory.'

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August 23rd Kit and I cycled from London to the Agricultural Workers Camp at Ampthill - a lovely easy ride of fifty to sixty miles. We arrived at 7pm and discovered it is a real camp of tents! I'd hoped it might be a building. We had an evening meal straight away and were given a ground sheet and blankets and a straw mattress! The camp is in a lovely situation and there are between 250 and 300 people.

August 24th Up at 6am and queued for breakfast at 7am and then queued again for work. There seems some difficulty about work. The farmers send in lorries for so many people but usually there are more people than the farmers need. We were not lucky so took to our bicycles.

August 25th We were lucky today. Eleven of us went by lorry to Stanghams Farm where we were met by a very nice foreman, Mr Wilmot, a schoolmaster in ordinary times. He showed us how to shock wheat - stand twelve corn-sheaves together in the field. We had a meal at twelve o'clock provided by the camp: bread and margarine, meat (de-hydrated) pies and tea made at a neighbouring cottage. Mr Wilmot said we did very well having shocked a nine-acre field and started on another one. We all earned 5/10d and arrived back in the lorry at 7.30pm. Most of the people are from London and the North and there are a few foreigners. Something is organised most evenings but Kit and I go to our hard and boney bed early. News is that Berlin was very heavily raided last night - fifty-eight bombers are missing.

August 26th A terrible morning - drenching rain - the camp is a quagmire. Kit and I discussed the situation and in view of the fact that there is not enough work to go round we decided to cycle back to London.

1944

January 20th Our road became a scene of great animation today. Hundreds of soldiers and many lorries and guns arrived.....Mother is busy making trolley cloths from a linen sheet given her by Miss Bridges marked 1822! It's an enormous sheet and will make dozens for sales. In this case it's for a Prisoner of War 'something new from something old' sale.

August 13th I am helping at the Harvest Camp at Breacham Green which has twenty-five boys from fourteen to seventeen, and eight helpers in twelve tents.....A typical menu for the day is 6.30 cup of tea. Breakfast at 8 consisting of porridge (or flakes), rasher (or sausage) and potato, bread and marg and marmalade ad lib, tea. The boys have six large sandwiches which they take to their farms (four savoury - cheese, meat, fish - and two sweet (jam). Tea is bread and butter and jam and tea. The evening meal is the meal of the day with a joint, potatoes and one other vegetable, plums and custard or rice. All the boys agree the food is excellent but one group wanted two more sandwiches at lunchtime!

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September 9th Hilda and I went to East Worthing canteen for the last time today; it's been open for four years. There are only very few soldiers left in Worthing now.

November 22nd Mother has made me a very nice smocked overall out of a green blackout curtain! I've just made seventeen calendars out of old Christmas cards for a sale. Should bring in about 30/- having spent just 4/-.

November 29th The government's White Paper on Britain's Prodigious War Effort was published. It's now possible to form a quantitative picture of Britain's achievement in total mobilisation for war. Between June 1939 and June 1945...part-time voluntary service has been rendered by 1,750,000 men in the Home Guard and 1,250,000 men and 350,000 women in the Civil Defence and over 1,000,000 in the WVS and several hundreds of thousands more in salvage groups, savings groups etc as well as several million men and women giving forty-eight hours a month to fire watching...

December 31st It's very difficult to keep up a war diary in the Christmas season! I've been out carol singing - £43 this year, a record. The money is to be divided between the ex-Servicemen of Gifford House and the local blind... We had a lovely Christmas... We had a very nice British soldier in for the day; he'd offered to come with our carol party, having heard us talking about in in the YMCA.

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