

MILTON AND SHIPTON DURING THE WARThe Land - A vital Front

During the last five years we depended upon home-grown food for our sustenance. The burden of the output fell upon the already harassed farmer, and the Land Front became an integral part of the battle.

More labour was required, and the response in this village was splendid. For many, the call to man the land was the second in a life-time. While new volunteers were found, those already on the land worked harder than ever, often inconveniencing themselves, so that they, too, could have a punch at the Nazi menace.

The first years were perhaps the most strenuous. The familiar green fields of the countryside turned to brown furrows, as more and more land came under extensive cultivation. Men who had left the farms for the forces had to be replaced by girls, many of whom were unused to the arduous of outdoor life. But these girls tackled their job - whether it was work amongst stock, machinery, or some of the million and one navvying jobs to be found on a farm. What is more, they proved to all their grit, winning esteem by the capable ways in which they fulfilled their various jobs. They showed the way, too, for the younger and later volunteers setting them a very high standard.

Meanwhile, the extensive cultivation of the land meant work from morning to night. Many of the tractor drivers had spent quite six months of the year doing extra hours of work. Sometimes there was grumbling, but the job was done, along with the usual 'smokes' and 'cracks'. British humour predominated. And still these tractor drivers carry on, although the 'cease fire' has sounded.

Extra crops meant extra help for the chief occasions on the farm. The local volunteers were greedily snapped up by the farmers; they wanted the best and had it!

There was threshing, when the dust creeps into everything; there was hay and corn harvesting, when blisters appeared as big as sixpences on their hands, soft from the washtub. And who will ever forget their backs, having stooped to gather many tons of potatoes?

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There was competition from outside workers too. Gangs of holiday makers, or Land Girls at Hostels. But the 'Locals' held their own; from them the farmers got work, without which many tons of foodstuffs would have been wasted. From some of the 'outside' gangs, they got the laugh!

On one occasion, some 'energetic' holiday workers thought fit to read in the shadow of a tall hedge, instead of stooking the field of corn. A few hours later they were dislodged by pitch forks in the hands of indignant women workers! It would perhaps teach these holiday workers to make sure no one was about next time they wished to take an afternoon nap!

To show how tough-skinned some of the Land Girls were, the following incident has been recorded: It was harvest time, and the girls from a nearby hostel had been called in to help. To the surprise of all, one of the girls removed her shoes and stockings, and presumably in the height of comfort, continued to load the corn barefoot!

The call of the land was heard by those not employed in agriculture. When their day's work in the factories, the timber yard, or at the 'drome was finished, they gave up their spare time to helping the farmers with their crops. And many spent their only too few holidays performing this noble work.

In the peace of the evenings, or on the rare half-days, the allotments became the centre of industry. Men, women and children alike helped in the all-important production of vegetables.

No account of war work on the land would be complete without mention of the part played by school children. Many spent holidays in the corn fields, leading the wagons home, or doing any of the other odd jobs required by the farmer. At potato time, they went out in gangs to lift the crops. Their teachers organized competitions involving the destruction of pests. One such competition was the greatest number of white butterflies to be caught.

So they worked, young and old; war veterans and members of another generation, side-by-side. And how shall we remember them? Not in stone buildings, or memorials, but in the thought which goes behind this epitaph: 'Si monumentum requiris, circumspice': ie 'If you want a monument, look about you'.