

In the Land Army
Memories of a Lenham Resident
Gladys' Crowhurst's story

Recorded by
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Gladys Crowhurst lived in Linton during the war and went to school there, and then went to Loose school. She has stories of the doodle bugs when going to school.



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When she left school at 14, just before the war ended, she went to do farm work on a farm near Boughton Monchelsea. She was living with her parents and brothers and sisters in Linton. She helped to pick fruit, black currants, gooseberries and apples. The fruit went up to a market in London. As soon as she was old enough at 17, in 1947 she joined the Land Army.¹ She lived in a hostel in Staplehurst, which was near the Convent. The Convent is now a Nursing home.

She slept in a room with 6 other girls. There were 20 girls in the hostel. They were well looked after and were fed well, and Gladys remembers that they were a good crowd. They were all quite local and some went home at the weekends.

¹ For more: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/what-was-the-womens-land-army>



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The cook was a rather large Irish lady who 'waddled' around. She had a young girl who helped her called Millie, who wore her 'glasses on the end of her nose'. They had a cooked breakfast, eggs, bread and margarine. They had a packed lunch to take with them, and a hot meal in the evening; meat or fish and two kinds of vegetable. They also had a pudding, with custard. The cook would wake them at 5.30am by banging the frying pan with a spoon. They had to be at work at 7.00am. Gladys cycled to work with one other girl. Some girls went in a lorry to the farm where they worked.

On Monday mornings they would strip their beds and leave the dirty sheets by their beds and when they got back, clean sheets were ready for them to make up their beds. The linen went to the laundry at the Convent.

The same thing happened to their working clothes. In the winter they wore breeches and long socks with their beige shirts and green jumpers. In the summer they wore dungarees and Aertex shirts. Once a week they would leave their clothes in a pile and when they returned they had their clean ones on their beds. They each had a box under their bed which they could lock to keep their clothes and anything special.

Gladys cycled to the farm to work, either to Cranbrook or Farleigh. They did a variety of work depending on the season, and sometimes finished late at

around 9.00pm especially when they were picking apples. It was dark when they started work in winter.

A man came from Malling to teach them how to prune the apple trees. Gladys was a natural, he said. Her father had done pruning and grafting all his life, so the man just let her get on with it. They would pick the apples but the cherries were picked by travellers (then called gypsies). The girls sorted the fruit before it was sent to Foster Clark factories by the river in Maidstone to be canned. Another job was to put up the strings for the hops, and then train the young shoots up them.

They picked up potatoes which had been dug up by a tractor. The girls followed putting the potatoes in baskets before packing them in sacks. She said the nuns kept an eye on the girls if they wandered on to their land or 'were up to something'.

She said she thought there were also hostels in Lenham² and Platts Heath. She left the Land Army when it disbanded in 1957.

² The Lenham hostel was at Swadelands