

## THE HOME FRONT IN SURREY IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR A GUIDE TO SOURCES AT SURREY HISTORY CENTRE

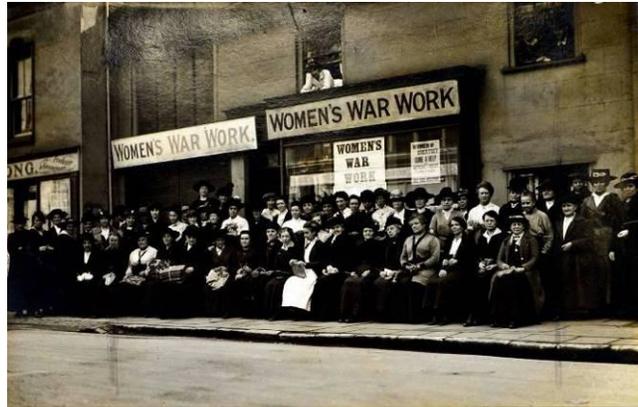
### Part 4. Women at War

When war broke out women were immediately involved in their traditional ‘nurturing’ role – forming working parties to make comforts for the troops, making supplies for local war hospitals and training as nurses or enrolling as nursing auxiliaries, through the Red Cross VADs (Voluntary Aid Detachments).

For a scrapbook of one such voluntary organisation, the Chertsey Women’s War Work Association, which collected money to make comforts for troops and support The Grange war hospital, Chertsey, see **SHC ref P2/7/1-22**. Between Nov 1915 and Jun 1919, the association made in total 11,140 items. For an account book of the Busbridge Parochial War Work Party recording receipts of donations and expenditure, numbers of items despatched and the attendance of the volunteers, see **SHC ref 5177/3/1**. For papers relating to the Dorking War Hospital Supply Depot at Nower Lodge, run by Lady Evangeline Farrer, including lists of items produced and a letter about supplies used in the military hospital at Sarzana (Genoa) Italy, with photographs, 1917, see **SHC ref 2572/123/1-14**.

However, increasingly women were called upon to take the place of men who had enlisted in the services in a whole range of occupations and to provide the workforce for munitions factories and other industrial concerns. For a splendidly illustrated 1916 War Office pamphlet sent to the Dorking Rural Military Service Tribunal and listing the range of tasks which women could undertake see **SHC ref LA4/23/302**.

In July 1915, following a public meeting, a Surrey Committee for Women’s Farm Labour was formed in Guildford to ascertain what Surrey women were available for farm and garden work and how they should be trained. References to its work will be found in reports of the County War Agricultural Committee and of the County Education Committee (for example see the bound reports for 1915, p.1400, and the bound reports for 1916, pp.627 and 820). The committee became the Surrey Women’s Agricultural Committee in 1916.



*The Chertsey Women’s War Work Association  
(SHC ref P2/7/1)*



*Women barrowing coke at a gasworks from a  
War Office pamphlet (SHC ref LA4/23/302)*

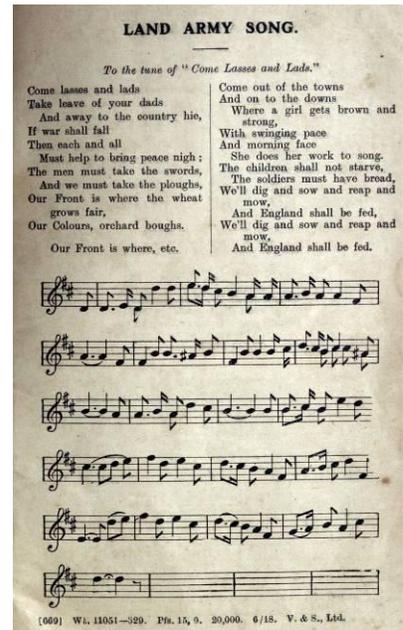
The Women's National Land Service Corps, formed in February 1916 by the Women's Farm and Garden Union, also participated in enrolling and training women to undertake farm work. In Surrey, Duxhurst in Reigate served as a training centre. For correspondence of the Earl and Countess of Onslow with the Surrey Committee for Women's Farm Labour and with the Women's National Land Service Corps relating to the employment of women on the Clendon estate, 1915-1918, see **SHC ref G173/212/1-101**, which includes a published report on the first 8 months of the Corps' activities.

The Corps was the prototype for the Women's Land Army formed in early 1917. The Surrey Women's Agricultural Committee was given the task of organising and training the Land Army in Surrey by delegation from the Women's Branch of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries. For minutes, 1917-1920, of the SWAC and its Instruction and Hostel and Selection and Allocation Sub-committees, see **SHC ref 3410/2/1/1-3**. For a poster issued by the Director-General of National Service claiming '10,000 women wanted for farm work' and setting out terms and conditions, see **SHC ref CC917/Bun10**.

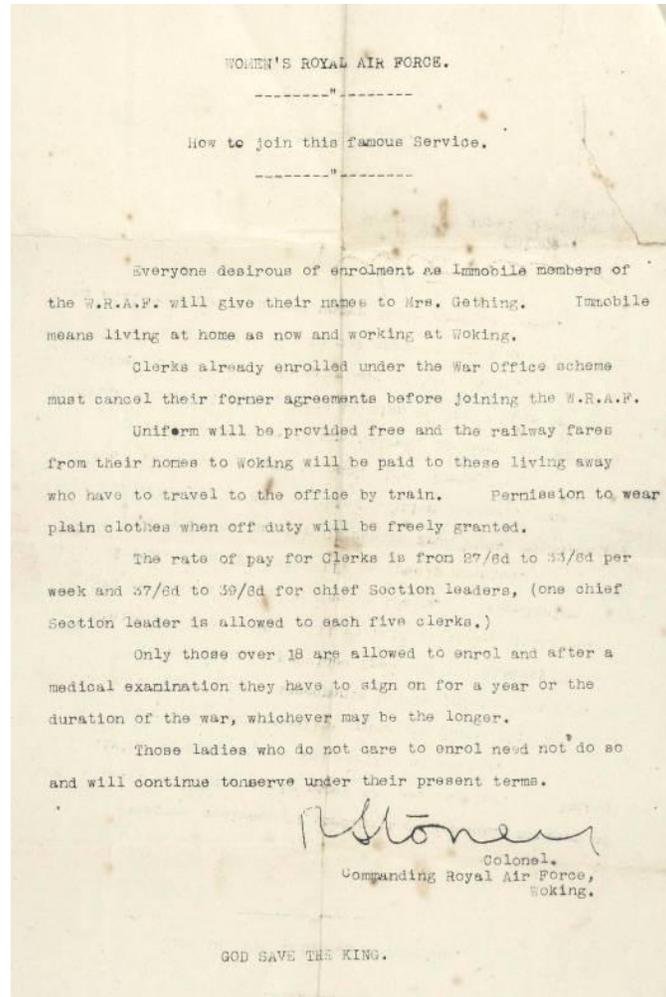
Florence Hooker of Ewhurst enlisted in the Women's Land Army between 1918 and 1919 and worked in Somerset, Surrey and the Isle of Ely. The handbook issued to her by the Women's Branch Food Production Department, Board of Agriculture, containing her service record and including the Land Army song, is held as **SHC ref 8488/1**.

The Women's Institute movement in Britain began during the war, introduced from Canada in 1915 by the Agricultural Organisation Society (AOS), with the aim of encouraging countrywomen to get involved in growing and preserving food to help to increase the supply of food to the war-torn nation. The organisation of new branches was taken over by the Women's Section of the Food Department of the Board of Agriculture and the newly formed branches supported the district committees of the Surrey Women's Agricultural Committee and were represented on the executive committee. Surrey History Centre holds minute books of two Surrey WIs formed during the war, Chobham, established in 1915 (**SHC ref 7650/8/1**) and Bletchingley, established in 1917 (**SHC ref 7610/2/1**). The books contain brief details of the classes that were held, for example how to make starch out of diseased potatoes and 'the responsibility of the vote', and mention initiatives such as the establishment of communal kitchens and the acquisition of allotments and goats.

As the war dragged on, The Women's Army Auxiliary Corps was formed to support the armed services behind the front line. Surviving service records of 7000 of the 57,000 members of the WAAC are held by The National Archives (WO 398). For a recruitment notice for women to join the Royal Flying Corps see **SHC ref 8419/4**. For two photographs of the Army Pay Corps Office in Oriental Road, Woking, 1917 and 1920, which illustrate the displacement of men by women in army clerical posts see **SHC ref 8084/1-2**.



*The Land Army Song*  
(SHC ref 8488/1)



*Notice calling for women to join the Royal Flying Corps as 'immobile members' (SHC ref 8419/4)*