

## Women at War

### *Background Information*

In World War One (WWI) hundreds of thousands of women helped the war effort. They worked in factories, helped on farms, became nurses and some even joined the military as secretaries or cooks. So when World War Two (WWII) began women knew their help would be needed. Many volunteered. But the Government felt it wasn't enough. So in 1941 the Government passed the National Service Act (no. 2). This Act conscripted women to the war effort. Single women aged 20-30 were called up. Later the age limit was changed to include 19-43 year olds.

These women were given the choice of joining the military, working in factories or farming. There was lots of different activities to take part in.

### The Military

There was more than one military group for women to join.

- **Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) and the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF).**

The ATS joined the army, the WRENS joined the Navy and the WAAFs joined the Air Force.

Women did not fight or carry weapons. Some of the jobs these women did instead, included; driving, repairing machines, cooking, operating telephones and even aiming anti-aircraft guns. By the end of the war over 190,000 women worked in the ATS, around 72,000 in the WRENS and 182,000 in the WAAF.

- **Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA)**

Women would work for the Royal Air Force in the ATA. They would fly planes between factories and airfields.

- **The Royal Observer Corps**

The Observer Corps helped the Air Force and women would work in their home towns. The Observer Corps had the job of keeping track of where planes were. Women would help the Air Force in their home towns. This information was passed on to the Air Force so that they could fight the enemy and warn people when air raids were coming. In Horsham, Observers around town would send information to the Observer Corps headquarters at the Drill Hall. At headquarters women workers would answer the phones and mark where the planes were on big maps. There were Observer Corps posts all over the country. In 1941 the King renamed them the Royal Observer Corps (ROC) because of their hard work during the Battle of Britain.

- **First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY)**

They had been running since 1907. In WWI they went out onto the battlefields and looked after injured men whilst waiting for help to arrive. It was a risky job. One of the first women to go onto the battlefields in WWI was Lillian Franklin. She came from Horsham. After WWI she became the leader of FANY.



Poster No.: 1998.1447 © Horsham District Council's Horsham Museum and Art Gallery

Horsham Poster showing the work the women of the ATS did.



- **Spy for Special Operations Executive (SOE)**

In WWII many of the members of FANY joined the secret Special Operations Executive. They became spies for the British, some even went to spy behind enemy lines.

### **Factory Workers**

Some women had worked in factories before the war. During the war many more took on jobs that men had been doing. They would make bombs, shells, air craft parts, uniforms, parachutes and much more. They often found themselves doing very hard jobs like welding. They worked 60 hours a week



© Horsham District Council's Horsham Museum and Art Gallery  
Horsham's Royal Observer Corps 1944.

but were not paid as much as men doing the same job. In Horsham some women worked at a special factory run by the Horsham Patriot Engineers. Everyone in the factory - women, schoolboys and retired men - were all volunteers.

### **Workers for the Women's Land Army**

Women who chose to go into farming joined the Women's Land Army. They were nicknamed 'Land Girls'. They were sent all over the country. They would do all sorts of jobs including; ploughing, planting, lifting potatoes, looking after poultry and even rat catching! The West Sussex County Times reported that many people made fun of the service but this changed as the war went on. By 1943 there were around 80,000 Land Girls in Britain.

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### **Nurse**

Another important job for women was nursing. Before the war many women already worked as nurses. But in the war more were needed.

- **Voluntary Aid Department Nurse**

Volunteer nurses could join Voluntary Aid Department they were known as VAD's. Over 300,000 nurses worked in the war. In Horsham many of these nurses worked at the Hospital on Crawley Road in Roffey. This started as a hospital that treated civilians as well as soldiers. After a few years, however, it was taken over by the Canadian army who were staying in Horsham.

### **Other jobs**

- **Worker for the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS)**

Many women who were not conscripted could still help by joining the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS). They helped with Air Raid Precautions, organising evacuees and looking after people made homeless by the bombs.

- **Teacher**

Teachers from London and other big cities were often sent to the countryside with evacuees. They would look after the children and help teach at the schools who took them in. In the Horsham area a number of teachers from London joined local schools. Because there were so many children the classrooms were not big enough. Teachers would instead take the children outdoors on nature walks or give them war work to do.



## Activity: Solve a History Mystery

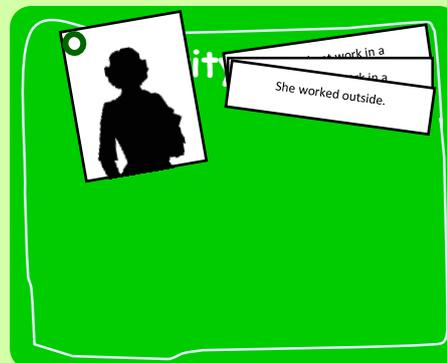
### The History Mystery

Your group should have 5 clues and a character card.

Your challenge is to use your clues to figure out which war-time job your character did.

Hint: If you get really stuck you can ask for one extra clue.

When you solve your History Mystery your teacher will give you an answer card. On your answer card you will find out about a real Horsham woman who did that job in World War Two.

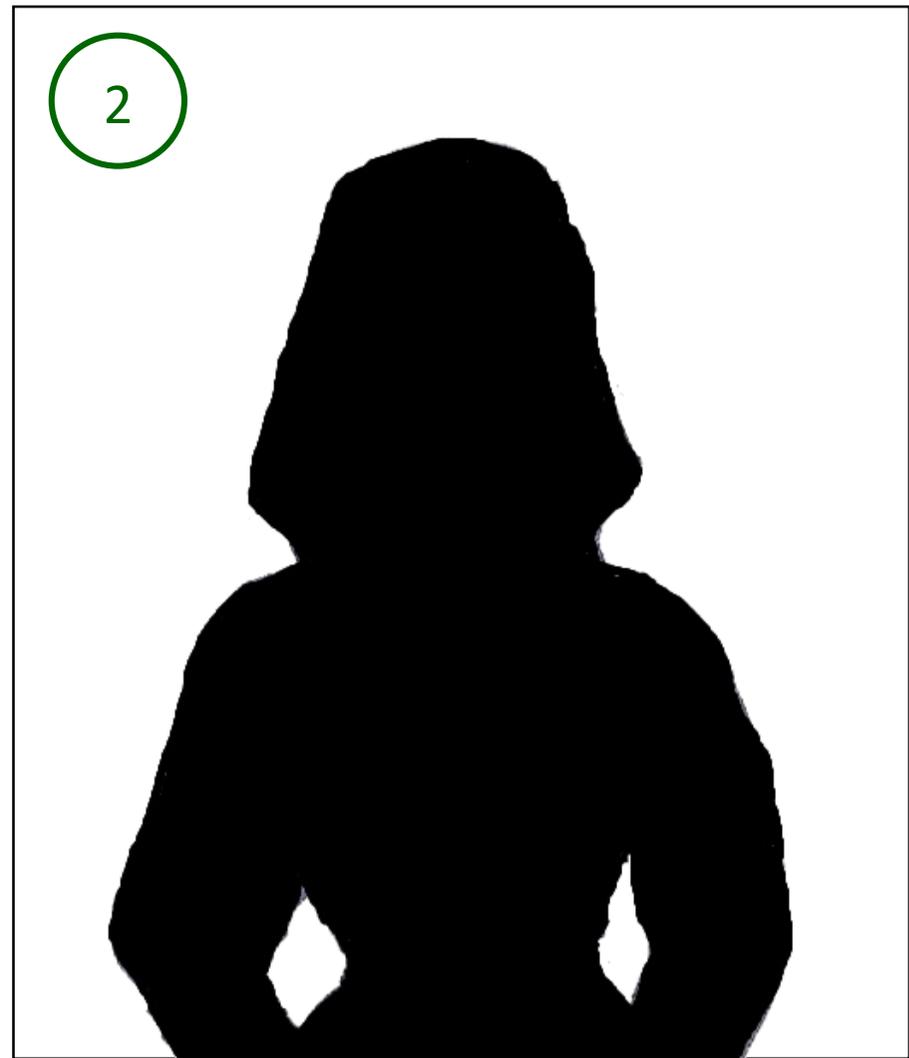
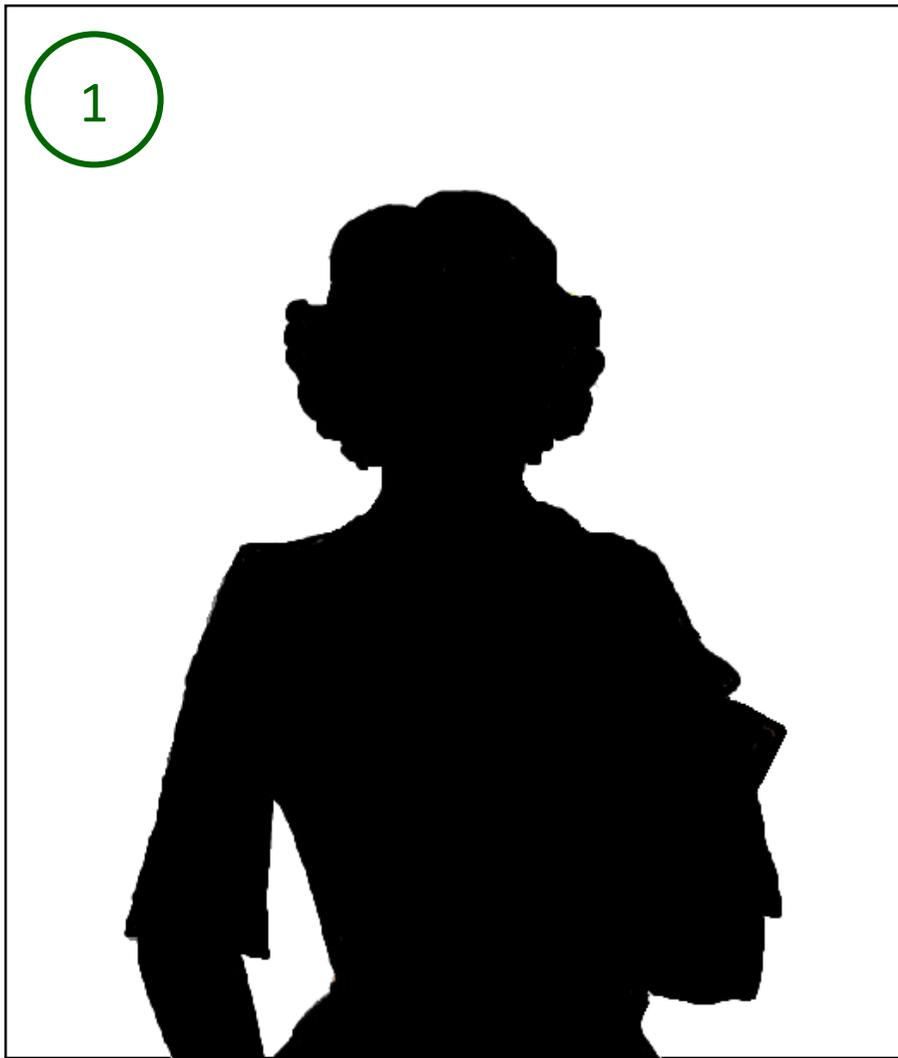


### Jobs to choose from

- Worker for the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS)
- Worker for Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS)
- Worker for Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF)
- Pilot for the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA)
- Worker for the Royal Observer Corps (ROC)
- Worker for the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY)
- Spy for the Special Operations Executive (SOE)
- Factory worker
- Worker for the Women's Land Army (WLA)
- Nurse
- Voluntary Aid Department Nurse (VAD)
- Worker for the Women's Voluntary Service
- Teacher



Character cards for Pupils.



3



Clues for Character 1

She travelled from London to do this job.

She did not have anything to do with military.

She was often outdoors.

She didn't work in a factory.

She had this job before the war began.

She did not work on a farm.

She did not have a uniform.

Extra Hint: she worked with children.

Clues for Character 2

She helped people - especially soldiers.

She was not in the military.

She wore a uniform.

She worked with women who had done this job before the war.

She had special training.

She did not work on a farm.

She did not work in a factory.

Extra Hint: she worked at the hospital

Clues for Character 3

She wore a uniform.

She worked in her home town.

She had special training for the war.

She did not work with children.

She did not work on a farm.

She helped the Air Force.

She did not work in a factory.

Extra Hint: she helped keep track of  
planes.

## Character cards for teachers

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1

Teacher from London



### **The Real Deal: Mrs Una Penny**

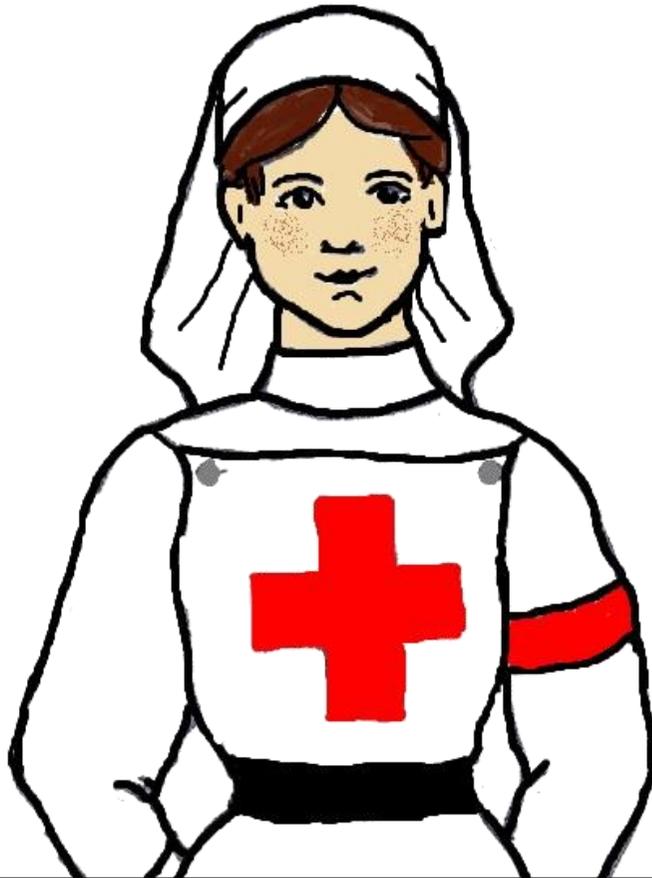
At the start of the war Mrs Una Penny was sent to Horsham from London with a group of evacuees. As a teacher she was not given much of a choice but was told to go. She started teaching in Horsham at Victory Road School then the High School, the Hurst Road School and Roffey school. When she first arrived she was sent to live at a farm in Coolham. She was offered a job to stay in Horsham. So she and her husband - another London teacher - stayed in Horsham after the war.

Information from *Horsham Town and Country: 'When the Siren Sounded'* by Cliff White, (1995).

Fold along this line

2

Nurse



### **The Real Deal: Nurse Marjorie Coste**

Marjorie Coste was a St John's Ambulance Nurse before the war. She helped when the first evacuees came to Horsham. But soon she had to take up war work. As she was already a nurse she went to the hospital at Roffey. She was very busy in the hospital after the battle of Dunkirk. She was also one of the nurses who looked after people injured in the bombing of Orchard Road in Horsham in 1940.

Information from *Horsham Town and Country: 'When the Siren Sounded'* by Cliff White, (1995).

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Worker for the Royal  
Observation Corps



### **The Real Deal: Miss Nellie Jackson**

In 1943 Miss Jackson joined the Observer Corps in Horsham. She had not wanted to work in the fields or the factories. She was trained for six weeks at The Centre on Denne Road. She was given one uniform and material to make another skirt. She was paid for the work and worked 8 hours a day. She worked at The Centre with other girls. The men were out keeping a look out. The girls took their calls and mapped out where the planes were on a big map in The Centre.

Information from *Horsham Town and Country: 'When the Siren Sounded'* by Cliff White, (1995).