

Joan Kleinwort and the WVS



In 1941 Mrs Kleinwort became the Women's Voluntary Services for Civil Defence (W.V.S) County Organiser for East Sussex, which at that time included both rural and urban Cuckfield. When we started looking into exactly what that role involved, it very quickly became clear that the WVS undertook such a hugely diverse range of activities for the war effort that only some could be represented in our display.

For instance, amongst many other activities, they provided and staffed canteens for troops and civilians, set up work parties to make garments for evacuees, ran Rest Centres for those made homeless by bombing, made camouflage netting, operated supply depots for fuel, food and clothing, organised and promoted salvage collections, knitted "comforts" for soldiers, merchant navy men and Civil Defence workers, arranged the billeting of evacuee children, ran Children's Clothing Exchanges, offered clerical assistance to local authorities, inaugurated the Housewives' Service which taught women how to cope in an emergency, arranged transport for servicemen on leave, encouraged the use of dog hair to make knitting yarn, organised the collection of medicinal herbs, operated travelling libraries for the armed forces, provided tea on the quayside as troop ships docked and, perhaps most surprisingly, filled Molotov cocktails (petrol bombs) for use by the Home Guard.

A 1945 caricature of Joan Kleinwort

The respect and admiration in which Mrs Kleinwort was held is evident from the pages of the tribute book presented to her in 1945. In the same year she was awarded the MBE in recognition of her outstanding public service. We show some of the congratulatory telegrams and letters that flooded in when the honour was announced, including one that simply says "I shall always feel that it stands for Most Brilliantly Efficient."

Calling All Dogs !!

This is a poem from Mrs Kleinwort's 1945 tribute book, displayed separately



I'm shaggy, beautiful and free,
As British as a dog can be.
You'll note my hair's a lovely shade;
This natty sweater here displayed
From doggy combings has been made,
Supplied by Merry Boy, that's ME!!

My ancestors, now long asleep,
Performed their duties tending sheep.
They little dreamt their frisky son
Would do his bit, forsaking fun
To play his part in battles won
By sailors, on the stormy Deep!

Now, canines fat and canines thin,
You too can help this war to win.
So, if your mistress starts to park
Your combings in a corner dark,
Remind her, with a friendly bark
That waste in war time is a sin!

And dog in kennel, Peke on rug,
Remember, when you're warm and snug,
That knitted combings may be worn
By Merchantmen, to danger drawn;
And you, like me, may yet adorn
A cruiser, tramp or saucy tug!!

**SO WHAT DID THE SUSSEX W.V.S DO
IN WORLD WAR TWO?***

Among many other activities they:-

- Provided and staffed mobile and static canteens for troops and civilians
- Set up Work Parties to make garments for evacuees and refugees using donated fabric and knitting wool
- Ran Rest Centres for those made homeless by bombing
- Made camouflage netting
- Operated supply depots for fuel, food and clothing
- Filled Molotov cocktails for the Home Guard
- Organised and promoted salvage collections
- Made knitted "comforts" for the military, Merchant Navy and Civil Defence workers
- Arranged the billeting of evacuee children
- Enrolled volunteers for the Public Assistance Committee which helped those made destitute by enemy action
- Co-operated with the W.I to recruit volunteer hop pickers
- Ran the Children's Clothing Scheme for unaccompanied evacuees and Children's Clothing Exchanges
- Distributed clothing coupons when rationing introduced
- Offered clerical assistance to Local Authorities
- Inaugurated the Housewives' Service which taught elementary first-aid and awareness of emergency actions
- Collected rose-hips for making into Vitamin C-rich syrup
- Arranged transport for servicemen on leave and "car pools" as required by government departments
- Provided staff for British Restaurants
- Organised travelling libraries for the armed forces

**It would be easier to list what they didn't do!*

