

## MEAT PIES IN DORNEY

What were the women of Dorney doing 80 years ago? Making meat pies!

They were making this contribution to the war effort as members of the WVS. Originally founded in 1938 as the Women's Voluntary Services for Air Raid Precautions, WVS was initially formed to help recruit women into the ARP movement assisting civilians during and after air raids by providing emergency rest centres, feeding, first aid, and perhaps most famously assisting with the evacuation and billeting of children. By 1943 the organisation had over one million volunteers and was involved in almost every aspect of wartime life from the collection of salvage to the knitting of socks and gloves for merchant seamen.



In September 1941, all the villages in the Eton Rural area were busy helping the military with camouflage nets. Later, women from Dorney were helping with the evacuation programme, driving vehicles and ferrying supplies to hospitals.

In October 1941, the WVS opened a canteen in Dorney. WVS members ran this until May 1943, when the canteen was taken over by the NAAFI. The NAAFI already ran a facility on the camp for the anti-aircraft battery on the Eton Wick side of Dorney Common.

May 1943 also saw the start of the meat pie scheme in Dorney. The pies were made at the village baker's, but shortage of labour meant the women had to help. Eight members of the WVS went to the bakery each week, and it was reported that 300 meat pies a week were being made in Dorney in June 1943. This scheme, which was a national initiative for rural areas, was designed to provide food in the middle of the working day to farm workers, taking pies and snacks out to them in the fields. As food rationing was having an impact, it was considered important to make sure that those engaged in strenuous work received enough nutrition. Nationally, it is recorded that 1,300,000 pies were sold in one week in 1944. The scheme was deemed a great success, in which the wives and mothers of Dorney were playing their part.

During the war, the farm workers locally included not just those who had made it their career but also women who volunteered to serve in the Land Army and schoolchildren who volunteered during the school holidays to help with harvesting. The Land Girls and schoolchildren helped to plug the gaps left by experienced workers who had joined the armed forces. In August 1943 it was reported that boys from a Slough school were ploughing 28 acres of land on Dorney Common on which barley had just been harvested.



Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading

Older boys were given three days training in driving a tractor and doing running repairs, and there was keen competition for this role.

Food rationing did not end when the war ended and likewise the meat pie scheme continued until 1953. In peacetime the WVS was able to take on other welfare activities; in April 1948, it was reported that the Dorney branch had received grateful letters from old people who had been given food parcels. The WVS carries on today as the WRVS.

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