

Doing your bit: the auxiliary and voluntary services

Wherever possible, men, women and young adults were expected to contribute to the war effort by joining the auxiliary or voluntary services.



Arthur Hill (shown above in 1945 at the age of 18) joined the Air Cadets at Shoreham.

Many people volunteered to help as soon as they could. Boy scouts acted as ARP messengers and those not old enough to join the Forces could carry messages for the army as part of the Messenger Service. At the age of 16 boys could become Army, Sea or Air Cadets and started their military training. Girls could join the Women's Junior Corps or the Girls' Training Corps.

In the early days of the war women signed up in their thousands to help. Despite this, more were needed and in 1941 the conscription of young women who were without dependents began. This scheme was gradually extended to include older women. The conscripted women were required to join the Forces (the Women's Royal Naval Service, the Women's Auxiliary Air Force or the Auxiliary Territorial Service) or take on another form of war work. Over 7.5m women were mobilised to work in the auxiliary forces or in the factories.

Those women who were not conscripted could join the Women's Institute (WI) or the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) and helped make jams, collected salvage, staffed field kitchens and rest centres, organised knitting parties and raised funds for the war effort. Other women joined the Civil Defence Services, working as ARP wardens and ambulance drivers.



WVS armband

As well as working in the Civil Defence Services, men between the ages of 17 and 65 could join the Local Defence Volunteers, later renamed the Home Guard. 'Dad's Army', as it became affectionately known, gradually took over many tasks from the military such as keeping watch on coasts and open areas for signs of enemy invaders, checking vehicles at road blocks and capturing enemy airmen who had baled out of their aircraft. At its peak, the Home Guard numbered nearly 1.8 million men.