

OUR HISTORY

.....SPAM AND TEA.....

At the beginning of the war Mrs Green, of Caryllhurst, Park Lane, joined the WVS, as did so many others. Later, this was to become the Women's Royal Voluntary Service (the WRVS of today). She started a canteen for the army – with two unused huts and much hope – which had no recreational facilities locally. The canteen was situated on the north side of the A272, immediately before the Buck Barn crossroads (no traffic lights in those days). Overnight it became very popular; at least it was somewhere for the boys to go for a cup of tea or coffee and a chat with a few locals. Mrs Murray of Glebe Cottage (a Hornung grandchild) was Mrs Green's deputy and together they collected various other helpers by the simple process of knocking on doors and asking for help. When I started work I could only go two evenings a week. My shift consisted of Mrs Green, Mrs Ken Tidey (Madge) of the Nurse's bungalow, Park Lane (sold when new accommodation for the nurse was built next door to the headmaster's house at the former Jolesfield school). Ken was the eldest of Harry Tidey's family and was employed by Southern Railway, but he and Madge wanted to get out into the country at that time with their young son. Then there was Mrs Court, wife of a porter at West Grinstead Station, who lived in one of the Station Cottages, and me.

Evenings were enjoyable and, on the whole, we had a lot of fun getting to know the men and all about their families and problems, and generally providing the "tea and sympathy". The food consisted mainly of spam (American luncheon meat) sandwiches, but I was always delegated to make the tea and coffee, so I don't remember details of food, except that sandwich making seemed to go on forever.

Rationing was very tight at this time (1941/2). I seem to remember that one week we would get 4oz of sugar, meat, butter or fat, and cheese – rather less bacon – while the next week it would be 2oz of each. If you wanted to make jam, you forfeited the jam ration, perhaps getting 1lb, even 2lbs of sugar some months. Mother continued to make jam, jellies and chutneys all through the war – as much as the available sugar allowed. In the country we were luckier than some, and we made good use of wild produce such as mushrooms, blackberries and crab apples etc. Sometimes we were given a rabbit or a brace of pigeons etc and all this helped to break the monotony of basic rations. We were also lucky with our milk "ration". Mr Pankhurst at the Tabby Cat kept a few cows and supplied a few households in the area. He always produced an extra pint or two (milk!) for us when the family refugees arrived.

.....From the memoirs of Claire Walton.....