

My National Service during WW2 By Peggy Hebden (nee George)



At the beginning of 1939, at the age of sixteen, I went to work for Mrs Richenda Digby at The Glebe, Gressenhall, with my sister Audrey. Mrs Digby was bed ridden and had a nurse living in, we were each paid ten shillings a week including bed and board which was good pay.

After a visit home to Brisley, we would cycle back to The Glebe through Fludges ford at Bilney, this photo of me was taken at Fludges foot bridge.

Sadly Mrs Digby died in 1940 and that was the end of our employment. So our bags were packed and we returned home dragging our suitcases through the snow back to Brisley.

Also by then World War II had started and things all changed.

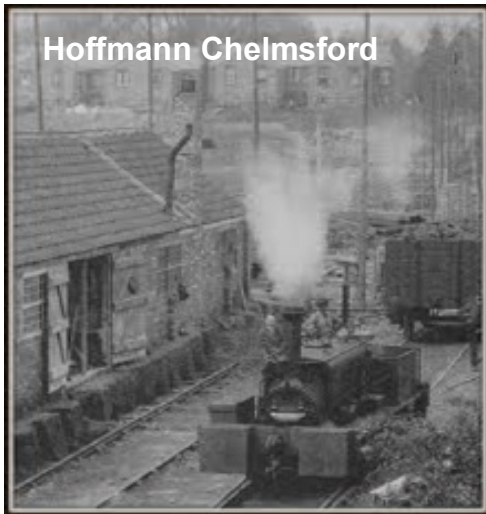
In December 1941 the government passed the National Service Act No 2, which made provision for the conscription of women, so women had to choose whether to enter the armed forces or work in farming or industry. I went to work in Dereham at the Jentique factory making boxes for bombs and instruments. Later the age limit was expanded from 19 to 43 years and then my mother, Minnie, came to work there too.



Jentique, Dereham - Munition boxes

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Later I left Norfolk and went to Chelmsford in Essex to work at Hoffmann's munitions factory. One of my jobs was to inspect ball bearings for faults and ensure that the bearing housing was smooth and the bearings ran freely. Another job I had was very messy, checking bullets for faults by immersing them in a suspension of iron filings in paraffin so that any faults would show up as the dark filings would lodge in the crevices.

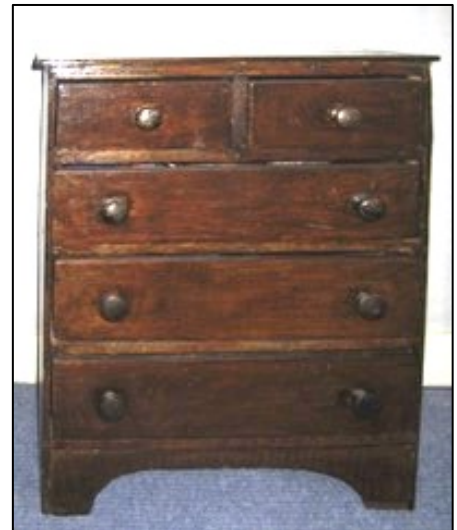


In Chelmsford I went into lodgings with Edith Bunn from Dereham (Edith married Joe Head and their daughter Linda married my nephew Barrie Frost in 1969). Most evenings tinned pilchards were on the tea time menu (something I dislike to this day).

The factories were targets for German bombers and I remember hearing the buzzing sound of the "doodlebugs" (V1 flying bombs) overhead, whilst you heard them you felt safer as when the sound stopped the bomb might have probably dropped somewhere else.

We worked long shifts both day and night, I preferred the night shifts as when the sirens sounded we had to go to the shelters and us girls passed the time trying on makeup. One night in December 1944 a German bomb hit the factory, at that time I was on the day shift and when we went to work in the morning we were turned back from the factory so I packed my bag and went home for the week.

While in Chelmsford in 1944 I celebrated my twenty-first birthday and received a miniature set of drawers from my parents Gus and Minnie, which they bought at an auction held in The Lion club room at Brisley, the chest is still in use today.



Andrew's Post Office & Stores Brisley

In 1946 Andrew Stores in Brisley needed a van driver so I was allowed to return home to Brisley and I started work at the shop. I would pick up the papers from Elmham Station then bike around delivering the papers and groceries in Brisley, Horningtoft and Elmham Heath.