

Women in Forestry

Eileen Worsell

Women's Timber Corps



On the eve of the Second World War, with only seven months' supply of timber stockpiled, Britain was in trouble. Timber was critical to the war effort: it was needed for everything from aircraft and shipbuilding to communications and coal mining. Lacking in both men and timber, the government made a choice. Reluctantly, they opened lumber work for women to apply - and apply they did. Enter the Lumberjills.

Before the war, Eileen Worsell worked in a glass bottle factory. She joined the Women's Timber Corps as she didn't want to end up in munitions factories. Eileen was trained at Culford camp in Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk and became a measurer. Using a tape measure, she recorded the length and girth of a tree. With the aid of a book, called the Hoppus Ready Reckoner, she calculated the cubic quantity of wood in each tree, the wages for the fellers and the cost of the wood. This was an important job as a constant supply of timber was vital during wartime.

Half the timber was needed for the coal mines. Round wood cut from softwood, such as conifer trees, and sawn timber from hardwood, like oak trees, were cut to length for pit props. Pit wood held up the ceiling of the coal seams while miners were at work beneath. The other half of the timber was needed for other wartime commodities, such as, railway sleepers, telegraph poles, shipbuilding, construction for Mosquito and Spitfire combat aircraft and rifle stocks.

The forests provided thousands of pickets, dug into the beaches to deter those attempting to land. Wood was used for packaging boxes for carrying everything from vegetables to military supplies and weapons. Charcoal was also made from wood for gas mask filters and towards the end of the war Eileen was also involved in the preparations for D-Day landings. *Eileen said: 'If it was raining, I would go to the barn and using chestnut palings we'd put them on a machine [tied them together with wire] and then made trackway for D-Day landings.'*