

20th Century Sparks!

Work

Into Service

Before the World War Two, women were an invisible workforce. They were unable to compete with men for jobs, through a lack of education and the firmly held belief that their place was in the home.

However, women did work. They would work as seamstresses, laundry women and in other occupations which could be conducted from the home or were associated with the home. Young girls would leave home to live and work in other homes as servants.



Women Working in Tivoli Laundry, c. 1912
Brighton & Hove in Pictures

On this page, we explore local memories of 'going into service'.

Near to the end of each term, some of the 'ladies' of the village would come to Ditchling School and look the girls over. They wanted those of a neat and tidy appearance who also had a malleable disposition as servants.

Mothers soon found out in which houses it was best to place their daughters, because in some houses with no other help the girl - who would in most cases be just reaching her fourteenth birthday - would become a drudge.

Those girls who had been placed into foster homes by various councils had no choice and it was they who usually got into such houses. They had to stay in their first job for two years.

Doris Hall - [Growing Up in Ditchling](#)

During this time I started to do the dreaded housework. The first job was for three elderly ladies at five shillings a week. This lasted for a year, until one of them died, and they had to make other arrangements. After this I was recommended to a Mr and Mrs Ramsden, who lived in Marine Parade, Rottingdean. They were very kind. He had lost his first wife and married his housekeeper. She taught me how to cook and do the housework. They had many dishes which I had never tasted before, such as halibut and turbot. These, of course, were beyond my mother's purse.

The housework was very hard. One of my tasks was to blacklead the boiler in the kitchen. Another was to hearthstone the back steps. There were no helpful gadgets at that time. Everything was done on hands and knees. Work started at 5am and finished around 4pm. I had to cook for the Ramsdens, so breakfast and dinner were included. The washing and ironing were left to me.

Margaret Ward - [One camp chair in the living room](#)



Work

Into Service - continued

When my eldest sister Emily reached 14 years of age, she was put into service as a housemaid at Pennant Lodge, Queen's Park. My aunt was working there at the time and spoke for her. The gardener was leaving, so my father offered to keep the garden going and we then had extra vegetables in exchange for his work.

Emily noticed the waste of bread, all crusts were removed for toast and no end ones used. She asked the cook if we could have them, so twice a week I took a bag to collect them. I would go into the gate of Queen's Park to see if a piece of cake or pastry was among them, before taking them home. They were used for our breakfast basins.

Daisy Noakes - The Town Beehive

I then went on to pass the Scholarship to the Intermediate School in Brighton. I remember sitting for that examination in a strange classroom. It was an atmosphere you could cut with a knife. I tried so hard, and was so excited to have passed. But although the headmaster implored my parents, they would not allow me to accept it. I was also offered employment at the local Post Office but they would not let me go there either. Instead they chose to send me out to do housework. I was most unhappy.

Margaret Ward - One Camp Chair in the Living Room