

UBBED JNERAL

Memorable diary of the war heroines

THE highly dangerous work of women who worked at Hereford's Royal Ordnance Factory at Rotherwas between the two World Wars will be recalled in vivid detail at a book launch next week.

In The Munitions: Women at War in Herefordshire will be launched at 11am on Tuesday, September 9, at Hereford's Courtyard Arts Centre, and will reveal first-hand accounts of factory workers 'telling it as it was' in a memorable diary of wartime days.

"Nearly 6,000 women worked making shells, bombs, landmines and torpedoes at the factory. It was dirty and dangerous work," said Herefordshire Lore project coordinator Bill Laws.

"At least 29 died a violent death at what was one of Britain's oldest and largest explosives-filling plants. Others died from handling the explosives."

He added: "The book marks a moment in British history when women coped with adversity inside and outside the factory - childbirth and childcare, absent fathers and amorous Americans, sabotage and sickness, hardship and humour, 12-hour shifts and dubious medical tests."

Lucky survivor

As they worked, women slipped notes into the armaments they were making "so the soldiers knew we were thinking of them".

But they found themselves on the receiving end of enemy bombs - one fell on to the factory and killed 19 workers, while another fell on the house occupied by the munitions inspector and his family, wiping out all but one youngster.

The lucky survivor was Ken Hursey, who lost his parents and other relatives in the explosion, and who will be at the book launch next week.

Another victim of the factory bombing recounted: "A girder struck my leg. I thought 'I'll never get out of here. This is my lot'."

Sometimes workers feared the worst. "My aunt said 'We're going to work tonight and I'm not coming home tomorrow'. She never came home."

Poet and performer Graham Hartill will be MC at the launch, when there will be readings by young and old, a live tune or two and light refreshments.

● *In The Munitions: Women at War in Herefordshire* is published by Herefordshire Lore with Longton Press. The book costs £9.99 + £1.50 post and package, and is available from Herefordshire Lore, Pool Farm, Belmont Road, Hereford HR2 7JZ.



A Second World War munitions worker, living at Redhill Hostel, waits for the bus home.

Man knocked to the ground by robbers



▲ ABOVE: Editor of *In the Munitions* Bill Law at Arctic Circle, one of the factories now based at Rotherwas, with Nora Foster, who had been the munitions factory radio operator and Debbie Gittoes of Arctic Circle and Rose Laws (left) and Sophie Chatfield (right) dressed as 1940s munitions girls. 033706-2 ▶ RIGHT: The new book.

The women ready to die for their country

NEARLY 6,000 Herefordshire women were prepared to die for their country working in one of the country's most dangerous wartime jobs.

Several did. The women were making shells, bombs, landmines and torpedoes at The Royal Ordnance Factory, Rotherwas, Hereford.

At least 29 died a violent death at what was one of Britain's oldest and largest

explosives filling plants. Others died from handling incendiary devices.

In the Munitions: Women at War in Herefordshire, is a diary of those dangerous days by Herefordshire Lore.

Adversity

It marks a moment in British history when women coped with adversity inside and outside the factory; childbirth and

child care, absent fathers and amorous Americans, sabotage and sickness, hardship and humour, 12-hour shifts and dubious medical checks.

The book is compiled from interviews with former workers and presented as told. Published with Logaston Press, it is available from Herefordshire Lore, Pool Farm, Belmont Road, Hereford, priced £9.99.

In the Munitions - *launch of book about local women working in wartime*

IN THE MUNITIONS: *Women At War In Herefordshire*, Herefordshire. Lore's book about the people who worked at Royal Ordnance Factor in Hereford during the last two World Wars, will be launched at the Courtyard Arts Centre, Edgar Street, Hereford, at 11.00 a.m. on Tuesday September 9th.

Nearly 6,000 women, including many from Ross, worked making shells, bombs, landmines and torpedoes at The Royal Ordnance Factory at Rotherwas, Hereford during two World Wars.

It was dirty and dangerous work. At least twenty nine died a violent death at what was one of Britain's oldest, and largest, explosives filling plants. Others died from handling the explosives.

'In The Munitions' marks a moment in British history when women coped with adversity inside and outside the factory: childbirth and child

care; absent fathers and amorous Americans; sabotage and sickness; hardship and humour; twelve hour shifts and dubious medical checks.

Women on the munitions slipped notes in with the armaments "so the soldiers knew we were thinking of them." They found themselves on the receiving end of bombs: "A girder struck my leg. I thought: I'll never get out of here. This is my lot..."

And sometimes they feared the worst: "My aunt said: 'We're going to work tonight and I'm not coming home tomorrow.' She never came home."

Compiled from interviews with former workers, and presented as told, 'In The Munitions' is a diary of those days.

Poet and performer Graham Hartill will be Master of Ceremonies at the launch when there will be readings from the book by performers young and old, a live tune or two from the era and light refreshments.

Book launch

NEARLY 6,000 women worked making shells, bombs, landmines and torpedoes at The Royal Ordnance Factory at Rotherwas during the last two World Wars.

A new book titled *In The Munitions: Women At War In Herefordshire* is launched at 11am next Tuesday at Hereford's Courtyard Theatre.

Compiled from interviews with former workers and presented as told, *In The Munitions* is a diary of those dangerous days. Poet and performer Graham Hartill will be at the launch when there will be readings from the book by performers young and old, a live tune or two from the era and light refreshments. Further details available on 01432 268806.



▲ A Second World War munitions worker, living at Redhill Hostel, waits for the bus home – an illustration from *In The Munitions*.

● Army discovered age deception



ANITA HOWELLS
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Call to arms for Annie, 16

AT 16-YEARS-OLD Annie Mary Slade was prepared to die for her country. The young patriot who sneaked into the Army underage eventually found her front line in Hereford.

Thrown out of the forces when her deception was discovered, Annie, now aged 101, moved from the Rhondda to Whitecross, Hereford, then Ross-on-Wye, and made munitions at the Royal Ordnance Factory, Rotherwas.

Her remarkable story is told in a new book, *In the Munitions: Women at War in Herefordshire*, produced by county reminiscence group Herefordshire Lore.

Polite men

"I wanted to do something for my country. So I joined the munition works when I was 16. They sent me to Hereford. I was on the Powder. The men were very polite to us," Annie reports.

Her words are a testimonial to thousands of brave women who risked life and limb during two world wars. At least 29 women died a violent death.

Twinkling lights were a grave warning.

"A Zeppelin came over one night and the factory lights twinkled and went out. Some of the workers had their hands off with the machines. There was a few 'ad their fingers off," said Annie.

She was there for three years until 'the peace was signed'. There was a daily routine of high drama and high security.

"When you went in, you had to go through two barriers. One with your clothes on and you would be searched...and then when we went over the other barrier we had to strip off and be searched in our under clothes...And then we were searched again going out. Yes, for fear we had any powder on us."

Initially she worked on the mills with a friend. "Nobody else was in there. If something went wrong only us two was in there."

Later she put powder in shells. "We had to drink a lot of milk because of the



▲ War survivor Annie Mary Slade. powder. We had to wear masks on our faces and only show your eyes to see what you were doing. My hair was curly and where it used to poke out it went all green from the powder," said Annie

who lost her teeth to the powder.

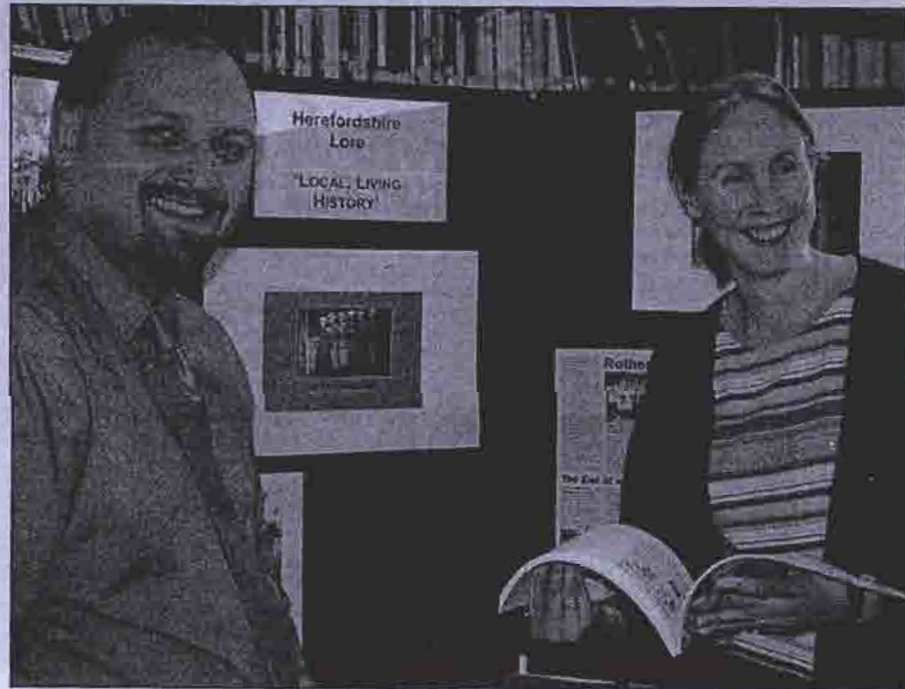
Arms production had began at Rotherwas in 1916 and ended in the 1950s. Women came from far and wide. The first wave of outsiders found lodgings but as numbers grew tents and sheds were erected in fields along Walnut Tree Avenue and Aylestone Hill. By 1917 3,977 employees were women.

Step dancing

They found fun too. "In the canteen at night all those Lancashire girls, they'd be step dancing on the tables. And we would be bashing the tin plates, you know? ... they'd be dancing on the tables in these clogs. It was dangerous work, but we had fun, didn't we? We enjoyed ourselves."

The book has become a local best seller and includes the memoirs of more than 50 women. Tape recordings from their interviews and old photographs are now stored at the County Records Office.

Published by Herefordshire Lore with Logaston Press, the book costs £9.99, plus £1.50 post and packing, from Herefordshire Lore, Pool Farm, Belmont Road, Hereford.



▲ Hot on the trail of history... Herefordshire Lore chairman John Turner with Herefordshire archivist Elizabeth Semper O'Keefe.