

Laura Murphy Interview Transcript

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...would have too prongs of from each end with an iron bar over the top...(?)...this we would put a butcher's hook and we would hang our pots on to the cook the food, if the wood was wet it would be a long time burning and very smokey our food used to taste of smoke but we still ate it.

There would be a tap at the end of the field for our water and right over the field there would be several huts these would have wooden seats with a hole in and these were our toilets, every thing was very basic, but we didn't mind we still enjoyed being hopping.

On Monday mornings we used to have to go the fields where the hops grew as we could all start picking, mum would have packed loads of sandwiches and we used to take big bottles of water and a big enamel tea pot that mum, would have put tea and sugar and condensed milk in, we would also take a kettle of water, tin mugs, our stools and baskets we took these and brought them, back every day, because once we got on the field we didn't leave until night time, and when we got to the field the poll pullies who were men, would loosen the Bines of the of the vine because the bines grew very tall about 7-8 ft or more and then we would pull the bines down and start picking the hop's into a big bin or baskets and then then tip the baskets into the bins, we would pull the bines across our knees to pick the hops and they were often wet and dimly so we would all wear coarse apron, these we would make before we went hopping, we would get a sack and cut down the side and bottom ad then sew tape each end to tie up round our backs, we would all wear scarfs as well because all the dust and insects would drop on us, we would pick the hops till dinner time and then the poll pullies would come round and measure the hops we had picked and the total would be put in his book and we would have a book as well, that he used to put the total in this was our record of the work we had done and the money we had earnt: a whistle would then blow and we would all stop picking to eat our sandwiches and make a fire so that we could boil the kettle to make our tea, our hands were always very dirty ad the hops would make all out food taste bitter, but by then we were so hungry that we ate everything. I think we would be able to play for the rest of the hour and then the whistle used to go again and we would all start picking again until it was time to go home, I think this was about half 5 to 6 but if it had rained and we wanted time we would have to work till later, the men would come and measure the hops again and mark it in the books, and then the whistle would go again and we would all pack up and walk home again to our huts these were sometimes about 20 minutes away from the hops so we were very tired by the time we got back, we would then light our fires to cook our dinner, while our dinner was cooking, the big children would go shopping for the food for the next day, while the young one would be getting washed.

We would have our dinner when it was cooked and we would get washed up all this was on the table outside the hut, us big ones would take it in turns to wash down inside the hut there weren't any baths, only the tin one we had taken, and then mum would have her wash while we played outside, and then he young ones would be put to bed and us older ones and the mothers would sit round the camp fire talking, and sometimes the Salvation Army used to come round and play there music and we would all have a sing song, sometimes they would bring there magic lanterns and then at the end we would all say our prayers and go to bed, to get ready for the next day.

We would work all week and on Saturday morning, on the Saturday afternoons Mum's would do these washing and shopping we would help and then we would all play or go scrumping till teatime that was good fun. On Sunday morning Mum would wash all our hair and bath us as best as she could, and then we would go to Church at the top of the hill, but on our way we would take our dinner to the Baker to cook, we would put our meat and potatoes in a big tin dish and the baker would put it in his oven for us, I think it was 6 or 7 and then at 1 o'clock when we came home from church we would get our dinner mum would have cooked the green so we would have a lovely roast dinner and our dads' often came down on Sundays so that was a lovely day.

We were down hopping for about 4 or 5 weeks and if the weather was nice we used to get lovely and brown, and I can remember we had some lovely dinners, sometimes the "Home Dwellers", these were people who lived and worked near the farms, would come round and sell fresh rabbits for about 1? each that would be about the same as 5d in todays money. Mum would put the rabbit after cutting it up into a big stew pot with lots of potatoes and vegetables and slices of pork, and when it was nearly ready she would thicken the gravy and chop parsley up in it as well, this was really a lovely dinner, and then we would have big pots of stew with dumplings in, there were always plenty of apples and plums and blackberries with custard for our pudding if we had sausages at any time these would be cooked on the camp fire as well, so I suppose they would be like people cook on barbecues now, except ours had burnt twigs in the pan as well.

We enjoyed it all though, and when it was to go home, we were always sad. Mum would have to pack everything up again, and then all the mums would have to go to the farmer to be paid the money we had earnt. The farmer would have a lot of chickens killed, and he would have big baskets of apples and plums, and new laid eggs as well, so all the mums would buy these.

When we all got back in our lorries to go home again we would have big bines of hops draped over the top and sides, branches with apples still on them which the farmer sold us, would be tied up as well, and the chickens would be hanging up as well, and then we would all be off, singing all the way home, it must have been quite a site because lots of other people would go by lorries and lots would go and come back by train as well, so everyone knew when hopping was all over for another year.

Laura Murphy nee Waller.