

WORKING FOR THE COUNTY HERB COMMITTEE IN WARTIME

Recollections by MOLLIE RIPPIN

The difficulty of importing ingredients for drugs drove us back to collecting and using some of the Herbs and Simples known and used by our forefathers (though I suspect our foremothers did a very great deal of the work).

The County Herb Committee co-ordinated this work under the Chairmanship of Mrs Keene, to whose memory the little Herb Garden, on the way into Castle Gardens from the Newark was made

ROSE HIPS, a very valuable source of Vitamin C were collected in enormous quantities for making into Rose Hip Syrup. Desford Women's Institute collected then on one occasion at least, but otherwise I think I worked alone in our village. I had to do it at weekends, as I was at work during the week, and daylight failed too quickly to pick except in the immediate neighbourhood. I made a note of where dog-roses were plentiful, and then in the Autumn picked and picked, to the outskirts of the Parish, until frost made them unusable, carrying them in a large rucksack as well as ordinary bags. They then had to be taken into Leicester, by car when we could run it, otherwise by bus, and carried across to Butlers the Manufacturing Chemists in Humberstone Gate, from the Newarkes. I did this every Saturday and Sunday through September and October, varying from Ratby Boroughs to Peckleton, and Fox Court to The Twenty-Nine Steps. It helped to have a good knowledge of the Rights of Way in the Parish.

FOX GLOVE LEAVES; an important source for Digitalis (for heart treatment). These had to be gathered, kept unbruised, and delivered to Butlers within 24 hours of picking.

I went armed with sacks, which were loosely filled, so it meant that where they were plentiful one had perhaps 4-6 sacks to cope with; not heavy, but cumbersome. Ratby Boroughs was a good source of supply, but I had to lug them down to the Bridle path, through the Boys' School garden (shortest route) to the Markfield Lane, where Marion Leedham met me with her bike, loaded up what she could carry, and I managed the rest over the Jot, and up the footpath to Desford. Kirby Moats was another good place, and not quite so far to the road. But I remember carrying packs up the Brascote Lane and piling into a fullish bus, accompanied by my very muddy dog who had had a happy time walloping about in a boggy bit of moat. Once or twice I had to get them to Butlers, and remember on one occasion carrying a sack over my shoulder through the town, and the sack read "Dogs love Vims". I turned it over - but found that Dogs still loved Vims on the other side.

DANDELION ROOTS; I never did much with them - they had to be dug up and dried. The best thing was to get a farmer's permission to follow the plough, and scrounge for any roots he turned up. Not sure what they were used for; possibly a Diuretic?

RASPBERRY LEAVES; picked and dried, used for women in childbirth. Necessarily, one's supply was limited.

NETTLES; the most unpleasant of the lot to handle. Used to obtain Chlorophyll for dyeing. You had to gather them when young, tie in bunches of 6 sprigs, and hang up to dry. I had the alcoves of Sunbreak festooned with them. When dry, one had to rub off the leaves, and they could still sting when dry.

One got paid a small amount for what one took in - the hardest earned money in my working life!

Illustration by Penny Hazelton

