

Book Review

And a Nightingale Sang

by Marianne Sells (compiled by Claire Sells)

Marianne was born in 1933 and spent the first few years of her life in the family home in Selsey. But when war broke out it was considered too close to the bombing targets of Portsmouth to be safe. The family headed north and fetched up on a farm in Lodsworth, and this is where Marianne's Sussex childhood took place.



In later life she wrote down her memories, and when she died her daughter Claire discovered papers scattered all over the house. Marianne had suffered with vascular dementia for five and a half years, and it was quite a task for Claire to gather the papers and put them into some kind of order. Claire's touch is light, and her mother's voice speaks directly to us, and rather than try to join them into a cohesive story Claire presents stand-alone anecdotes that offer of us glimpses of a rural idyll under the shadow of WW2.

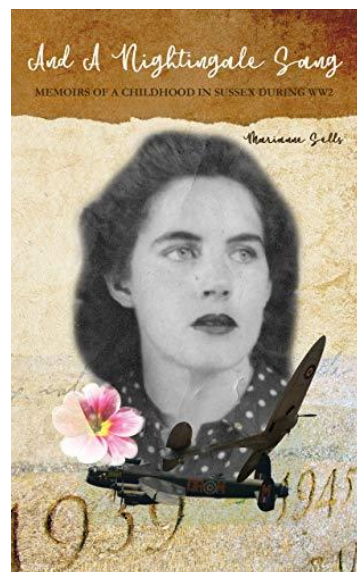
Is it a literary masterpiece? Probably not, but it is a fascinating insight into everyday village life through the eyes of a child growing from 6 to 14. And because the village is Lodsworth, Midhurst and Easebourne also get a mention.

To give a flavour, here are some short extracts:

"The small village where we were based [Lodsworth] was self-sufficient, with a village store, separate post office, vet, shoemakers, blacksmiths and two women who laundered. Two doctors resided in nearby Midhurst, who would come out for a fee. There was also the village bobby on a bicycle who would put the fear of God into little boys who misbehaved!"

"In the hall my father's shotgun hung on the wall, the cartridges stashed in a drawer. [Father was absent for most of the war.] We had been given strict instructions to use it if any German tried to enter the house. 'It might be better if you took aspirin,' my father had told us, as we women would all be sent to the camps to be used for further breeding by the Germans. We accepted this as normal."

"My mother suggested one warm evening that we go and listen to the nightingales and so we made our way to the clearing in the copse. The moonlight had an unearthly glow and soon we heard the clear and familiar notes, one silver peal after another, the most wonderful sound. I reflected that the world was in chaos but here was a bird singing away as if there were no bombs, displaced people or broken homes."



Harvey Tordoff, Midhurst, 24 August 2021