WORKING AT THE FACTORY

by Paul R. Hare

THE ARMY AERIAL WORKS. FARNBORO.
NO 117.

One worker proudly sent this postcard to friends in Surrey saying "The large building in the front of the photo is our workshop. Not a bad sized place is it?".
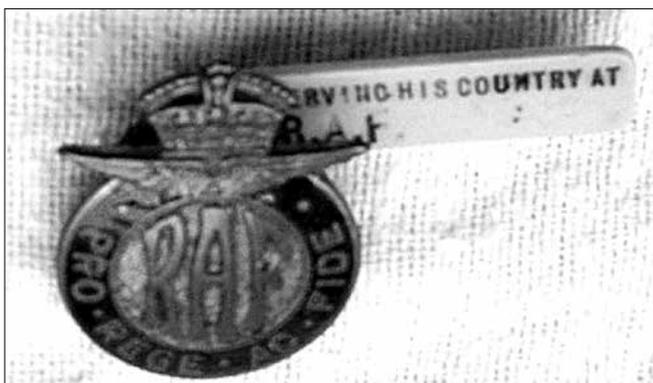
FOR MANY PEOPLE, their careers are dictated by the place of their birth; just as fishing villages send their sons to sea, those born on farms work on the land, and miners' sons almost inevitably spend their working lives underground so in the area around Farnborough the Royal Aircraft Factory drew workers like a magnet.

So great was its attraction that middle class families soon began to complain of a shortage of domestic servants, especially as the Factory offered better pay and conditions than they were prepared to, a fact reported to the 1916 enquiry into the Factory's affairs as an objection to its continued existence!

From a staff of about 100 in 1909 the Factory grew, under the superintendence of Mervyn O'Gorman, to employ around 360 at the beginning of 1912 with the number rising rapidly in 1914, reaching a peak of almost 5000 before the end of the war, more than half of them being women.

Soon after the outbreak of the war, with jingoistic civilian ladies handing out white feathers to any man of military age and not in uniform, Mervyn O' Gorman, in anticipation of a government initiative, issued all his staff with small lapel badges to show that they were employed on war work, and so already serving their country. These had the letters RAF in the centre, surmounted by a pair of wings and a crown, and bore the inscription *Pro Rege Ac Fide* (which the author's schoolboy

Workers 'stringing' the wing panel of an FE8 by passing a long needle back and forth through the panel to secure the fabric to the ribs.:Crown Copyright

Lapel badge intended to show that the wearer was employed at the Royal Aircraft Factory, on War Work. This one, No. 3235, from the author's collection, was issued to W.E. Pollard. about whom, unfortunately, no details are known.