

Continuing the Editor's look at women in war time Three Stories of the Women's Land Army

Doree Griffin

Doree Griffin loved the five years that she spent in the Women's Land Army.

Doree was working as a tracer at Filton when she and Peggy Coombes decided to join up. The girls had one month's training at Usk Agricultural College. Among the skills they were taught was milking, using a rubber udder on a trestle as a substitute cow. Most of her learning was done 'on the job' though, often from the old hands left working the farms.

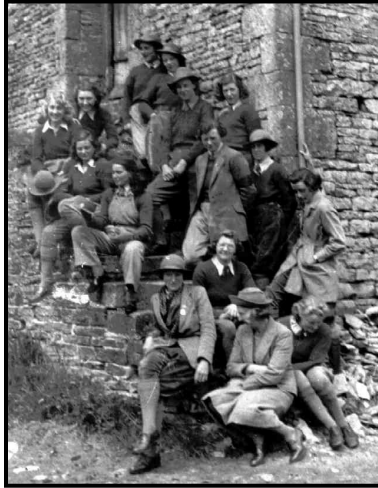
Doree started her service near Stroud but moved to Gawcombe in 1940. She recalls that the 'old hands' on the farms enjoyed playing tricks on the Land Girls, often thinking that they were not up to the

hard, manual labour. One old carter showed her a nest of goose eggs, hidden amongst a stack of swedes. They were obviously too old to eat so he suggested she throw them against the barn wall. You can imagine the smell that resulted!

Italian POW's were used on the farm as extra labour. One prisoner made a cigarette case for Doree from scrap metal; she still has this treasured memento.

Doree met her future husband Mervyn at a Young Farmer's

dance. She recalls that you could always pick out the Land Army girls, they were the ones sitting on their red, work-worn hands!



Doree and Land Girls at a milking competition

Peggy Coombes

"I could write a book about my life in the Land Army, but thought I would tell you of a different aspect of our life. There were five of us living in Hawkwell Cottage, Westcote - Doree, Josy, Pam, Diana and myself. We had the cottage for ourselves and our housekeeper lived next door. We had no use for the kitchen, so Mr. Wagner, our boss, put a bath next to the copper and built a large cupboard for our coats and gumboots. The floor was concrete; we had no electricity or hot water, so bath night was a special treat.



Josy was excused from the preparations as she worked in the dairy and worked the longest hours. Pam was the tractor driver and usually took Diana with her to the wood to fetch a fallen tree, or one that Charles the woodman had cut down for some reason. They would take it to the saw bench down at the farm and cut it into logs.

In the meantime Doree and I would pump the water to fill the boiler and lay the fire. The actual bath time was ruled by the weather, if there was a wind the

fire would burn up, if it was calm the fire sulked.

We took it in turns to have first bath; the first person had half the copper of water and each succeeding person was allowed one scoop of hot water to add to the now tepid bath. The last person had the most water but it was now a bit murky! Our young men often called at the cottage. They would knock loudly at the back door, the only way into the cottage,

so that we could blow out the candle while they walked through our 'bathroom' to the sitting room. Three of the girls married local farmers at the end of the war, and I married Bob, a local trainee accountant. Sixty years on, I often have a little chuckle while enjoying a bath full of hot, scented water. Those were the days!"

Irene Carpenter



"I was born and grew up in Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire. When I was 17 ½ years old I signed up to join the Women's Land Army. After basic training at Rease Heath College in Nantwich, Cheshire I had hoped to go into horticulture but it was not to be. I was sent as a hand-milker to a farm in Iffley. Being a townie I was not used to cows but this was soon to change! After a short time at Iffley I moved to Mrs. Hall's Court Farm in Shipton. Mr Reg Bradley met me at the station and drove me to Springhill Cottages, where I was to live with several other Land Girls. I shared a room with Dorothy, a girl from Birmingham, who was to become a lifelong friend. We were up early for milking, but the cottage was not designed for multiple occupancy; if you were late in the bathroom queue it meant cold water to wash in.

Milking time

Over to the cowshed for a 5:30am start on washing the cows prior to milking. On cold, winter mornings Dorothy would slip a hot water bottle down her overalls; this made walking extremely difficult!

After milking we went to the bothy, opposite the cricket field, for breakfast. There were two lady evacuees who did the cooking, Vi (?) and Win Dolton (mentioned in 'Staying On', Dec/Jan edition). They made good meals from whatever was available.

Mrs Hall had a huge, walled garden in Plum Lane (now occupied by houses); May Wright and her uncle worked the garden, providing us with vegetables. POW's worked on the arable side of the farm, along with lads from the YMCA, including 2 Jewish German refugees, who shared meal times with us. We also exchanged views on everything, including what we would do when the war was over.

When funds allowed we went to the Red Horse or the Lamb, hosted by Mr & Mrs Avery, for a shandy and a game of darts. I loved the village and it was here that I met my future husband. I moved briefly with the WLA but have such happy memories of the village and its people during my early years here. Ramsay and I married in 1946 in St. Mary's church and I have lived in the Wychwoods ever since".