
Three Stories of the Women's Land Army

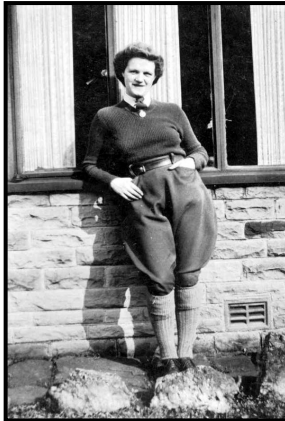
Concluding the Editor's look at women in wartime

Dorothy Treweeke

“At the outbreak of war in 1939 I was 16 years old and worked in an office in a small town in the West Riding of Yorkshire. By 1941 I was eligible for active service and the choice was between the armed forces or a munitions factory. My mother thought that the WAAF would be too dangerous so I joined the WLA. One very cold November morning I arrived on Leeds City Station and joined 36 other girls to travel to Northampton. We went to a large house, commandeered for Land Girls, and from there we all worked on different farms in the area.

Hard life

It was pretty grim at the hostel, no hot water and not much hot food either. After 12 months I was sent to another farm to take responsibility for milking 5 cows, feeding the calves and pigs and helping with jobs in the fields in my spare time! One summer day I went to the fields to



bring in the cows to milk. We had a large bull that always accompanied the cows to and from the fields; on this particular day, as I came close to him he started behaving strangely; he put his head down and came for me. Luckily I was not far from the edge of the field, so I turned my back and he tossed me into the hedge. I was able to crawl through the hedge and, as the farm manager pointed out, I was very lucky indeed. The bull had to be destroyed because he also tossed an Italian POW into the manger.

Milton Forever

My next posting brought me to Milton-under-Wychwood, in September 1944. Mr Treweeke, my new boss, met me at Shipton Station and my first memory is the smell of wood smoke from Groves' yard. There is not much more to tell except that this was where I met my husband Norman and I decided to stay FOREVER.”

Margaret Longshaw

“I first came to Oxfordshire in 1945 as a volunteer Land Girl. We were greeted at Oxford and taken to Glympton Park Manor House, where we did a month's basic training. Country life was very different from what I was used to in the

city and the training was tough – blisters on hands and feet and aching muscles. After training, I was sent to Swalcliffe Manor, near Banbury. There were 28 girls living there; I was 18 but some were younger than me. We were mostly from

the North; the Geordie girls were best!

Learning the ropes

We usually worked in gangs of six and I became an expert at bond cutting. When we were threshing and pitching sheaves of barley, we wore gumboots all the time, because of the rats and mice. Some of the ricks of corn were left for a long time, hence very fat rats! We did most of the jobs in season and earned 19/6 for a 48-hour week; all our keep and uniforms were provided. After a while I became a gangleader responsible for 10 girls and was paid an extra 2/6 (12 ½p) per week. In January 1948 I was sent to Oxford on a driving course, living in a hostel at Shotover Manor. At the end of the course I was sent to Chadlington with a canvas-topped, army-type, Austin van, which held 10 girls at a pinch. I was the forewoman responsible for 24 girls. They were great girls who, despite the hard work, were full of fun; some were hoping to find rich farmers as husbands. We all loved dancing but had to dance

with each other at village hops, as men were in short supply. Food was short too; we did not have much rich or sweet food. We did have an excellent cook at Chadlington, Betty, who did wonders with national supplies. I have many happy memories and lived in some beautiful old houses, all commandeered by the government.



Cosying Up

We slept in army-type beds or bunks; in winter we had to put our greatcoats over our thin blankets to keep warm. One day the warden gave us each a present from the Canadian Red Cross – beautiful, handmade patchwork quilts, made from old shirt and dress prints. Betty, the cook from Chadlington, did find her farmer husband and Audrey, my Yorkshire friend, also married a handsome farmer's son. I married a lad from Ascott, not a farmer or rich. I was released in 1951 receiving a certificate in recognition of my service, signed by Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother".

Gladys Avery

Gladys Avery (nee Habgood) did not join the Women's Land Army as she was already working on her father's farm at Chadlington. At the outbreak of war 90 of the farm's 120 acres were taken for a landing ground by the RAF. Bulldozers were brought in to remove all hedgerows and trees, never to be replanted. The Army pitched their tents in the fields and the cart shed became a cookhouse and canteen. Towards the end of the war the great barn was demolished to give a clearer way for planes to land. Labour was short and Gladys and her

brother would often have to help milk the cows after walking home from school. The morning milk had to be taken to the main road for collection, which meant walking across the airfield. Despite waiting for the 'all clear' Gladys often had to flatten herself on the ground while planes took off and landed around her.

Gladys wrote a very detailed account of her farming memories, which can be read in the Wychwoods History Journal, No.13, 1998.