

“The girls call this ‘The Women’s Liberation Army’”:
Oral History and the Experience of being in the Women’s Land Army

Tyson Rosberg

A Graduating Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements, in the
Honours Program,
For the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts
in the
Department
of
History

The University of Victoria
April 27, 2011

Table of Contents

Introduction: The Women's Land Army and Oral History	Page 3
Chapter I: Agriculture and Food before the Second World War	8
Chapter II: Back to the Land	16
Chapter III: Bad Food and Poor Housing	24
Chapter IV: Sexism and Discrimination	29
Conclusion: Why Have We Forgotten?	38
Works Cited	42
Appendix	45
Participant Consent Form	46
Interview Questions	48
Recruitment Scripts	50

Introduction:

The Women's Land Army and Oral History

*What hosts of women everywhere I see!
 I'm sick to death of them—and they of me.
 (The few remaining men are small and pale—
 Was lends a spurious value to the male.)
 Mechanics are supplanted by their mothers;
 Aunts take the place of artisans and others;
 Wives sell the sago, daughters drive the van,
 Even the mansion is without a man!
 Females are farming who were frail before,
 Matrons attending meetings by the score,
 Maidens are mending multiple machines,
 And virgins vending station-magazines.
 Dames, hoydens, wenches, harridans, and hussies
 Cram to congestion all the trams and busses;
 Misses and grandmas, mistresses and nieces
 Infest bombed buildings, picking up the pieces.
 Girls from the South and lassies from the North,
 Sisters and sweethearts, bustle back and forth.
 The newsboy and the boy who drives the plough:
 Postman and milkman—all are ladies now.
 Doctors and engineers—yes, even these—
 Poets and politicians, all are shes.
 (The very beasts that in the meadows browse
 Are ewes and mares, heifers and hens and cows...)
 All, doubtless, worthy to a high degree;
 Yes, including me!¹*

- Alice Coats, "The Monstrous Regiment," 1943

¹ Alice Coats, "The Monstrous Regiment." *Poems of the Land Army: An Anthology of Verse by Members of the Women's Land Army*. V. Sackville-West, ed. London: Chesham Street, 1945, 35.

This poem from 1943 clearly illustrates the spirit of the age. With voluntary enlistment, conscription, and movement of male workers throughout the country, many of the jobs traditionally held by men—mechanics, van drivers, artisans, postmen, milkmen, doctors, and engineers—became increasingly dominated by a female workforce. Even in agriculture, the oldest occupation from which women had been excluded during the early years of the Industrial Revolution, did women take up jobs for the war effort; by the end of the war some 80,000 women had enlisted in the Women's Land Army. They worked long hard hours with poor pay, endured bad living conditions and abuse, and faced discrimination from farmers, all so that Britain and its army could continue to fight the war against Germany on a full stomach. However, the Land Army's efforts during the war have not been recognized and are virtually forgotten. In terms of traditional historiography, most histories of the Second World War make limited, if any, reference to the Women's Land Army. Even Angus Calder, perhaps the most eminent of British wartime historians, only devotes a mere three pages to the topic in his expansive and wide-ranging book *The People's War*. Worse still, those books that do discuss the Land Army misrepresent its experience as one of idyllic and pastoral bliss; they portray the Land Girl as a "Cinderella in the field," glazing over or completely ignoring the harsher realities of being in the Land Army. Evidently then, despite their hard-work and sacrifice, and ability to keep the British army and civilian population fed in wartime, the Land Army has been steadily forgotten and excluded from both the written history and memory of the Second World War. Thus, a new history needs to be written—one that realistically depicts the experience of being in the Women's Land Army during the Second World War, and focuses not just on their working and living conditions, but also the social lives of the women as well. This essay is at least an attempt to fill the historical gap surrounding the Women's Land Army. However, this raises the question of how to best illustrate the experience of the Women's Land Army, when traditional history has largely forgotten it? The answer: oral history.

In his article "Talking about War: Reflections on Doing Oral History and Military History," Edward Coffman states that in order to get "contemporary colour, [and] contemporary atmosphere one must seek it among the impressions which can only be obtained from those who lived a life amid

particular surroundings.”² Thus, in trying to recreate the experience of an historic event, one should not search for explanations exclusively in books, but rather from the very people who witnessed and lived their lives during that particular event. This is of particular importance when dealing with World War II, since the majority of books on the topic were written forty to sixty years after the war by historians who not only did not experience the conflict themselves, but who also grew up in the post-war world. Thus, in trying to understand the experience of being in the Women’s Land Army one ought to ask the experts on the subject—the women who served in it. This essay draws on the oral history accounts of two former Land Girls currently residing in Victoria: Edna Steel, who was born in Bournemouth and served primarily in the Northeast of England, and Joan Lowther, who was born on the Isle of Man where she also served.

Of course, there are obvious problems with constructing a narrative of the Women’s Land Army based solely on oral history, namely, the availability of women to interview (at least outside of the United Kingdom). No doubt there also problems centred around the fallibility of memory with age--particularly with over a sixty-year span since the war. However, in her book *Oral History Theory*, Lynn Abrams dismisses such fallibility claims. She states that “there is no reason to think that an older person’s memory is less acute or reliable than that of a younger person. Whatever our age, we remember what is important to us.”³ No doubt there is truth in what Abrams claims. Undoubtedly, it would be of limited use to ask Land Girls about specific dates or specific policies, as these are less likely to be remembered. However, there is no reason that routine occurrences--recurring events experienced on more than one occasion--could not be recalled in useful detail. Moreover, the traumatic, visceral nature of military service is something that M. Klemperer claims is more than likely to be ingrained into memory. In her article “Navigating Life Review Interviews with Survivors of Trauma,” she argues that trauma survivors “live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attaining no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned,

² Edward Coffman, “Talking about War: Reflections on Doing Oral History and Military History,” *Journal of American History* 87.2 (September 2000), 582-592.

³ Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory*. New York: Routledge, 2010, 90.

continues into the present and is current in every respect."⁴ Evidently then, there is little reason why members of the Women's Land Army could not recall their wartime experiences, as many encountered combat scenarios of air raids and being bombed despite being on the homefront and far behind the front lines. (If anything, the Second World War brought the front lines to the British homefront).

Moreover, just as there are fundamental issues around oral history, there are also many benefits, especially in the field of women's history. As Abrams claims, many feminist historians embrace oral history as it offers the potential for "reclaiming the voices of ordinary women, for liberating women's experiences from the oppression of patriarchal structures and language."⁵ Similarly, in her article "What's So Special about Women?," Sherna Gluck argues that women's oral history is fundamentally a feminist encounter. She writes:

It is the creation of a new type of material on women; it is the validation of women's experiences; it is the communication among women of different generations; it is the discovery of our own roots and the development of a continuity that has been denied us in traditional historical accounts.⁶

While it may be a bit extreme to call the long-established historiography an oppressive or a "patriarchal structure," it is no doubt true that women have been marginalized in those traditional histories of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which focused primarily on the guns and steel exploits of military men and great explorers.⁷ This is particularly true with regard to the Women's Land Army, which has all but been forgotten in most histories of the Second World. Thus oral history is an immensely useful method of illuminating their wartime experience.

Given these benefits, oral history accounts should be given priority. However, their limited availability does prove problematic for the purpose of this paper; while two interviews are better than

⁴ M. Klempner, "Navigating Life Review Interviews with Survivors of Trauma." *Oral History Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2006, 198-210.

⁵ Abrams 71.

⁶ Sherna Gluck, "What's So Special about Women?" *Women's Oral History: The Frontiers Reader*. S. H. Armitage and K. Weathermon, eds. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002, 3-26.

⁷ I am reluctant to align myself fully with these feminist scholars. While their claims may have held more weight before the 1980's, they seem less applicable given the burgeoning of alternative fields of historical research (including, but not limited to, women's history) in recent years.

none, they cannot even remotely be called representative of the entirety of the Land Army experience. Due to their limited quantity they must also be situated within other primary sources—journals, magazine articles, newsprint, and political cartoons, which although they do not physically speak to us, still literally present the voices of those who created them. With this method of historical documentation in place, it is easy to at least partially reconstruct an accurate image of the experience of being in the Women's Land Army during the Second World War. However, to clearly understand the experience of being in the Women's Land Army, one must first understand the long term trends that occurred in agriculture in the years preceding the outbreak of war in September 1939, which had a direct impact upon the nature and character of wartime farming. A close analysis is necessary.

Chapter I:

Agriculture and Food before the Second World War

*"The roots of English agriculture, like those of English country life, go deep into the past, and no one can fully understand either without a knowledge of history."*⁸

- Sir E. John Russell, *English Farming*, 1941

Throughout most of British history, British agriculture was able to produce enough food to feed both the rural and increasingly urban population. However, this trend ended in 1797 when population growth surpassed agricultural production and it became necessary to import overseas foodstuffs for the first time in British history.⁹ Threatened by cheap overseas grain imports and recognizing the potential of agricultural decline at the close of the Napoleonic Wars, the British government (dominated largely by the landed aristocracy and gentry) passed the Corn Laws in 1815, which created a series of protective tariffs on grain imports. These tariffs protected domestic agriculture, and thus ensured a continuing investment in and development of British farming. However, in 1846, with the rise of Chartism, and food scarce throughout Britain due to a series of poor harvests and starvation conditions in Ireland resulting from the potato blight, the Corn Laws were repealed.¹⁰ However, it is important to note that the abandonment of

⁸ Sir E. John Russell, *English Farming*. London: William Brown and Co. Ltd., 1941, 18.

⁹ Pamela Horne, *The Rural World, 1780-1850: Social Change in the English Countryside*. London: Hutchinson Ltd., 1980, 13.

¹⁰ Of course, there is historical debate over why exactly the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846. One school of scholarship claims that they were repealed to address the severe food shortages mentioned above; another school, headed by Herald Perkin and his book *The Origins of Modern British Society*, argues that the Corn Laws were actually repealed because the Prime Minister, Robert Peel, was won over to new classical liberal arguments on the issue, which stemmed from the writings of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, and which increasingly permeated all aspects of Victorian society after the 1830's.

the Corn Laws and the move towards free trade did not prove instantly detrimental to Britain's farming industry, and miraculously the industry held strong for another thirty years. Indeed, in some cases British agriculture actually flourished despite the repeal of protective tariffs. In *Agriculture in Depression, 1870-1940* Richard Perren argues that this miraculous general prosperity of British farming before 1870 depended on the fact that the British market was still relatively untouched by foreign competition: thriving trade, along with gold discoveries in Australia and America, helped to stimulate grain demands, while the Crimean and American Civil Wars interrupted cereal exports from Russia and the United States.¹¹ Moreover, Perren notes that Britain was blessed with a series of bountiful harvests, and faster transportation in the form of railway expansion offered farmers in formerly distant counties such as Norfolk and Lincolnshire easy and inexpensive access to London and global markets.¹²

However, by the 1870's and 1880's British agriculture began a period of steady decline that would last until the start of the Second World War. As with the causes of the prosperity of British agriculture in the 1850's and 1860's, this had more to do with world developments, rather than anything to do with Britain itself. As Perren illustrates, by the 1870's the American Civil War was over, transcontinental railways were beginning to extend westward into the fertile grain growing regions of the American and Canadian prairies, and new technical innovations in steam navigation drastically reduced the costs of ocean transport.¹³ In addition, improvements in refrigerated transport allowed perishable goods like milk, butter, meat, eggs, and fruit to be inexpensively imported from overseas.¹⁴ The combined effect of such innovations was an extreme increase in the number of food products available on the world market after 1870, many of which Britain began importing in increasing number and which

¹¹ Richard Perren, *Agriculture in Depression, 1870-1940*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. 2.

¹² Perren 3.

¹³ Perren 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

began to depress prices the domestic market.¹⁵ Higher food imports ensured that Britain's agricultural industry began to decay as home-produced goods simply could not compete with those cheaply brought in from overseas. Moreover, Perren states that British agriculture was in a sense fated to decay because of its declining importance to the national economy, which was already beginning to favour manufacturing and the service industry.¹⁶

In addition, beginning in the 1870's a series of bad growing seasons proved further detrimental to British agriculture. In *Agriculture in Depression: A Survey of Farming, 1870-1947*, Jonathan Brown states that the rainfall for the years 1875 to 1882 was about fourteen percent higher than usual years, and in some regions such as Berkshire, Lincoln, St. Edmunds, and Worksop rainfall was upwards of fifty-one percent higher than in previous years.¹⁷ Moreover, Brown claims that it was not merely the total fall of rain throughout the year that was the central problem, but its distribution throughout the year, as much of this rainfall occurred in the spring and summer months. The effects of the weather on agriculture were disastrous: there were floods in the Fenlands, and everywhere harvests were late and of less than average quantity and quality--often less than half the average for better years.¹⁸

Poor weather not only plagued arable farming, but also livestock farming. Brown states that abundant rainfall was ideal for grass growing, but often proved problematic in the summer months when hay was cut and dried in poor conditions, so that animals derived little benefit, or pastures were too waterlogged to be cut at all.¹⁹ Moreover, wet pastures proved ideal conditions for the spread of livestock

¹⁵ Indeed, the so-called "Long Depression" that many British historians describe in the period between the 1870's and the turn of the twentieth century, was not so much an actual economic crisis, but a perceived one as it was the first time since in nearly seventy years that Britain had experienced competition in the global market. Britain had been the first European nation to industrialize (arguably beginning in as early as the 1790's), but by the 1870's and 1880's other countries, namely Germany, France, the United States, and Japan, had begun industrializing and increasingly taking part in part in global trade, thus spurring a perceived economic depression in Britain, despite the fact that the economy was still growing, just not at the rate of previous years.

¹⁶ Perren, 7.

¹⁷ Jonathan Brown, *Agriculture in Depression: A Survey of Farming, 1870-1947*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990, 2.

¹⁸ Brown, 3.

¹⁹ Brown, 4.

diseases, namely foot rot and liver fluke among sheep and foot-and-mouth disease in cattle. Brown suggests that it was not uncommon for farmers to lose entire herds of animals; those animals that did survive outbreaks were often always less healthy, underweight, less useful for breeding, and of less value at market.²⁰ Indeed, arguably British agriculture was in such a state of decay by the 1880's that the move towards foreign food imports came less out of economic reasoning, than simply out of necessity-- domestic agriculture could not supply the nation's need for food, and it was necessary to look overseas to fulfil those needs.

Only the onset of the First World War in August 1914 halted the state of decay begun in the 1870's, albeit only temporarily. According to P. E. Dewey's book *British Agriculture in the First World War*, at the onset of the war the British government's response towards agriculture (like so many other sectors of the economy in the early years of the war) had been one of "business as usual"—meaning that the government ought not to intervene at any level in either society or the economy as a means of encouraging stability and high morale.²¹ However, government intervention finally occurred in 1916, following a poor harvest and intensified German submarine warfare that had brought the country to within an estimated three weeks of starvation conditions.²² According to Dewey, a food production programme was hurriedly put together in the spring of 1917: farmers were given guaranteed minimum prices for wheat and oats for six years, rents on agricultural land were fixed as well, while minimum wages for agricultural workers were strictly enforced by wage boards.²³ It was also during the First World War that the original Women's Land Army was created to provide a steady supply of farm labour as male agricultural labourers were increasingly conscripted or left agriculture for more financially-rewarding work in wartime factories. This paper is not the place to discuss the lives, events, or hardships

²⁰ Brown, 5.

²¹ P. E. Dewey, *British Agriculture in the First World War*. New York: Routledge Publishing, 1989, 23.

²² Anne Kramer, *Land Girls and their Impact*. South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Ltd., 2008, 3.

²³ Dewey, 91.

of that Great War Land Army; however, it is important to remember that by the close of the war some 13,000 women were doing their part for the war effort by serving in Britain's fields.²⁴

With a steady supply of farm labour provided in the form of the Women's Land Army and with beneficial government policies, the position of British agriculture steadily improved for the first time in over forty years. Dewey claims that favourable conditions even remained in place after the war, as in 1920 the Argentinian government announced an embargo on grain exports for a year, and in the same year the Australian harvest nearly failed, which put high demand on home produced goods, especially grain.²⁵ By 1921, however, conditions again worsened as the government repealed wartime legislation and the nation entered into a severe economic recession that would last until the start of the Second World War.

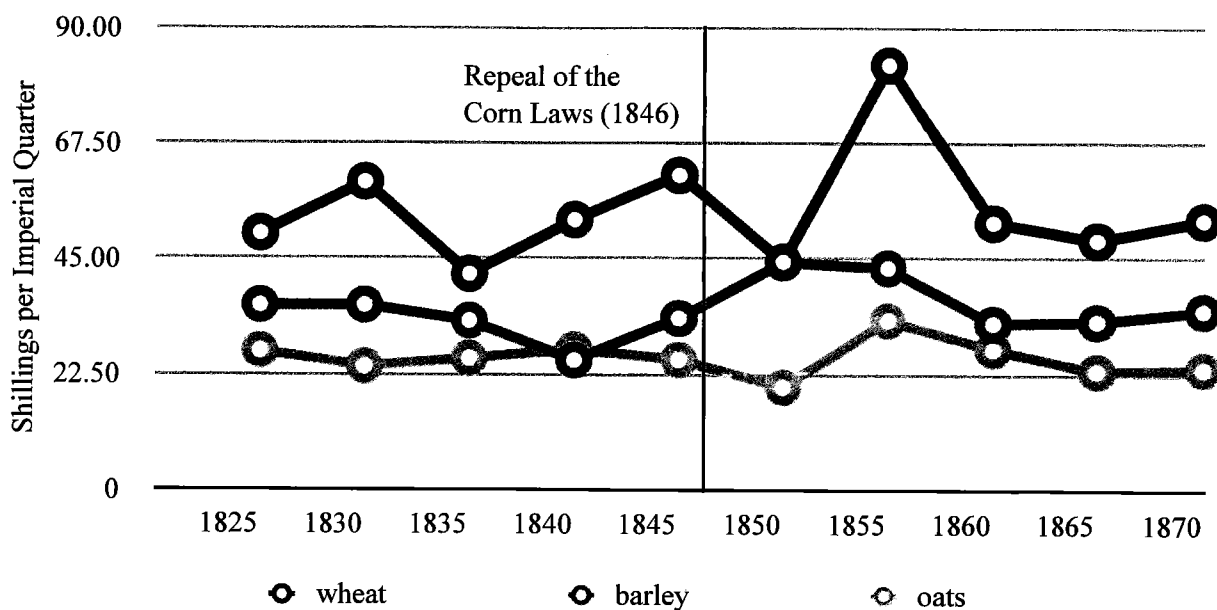
In the post-World War I years, British agriculture was out-dated and ill-equipped to deal with the growing food demands of a modern urban and industrial economy. British agriculture was so backwards and underdeveloped at this time that historian Raynes Minns has noted that compared with the mechanized farming techniques of the United States, British farming methods of the 1930's were archaic. Indeed, they were essentially the same as they had been in the 1880's, simply because of the declining monetary investment put into agriculture as the nation moved towards free trade.²⁶ According to Minns, very little of British agriculture had been mechanized by the 1930's: horse drawn ploughs, cultivators, and carts, along with the hand hoes, were all common sights, while tractors were still rare—perhaps fewer than ten thousand in the entire country. Indeed, mechanized farm machinery was in such short supply that farmers in many parts of the country had to pool combine harvesters, tractors, and ploughs in order to maximize benefit. Of course, while the conditions of British agriculture remained in a steady state of decay since the 1870's, a trajectory only temporarily halted by the events of the Great War, British food imports steadily increased over the period. This is perhaps most evident in the cereal market.

²⁴ Anne Kramer, *Land Girls and their Impact*. South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Ltd., 2008, 9.

²⁵ Dewey, 240.

²⁶ Raynes Minns, *Bangers & Mash: The Domestic Front, 1939-45*. London: Virago Ltd., 1980, 75.

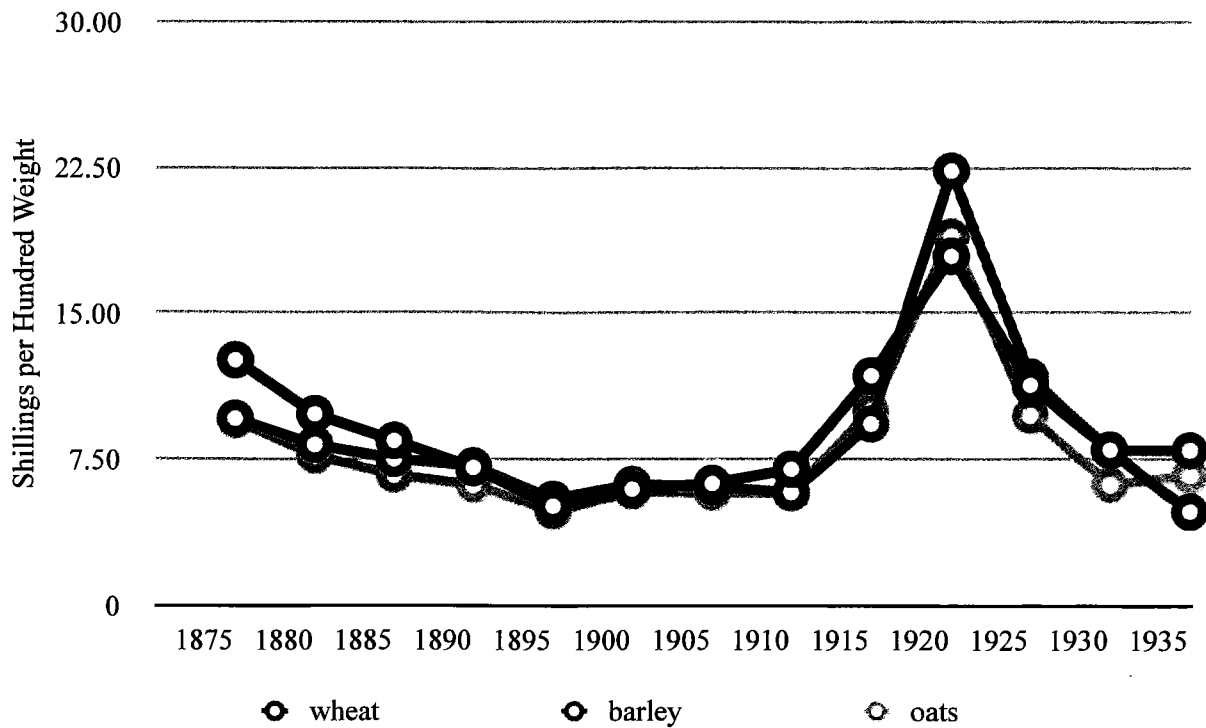
Perren states that in 1846, at the time of the repeal of the Corn Laws, Britain imported only a small portion of its cereals from abroad.²⁷ However, by the late 1850's Brown estimates that Britain was importing roughly one-quarter of its cereals from abroad, largely from territories within the Russian Empire. With the expansion of farming practices in Australia, South America, India, and above all the North American prairies in the 1870's and 1880's, this number had rapidly risen to fifty percent, which Brown claims was enough to begin seriously depressing the price of domestic wheat. The increasing depression of cereal prices after 1870 can be visually illustrated in the prices advertised in the Corn Exchange tables of *The Times*:



Cereal Prices by the Imperial Quarter, 1825-1870 ²⁸

²⁷ Perren, 2.

²⁸ Produced from data presented in the Corn Exchange tables of *The Times*. Cited in full in the Works Cited.



Cereal Prices by the Hundred Weight, 1875-1935 ²⁹

Due to a change in 1923 in how cereals were measured--originally by the imperial quarter and then by the hundred weight--it is impossible to compare cereal prices between these two tables, however each separately illustrate the state of British farming and its decline after 1870. The first graph reveals that, as Perren claims, cereal prices remained fairly constant in the first half of the nineteenth century, despite the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846. The only anomaly exists in the ten years between 1850 and 1860 when the price of wheat nearly doubled, but this period corresponded with the period of the Crimean War (1853-1856), when grain imports from Russia were cut off and prices thus driven up. Apart from this brief period, cereal prices remained fairly constant. However, the second graph clearly shows the gradual decreasing prices of cereals beginning in the 1870's. Again, only the experience of the First World War and the immediate post-war period provided an anomaly to the downward trend, which again continued

²⁹ Produced from data presented in Brown, 149.

into the 1920's. Indeed, on the eve of the Second World War cereal prices were the lowest they had been in over a hundred years.

In the early post-World War I years, the government had provided some subsidies for home-grown foods, since the war had left Britain with a large trade deficit; however, a substantial amount of food was still imported from overseas farms. Steps were taken to encourage the consumption of goods produced within the British Empire: the Empire Marketing Board was formed in 1926 to promote intra-empire trade between Britain's colonies and dominions, and to persuade consumers to "Buy Empire." Promotion came in the form of poster campaigns, exhibitions, "Empire Shopping Days," lectures, talks, press advertisements, radio talks, shop displays, and perhaps most prominently, in the work of the Empire Marketing Board Film Unit, which was led by John Grierson (considered by many to be the founder of the documentary film movement) and produced films such as *Song of Ceylon*, *Wheatfields of the Empire*, and *Industrial Britain*, all in order to promote "Empire" consumption. Whether "Empire" goods or not, Britain's food imports continued to increase throughout the 1920's and 1930's, despite the post-war trade deficit and the onset of the Great Depression following the collapse of the American stock market in October 1929. Imports increased so much that by 1939 Britain was importing fifty-five million tonnes of food, or seventy percent of the food needed to feed its population, from abroad.³⁰ From these imports came sixty percent of the meat, seventy percent of the cheese, nearly eighty percent of the fruits and vegetables, and an astonishing ninety percent of the cereal grains consumed by the British populace. Only fresh milk and potatoes were produced almost entirely at home--a dire position for any country with war on the horizon.

³⁰ Jennifer Davies, *The Wartime Kitchen and Garden*. London: BBC Books, 1993, 13.

Chapter II:

Back to the Land

*Back to the land, we must all lend a hand,
To the farms and fields we must go.
There's a job to be done,
Though we can't fire a gun,
We can still do our bit with a hoe.³¹*

- Official Song of the Women's Land Army

Nearly twenty years after the end of the First World War, Britain was again in need of its Land Girls. On 1 September 1939, one week after signing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany launched its invasion of Poland. On 3 September, the British government issued an ultimatum to the German state demanding that it withdraw its troops from Poland or else a state of war would exist. No withdrawal occurred and consequently Britain went to war with Germany for the second time in less than twenty-five years. Drawing upon the experiences and failures of the First World War, immediate mobilization began in Britain, including the call-up of a second Women's Land Army.

Of course, it is important to remember that the Women's Land Army of the Second World War was not spontaneously recreated with the start of the war in 1939. Although officially the government had retained a policy of appeasement with Germany, by 1938 it had begun planning for war--not an inevitable one, but one that seemed increasingly likely given the events of the previous four years. In particular, the annexation of Czechoslovakia, even after Hitler had personally promised no further German territorial expansions in the Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938, proved to the British

³¹ Official Song of the Women's Land Army, Sackville-West, 112.

public that Germany's dictator could not be trusted. Part of the planning for another war included active recruiting for the Women's Land Army.

On 12 June 1939, Sir Reginald Dorman-Smith, the Minister of Agriculture, announced in the House of Commons that the Women's Land Army had officially been reorganized, that "county committees [had been] established to interview women volunteers," and that "the first courses of training provided by the ministry [would] commence early next month...including short periods of training on farms during the summer holiday months."³² However, public advertisements for the Land Army had already begun months earlier. Articles from *The Times* reveal that as early as the spring of 1939 listings were appearing in newspapers advertising recruitment for the Land Army. The 6 March edition of *The Times* stated that "Applications for enrolment in the Women's Land Army [had] already reached a total of over 4,700" and that "members of the Women's Land Army would play the same indispensable part in maintaining or increasing agricultural production as the land girls did between 1914 and 1918."³³ Likewise, a similar article called for recruits, but explicitly stated that "Strictly speaking, the Women's Land Army is not yet in existence, and according to the present intentions of the government it will be established only in the event of war."³⁴ Evidently then, while the British government recognized the importance of the Women's Land Army in the First World War and was taking steps to recruit women in case of a second war, it also deemed the creation of a second Women's Land Army as only a wartime measure and was not prepared to mobilize such a female workforce in peacetime.

If conditions in agriculture were archaic and out-dated in the inter-war years, they only worsened with the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939. Minnes states that the factories that could potentially have produced new mechanized farm equipment were now not only desperately producing submarines, airplanes, tanks, and other armaments for the war effort, but were also luring underpaid farm

³² "Agriculture: Women's Land Army." *House of Commons Official Report*, Vol 8, 1938-1939, 12 June 1939.

³³ Women's Land Army Recruits Preparation For Service. *The Times*, 6 March 1939.

³⁴ Women's Land Army Recruits Preparation For Service. *The Times*, 15 Apr 1939.

labourers away from the countryside by paying high industrial wages.³⁵ By 1940, Minns claims that there was a shortage of some 100,000 farm workers.³⁶ In addition, the Germans launched a campaign of submarine warfare aimed at destroying Britain's food supply and thus squeezing it out of the war (a similar tactic to that which had undergirded the German naval effort in the Great War twenty years earlier) The re-emergence of such a threat meant that British farmers had to produce three times as much as they had before, but under the same archaic pre-war conditions.³⁷ It was into this world that the Women's Land Army was brought into creation for a second time after nearly twenty years of disbandment, with the goal of not only tripling Britain's home food production, but also filling the shortage of agricultural labourers. By 1941, some 20,000 women had enlisted in the Land Army, and by 1943 the number had risen to an astonishing 80,000--four times the size of the World War I contingent--before numbers were capped so that recruitment could be redirected to other important components of the war effort.³⁸ Who then were these 80,000 girls who desired to fight a war in Britain's fields as others had done twenty years earlier? Moreover, what were the harsh realities that history has forgotten?

The most obvious way in which the realities of the Land Army experience were a lot more difficult than the idealized memory was in the hard, gruelling work that Land Girls encountered on a regular basis. The romanticized image of the Land Girl seen on recruitment posters showed smiling women, cleanly dressed, and enjoying a pastoral lifestyle. The reality, no surprise, was quite different. In her 1944 commentary on the Land Army, Vita Sackville-West depicted a detailed and realistic image of the kinds of conditions that a typical Land Girl experienced on a daily basis:

She is cold, and rain drives in her face, for there is no protection against the weather. Now she is stooking, and this time she is hot; too hot; so hot she wonders how long she can go on; for it is full summer and there is no shade out in the harvest field. She is pitching the heavy sheaves up on the cart. She is in the stack-yard, the threshing machine grinding and clanking; her head is tied up in a scarf, she wears a cellophane shield over her eyes, the grit and chaff fly all around her, up her nose, down her throat; she is dirty as

³⁵ Raynes Minns, *Bombers and Mash: The Domestic Front, 1939-1945*. London: Virago Limited, 1980, 75.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Minns, 75.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

a sweep; the machine proprietor swears at her. Or she is out in the snowy forest, her fingers numbed with handling the slippery frosty logs. Or she is up to her ankles in water, clearing a ditch. Nobody sees her; nobody but the men whose ordinary life it has been, and who, she knows, will be only too glad of a chance to catch her out.³⁹

While no doubt poeticized, this passage reveals a truer image of life in the Land Army than does the romanticized poster-woman. These women worked year-round, in even the worst of weather, and under the largely unmechanized, archaic conditions described in the previous chapter. The work they did was backbreaking, hard, dangerous, and hazardous to their health. That is not to say life in the Land Army was more dangerous or harder than other wartime occupations open to women, such as working in munitions factories or being in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, but whereas the gruelling realities of those occupations have been recognized, they have not yet been acknowledged for veterans of the Land Army. Sackville-West's passage also clearly illustrates the discrimination felt by Land Girls--a topic to be discussed in more detail later.

Steel also remembers the hard work of being in the Land Army and describes it in similar terms as Sackville-West. She recalls:

I did milking and a lot of market gardening, which was a lot of fields of vegetables. And also wheat, and oats, and other grains, which would be harvested and either made into sheaves ready for milling, or threshed. And then you'd have to make this stack, and they'd hire a threshing team that would come with their machine. And you'd have to load the sheaves on to this machine. It was very heavy, dirty work; it was filthy. Because it was usually late summer, it would be very hot. And that you had to stay with it until it was done, you couldn't just leave. That was dirty work. And sometimes you'd take a horse and you would plough with that, and you had to make sure your furrows were straight behind you. We used horse and carts a lot for transporting things around. There was the odd truck or tractor, but it was mostly manual.⁴⁰

Likewise, Lowther's memories again illustrate the physically demanding realities of being in the Land Army, and interestingly, like Steel and Sackville-West, she also depicts threshing as particularly hard work. She remembers that

It was hard work...You'd be pretty sore by the end of it. The work we did with the mills, that was heavy and oh so very very tiring. You'd be hot and miserable at the end of the

³⁹ Sackville-West, 23.

⁴⁰ Edna Steel, Interviewed by Tyson Rosberg. 13 Jan 2011, Sannich, British Columbia, 23:10.

day. Of course, we also did spreading manure and shovelling it into carts, picking potatoes, and thinning turnips. It was all hard work.⁴¹

If regular farm work was not difficult enough, Land Girls often had to perform odd jobs that were particularly demeaning and unpleasant. Steel recalls one incident that illustrates such tasks:

I remember one time, why I had to do it I don't know, but the Ministry of Agriculture was going around to different farms checking livestock and chickens for any disease or anything. So I was assigned with this inspector to go to these farms and check the chickens. And that meant I would have to catch them and hold them, while the inspector would use a syringe-type-thing to take a sample of their blood and then from that they would tell if they were healthy or not. And oh that was a terrible job; I got absolutely filthy, and oh the smell, it was just terrible. I hated the smell. Today, I still don't like birds and things fluttering about me. I did that for about a month.⁴²

Hard work alone was not the only difficulty faced by Land Girls; the duration of that work was also a challenge. Steel remembers that she

worked very long hours, often from six in the morning to six at night. You were supposed to have one half day off a week, and maybe every other Sunday. But, there was no guarantee; if a job needed doing, you had to do it.⁴³

Moreover, the work day did not necessarily end at six in the evening. Steel recalls often having to perform night deliveries to local a canteen after a full day of hard work:

The nearest NAAFI [Naval, Army, and Air Force Institute] canteen was at St. Neots, between Bedford and Cambridge, and we supplied them with the vegetables for their canteen. So after we'd done our day's work, there would be three of us and we'd have to load a trailer with sacks and bags of produce and then drive it to this place, which was about twenty miles away. But it was at night, and of course there were blackouts so there were no lights. So one girl would be driving the thing, and there'd be one on either side with a flashlight to see the side of the road, because it would be out in the country, in the dark. So when we got there, some guys would be there to help you unload and then they'd give us something to eat. And maybe we wouldn't get back till after eleven o'clock and then we'd have to get up early the next morning.⁴⁴

Of course hard work and long days were not the only thing that made life in the Land Army more difficult than the idealized image portrays. While the nature of the tasks women regularly performed were often dangerous, especially when contrasted with twenty-first-century farm life as shaped by the impact of

⁴¹ Joan Lowther, Interviewed by Tyson Rosberg. 17 Jan 2011, Sannich, British Columbia, 23:20

⁴² Steel, 25:00.

⁴³ Steel, 19:20.

⁴⁴ Steel, 21:47

modern safety regulations and standards, they compared nothing with the very dangerous, near-combat environments in which wartime farming tasks were performed. Perhaps because the Land Army experience was a rural one and thus removed from the urban danger of being bombed, one might tend to forget that Land Girls experienced the dangers of working in combat zones. Indeed, this fact is not a major component in the "Cinderella in the fields" image. However, the reality again was quite different.

Sackville-West used the phrase "They fight in the fields" to describe the actions of the Women's Land Army, and for her this was often a very literal form of fighting.⁴⁵ She extolled the "insouciant courage" of the Land Army, particularly in the eastern coastal counties of Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Kent, where Land Girls were "at the nearest point to Hitler's Europe, and not only under air-attack, but also the shelling from enemy batteries across the channel."⁴⁶ Again, Sackville-West's prose is in itself poetic and romanticized, but it nevertheless depicts the realities of farming on the east coast, where Land Girls often experienced air raids or bombings like their urban, civilian counterparts. An article in *The Times* from 23 May 1942 provides an excellent example of the physical, combat dangers that Land Girls encountered in their daily work. The article announced that Miss Harrison, tractor driver with the Women's Land Army, would receive the British Empire Medal for brave conduct:

Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell [the farmer and his wife] and Miss Harrison have made an unexampled effort and shown sustained bravery and duty in carrying on farming under the gunfire and air attacks of the enemy. The farm is at the nearest point to the Continent and is scarred with filled-in shell-holes. The farm buildings are probably the most vulnerable in the country, yet work has carried on through the Battle of Britain and ever since. During intense air raids the German pilots machine-gunned the farm and work on the land had to be stopped, but in spite of all the difficulties and dangers there has been no change in the routine of attending to the stock. When cutting corn, Mr. Mitchell and Miss Harrison often had to take cover under the tractor or binder when German pilots were machine gunning. On one occasion a balloon nearby was shot down in flames. The burning fabric fell across the tractor, but was quickly extinguished and work continued. Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell, with the help of Miss Harrison, remained at the farm and not only saved their own crops, but also those of other farms which had been evacuated.⁴⁷

Sackville-West also recorded similarly brave stories. She stated that

⁴⁵ Sackville-West, 80.

⁴⁶ Sackville-West, 81.

⁴⁷ "Farm Nearest The Enemy Awards For Bravery." *The Times*. May 23, 1942.

There was one Land Girl, an ex-librarian, a peaceable occupation, if ever ever was one. On the lonely farm where she worked near Dover, she came under much shelling and bombing, and was personally singled out for attention in machine-gunning three times by a diving German plane. The War Agricultural Committee's badge for courage is now her's.⁴⁸

She also stated that on another occasion "after a raid on Canterbury, ten out of eleven Land Girls from a bombed out house reported for work the next morning at the usual time. The eleventh girl apologized for being late, but explained she had had to be dug out of the debris."⁴⁹

Steel remembers reading about such heroic and dangerous exploits of her fellow Land Girls, and herself remembers a similar situation where a German aircraft came down on the farm on which she was working. She recalls:

We did get bombed quite a bit, but one of the freakiest things was when we were out working in the fields and this German fighter plane--he was a loner, he'd come away from the rest--he was just shooting up anything that he could see. But, the gunners got him in a spotlight and shot him down. And so we watched him come down, and there was bits of the plane going everywhere. And finally, we got into the ditch because we could'a got hit by some of this stuff. And you know that plane disintegrated coming down, but the actual cockpit landed on the grass right in front of the farm house. And the pilot was still inside it with his helmet and all in his uniform; he was dead, but he was still in this cockpit. I couldn't believe it.⁵⁰

Likewise, she also remembers being in areas targeted by V-1 rockets: "They started having the doodlebugs later in the war, and you'd hear them coming and when the engine stopped you knew they were coming down so that's when you definitely hit the ditch, because at least it gave you some protection. That happened many times."⁵¹

Steel's memories, along with the story of Miss Harrison and the others who's stories Sackville-West recorded, reveal that even though Land Girls spent their wartime experience predominantly in the rural countryside, they were not exempt from the bombings or air raids that occurred in urban areas. Of course, in some ways this should not be that surprising, as Steel remembers most American and

⁴⁸ Sackville-West, 82

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Steel, 37:28.

⁵¹ Steel, 34:50.

Commonwealth airdromes were located in the country, and thus it made all too perfect sense for the Germans to be targeting rural as well as urban areas.⁵² Such episodes also depict a harsher reality behind the experience of being in the Women's Land Army than is commonly perceived today. Moreover, they also contribute another chapter to what has been left out of the traditional historiography of the war. Likewise, so too have the poor living conditions and bad food of the Land Army been forgotten.

⁵² Steel, 39:59.

Chapter III:

Bad Food and Poor Housing

*"I am alone
 Upon the hillside in the fog.
 I cry with desperate joy,
 I run from side to side.
 White wreaths of mist
 Blind mine eyes
 With the blindness of the seer.
 White wreaths of mist
 Bind my feet, but leave my spirit free.
 My heart is numb,
 I am thrown upon myself.
 I am a lost soul.
 Alone in the country."*⁵³

- Barbara Barton, "Fog in the Country," 1942

Many historians have argued that war disrupts normal social patterns, Arthur Marwick being perhaps the most predominant. This assumption is especially true for the Second World War, given its nature as a fully mobilized, "total warfare" conflict, and for members of the Land Army in particular.⁵⁴ Many new Land Girl recruits were leaving home for the first time and homesickness was fairly common.

⁵³ Barbara Barton, "Fog in the Country." *Poems of the Land Army: An Anthology of Verse by Members of the Women's Land Army*. V. Sackville-West, ed. London: Chesham Street, 1945, 15.

⁵⁴ "Total warfare" referring to the fact that every aspect of the British nation (agriculture, food distribution, the female and child workforce, wages, etc.) was mobilized towards obtaining victory over Hitler's Germany; it was a more militarized nation than Germany, which did not fully mobilize its economy until the last years of the war, as Hitler viewed both rationing and the entry of women into the workforce as detrimental to morale. A state of "total warfare" also existed in Britain during the First World War, but only after 1917; prior to 1917, the British government had been reluctant to intervene at any level in the economy as it believed government intervention would hinder morale (reflecting the dominant classical liberal ideals in British society that extended into the twentieth century).

Lowther was one such girl, and having never left home before, she remembers being initially quite homesick, but took ease in encountering and bonding with other young women in similar situations.⁵⁵

Anne Kramer states that a few Land Girls had the luxury of getting work close to home and thus were able to stay at home “with mothers who cooked and washed for them,” but the vast majority of Land Girls were sent far from home and had to be billeted in either hostels or on the actual farms on which they worked.⁵⁶ Living conditions varied enormously and could be quite primitive, if not poor: according to Kramer, “many lodgings and farms did not have running water, bathrooms, or inside lavatories,” and “the attitudes of farmers and landladies to Land Girls billeted with them also varied.”⁵⁷

Steel herself remembers some of the places she was billeted in similar terms as recounted by Kramer. She recalls:

The first place I went after I'd done my training was called a land settlement farm; so there was the main farm, and then there was about eighteen, what they called, small holdings. Each one had a certain amount of acreage. Most did market gardening, but they could also have chickens, goats, maybe a cow. So, you would be assigned to one of them as needed. And I was billeted in one of these small holdings. It was ok; there was another land girl, who I'd never met, and we both shared a bedroom there. The wife was ok, but the farmer wasn't; he was very strict about things. “I'm the boss. You do as I tell you,” he used to say. And I remember, they used to have these goats and they would come in the house and wonder around, and you'd be sitting at the table having a meal and all of the sudden there would be a goat there and he would be trying to eat your food.⁵⁸

During her time in the Land Army, Steel was also billeted in two hostels. She describes one as “a big old house and there was eight or nine girls to a room. And you'd have a little bed, and we all shared a chest of drawers, so you had maybe a half drawer to put your things in.”⁵⁹ The second hostel she stayed in was

an old manor house too, located in just a little village...now that was not a good hostel to be in, because there was a lot of girls and it was one bathroom between about eight girls. And it was very bare-bones, you know, wood floors and little heat. You'd have your basic bed covering, but you would need something else to keep you warm. And there was a sink, but there wasn't a real bathtub. And then you went out a

⁵⁵ Lowther, 5:01.

⁵⁶ Kramer, 97.

⁵⁷ Kramer, 98.

⁵⁸ Steel, 14:30.

⁵⁹ Steel, 8:50.

back door and across the stone walkway and that's where the toilet was. And you needed a flashlight because at night it was dark. There was no toilet-paper; she would get a mail-order catalogue and chuck it on the floor, and you just had to rip off what you wanted. It was very primitive.⁶⁰

The conditions Steel describes might not have been too horrendous, but given that she had been raised exclusively in an urban environment before the war and had never been out of her parent's house for an extended period of time, such conditions were completely different from anything she had previously experienced. Lowther also billeted in a converted manor house in Ramsey, which she remembers also had about eight or nine girls to a room.⁶¹

One feature that Kramer emphasizes about the living conditions of some Land Girls was the isolation and extreme loneliness felt by many of them, especially those billeted on farms in remote areas, and those who had grown up in urban areas or with large families and thus had never really experienced being alone before.⁶² Lowther was never billeted on a farm, but she does state that life in a hostel was far better than living on a farm, because at least at the end of the day she had the opportunity to make friends, which was much more limited if one were actually living on a farm.⁶³ Others were not so lucky. The isolation of rural billeting provided an ideal environment for another component of the Land Army history that has been forgotten in traditional historiography: rape. Kramer states that Land Girls were on occasion attacked by farmers, farmhands, or soldiers, and there were even multiple instances of rape or attempted rape. She cites the assault and attempted rape of a Land Girl by a soldier that was reported on 29 May 1942 by *The Sussex Express and County Herald*:

The land girl, who left the pub with her attacker, was thrown to the ground, hit in the face, and the soldier pulled a knife on her. Passers by came to her rescue. The case came to court where evidence was presented as to the soldier's previous good record and, perhaps not surprising, the soldier was let off with only a fine.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Steel, 1:15:20.

⁶¹ Lowther, 4:36.

⁶² Kramer, 99.

⁶³ Lowther, 4:11.

⁶⁴ Kramer, 126.

Of course, the frequency of such incidents should not be overstated. Kramer herself notes that, while there were multiple incidents of rape and abuse, they occurred throughout the entire course of the war, and thus did not occur often or regularly. Neither Steel nor Lowther recall ever hearing about such incidents; however, they do think it could have been possible. Moreover, just because assaults did not occur frequently does not mean they can be simply brushed aside and ignored--that would continue the trend of selective memory that already informs the history of the Land Army, and which needs to be addressed.

The quality of food was as variable as the lodgings that Land Girls encountered. Steel remembers that unlike serving in the regular forces, being in the Land Army was just the same as being any other civilian worker: "you had your civilian ration card which would be turned over to your landlady or matron, which meant you had two ounces of butter a week, four ounces of marg', and meat was very rationed anyways so we hardly got any."⁶⁵ However, there were a few concessions. Given the hard nature of farming work and the need for energy throughout the work day, Steel remembers that Land Girls received "an extra ration of cheese, which was about six ounces a week."⁶⁶ She does, however, also remember ways in which one could always add to one's rations: "There were a lot of American aerodromes in the area. And once you got to know some of the GI's they would bring you peanut butter, tinned pineapple, or other fruits, and that would be a substitute for once you'd used up your rations."⁶⁷ Lowther was even more lucky. She recalls that since she was on the Isle of Man, which had its own semi-independent government, she was on a different rationing system and thus could get a lot more other things than one could in Britain. She says:

We were on the Isle of Man. And we were fortunate to be not rationed on the same system as the rest of Britain. We could buy eggs and different farm things like milk or butter a lot easier than you could in England. We were more fortunate.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Steel, 15:00.

⁶⁶ Steel, 15:17.

⁶⁷ Steel, 18:35.

⁶⁸ Lowther, 9:56.

In terms of actual meals, both Steel and Lowther remember things being quite plain. Steel recalls in particular eating meals such as “shepherds pie, maybe stew. Wholesome food really, nothing fancy. On special occasions you might’ve got rice pudding or custard for dessert, but sugar was rationed of course.”⁶⁹ Lowther remembers similarly plain food with lots of vegetables and, in particular, potatoes with seemingly every meal.⁷⁰ Katherine Phipps was a member of the Women’s Land Army during the Second World War before becoming a nurse. On 9 October 1943 she wrote in her diary about one particularly unpleasant meal: “Everyone rather grumpy tonight...odious Woolton pie for dinner. Black on the bottom and nearly cold! And some scrapings of marmalade pud from which all traces of marmalade seemed to have been evaporated.”⁷¹ Bad food was not just restricted to dinner. Kramer states that lunch sandwiches in particular were often a source of irritation and annoyance.⁷² The worst of sandwiches she cites Land Girls complaining about were grated raw carrot sandwiches, cold baked bean sandwiches, mashed potato sandwiches, cold bacon fat sandwiches, and the almost universally disliked beetroot sandwiches, which had “the added disadvantage that if it rained the dye ran out of the beetroot, turning the sandwich into a red, soggy mess.”⁷³ Steel does not recall ever having to eat such sandwiches, but she does remember a monotony in her daily lunch material that was almost just as bad. She says, “We’d get cheese sandwiches day after day after day. I thought I’d never eat cheese again. I still don’t like them.”⁷⁴

Again, hard work, bad food, poor living conditions, and physical and sexual abuse were not the only difficulties that Land Girls encountered in their daily lives, nor were they the only things left out of traditional historiography. Another forgotten experience of being in the Land Army involved discrimination not only from farmers and male farm workers, but also from the media. Land Girls also lacked pay equality with men doing similar labour.

⁶⁹ Steel, 1:17:10.

⁷⁰ Lowther, 10:15.

⁷¹ Phipps, Katherine. “October, 1943.” *The Second World War Diary of Kate Phipps*. Alexandria, VA: Alexander Street Press, 2004, 220.

⁷² Kramer, 101.

⁷³ Kramer, 102.

⁷⁴ Steel, 15:37.

Chapter IV:

Sexism and Discrimination

*“The wailing siren, with its message of dread,
 Is heralding the enemies of Right,
 Whose monsters come to claim their living bread
 And make a phantom of the quiet night.
 For those who toil by day can find no rest,
 For all the world is sick with greed and lust.
 Men seek for truth, then leave the irksome quest,
 And Christ’s great Cross is trampled in the dust.”*⁷⁵

- Audrey Hewlett, “October,” 1941

Despite women’s sacrifices and accomplishments in the First World War, there was still sizeable opposition to employing women in occupations traditionally held by men. Indeed, Jane Lewis argues that while women workers may have been indispensable in ensuring victory in the First World War, a “sex war” had raged in British society in the 1920’s and 30’s which focused on returning women to the domestic sphere and removing the new liberties that wartime conditions had granted them.⁷⁶ She claims that, by 1931, the female participation rate in the workforce was lower than it had been in 1911, before the First World War, and that for most women of the 1930’s “work was still low-paid and undertaken to assist the family exchequer rather than for its own sake.”⁷⁷ Moreover, she states that a new cult of motherhood began to arise, which stressed the importance of home, childbearing, and childrearing, and

⁷⁵ Audrey Hewlett, “October.” *Poems of the Land Army: An Anthology of Verse by Members of the Women’s Land Army*. V. Sackville-West, ed. London: Chesham Street, 1945, 38.

⁷⁶ Jane Lewis, “In Search of a Real Equality: Women Between the Wars.” *Class, Culture, and Social Change: A New View of the 1930’s*. Ed. Frank Gloversmith. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980, 208-235.

⁷⁷ Lewis, 209.

which idealized women in the home--counter to the idealization common to older forms of feminism.⁷⁸ Discrimination was especially experienced by married women, with or without children, since the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919 allowed women equal access to higher education and to work in the professions, but required them to drop out of the labour market upon marriage.⁷⁹

For members of the Land Army, this type of discrimination was experienced even before the outbreak of war. Kramer states that despite the need for labour in all sectors of the economy, many inter-war and wartime farmers still regarded farming as a male vocation and were reluctant to take on women farmhands.⁸⁰ So boisterous were farmers' concerns that the call up of female agricultural labourers was temporarily halted by the government.⁸¹ Concern over women farmhands was not just the worry of farmers. Farming unions were also concerned that unskilled women workers would undercut the already low wages of male agricultural workers. According to Kramer, in June 1939, before the war even started, the National Union of Agricultural Workers announced its decision to boycott the Women's Land Army because the government had given no assurance that the interests of skilled, male labourers on the land would be safeguarded.⁸²

Journals and magazines also openly revealed their opposition to the employment of women in farm labour. Kramer quotes one editorial in the *Land Worker*, the magazine of the National Union of Agricultural Workers, that managed to bring religion into its attack against working women, stating that "Eden was a successful holding utterly wrecked by the employment of women in the fruit-picking season."⁸³ Similarly, *Punch* showed little discretion in illustrating its opinion regarding women working in agriculture:

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Kramer, 28

⁸¹ Kramer, 29.

⁸² Kramer, 30.

⁸³ Kramer, 31.



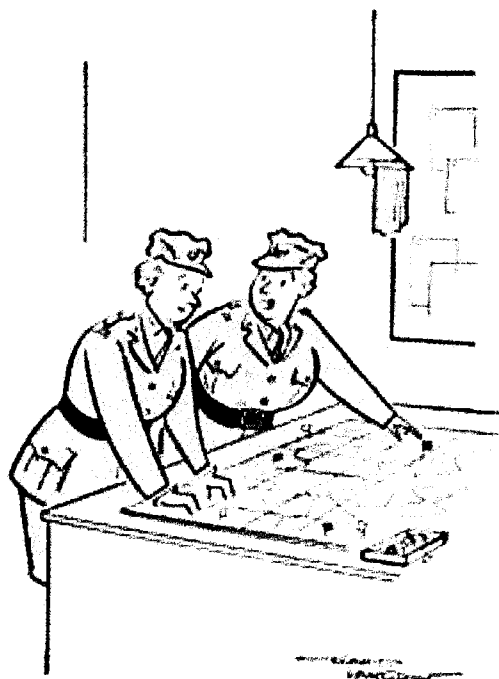
*"Farmers' Thoughts of the Land Girl"*⁸⁴



*"I don't know who you are, Madam, but I'm afraid we're at cross purposes."*⁸⁵

⁸⁴ "Farmers' Thoughts of the Land Girl." *Punch*. 13 March 1940. 274.

⁸⁵ "I don't know who you are, Madam, but I'm afraid we're at cross purposes." *Punch*. 24 September 1941. 279.



"Just there. 15/-, whole head perm."

*"Just there. 15/-, whole head perm."*⁸⁶

These and other illustrations of girls in comical situations reveals the absurdity that *Punch* attached to the idea of women working as farm labourers. Moreover, they reveal the endemic sexism that existed within the agricultural economy at that time. Of course, as the last illustration of two plotters suggests, such sexism and discrimination was not unique to members of the Women's Land Army, but common among women in other wartime occupations. Lowther does not remember seeing any such publications, but she does remember feeling similar discrimination and sexist attitudes from farmers. She recalls: "The farmers looked down on us quite a bit. They still saw farming as man's work, and we weren't men. Some were friendly, but mostly they weren't. They were really gruff."⁸⁷

⁸⁶ "Just there. 15/-, whole head perm." *Punch*. 10 April 1940. 412.

⁸⁷ Lowther, 16:04.

Of course, such discrimination by farmers and other agricultural workers was at least in some part justified; their concerns centred around the potential of mass amounts of unskilled labour dominating the agricultural sector and driving down already horridly low wages, and that is exactly what the Land Army was--unskilled farm labour en masse. In a letter she wrote to Ruth Crawford in 1942, Katherine Phipps described her fellow Land Girls with whom she was billeted: "they are all sorts, and most have no experience of farming. Only two were actually brought up on farms; there are machinists, tailoresses factory workers, typists, a cinema attendant, two hairdressers and a maker of artificial flowers."⁸⁸ Phipp's letter reveals that few Land Girls actually came from rural backgrounds, and that most previously had urban occupations and had no experience in the agricultural sector. Of course while Phipp's description is only useful in understanding the women with whom she was directly billeted and cannot be transposed onto an image of the Women's Land Army in general; however, other contemporary sources depict a similar situation. Vita Sackville-West also notes that many Land Army recruits were "town-bred" and whose "idea of the country was a summer-holiday, when you strolled down a Hampshire lane picking wildflowers to which you couldn't put a name, or lay in the sun on the Sussex Downs sniffing the thyme and gorse."⁸⁹ Oral history interviews produce a similar image: Steel was born in Bournemouth, and had been raised in Windsor and Bedfordshire--both urban areas.⁹⁰ Moreover, she had worked in a post office before enlisting.⁹¹ Similarly, Lowther was born in Peel, on the Isle of Man, and had worked as a hairdresser before the war.⁹² Indeed, the fact that most Land Girls came from urban areas should not be surprising given that recruitment publicity for the Women's Land Army was conducted in newspapers, like *The Times*, and in cinema, both of which were predominantly urban forms of mass media.

Of course, the unskilled background of the Land Army was not entirely problematic. What was problematic, and what fed into farmers' and male farm labourers' concerns, was that in the early stages of

⁸⁸ Phipps, Katherine. "Letter from Katherine M. Phipps to Ruth Craufurd, September 27, 1943." *The Second World War Diary of Kate Phipps*. Alexandria, VA: Alexander Street Press, 2004, 256.

⁸⁹ Sackville-West, 23.

⁹⁰ Steel, 0:43.

⁹¹ Steel, 1:45.

⁹² Lowther, 0:26.

the war the women of the Land Army received little or no training and were simply sent into the countryside being expected to be competent in any work they would encounter. Kramer states that early in the war “many inexperienced girls were just placed on farms and expected to pick up the work, learning as they went along.”⁹³ She cites Land Girl Sheelah Cruttenden, who recalls having been “offered no training and that jobs were either common sense or learnt on the job from fellow Land Girls.”⁹⁴ Moreover, she states that Land Army officials had originally expected that farmers would make the effort to train their Land Girls, which often did not happen, and a system of training had to be developed in order to ensure that recruits knew their skills before being sent into the field. However, even Lowther, who enlisted in 1943, remembers a comical incident that reveals her lack of training:

My friend and I were sent out to a farm one day and we thought we were just going for the morning; it was a Saturday. And when we got there the farmer said to us, “here’s your horse and cart, and here’s your horse and cart.” But, you see, we’d never used a horse and cart before. So we felt peculiar. We took these up the field and began filling the carts with manure. I had a very slow horse, and my friend Edith had a very fast horse, and coming back she was shouting to me, “Get out of the way! Get out of the way!” And she came past me so fast she hit my cart. But, the farmer was there. We were both so nervous that we started to laugh, and we were reported for that.⁹⁵

Lowther’s story is more than just a comical anecdote and importantly also reveals an incident in which Land Girls were untrained in a task, but nonetheless expected to do it.

Discrimination was not just the product of farmers or other male farm labourers, and was also felt by Land Girls in terms of their own wages and benefits. Kramer states that Land Girls were paid less than civilian women in munitions factories, and worse still did not receive the same wartime benefits as women in the Armed Forces. Lowther agrees with Kramer’s claims, saying “we really were underpaid for the work we were doing.”⁹⁶ Moreover, she remembers living almost entirely in her uniform because

⁹³ Kramer, 60.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Lowther, 15:50.

⁹⁶ Lowther, 12:20.

despite receiving clothing coupons with her ration book, she did not earn enough to be able to buy new clothes.⁹⁷ Steel also recalls receiving poor pay and no benefits:

It was very, very poor; I think it was something around fifteen shillings. But you see, because we weren't army/navy, they had all of their medical and dental taken care of, we didn't. So, you were like a civilian as far as if you needed a doctor, you would have to make your own arrangements and pay. We didn't get a lot of the perks that you would in the regular services. And the same thing with leave: they would have so many days off or so much time off, and we didn't. On the times I did get off, I had to cycle home because I didn't have the fare.⁹⁸

Wages were so poor for members of the Land Army that Kramer cites one Land Girl, Stella Hope, in saying that "Land Girls were civilians with their rights taken away."⁹⁹ If poor wages were not bad enough, Land Girls also encountered discrimination from armed forces' clubs and canteens. According to Kramer, Land Girls were forbidden to use forces clubs and could not use railway station canteens that were run for the armed forces, despite the fact that they too often had to commute long journeys either from home to their billets, or from billets to actual farms.¹⁰⁰ She cites one incident where a group of Land Girls were returning home after a day's work and went into a YMCA canteen for a cup of tea, but were refused service because they were not in the forces, and only received their tea because a soldier standing nearby overheard what had happened and ordered it on their behalf, claiming that "the woman there could not refuse him service."¹⁰¹ Perhaps surprisingly, discrimination also existed between women serving in the actual armed forces and members of the Women's Land Army. Kramer illustrates this prejudice by citing a bitter exchange that occurred in an article of the *Land Girl*, the official magazine of the Land Army, in 1945. It partially quotes from a letter sent by Aileen Wing, who had served in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force throughout the entirety of the war, in which she stated her opinion that "Land Girls

⁹⁷ Lowther, 11:41.

⁹⁸ Steel, 19:30.

⁹⁹ Kramer, 131.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Kramer, 132.

had no idea how difficult conditions had been for women in the armed services, and that they had only joined the Land Army because they were in mortal fear of being conscripted.”¹⁰²

The greatest discrimination came at the end of the war. For whatever reason--no doubt because the Land Army was technically a subset of the Ministry of Agriculture, and not technically part of the Armed Forces--members of the Land Army did not receive any of the same post-war benefits as did men and women who had served with the forces. Worse still, because agriculture was still considered an integral sector and because Land Girls were not members of the forces, most were still required to remain in service after the war had ended, much to the resentment of male labourers who saw the Land Army as only a temporary wartime necessity. Kramer states that even after the surrender of both Germany and Japan in 1945, and in the period of demobilization that followed, some 54,000 women were still working on the land and new recruits were actively joining.¹⁰³

The poor compensation that Land Girls did receive was more of a mockery than a reward for their hard work and sacrifice: they received no health benefits or pensions, but like members of the forces, they were permitted to keep their uniforms and also received a brief letter, signed by the Queen, thanking them for their “unsparing efforts at a time when the victory of our cause depended on the utmost use of the resources of our land.”¹⁰⁴ They were also allowed to march in the nation’s victory parades, although as Lowther remembers this too was almost more demeaning than rewarding:

I remember at the end of the war parade, the Victory Parade, all the forces from the Isle of Man were in it: the army, the navy, airforce. And we were in it too, but we were at the very back. And somebody shouted out, “Here come the cabbage commandoes!” And mind you, we got a wonderful cheer, but I thought that was a little demeaning.¹⁰⁵

On 21 October 1950, the Women’s Land Army, which by then still numbered around 8,000 women, was disbanded and some five hundred of those 8,000 marched past Buckingham Palace in their

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Kramer, 152.

¹⁰⁴ Queen Elizabeth to Steel, 1945, personal correspondence in possession of the author.

¹⁰⁵ Lowther, 14:40.

final stand-down parade and salute to the Queen.¹⁰⁶ After this the Land Army faded not only from physical existence, but also from the traditional historiography of the war and largely from the collective memory of it as well. Only in 2007, sixty-four years after the end of the war, did the British government award medals to the surviving members of the Land Army in recognition of their service. When she received her medal, Lowther remembers feeling that her hard work was finally acknowledged for the first time:

It was quite a big surprise when I got it. It felt pretty good. We were acknowledged at last. I mean, if you were in the WRENS [Women's Royal Naval Service] or the army, or the airforce, you were recognized. But, we were not. We never were. So, yes, I do think we were discriminated against in that way.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Kramer, 164.

¹⁰⁷ Lothar, 42:00.

Conclusion:

Why Have We Forgotten?

*The fields are quiet now, the corn is carted:
The harvest moon dreams on an empty land.
And I am free to cry "Te Deum!" with my hand in yours.
My tired arms may gather to my heart
This last rich sheaf. You are my harvest home.¹⁰⁸*

- Enid Barraud, "Harvest Home," 1945

With the harsher realities of being in the Women's Land Army revealed, it seems logical that the next question should be why the Land Army has been forgotten in the traditional historiography of the war, and why those books that do mention the Land Army do so in an idealized fashion that misrepresents the actual experience? Among many possible answers to these questions, two seem most likely. The first of these answers lies in the existence of a "collective memory" of the wartime experience. Katherine Bishop argues that there is a "collective memory" of the war—that is, an understanding of how the war has been constructed, and continues to be constructed, in human memory, literature, art, and film.¹⁰⁹ This "collective memory" of the war, according to Bishop, focuses on the victory and defiant narratives of the "Myth of the Blitz" and the "Dunkirk Spirit." Mark Connelly provides a clear image of these narratives. According to Connelly, the "Myth of the Blitz" and the "Dunkirk Spirit" provide proof of the distinct qualities of the British island race; the war is remembered as the moment "when the Few of Churchill's

¹⁰⁸ Enid Barraud, "Harvest Home." *Poems of the Land Army: An Anthology of Verse by Members of the Women's Land Army*. V. Sackville-West, ed. London: Chesham Street, 1945, 51.

¹⁰⁹ Katherine Bishop, *Commemorating Forgotten Communities: The Women's Land Army and Collective Memory*. Archeology, M.A. Thesis, University of York. 2009.

island stood shoulder to shoulder, regardless of class or creed, and withstood the full terror, might, and fury of the enemy.”¹¹⁰ Instead of buckling under pressure, the British people laughed and joked their way through it, full of composure and never doubting eventual victory. Both the “Myth of the Blitz” and the “Dunkirk Spirit” perpetuated the image of Britain in “defiance, solidarity, and togetherness, and improvisation in the face of a powerful enemy.”¹¹¹ These narratives drew heavily upon the urban experiences of being bombed, rationed, or evacuated. Indeed, talking about modern museum exhibits, Lucy Noakes suggests that these urban narratives are often privileged in exhibits because they represent easily understood, dramatic events that require little knowledge of military, diplomatic, or political history to understand.¹¹² Moreover, the exciting elements also appeal to children, while the fact that the blitz most deeply affected the homefront makes it an experience with which women can empathize.¹¹³ Evidently then, perhaps because of a desire to address a larger, less academic audience, the popular “collective memory” of the war completely ignores the wartime rural experience of life in the countryside. Since the Land Army existed outside the realm of this “collective memory,” it makes sense that it would have been excluded from the historiography of the war--it was, and is still considered (although wrongly), to have functioned on the periphery of the main action. Moreover, since the Land Army was technically not a part of the Armed Forces, it was not just excluded from the urban “collective memory” of the war, but also from those recollections that draw more largely upon the actual military experience.

The second explanation for why the experience of being in the Land Army has been misconstrued lies not in our “collective memory” or representations of the war, but in the memories and perceptions of the Land Girls themselves. In talking about the “Myth of the Blitz,” Peter Clarke claims that the myth and memory of the blitz was being constructed even as the first of the bombs were being dropped in

¹¹⁰ Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War*. London: Pearson Education Ltd., 2004, 129.

¹¹¹ Connelly, 129.

¹¹² Lucy Noakes, “Making Histories: Experiencing the Blitz in London’s Museums in the 1990s.” *The World War Two Reader*. Ed. Gordon Martel. New York: Routledge Publishing, 2004, 422-434.

¹¹³ Noakes, 423.

September 1940.¹¹⁴ For Clarke the myth appears not only in the propaganda of the government, but also in the very day-to-day diaries and letters of ordinary citizens. However, as Angus Calder reveals, the realities of the blitz were not quite so clean cut; class distinctions, for example, did not melt away in the wake of the blitz, nor was there anything jolly about being bombed for fifty-seven consecutive nights.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, Clarke argues that perception fundamentally matters—if the people who went through the blitz felt united and defiant in the face of Nazi might, then their experience is true, despite whatever factual contradictions that might arise.¹¹⁶ The same notion is true with regard to the experience of women in the Land Army.

Despite the harsh realities of hard work, long hours, and poor living conditions, many Land Girls remember their time in the Land Army in positive terms, if not as the best times of their lives. There is a good reason behind this perception, and it is perhaps most clearly illustrated in a handwritten note jotted on the back of a photograph of Lowther on a farm with other Land Girls: “The girls call this ‘The Women’s Liberation Army.’”¹¹⁷ The phrase says it all. Most women of the inter-war generation came of age largely only knowing about life in the domestic sphere. As mentioned earlier, despite the immense numbers of women who worked in wartime occupations during the First World War and the opening of the professions to women in the 1920’s, the trend of the 1930’s had not been for women to work, and indeed the new feminine ideals of the period romanticized women as mothers and homemakers. Thus the experience of the Second World War offered many women their first experience of liberation, mobility, and independence. Moreover, it also provided adventure and excitement in the form of an alternative to the domestic routine. Along with the inscription on the back of Lowther’s photograph, this notion is also illustrated in the autobiography of Pat Parker, a Lumberjill with the Women’s Timber Core, a subset of the Land Army. Reminiscing on her wartime experience, she says:

¹¹⁴ Peter Clarke, “Whose Good War?” *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990*. New York: Penguin, 1996, 207.

¹¹⁵ Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz*. London: Pimlico Publishing, 1992, 34.

¹¹⁶ Clarke, 209.

¹¹⁷ “The girls call this ‘The Women’s Liberation Army.’” Inscription on the back of a photograph, in possession of the author.

I'd been so happy there. No matter what happiness came after that it would never be better than those three and a half years. They were absolutely fantastic. They were complete freedom, where I'd never known it before. I'd always had my father standing on the corner of the street saying, "You should be indoors!" This was nine o'clock at night. Imagining telling a girl these days to be in by nine o'clock at night. But that was the way it was. Dad had to go to work, because he was on night work, and if we weren't home before he went, he'd be standing on the corner waiting. Whereas being away I could do what I liked. All of a sudden nobody was bothering me, my life was my own. It was really a marvellous time.¹¹⁸

Likewise, Lowther herself remembers that after she got over her initial homesickness she took extreme pleasure in being out of her parents' home: "I enjoyed being away from home for the first time, I mean who wouldn't? It felt a little like freedom for the first time."¹¹⁹ Evidently then, the independence and freedom that Land Girls experienced at least compared to the experience of their lives before the war, outweighed any of the harsh realities that came with their occupation. As well, their positive memories helped to skew the modern perception of life in the Women's Land Army. Thus, just as the "Myth of the Blitz" was being created as the bombs were dropping, so too was that of the Land Army being created at the same time that ploughs were turning the soil.

Of course each of these points is only a theoretical explanation for the inaccurate or completely forgotten image of the Land Army in traditional historiography. As with all historical interpretations, while each no doubt had an influence on modern perceptions of the Land Army, it is impossible to prove any of them. Nor are these the only possible explanations, as others also exist (including idealized and romantic representations of the Land Army in modern novels such as Angela Huth's *Land Girls*, or the subsequent 1998 film of the same name). What is certain, however, is that the image of the Land Army that exists in historiography--the manicured and smiling "Cinderella in the fields"--fails to take into account the realities of hard work, bad wages, poor living conditions, and discrimination. Worse still, in many histories, including even those of Angus Calder, the Land Army does not appear at all, or appears only in passing. However, this history is not good enough. For its hard work and immense contributions to the war effort, the Land Army deserves to not be forgotten!

¹¹⁸ Pat Parker, "The Rewards of Hard Work." *What Did You Do In the War Mummy?* Ed. Mavis Nicholson. London: Random House Ltd., 1996, 41-50.

¹¹⁹ Lowther, 6:09.

Works Cited

Primary Documents

- "Agriculture: Women's Land Army." *House of Commons Official Report*. Vol 8, 1938-1939. 12 June 1939.
- Barraud, Enid. "Harvest Home." *Poems of the Land Army: An Anthology of Verse by Members of the Women's Land Army*. V. Sackville-West, ed. London: Chesham Street, 1945. 51.
- Barton, Barbara. "Fog in the Country." *Poems of the Land Army: An Anthology of Verse by Members of the Women's Land Army*. V. Sackville-West, ed. London: Chesham Street, 1945. 15.
- Coats, Alice. "The Monstrous Regiment." *Poems of the Land Army: An Anthology of Verse by Members of the Women's Land Army*. V. Sackville-West, ed. London: Chesham Street, 1945. 35.
- "The Corn Exchange." *The Times*. 27 December 1825.
- The Times*. 21 December 1830.
- The Times*. 14 December 1835.
- The Times*. 23 December 1840.
- The Times*. 11 December 1845.
- The Times*. 31 December 1850.
- The Times*. 19 December 1855.
- The Times*. 25 December 1860.
- The Times*. 27 December 1865.
- The Times*. 31 December 1870.
- Hewlett, Audrey. "October." *Poems of the Land Army: An Anthology of Verse by Members of the Women's Land Army*. V. Sackville-West, ed. London: Chesham Street, 1945. 38.
- "Just there. 15/-, whole head perm." Illustration. *Punch*. April 10, 1940. 412.
- "I don't know who you are, Madam, but I am afraid we're at cross purposes." Illustration. *Punch*. September 4, 1941. 279.
- "The Farmer's View of the Land Girl." Illustration. *Punch*. March 13, 1940. 274.

"Farm Nearest The Enemy Awards For Bravery." *The Times*. May 23, 1942.

Lowther, Joan, interviewed by Tyson Rosberg. 17 Jan 2011, Sannich, British Columbia. In possession of the author.

Parker, Pat. "The Rewards of Hard Work." *What Did You Do In the War Mummy?* Ed. Mavis Nicholson.

London: Random House Ltd., 1996. 41-50.

Phipps, Katherine M. *The Second World War Diary of Kate Phipps*. New York: Alexander Street Press, 2004.

"Letter from Katherine M. Phipps to Ruth Craufurd, September 27, 1942." *The Second World War Diary of Kate Phipps*. Alexandria, VA: Alexander Street Press, 2004, pp. 220.

Queen Elizabeth to Steel, 1945, personal correspondence in possession of the author.

Russell, Sir E. John. *English Farming*. London: William Brown and Co. Ltd., 1941

Sackville-West, Vita. *The Women's Land Army*. London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1944.

Steel, Edna, interviewed by Tyson Rosberg. 13 Jan 2011, Sannich, British Columbia. In possession of the author.

"The girls call this 'The Women's Liberation Army.'" Inscription on the back of a photograph, in possession of the author.

"Women's Land Army Recruits Preparation For Service." *The Times*. Mar 06, 1939.

"Women's Land Army Recruits Preparation For Service." *The Times*. Apr 15, 1939.

Secondary Sources

Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Bishop, Katherine. *Commemorating Forgotten Communities: The Women's Land Army and Collective Memory*. Archeology, M.A. Thesis, University of York. 2009.

Brown, Jonathan. *Agriculture in Depression: A Survey of Farming, 1870-1947*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990

Calder, Angus. *The Myth of the Blitz*. London: Pimlico Publishing, 1992.

Clarke, Peter. "Whose Good War?" *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990*. New York: Penguin, 1996.

- Coffman, Edward. "Talking about War: Reflections on Doing Oral History and Military History." *Journal of American History* 87.2 (September 2000): 582-592.
- Connelly, Mark. *We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War*. London: Pearson Education Ltd., 2004.
- Davies, Jennifer. *The Wartime Kitchen and Garden*. London: BBC Books, 1993.
- Dewey, P. E.. *British Agriculture in the First World War*. New York: Routledge Publishing, 1989.
- Gluck, Sherna. "What's So Special about Women?" *Women's Oral History: The Frontiers Reader*. S. H. Armitage and K. Weathermon, eds. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002. 3-26.
- Horne, Pamela. *The Rural World, 1780-1850: Social Change in the English Countryside*. London: Hutchinson Ltd., 1980.
- Klempner, M. "Navigating Life Review Interviews with Survivors of Trauma." *Oral History Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2006. 198-210.
- Kramer, Anne. *Land Girls and their Impact*. South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Ltd., 2008.
- Minns, Raynes. *Bangers & Mash: The Domestic Front, 1939-45*. London: Virago Ltd., 1980.
- Noakes, Lucy. "Making Histories: Experiencing the Blitz in London's Museums in the 1990s." *The World War Two Reader*. Ed. Gordon Martel. New York: Routledge Publishing, 2004. 422-434.
- Perren, Richard. *Agriculture in Depression, 1870-1940*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Appendix

Participant Consent Form

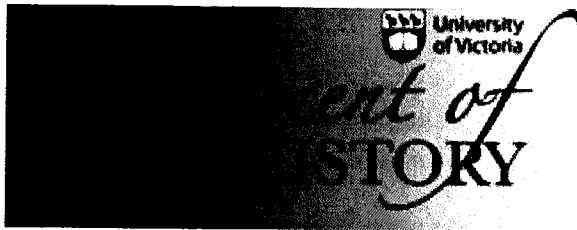
Page 46

Interview Questions

48

Recruitment Scripts

50



Participant Consent Form

You are invited to participate in an oral history interview that is being conducted by Tyson Rosberg. Tyson Rosberg is an Honours Student in the department of History at the University of Victoria and you may contact him if you have further questions at (250) 893-0124 or trosberg@uvic.ca.

As an Honours student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for my thesis. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. P. Biddiscombe. You may contact my supervisor at perrybid@uvic.ca.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to gain a better understanding of the experience of being a member of the Women's Land Army during the Second World War through oral history interviews.

Importance of this Research

The topic of the Women's Land Army is not historically well researched, and I hope to gain a better understanding of the things completely left out of traditional histories of the war: what people ate, the kind of music they listened to, what they did for fun, and what work was like.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you were a member of the Women's Land Army during the Second World War.

What is involved?

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include participation in an oral history interview, to take place in your home (or, if preferred, at a different location) at your convenience. The interview will be digitally recorded, and with your permission will be kept indefinitely by the researcher and on archive in the University of Victoria Special Collections for future academic use.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including having to participate in an hour or two oral history interview. For your convenience, however, interviews will take place in your home (or, if preferred, at a different location) to minimize travel efforts.

Interview Questions

Interviews will begin with the following statement: "My name is Tyson Rosberg, and I am here with _____ in her home in _____, and today's date is _____. Now, before we begin the interview I just want to make sure that you give your consent for this interview to be recorded and for the recordings to be kept indefinitely by both me and archived in the University of Victoria's Special Collections for future academic use. Is that correct?"

Questions

1. Where and when were you born?
2. Can you tell me a bit about your life before the war? School, work, family.
3. Had either of your parents been involved in the First World War?
4. What happened at the outbreak of war in September 1939? How did you feel? Where did you go? What did you do?
5. When did you join the Women's Land Army? Where did you enrol?
6. Why did you choose the Land Army?
7. When did you join the Women's Land Army? Where did you enrol?
8. What happened after you enlisted? Did you receive any training? If you didn't, do you know anyone who did?

What was training like?

There is an image that the Land Army did not receive much training, do you believe this?

9. Where did you go next?
10. What were living conditions like? Were you billeted or stay on a farm? Could you describe your living conditions?
11. Was enlistment the first time that you left home? What was like? Were you homesick?
12. Many historians mention that Land Girls were often the subject of both physical and sexual abuse being in such isolated conditions. Have you ever heard instances of sexual or physical abuse?
13. What was food like? What sorts of food did you eat? There is an image that the Land Army was underfed during the war despite the heavy work they were doing. Do you feel that you got enough?

Who fed you? Did you have to cook food yourself, or did the farmer's wife distribute your rations?

Did you ever feel cheated out of your food rations?

14. Do you remember what the pay was like? How did this compare to women in other military sectors?

Many historians suggest that the Land Army was the most underpaid unit in Britain. Do you agree?

15. What did you do for entertainment? Concerts? Music? Dances? Cinema? Could you explain some of these situations?
16. What was work like? What sorts of tasks did you do daily? Was farm work mechanized? Or, were you still using old technology like horses and drawn ploughs?
17. Were there tractors? What kind? Were they problematic?
18. Did you ever work with Italian or German prisoners of war? Could you explain any of these situations if possible.
19. In some traditional histories, there is an image that the Land Army lived an idyllic country life. Do you believe this? Or was life in the Land Army hard work?
20. When did you leave the Land Army?
21. What did you do after?
22. How did the experience of being in the Land Army affect the rest of your life?
23. Did you ever have a sense of the importance of the work that you were doing?
24. Do you feel that the efforts of the Land Army have been remembered? Were the efforts of the Land Army recognized at the end of the war?
25. If not, why do you think that the Land Army has been forgotten?
26. How do you remember your wartime experience? "The happiest times of our lives"?

Interviews will conclude with the following statement: "Again, before we conclude the interview I just want to make sure that you give your consent for this interview to be recorded and for the recordings to be kept indefinitely by both me and archived in the University of Victoria's Special Collections for future academic use. Is that correct? Thank you very much for your time; it has been a pleasure talking with you!"

Recruitment Script—what will be said to prospective interview subjects

Hello, my name Tyson Rosberg, and I am an Honours History student up at the University of Victoria. I am contacting you because I am writing my thesis on the experience of being in the Women's Land Army during the Second World War, and it is my understanding that you were a member of the Land Army. Barbara Frosdic of the Pro Patria Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion supplied me with your phone number. I would like to use oral history in writing my thesis, and I was hoping that you would be interested in participating in an audio interview. The interview will take place in your home, for your convenience, and will be recorded. The Women's Land Army is not historically well researched, and your participation in the interview will provide immensely valuable information to scholastic knowledge. I do not anticipate any major risks, but there is the potential emotional risk associated with discussing the experiences of wartime life. My questions, however, are concerned with the social life of the war (food, entertainment, work), rather than any traumatic occurrences that might occur. Would you be interested in participating in an oral history interview?