



Diary of a Land Girl

Joyce Jenkinson recalls how she came to Hensall—the village that has been her home for more than 60 years - as a member of the Women's Land Army (WLA) in the 1940s

The Women's Land Army (a civilian organisation) was first formed during World War 1 to replace the male farm workers who had left their jobs to join the forces. It was re-constituted at the beginning of the Second World War (1939) and by 1943, an estimated 80,000 women worked in every aspect of agriculture. Most land girls already lived in the countryside, but around a third came from London and the urban areas of the North of England. After the war, the WLA was kept in place until 1950 to put a wide range of produce on the tables of the nation and help grow the economy until the men were de-mobilized. A lack of recognition for the services of the 'Land Girls' (and their counterparts in the Women's Timber Corps—the 'Lumber Jills') was finally put right in 2008 when a medallion was awarded to the surviving members, most of them in their 70s and 80s.

Joyce, what made a teenage girl—as you were then—leave home and join the Women's Land Army?



I was born in Elland and when I left school I went into printing for two years, which I enjoyed. During that time a girl came home from the land army and used to tell us all sorts of stories about it. One day, I decided I'd like to try it, so I applied. This was in 1946 and mum and dad weren't very pleased. They said, 'Are you aware that you won't be near home. You won't be in Yorkshire'. But when it came through, I went to Sherburn—in-Elmet for a fortnight's training, and from there, three of us were sent to Selby to Brooklands—Jumbo Castle, we called it.

How was a young girl from a West Yorkshire printing firm trained to work on the land?

Well we learnt how to stook corn first of all. In those days the corn was cut with a binder, tied up with band, and then laid down as the binder went round and round the field. We had to go round and pick up two sheaves in our arms and stand them up together. The heads interlocked and became known as a stook. Each stook had six or eight sheaves. Apart from one day's hoeing, that's all we did for a fortnight.

What happened next?

First of all I went to Hensall Farm. That was when Willie Killingbeck had it, and I had a fortnight there. Then I went across to Manor Farm, where Mr Watmough lived.



In land girl uniform of green jersey and brown breeches

I was there all the time I was in the land army, apart from odd days if farmers were threshing. Or if they were behind with potato picking or harvesting and they wanted extra girls. So I did get to one or two different farms. But I worked at Manor Farm really, and it was lovely. I really enjoyed it.

How did you get about?

I learnt to ride a bike. I was at Willie Killingbeck's and the wagon that used to come for us was late one morning. We were riddling potatoes and Willie had left word to 'put Joyce on a bike and push her off'. I fell off four times and I said 'I'm not riding that bike back'. So Willie brought me home at dinner time. But I had to learn how to ride one after that.



Tractor-driving, 1947

Did you work with the Shire horses?

Oh yes. I loved the horses. I didn't like tractors but I loved following the horses up and down the fields. I did everything for them: gear them up, feed them. There were four on Willie's farm and two at Manor Farm: Canada – a lovely horse - and Major, who I mainly worked with. I still have one of his shoes. We'd spread muck with them, do the harvesting, haymaking and harrowing. The only thing we had to watch was when we went down the Weeland; to make sure there wasn't a train coming as we went through the bridge, because it used to frighten them. Only once did a horse run away with me. But luckily somebody was working in a field down there and managed to stop it for me.



And all this time you were living with other land army girls in Selby and travelling to Hensall to work?

Yes. We had to catch the 7 o'clock bus from Selby on a morning, although we used to come in a lorry first. Then, when Pollington RAF Camp was turned over to the land girls, we moved in there for six weeks. We were usually dropped off at Roal Waterworks; that's on the A19 just past Hensall lane end. Then we picked up our bikes and cycled into the village. Hensall was different then. It was a very busy village, but everybody spoke and tractor drivers would wave. Hensall was—and it still is—a friendly place to live. It's where I met Bernard, my husband, and where we settled down and had our children. And even though the Land Army stopped in 1950, I still worked at Manor Farm after that.

Finally, the government gave you a medal?

They did. It was a long time coming. But it's nice that the land girls have been recognized for what they did. It was hard work — but we had loads of fun as well.

