

I was a shop assistant in Hull when I volunteered for the W.L.A. at the age of 17 years and 9 months. I was sent to Malton in Yorkshire and arrived on the doorstep of Yates and Sons, Farm Machinery Suppliers, on an icy February morning. I was shivering in thin clothes' (my uniform had gone astray in transit).

I was to be hired out with a threshing team which consisted of the machine, a steam engine, a driver, a fireman and two other Land Girls. We were given 'War Agriculture' bicycles and instructed to follow the team within a twelve - mile radius of our billet in Westow village.

My only experience of the countryside before, was riding through it as a keen cyclist. My workmate was to be a girl of 21 years from Leeds, also a beginner. The first problem was teaching her to ride a heavy bike. She had never ridden before and was very nervous. After a few tumbles and giggles she got the hang of it. The noise, dust and back breaking 'Chaff' carrying seemed a bit of a nightmare to me but after a while we got used to it. I decided, that if I was to be stuck with a winter season of threshing, I had better become more efficient so that I could get away from this dreaded task.

After a short course and test, I received a proficiency badge and was able to work straw stacking, building up the corners as good as a man. I heaved bales about, threaded the baler with wire, I could even perch on top of the machine, feeding the roller drum with sheaves of corn, or band cutting for the feeder. We followed this routine daily until Easter and after a week's holiday back in Hull, we were sent to do field work at a farm in North Grimston. The two of us stayed there until after the Harvest when the threshing team was once again, loaned out for the winter season.

Our living accommodation in Westow was not a happy arrangement. The District Commissioner, Lady Howard-Vyse helped us to find more suitable lodgings. We cycled many miles to work. I used to envy the Land Girls who passed in lorries as they were driven from their hostel to the farms. They always looked so happy, and sang in unison wherever they went. I missed the comradeship they obviously found in groups, but the family life in the cottage had its own rewards.

Our days in the fields were mostly enjoyable, though hard work. I enjoyed haymaking, tossing the loads into the carts and riding the horses home. No one taught us how to ride or even harness a horse, they presumed we knew all these things, because we wore the uniform.

My first experience was memorable. The harness was not fixed properly and off I slid under the horses belly. I was dragged along the rough lane hanging on like grim death. I had to be helped up and 'pinned up' as the foreman said. My rear end was a sight for sore eyes, I was a long time living that down.

No one ever told us about wearing a mask when we mixed the pink chemical powder into the corn. I had been doing the job for eight hours. I had a breathing problem and much discomfort. We were supposed to know about these things. However, we survived and stayed happy most of the time.

I enjoyed scything thistles as we stood in a row of three or four workers, making our way across the pastures. Being left - handed brought its own problems. I developed a powerful swing and a good rhythm. My left - handed action caused the unfortunate worker beside me, to jump about to avoid losing a foot as I swung in the opposite direction to everyone else. I remember working in the fields with the Italian prisoners of war, that were stationed at Eden Camp in Malton. They used to sing opera as they worked and a few of them fancied themselves as 'Romeos'.

The comradeship we all learn during these trying times, was something that we should all really try to benefit by. I am sure that the Land Girls did just that.

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