



Life at Home



Women's Land Army Ploughing



Women Flax workers

By 1915 Germany's best chance of winning the war was to starve Britain into surrender. In 1917 Britain lost over 800,000 tons of shipping.

German blockades at sea created shortages of foods including tea, wheat, fruit and agricultural fertilisers. Food shortages in the towns led to long queues outside shops. Government posters encouraged people to use alternatives to replace staple items with little success. There were food riots in major cities. At the start of the war Britain produced only 35% of the food it needed.

The introduction of conscription for men aged 18 to 41 in 1916 removed many men from the farms.

In 1917 when the harvest failed the Elvaston estate was hit as badly as the rest of the country. The country had only 3 weeks supply of food left in store.



Women Flax workers

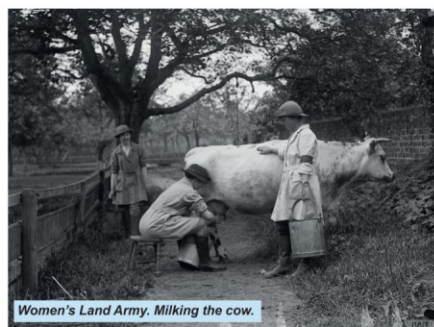


Animal Husbandry: Milking the cow

The Women's Land Army.

The Women's Land Army was formed in January 1917. It offered cheap labour to farmers not always keen to employ women. The 260,000 volunteers were given a uniform which consisted of twill breeches, pullovers and short mackintoshes with a light smock for summer with smart laced gaiters and boots. Their wages, 26 shillings a week, were paid by the farmers. This was about half the men's wage but considerably more than they were paying the school children and pensioners who were doing the work until then.

Tasks included the reclamation of land, sowing, digging, ploughing and looking after the farm animals. The fact was that it was brutally hard work.



Women's Land Army. Milking the cow.

The Women's Land Army (continued)

For most girls born in the country and who worked in service the Land Army offered a life of freedom with greater rewards than they were used to. Many, like Alice, had worked as children to look after animals and help cultivate crops. This was done before and after school.

As servants they were used to 15 hour days of drudgery earning a pittance of a wage so a life in the open air doing jobs they had been doing since childhood and paying a higher wage was welcomed.

The uniform was frowned upon by middle and upper class ladies who still wore skirts that covered their ankles and many men considered the land girls to be 'neither man nor woman' and 'disgraceful'.



Woman bargee



Women's Land Army. Preparing the harrow.



Women Forestry workers



WW1 Poster encouraging women to save food.

Save Food Campaign

Rationing was introduced in 1918 as Government campaigns to 'Eat Less Bread and Save the Fleet' were unsuccessful. It began in January with the rationing of sugar which was all imported in 1914. By April meat, butter, cheese and margarine had all been added to the list. From October 1917 bakers had been allowed to add potato flour to bread.

Government propaganda promoted the idea that it was the duty of Mothers to conserve food in order to defeat the enemy. In working class areas of towns and the countryside this was not a popular campaign. The poor relied on bread as a staple part of their diet.



WW1 poster. Don't Waste bread.



Woman 'postman'

October 1917

Dear Charley

Thank you for your letter.

I was sorry to hear that you have suffered a bout of malaria. It seems quite common amongst the troops out there. You must always take your daily dose of quinine to keep it at bay.

Fancy you meeting the Derby County footballer, Churchman. He sounds a dab hand at inventions using that cart wheel to mount the gun. We have started a football team of our own. It's only a kick about during our lunch break at



present but who knows. We might get into a league and start to play other factories. It's quite the thing now that the man's game has finished for the war. Some of the munitions factories have formed a league and they get huge numbers of spectators. The money they raise is all for the war effort or for war charities.

I'm still at the loco works and really enjoying it. We had a bad accident here when 2 girls were crushed between a loco and the buffers. We are all being much more careful now.

Since January when the Women's

Land Army was formed, the farmers have been a bit happier. Even though they moan about employing women it's better that relying on young boys and old men to do the tough jobs. The older folks moan about girls wearing trousers and going to the Harrington to spend their wages but they are glad of the extra help. The local farms have all had a terrible harvest. Apparently it's the same all over the country.

That's all for now Charley. I do hope this war will not last too much longer.

Your friend
Alice



Supported by
The National Lottery
through the Heritage Lottery Fund

