

Grace Wallace (née Jackson)

A member of the Women's Land Army during WWII



As the prospect of war became increasingly likely, the government wanted to increase the amount of food grown within Britain. In order to grow more food, more help was needed on the farms and so the government reformed the Women's Land Army (WLA) in June 1939. Under its Honorary Director – Lady Denman, it initially asked for volunteers, but by 1941 women were conscripted. By 1944 it had over 80,000 members. The WLA lasted until its official disbandment on 21 October 1949.

Grace was 16-and-a-half years old when she volunteered for the Women's Land Army. Leaving her home in Blackpool for the very first time, she was first stationed in a hostel four miles outside Aberystwyth in Wales.

“There were around 30 girls, we all got on quite well together. ...Most people used to think that because we were in the country and working on farms we were having a really good time. This was not so, although I am not saying it was all bad. We enjoyed the village dances, and made quite a few friends.”

Land girls were expected to work from dawn until dusk with no such thing as overtime pay in all kinds of weather. Grace's uniform consisted of one hat, one overcoat, one pullover, two shirts, one overall and one pair of wellingtons. If any of these items were lost or worn out she, like the other women, were expected to buy replacements themselves.

Grace felt that the farmers thought the women were there just to do all the menial, dirty jobs that no one else wanted to do. On one occasion, she and another girl were directed to clear a field covered in thistles and weeds almost as tall as themselves. They had no gloves and even their faces were scratched.

Even though they were in the country, the effects of war were still felt. Grace recalled working in a field with an unexploded landmine in it; thankfully she was moved when it was discovered. On a different occasion, working with another girl in a potato field, she spotted a lone plane flying towards them. Assuming initially it was an RAF plane, they ended up running for their lives as the stray German plane emptied his machine gun on them. Neither girl was hurt, but it certainly gave them a scare.

It was not always easy to return home either. Land girls were not allowed travel warrants as they were told they were not in the services. They were also denied cheap train fares, not being classed as 'war workers'. "No one seemed to know what we were, even though many girls were conscripted into the Land Army."

On being demobbed in 1945, Grace had to return all her uniform, even the socks that were darned. She was, however allowed to keep the overcoat.





“The land army fights in the fields.

It is in the fields of Britain that the most critical battle of the present war may well be fought and won”.

This quotation from Lady Denman, the Honorary Director of the Women's Land Army, sums up the importance of the Land Girls during World War Two. For many girls, the 'phoney war' was all too soon becoming a reality as they had the opportunity to do 'their bit' and enrol for the Women's Land Army.