

**The Women's Land Army 1939 - 1950: a study of policy and practice
with particular reference to the Craven district**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit
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Abstract

This study examines the Women's Land Army (WLA) in Britain: a new, mobile, agricultural labour force of women specially recruited to assist in increasing the production of home-grown food during both World Wars, as men were called up to join the fighting forces. Its role was particularly important due to imported food supplies being destroyed through enemy action at sea, which successive governments feared might result in starvation of the nation.

A review of literature on the WLA indicates that it has been a relatively little researched area in both women's history and agricultural history and the aim of this study is to begin to redress the balance.

The thesis considers the introduction of the WLA (1917-19) as this provided the platform from which its sister organisation was launched in 1939. The context in which the WLA operated (1939-1950) is analysed together with the structure and function of the organisation, its relationships with government ministries and regional agencies and its concomitant redevelopment through to disbanding in 1950.

The formulation of national policies at government level to set up the WLA and recruit its membership is examined and assessed, as are policies on the accommodation and welfare of recruits, their training, work and conditions of service and the winding down of the organisation. The implementation of these policies within the complex county administrative structure of the Yorkshire Ridings and Craven district is explored. This was a particularly difficult task for the WLA due to the reluctance of the local agricultural community to employ women on its farms. The WLA had, therefore, to overcome prejudice as well as new and difficult working conditions if it was to be successful. The outcomes of policies are presented through previously undocumented data obtained from undertaking oral history interviews with 32 former WLA recruits on their experiences of working on the land during the Second World War as they endeavoured to put policy decisions into practice.

The contribution of the WLA is evaluated and findings from the study show that the organisation achieved its objective of placing a new and mobile female agricultural labour force on the land. Furthermore, women in the WLA, albeit from the land-owning classes, participated in the making of national policy in a period when male decision makers dominated rural and urban contexts. In addition, while WLA recruits performed practical agricultural tasks consistent with traditional views on what was appropriate work for women, for example horticulture and the care of livestock, they also challenged the *status quo*. They undertook jobs such as fieldwork, tractor driving and the operation of mechanical implements formerly considered to be beyond the physical and mental capacities of women. The participation of the WLA in the greater mechanisation of the agricultural industry has hitherto largely been overlooked. The involvement of recruits also resulted in achieving government targets of increasing the acreage of both national and local crop cultivation between 1939 and 1944 in order to feed the country. The contribution made by the WLA convinced an initially sceptical agricultural community of its ability and commitment to the cause resulting in the WLA being operational for a total of 11 years, some five years beyond the cessation of hostilities in 1945.

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Abbreviations in the text

ATS	Auxiliary Territorial Service
BoA	Board of Agriculture
BoT	Board of Trade
BWLAS	British Women's Land Army Society
CTFA	Craven Tenant Farmers' Association
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
MoLNS	Ministry of Labour and National Service
NUAW	National Union of Agricultural Workers
NFU	National Farmers' Union
PoW	Prisoner of War
TGWU	Transport and General Workers' Union
TVO	Tractor Vapour Oil
WAAF	Women's Auxiliary Air Force
WAEC	War Agricultural Executive Committee
WFGU	Women's Farm and Garden Union
WI	Women's Institute
WLA	Women's Land Army
WNLSC	Women's National Land Service Corps
WRNS	Women's Royal Naval Service
WRWLA	West Riding Women's Land Army
WRWAEC	West Riding War Agricultural Executive Committee
WVS	Women's Voluntary Service

Notes on style

1. The popular name for a recruit to the Women's Land Army during the period under consideration was 'land girl' and in time this came to be used in official documentation. The term appears to have been used as one of description or affection but for the purposes of this study, members of the WLA are referred to as 'recruits' or 'volunteers.'
2. With regard to the referencing of documents located at the Public Record Office (PRO), on the first occasion reference is made to a particular document in the text, the PRO file number and name will also be indicated in the reference section at the end of the chapter. In subsequent citations, the document will be named in full in the reference section with PRO file details being abbreviated. The Bibliography includes a list of all documents to which reference is made under the complete headings of the PRO files.
3. Where data are presented from interviews with individual recruits on their WLA experiences, and the recruits are referred to in the text under their pseudonyms, citations will not be repeated in the reference sections at the end of each chapter. Details of interview dates and biographies of recruits providing information for this research can be found in Appendix II.
4. Where dates of committee meetings are referred to in the text, they are not repeated in the reference section at the end of each chapter. Where details are not indicated in the text, then they will be included as references.
5. When referring to wage rates, denominations of currency in force during the period are used, i.e. pounds (£), shillings (s.) and pence (d.). (12d. = 1s.; 20s. = £1.). For the same reason, when referring to measurements, feet and inches are used rather than metres (39.37 inches = 1 metre).

INTRODUCTION

1. The establishment of the Women's Land Army

The Land Army appeared in the world of agriculture suddenly, and with glowing hopes of the important position which it was to fill, only to find that it was destined to fight for a place.¹

The Women's Land Army (WLA) was a new, mobile, agricultural labour force of women specially recruited in both world wars to assist in increasing the production of home-grown food. Although the women had no previous agricultural experience, the need for their services was great, particularly as skilled male labour was being called up to the fighting forces and food imports were being lost due to enemy action at sea (35,600 tons were lost in 1939, rising to 65,600 tons in 1941).²

The WLA was first instituted in Great Britain in 1917, some three years into the First World War, when it was reported that

the food supplies of this country are seriously menaced both immediately as well as in the future and every effort must be made to increase our resources. It is imperative, therefore, that strong and suitable women should come forward to work on the land under the scheme arranged by the Board of Agriculture.³

The WLA was disbanded in 1919, having reached a membership of approximately 18,000 in 1918, when recruitment was at its height.⁴

The government decided to reintroduce the organisation in 1939, prior to the outbreak of World War II, when it was described as 'primarily a mobile force consisting of women who are ready to undertake all kinds of farm work in any part of the country'.⁵ As in 1917, its purpose was

to recruit, equip and supply girls and women from non-agricultural occupations between 18 and 40 for regular full-time employment in agriculture and in this way to supplement the ordinary sources of agricultural labour during the period of the emergency.⁶

It was envisaged that individual farmers would employ most WLA recruits, although other members would form travelling gangs at harvest time. They would wear a uniform and be supervised by WLA representatives under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries (MAF). Lady Gertrude Denman, who had been Assistant Director of the WLA during World War I and was President of the National Federation of Women's Institutes, was invited by the MAF to become Honorary Director. Her first task was to set up women's committees in each county to recruit and place the WLA on farms.

The new organisation recruited a much-increased membership in comparison with its predecessor, reaching almost 77,000 women in 1943⁷ and would have grown even further had the government not placed a ceiling on admissions to safeguard recruitment to other industries and services which were competing to attract female labour. It was finally disbanded in 1950, some five years after the cessation of hostilities.

The WLA also operated in parts of the USA, Australia and New Zealand during World War II with each country's organisation being modelled on its British counterpart.

2. Aims and structure of the thesis

It will be shown in Chapter Two: 'An Overview of Related Literature', that relatively little analysis of the WLA has so far been undertaken. The aim of this study is, therefore, to try to redress the balance by examining the policy and practice of establishing and operating the British Women's Land Army between 1939 and 1950, thus bridging some of the current gaps in both women's history and agricultural history.

The relative success of the WLA between 1917 and 1919 influenced the government's decision to reintroduce the organisation prior to World War II. The first WLA had provided an administrative platform from which to launch the later model but as it grew in size and complexity from 1939, a further series of policies

was formulated. This was necessary in order to maintain a large number of young women inexperienced in agriculture, many of whom were living and working away from home for the first time. Selected major policies will, therefore, be analysed to ascertain how decisions were made at national level and implemented through a network of agencies in the counties, using the Craven district of the former West Riding of Yorkshire as an example. The policies selected for investigation were based on data obtained from a combination of sources used in this study and which are described in Chapter Three: 'Defining Methodologies.' From an examination of MAF files, West Riding WLA and War Agricultural Executive Committee (WAEC) minutes, parliamentary questions and interviews with former WLA members, it became evident which issues had a major influence on life and work in the Women's Land Army. These included recruitment, accommodation and welfare, training and work, and conditions of service. An indication of the outcomes of these policies is given by presenting information obtained from ex-WLA members, most of whom were billeted in the Craven district.

The structure of the thesis is, therefore, as follows:

Chapter One provides the context for the introduction of the WLA by considering the national agricultural situation prior to the outbreak of both World Wars and by assessing the roles undertaken by women in agriculture.

Chapter Two reviews literature and research undertaken on the WLA to provide an insight into the nature of the organisation and its workforce. It also examines the fundamental issues in policy studies literature.

Chapter Three defines the various methods of data collection utilised in the research and shows how the policy studies approach is used to provide a structure for the chapters considering selected policy areas.

Chapter Four examines the Craven district as the locus of operations of most of the former WLA members interviewed. The views held by the farming community were not neutral and are considered alongside the culture and geography of the area.

Chapter Five investigates the establishment and structure of the WLA together with the networks used in the policy making process and discusses the status of the organisation.

Chapters Six to Nine assess selected policy areas of recruitment, accommodation and welfare, training and work, and conditions of service, together with various associated issues.

Chapter Ten examines the 'winding down' and disbanding of the organisation.

The concluding chapter evaluates the achievements of the WLA and considers whether the operation of the organisation and its policies were successful.

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- ⁶ PRO MAF 59/28 (i) Committee on Employment of Women in Agriculture (ii) Advisory Committee. Committee on Employment of Women in Agriculture. Notes of meeting 2.8.1947.
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CHAPTER ONE: THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THE WOMEN'S LAND ARMY WAS ESTABLISHED

Whilst the scope of this study precludes the possibility of presenting a detailed history of agriculture, it is important to provide an insight into the combination of factors giving rise to the establishment of the WLA. This chapter, therefore, identifies issues, derived mainly from commentators on agricultural history, which contributed towards the formation of a body of organised female agricultural labour. Many of these issues will recur throughout the thesis.

1. Government intervention in agriculture

In 1905 agriculture was impoverished to the extent that Horn writes that farmers in north east Yorkshire did not expect to make money and had to be satisfied if they had one more calf than in the previous year. In many cases smaller farmers (farming up to 100 acres) had to take another occupation, such as coal haulier or publican, to make a living.¹ By 1908 the National Farmers' Union (NFU) had been formed to support the interests of farmers by, for example, improving the security of tenant farmers, and it later became an agency with which the government could negotiate over agricultural policy. However, agriculture had been neglected for generations and the local newspaper in Craven, the *Craven Herald*, stated that 'the decline of farming in Britain has had one calamitous result, it has enabled Germany to threaten us with starvation'.²

This situation within the farming community led Ernle to suggest that farmers who had previously valued their independence and freedom were now prepared to 'submit to state control' to increase food production³ and, presumably, to secure their own position. Horn concurs, stating that the way forward was for government to guarantee cereal prices to encourage a move from livestock farming to more profitable and productive arable crops.⁴ (An acre of crops fit for human consumption was deemed to supply three or four times as much energy food as an acre supporting livestock⁵). The setting up of the Food Production Department in 1916 and the introduction of county WAECs (see Chapter Five) to direct farmers on the ploughing up of land are further examples of government intervention.

Whilst price guarantees were retained beyond the end of World War I, Murray states that the inter-war years were marked by the ‘distrust and bitterness’ of farmers towards the government.⁶ This was due to the government reneging on its promise in 1922 when, faced with indemnifying farmers against their losses due to a fall in grain prices, it repealed the Act issuing the guarantees. Agricultural workers also felt betrayed as farmers cut their wages in attempting to reduce costs. Horn suggests that this period caused the further depression of agriculture with properties being neglected as workers were attracted to better paid work in towns.⁷

The situation prior to the outbreak of World War II mirrored that prevailing in 1916, with agriculture in a state of decline and, in fact, producing only 30% of Britain’s food. This left the country in a vulnerable position if, in the event of war, it still needed to rely on overseas food imports. The government, therefore, found it necessary to intervene once more by reintroducing price guarantees and also introducing import quotas. Murray felt the government faced extreme difficulty in regaining the confidence of farmers who had previously been abandoned.⁸ Nevertheless, in order to increase the amount of food grown at home, the MAF set farmers a target of an additional two million acres of grassland to be ploughed up in 1940 compared with 1939, with a further two million acres targeted for 1941.⁹

2. The nature of agricultural work

Prior to the outbreak of World War I many agricultural tasks were carried out manually, although Caunce suggests that at this time ‘horses were the backbone of all farms’ and ‘horse powered machinery was gradually being introduced’. In addition, steam engines were used for operations such as threshing.¹⁰ He states that tractors were introduced towards the end of the war to augment horse-drawn ploughs in the ploughing up programme. Horse numbers declined in the 1920s and 1930s due to the financial position of agriculture as farmers tried to reduce their costs. However, by 1939 there were still 549,000 horses at work on the land together with 55,000 tractors.¹¹ At this time tractors simply drew mechanical implements rather than powered them and although movements were being made towards mechanising agriculture, it remained a labour intensive industry.

3. Agricultural labour

Despite an increasing membership of agricultural labourers' unions formed at the beginning of the 20th century, little progress was made in improving wages and working conditions due to the difficulty in organising workers dispersed across the country. In fact, the numbers of part-time and full-time male and female labourers fell from an average of 816,000 between 1921 and 1924 to 593,000 in 1938.¹²

This reduction can be explained by the poor conditions of work for farmers and their employees. Many rural areas lacked suitable living accommodation, sanitation, water and electricity supplies in 1939, let alone prior to the outbreak of World War I. Horn also considers the 'push and pull' effects on agricultural labour. Farmers needed to cut their costs and so 'pushed out' labour, even to the extent of reducing husbandry standards. In addition, there existed a 'pull' on workers to towns offering improved prospects.¹³ This 'rural depopulation', coupled with the expectation of conscription, leads Ward to suggest that at the start of World War II agriculture required a further 50,000 workers to meet the government's ploughing up targets.¹⁴

The task of increasing food production in a labour intensive industry in both World Wars was, therefore, compromised by the continuing reduction in available agricultural workers due to the nature of the industry and call-up to war. It appeared that the only major source of replacement labour remaining to be tapped was that of women.

4. Women on the land

Bradley states there are 'no tasks in agriculture, however heavy, skilled or responsible, which women have not undertaken at some place, at some time.'¹⁵

However, she suggests that when the division of labour in agriculture commenced around the 14th and 15th centuries, jobs such as ploughing, hedging and ditching, and specialist work of shepherds and horsemen, were labelled as men's work. This resulted in women undertaking such jobs as transplanting, hoeing, raking and fruit-picking which Bradley describes as laborious and requiring little skill.¹⁶ Ernle also writes that there were certain agricultural tasks to which women were particularly inclined, for example, care of animals and dairy work.¹⁷ The light and dextrous touch

of women was perceived as being more appropriate than that of males to deal with young animals and milking, and the standards of cleanliness of women were considered superior to those of men.¹⁸ When mechanisation was introduced, however, Bradley suggests that men controlled the machinery, resulting in greater marginalisation of women's work. She continues that division of labour was further increased due to 'masculinisation of tasks' based on possession of strength.¹⁹

Agricultural labour was, therefore, deemed as 'unfeminine and rough' and by the late 19th century any women who carried it out were considered to be 'rough and rude and a threat to femininity'.²⁰ Ernle recorded that agricultural employment was viewed as 'improper' for women due to the cultural changes associated with the division of labour and also to the 'self interest of male labourers' who were afraid that their conditions of service would suffer further if they were substituted by lower paid female labour.²¹ Such views were also expressed locally in Craven when, on hearing about a scheme for women agricultural workers in 1917, the Chairman of the Craven Tenant Farmers' Association commented that 'much of the work on a farm would be degrading for a woman to do.'²² This scenario was replicated in other areas where it was reported that women land workers were considered to be 'socially inferior to the domestic servant'.²³

As a result of this perception of female agricultural workers, it is not surprising that both Ernle and Horn write of the negative attitude of farmers towards women's labour. Despite the emergency war situation, Ernle felt that farmers would consider an influx of women on the land as a 'novelty' to which they had a 'rooted dislike'. 'They really feared that the women might be as great pests on the land as the weeds' and 'did not believe they could do the work'.²⁴ Horn writes that farmers did not feel that women could carry out much of the work and were 'incapable of performing heavier, dirtier jobs.'²⁵

It was not until 1916 that the government decided to suggest a way forward in terms of the labour situation by advocating the introduction of Women's Farm Labour Committees to work alongside WAECs to recruit females for farm labour. Horn states that during the spring and summer of 1916, 140,000 women volunteered for work.²⁶ The first WLA followed in 1917 and throughout the duration of the First

World War women not only undertook those tasks which had been labelled 'women's work' but also carried out more physically demanding and technical work for which they had previously been considered unsuitable.

Following the end of the war and the disbanding of the WLA, the nature of women's contribution to agriculture appears to have reverted to the status similar to that held before 1916. The Committee on Employment of Women in Agriculture considered that in the 1920s women's work fell into three categories of agricultural employment: regular, seasonal and casual.²⁷ Those women who were employed as regular full-time workers were few in number. They undertook 'ordinary' farm work including dairy tasks, milking, poultry work, market gardening and horticulture. Casual workers spent around eight months of the year on one farm or on several farms and, in addition to those tasks indicated above, also appear to have carried out some physically demanding jobs such as general fieldwork, lifting potatoes, weeding, hoeing and harvesting. Seasonal workers were said not to have been dependent upon agriculture for a living but worked at periods of intensive activity such as harvest time.²⁸ The Committee, therefore, noted a similar situation to that prevailing earlier in the century as the tasks carried out by women usually required manual dexterity and few of them were employed on a permanent basis.

Despite the fact that women had undertaken a wide variety of work during the First World War, the need to re-educate the farming community on their capabilities was still evident, as lessons learned between 1917 and 1919 had been forgotten by 1939 when the WLA was re-formed.

5. Summary and conclusion

Two world wars in the first half of the twentieth century made a major impact on agriculture which, in peacetime, had usually been given freedom of operation by the government. In adopting this *laissez faire* approach, however, successive governments had made little investment in the industry, resulting in a lack of innovation in farming methods and machinery. Britain was, therefore, vulnerable in war because it was not self-sufficient in food production, importing much of its requirements.

In an attempt to address this situation, the Board of Agriculture (later MAF) gave some financial support to farmers although this was withdrawn at a strategic time resulting in a period of mistrust of government by agriculturists. However, prior to the outbreak of World War II, it was again necessary for the government to intervene in several aspects of agriculture to safeguard the country. Further financial assistance was forthcoming, stockpiles of fertiliser were procured and more tractors purchased. Nevertheless, agriculture remained a labour intensive industry, as manual labour was still required to operate the newly acquired machinery. Furthermore, as government set the farming community a target of increasing the acreage ploughed for human and animal fodder crops, the need for agricultural labour was actually much increased.

Due to the government's recent history of intervention in agriculture, it was able to introduce the WLA as a major source of agricultural labour in 1939. Whilst some reluctance was expressed by the farming community at the prospect of female labour with little or no experience of rural life and work, the government met with little national opposition although local pockets of resistance existed.

The combination of factors identified in this chapter - in particular the threat of war, the economic position of agriculture, its method of operation, government intervention in the industry and its labour history - resulted in the perceived need for the formation of a Women's Land Army in 1939.

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- 25 Horn, *op. cit.* p.116.
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CHAPTER TWO: AN OVERVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

1. The Women's Land Army (1939-50)

The Women's Land Army (1939-1950) has been the subject of relatively little academic research. Publication of literature on the period under consideration began in the 1940s and was autobiographical in nature. This was followed by similar offerings in the 1980s and 1990s. In some cases, however, the WLA was scarcely mentioned and on occasion appears almost incidental to accounts of other matters which affected the lives of recruits. Other contributions to literature on the WLA have taken the form of collections of reminiscences edited by former WLA members. This material has been augmented by authors who utilised reminiscences in conjunction with documentary evidence from sources such as the Public Record Office and Imperial War Museum to raise issues concerning the operation and administration of the WLA generally ignored in autobiographies.

An 'official history' of the WLA, *The Women's Land Army*, by Vita Sackville-West, was published in 1944, although this is only a partial history given that the organisation continued for a further six years beyond the date of publication. It was followed by war histories such as Murray's *Agriculture* (1955) and Parker's *Manpower* (1957) but neither chose to take account of the contribution made by the WLA. The work of the WLA has, however, been mentioned in publications giving an overview of wartime conditions such as Calder, *The People's War* (1969) and Longmate, *How We Lived Then* (1973). This material contains little detail on the day-to-day operations of the WLA but addresses the social and economic environments of war. Such issues are largely ignored in the autobiographical work and collections of reminiscences.

An identifiable pattern in literature concerning the WLA is therefore apparent, commencing with autobiographies by former WLA recruits, which are followed by collections of reminiscences interspersed with publications showing an awareness of the WLA but which concentrate on other aspects of the war. However, they provide a context within which an evaluation of the WLA might be made. By considering these publications in more detail, together with a selection of those issued on other work

undertaken by women during the war, it is possible to identify opportunities for further research into the Women's Land Army.

1.1 'Autobiographical' literature

Early contributions to WLA literature were made by former recruits and concentrated on the individual, her personal experiences and reminiscences, e.g. Whitton, *Green Hands* (1943), Barraud, *Set My Hand Upon the Plough* (1946), Joseph, *If Their Mothers Only Knew* (1946), Knappett, *A Pullet on the Midden* (1947) and Iddon, *Fragrant Earth* (1947). Work of a similar nature followed from Wells, *My Life in the Land Army* (1984), Abbott, *Librarian in the Land Army* (1984), Mist, *Aw Arrh! Experiences in the Women's Land Army* (1992) and Hall, *Land Girl*, (1993). In 1974 and 1975 Hazel Driver wrote two series of articles for the *Dalesman* relating to her experiences of working on the land in the Craven area which provide an informative account of the living conditions and camaraderie of hostel life. However, the majority of these writers do not indicate the sources of their data but by their use of the first person one assumes that they were based on personal experience. In some cases it is difficult to assess whether the publication was a fictional account or an accurate portrayal of service in the WLA. This is most apparent in the initial stages of Whitton's book which has been described as a 'gay and amusing chronicle'¹ but throughout her narrative one gains the impression that it is a combination of both fiction and fact.

The aim of the autobiographical literature appears to have been to entertain the reader with stories of family issues, tasks undertaken on the land, personal relationships and the poor conditions under which some recruits worked. Knappett concentrates on 'life on the farm', describing tasks carried out in great detail and presenting amusing anecdotes of her interactions with both people and animals. A large part of Iddon's book describes her feelings on a number of matters, some of which relate to the WLA but other reminiscences recount her upbringing, holidays and her atypical experience of leaving the WLA to help a solicitor rework a derelict farm. The more recent autobiographical work by Hall and Wells continues in a similar vein. For example, Hall refers in her writing to occurrences in her family which often appeared to take precedence over her WLA work, even though the title of

her publication is *Land Girl*. Enid Barraud differs from most of these authors as she specifies that the evidence for her book was taken from a diary she kept throughout her five years in the WLA. She discusses aspects of training and learning about work and life on different farms in Cambridgeshire. In reviewing this publication, Vita Sackville-West points to the ‘authentic voice’ exhibited in Barraud’s writing which she regards as evidence that the author had had ‘years of close contact with the land, its moods, its workers ... moments of despair [and] pleasure ... Her book is one which every true countryman will recognise as being the real thing.’²

Neither Shirley Joseph nor Hazel Driver make reference to any records used in their accounts of working in the WLA. Nevertheless, the issues they raise suggest that these were based upon personal experience. Shirley Joseph offers a far more critical evaluation than the other authors of the way in which the WLA operated. It has, however, been suggested that ‘the trouble with Miss Joseph is that she does not stop to think and this is evident in her remarks about both the personal ... and organisation of the WLA.’³ Hazel Driver has a much more sympathetic attitude to the WLA than Joseph and, with some 30 years’ hindsight, remembers her service with great affection.

All the women mentioned above worked on the land and their personal experiences led them to take no account of the difficulties in setting up or operating such a complex organisation as the WLA in wartime. Only Iris Tillett has described life as a county secretary in Norfolk in *The Cinderella Army* (1988). Her booklet is an important contribution to WLA literature as it offers an insight into the complex ‘middle management’ role of WLA volunteers. No publications appear to have been forthcoming from WLA members who operated at the level of its headquarters or who were involved in policy making. However, Huxley’s biography of Lady Denman (1961) provides observations on her dealings with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, as does Twinch’s publication *Women on the Land* (1990).

Despite perceived weaknesses in the autobiographical work, the strengths of these publications lie in their descriptions of the living and working conditions encountered in the WLA. The variable standards of accommodation in hostels and private farms together with the completely new types of work which recruits were

required to carry out, were obviously of major importance to young women living away from home for the first time.

The variety of tasks undertaken by recruits has been described in meticulous detail. This consisted of weeding (Knappett, Iddon),⁴ hoeing of beet and turnips (Knappett, Joseph, Iddon, Barraud), stone picking (Whitton, Mist), muck spreading (Abbott, Whitton, Knappett, Barraud), harvesting of fruit (Barraud, Iddon), harvesting of vegetables e.g. potatoes (Abbott, Knappett, Barraud, Mist) and sprouts (Abbott, Knappett and Barraud), through to tractor-driving (Whitton, Iddon, Mist), ploughing (Iddon), baling (Abbott), care of livestock (Knappett, Barraud) and dairy farming (Joseph, Whitton, Iddon, Barraud, Mist). Probably the most described and disliked job was threshing due to the filth in which recruits had to work, often with inadequate protection from dust (Abbott, Joseph, Whitton, Knappett, Iddon, Barraud, Mist). Other tasks in the harvesting cycle such as stooking have also been described (Whitton, Knappett, Iddon, Barraud, Mist). These accounts show the breadth of work carried out, including that which was physically demanding and not perceived as 'women's work' by farmers in particular and society in general.

1.2 Collections of reminiscences

Little indication has been given by authors as to how information was obtained for collections of reminiscences but this appears to be mainly from letters received from former recruits. For example, Joyce Knighton thanks

everyone who helped me with information and advice, especially ex-members of the Women's Land Army for taking the time out to sit down, put pen to paper, and tell me their stories which made such enjoyable reading.⁵

However, she does not take the issue further and the publication appears purely as a collection of reminiscences with no analytical content. Mant, (*All Muck, No Medals*, 1995) also obtained letters from former Land Army colleagues and has extracted from them recurring themes within which to group the reminiscences. It is possible that the occasional interview was carried out but there is no discussion of data collection. Chapters are presented on joining the WLA, the uniform, 'how we lived' and training. In a similar manner to the autobiographies, almost every job undertaken by the WLA

on the land is considered to a greater or lesser extent. Mant, herself a former WLA recruit, intersperses the reminiscences with pertinent comments from her own experiences.

The aim in this category of literature again appears to be to entertain the reader with amusing anecdotes although experiences described include more references to the harshness of life than in the autobiographical works. The recollections are from WLA recruits who worked on the land and offer only their perspectives. These have not been challenged by obtaining the views of farmers, hostel wardens or administrators; nor is a management perspective considered. However, in some instances mention has been made of the various localities in which work was undertaken. This is important as the autobiographies only considered the farming methods used in the area in which the recruit was located, e.g. Knappett in south Lancashire and Barraud in Cambridgeshire. In Mant's collection it is possible to glean some idea of different regions and how conditions, farming methods and types of work differed between them. There is, however, no analysis of this differentiation and the work stands as a series of interesting but descriptive chapters. There has been little overt recognition of the character and flexibility shown by women in the creation of a nationwide mobile agricultural workforce willing to undertake a variety of work.

Twinch (1990) considers several of these issues by utilising documentary evidence in conjunction with a sample of recollections. She indicates the sources used and identifies certain records to which she had access. She is also aware of government records which no longer survive. Twinch interviewed former WLA recruits and received correspondence from them. Although she might have explored further the strengths and weaknesses of this methodology both she and, to a much lesser extent, Tyrer (1996) were the only authors to have devoted any discussion to this aspect of their material. Twinch locates the introduction of the WLA in 1917 within the context of the economic position of agriculture. She discusses the emergence of the organisation, the women who were involved and opinions held by various parties regarding the advisability of women working in uniform on the land. She bases her World War II account of the WLA on Lady Denman and examines the interaction between Lady Denman and government ministers. She describes work on

the land by presenting two chapters of reminiscences from former WLA members employed in both the First and Second World Wars. The major criticism of this publication is the lack of adequate referencing resulting in difficulty in following up issues raised and in attributing them to a particular source.

Tyrer (1996) makes use of personal material such as diaries, letters, and newspaper cuttings from former recruits in adopting a similar approach to that of Twinch by supporting Lady Denman, her policies and personal qualities. She draws on recollections from individuals and quotations from personal accounts which are used within the text. She examines the image of WLA recruits and what she perceives as unjustified prejudices and discrimination against them. However, the journalistic style adopted together with scant referencing and a poor bibliography detract from the academic rigour of the book. It leads Penelope Lively to an inappropriate assumption that the bibliography is the extent of work published on the WLA. In her review of Tyrer's book Lively indicates that 'she could have done with further discussion of the urban-rural dichotomy, along with much more background to agricultural conditions and methods of the time'⁶ thus identifying areas which might be developed in future research.

1.3 'Official histories'

Vita Sackville-West's *The Women's Land Army* (1944) is a 'record of the WLA since its inception in September 1939 down to 1944'⁷ and is, therefore, only a partial history. It obviously cannot take account of occurrences from the birth of the organisation through to its disbanding in 1950. Therefore, such important aspects as the perceived lack of acknowledgement by the government in 1945 of the contribution made by the WLA to food production in wartime could not be considered despite the fact that it is a vital part of WLA history. Twinch states that 'much of the book ... was based on Vita's own local experiences and knowledge of farming' and suggests that Sackville-West did not leave London to undertake research for the publication but relied on radio broadcasts and letters from recruits, some of which she quoted extensively.⁸ Twinch therefore considers that the publication 'turned into an uncertain combination of recruiting document and historical record of WLA administration and membership.'⁹ Sackville-West

wrote the WLA history in a style which occasionally detracted from the purpose of the book, which was to give a serious account of the WLA, thereby causing one to question its appropriateness at times. For example, she states that

[the counties] were suddenly personified, dressed in honest tweeds and rather strong shoes. I felt how much, how very much, I liked the English; how much, how very much, how painfully much, I loved England.¹⁰

However, Twinch suggests that 'it is certain that none of the other services is able to lay claim to such philosophy and writing excellence as that which appears in *The Women's Land Army*'¹¹ and Calder considers that it was 'an unusually graceful official history.'¹²

Sackville-West does, however, draw attention to features of the WLA which might be developed to give a clearer picture of its organisational structure and the manner in which it was administered. For example, she acknowledges that the membership of the WLA was 'united by gender' as the female workforce was administered by a female management team, but suggests that it was divided by class and age. She writes that the county representative

belongs to a different class of birth and upbringing and also (which is quite as significant) to a different generation... let us at least recognise that some divergence of point of view must inevitably arise between the staid squirearchy of middle age, and gay wild youth out for all the fun it can get.¹³

These differences are reflected in the various roles undertaken. Women working on the land had mixed class origins and were in the age range 17 - 40 years whereas women who occupied managerial roles had origins in the upper classes and were usually a generation older.

Not only do other 'official histories' ignore these issues they actually choose to take no account of the contribution made by WLA labour in the home production of food between 1939 and 1950. Murray states in the preface to *Agriculture* (HMSO, 1955) that the WLA warranted a history of its own, thereby attempting to justify the omission of some 250,000 members of the agricultural labour force from an official

history of the industry during the war. It is difficult to understand why this report, together with that by Parker on *Manpower* (HMSO, 1957), did not adequately acknowledge the contribution made by the WLA.

1.4 Social and economic contexts

The social and economic contexts within which the WLA operated are seldom alluded to in the autobiographies and collections of reminiscences. However, by reference to publications of a more general nature, it is possible to gain some understanding of the environment within which the WLA operated. For example, Ward (1988) *War in the Countryside 1939-45*, concentrates on the effect of war upon agriculture and rural areas rather than on the detail of daily life described in the autobiographical accounts. She places the WLA in the social and economic contexts of the countryside, recognising that experienced agricultural workers had been lured away from the land by higher wages in industrial work. She acknowledges that farmers were initially hostile to male labour being replaced by female labour but a change of attitude resulted when it became apparent that the WLA possessed the ability and determination to 'do a good job'. Ward also considers the input made by other agricultural labour including prisoners of war, conscientious objectors, boys' camps and the involvement of the WAECs. She draws attention to the 'enforced pace of modernisation' on farms pointing to the increased number of tractors from 55,000 in 1939 to 200,000 in 1956, with a resultant decrease in agricultural labour.¹⁴ She also mentions the 'generous income' received by farmers in 1942 compared with that in 1939 and the dependence of the farming community on state direction and control.¹⁵ Again, this is of major relevance to WLA labour and its functioning but is not discussed in publications mentioned in the previous two categories.

In writing about World War I, Lord Ernle (*The Land and Its People*, 1925) also raises issues within the rural and agricultural environments which had relevance for WLA operations. Some of the points to which he draws attention were also valid for WLA organisation in World War II. These include the responsibility held by government in setting up an organisation to cope with the fluctuation of supply and demand of labour, in relocating hundreds of young women to various parts of the country and providing them with adequate living and working conditions and

appropriate welfare. Other publications which might also be included in this category are Calder, *The People's War* (1969) and Longmate, *How We Lived Then* (1973). They offer little direct debate on the WLA itself but consider the social and economic contexts of war such as the evacuation of children to the countryside, rationing, the 'Dig for Victory' campaign and various forms of work carried out by women in the war.

1.5 The ideological context

There appears to have been little attempt made within the WLA material outlined above to locate it in an ideological context. For example, the implications of introducing a new and mobile female workforce to agriculture for the duration of the war and its relationship to employment generally have rarely been considered. Exceptions include Fredricks in *Insurgent Sociologist* (1984),¹⁶ Ouditt in *Fighting Forces, Writing Women* (1994) and Carpenter in *Agricultural History* (1997).¹⁷ Fredricks used the WLA in the USA in World War II as a case study to show the way in which she perceived women's labour as being 'manipulated and utilised under particular historical circumstances.'¹⁸ Whilst she considers the WLA was 'extremely successful' in providing emergency agricultural labour, this same labour was not only seen by its contemporaries as subordinate to that of men but was equated to that of 'boys in the 12-16 year age group.'¹⁹ Fredricks also draws attention to the fact that the work carried out in the USA by the WLA was predominantly in states where fruit and vegetables were harvested. She suggests government and the farming community felt women were well suited to this type of work as care and dexterity were required to carry it out successfully. These qualities were seen as commensurate with the type of tasks women were best able to undertake to increase the production of home grown food. Nevertheless, when male workers returned from the war, women were seen as surplus to requirements. They had provided a 'reserve army of labour' and were advised to return to their homes.

This aspect is considered by Ouditt in *Fighting Forces, Writing Women* (1994), through her examination of the Voluntary Aid Detachment, the WLA and munitions workers in Britain in World War I. She argues that women made a 'round trip', starting out from domesticity at the outbreak of war, entering the public domain for the duration but due to the prevailing power structures, returning home at the end

of the war.²⁰ Ouditt uses the imagery of women as both producers of ammunition in the factories and reproducers of male workers and soldiers in the home to show the conflicting roles allotted to women in wartime.

Carpenter offers a similar account of the WLA in the USA to that of Fredricks. However, in addition she draws attention to the fact that in 1943 farmers expressed concern at the prospect of employing urban white middle class women inexperienced in agricultural work, although they were willing to employ black women and men.²¹ The decision was made to hire urban white women only in an emergency but Carpenter suggests that by 1945 farmers appreciated the input of the WLA and

stereotypes of useless urban women working in the nation's fields disappeared as farmers ... learned to appreciate and utilise available female labour in order to continue high levels of production to meet wartime demand.²²

Bradley considers women's work in general during wartime in *Men's Work, Women's Work* (1989), although her views could also apply specifically to the WLA. She states that

wartime experience is significant because it reveals to us the extent to which the sexual division of labour is an artificial construct and not a natural effect of sex differences in physique and personality. It also provides a salutary example of how rapidly change can occur if the 'national will' and governmental power is behind it.²³

Here Bradley draws attention to two important elements of women's work in wartime. Firstly, she points to the artificiality of categorising work along the lines of gender, which she feels has been manipulated to suit particular historical circumstances. Secondly, Bradley mentions the role of government as being crucial in presenting change as acceptable, thus influencing national perceptions. Summerfield is also interested in state intervention in employment and notes that the state had vested interests rather than being the 'set of neutral structures' she had assumed.²⁴

The munitions industries have been the subject of attention from authors such as Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War* (1984), Braybon and Summerfield, *Out of the Cage* (1987), and Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*

(1994). They raise issues concerning gender stereotyping of jobs, state intervention, class relationships, subordination of women and how social pressures and expectations influenced women. This work highlights the vacuum in research into the WLA and yet some of the arguments put forward in relation to the munitions industries are equally applicable to the WLA. For example the 'heterogeneity of women thesis' discussed by Woollacott has similarities with the points made by Vita Sackville-West on the differences in class and age between policy makers and implementers and those working on the land. Woollacott suggests that women with working class backgrounds worked in a variety of skilled and unskilled jobs whereas 'middle class women held quasi-professional jobs such as welfare supervisors, factory inspectors and women police and patrols.'²⁵ She is aware of the commonality and diversity of experience of women in the munitions industries but suggests that due to class differences there was a failure to create gender bonding which consequently affected post-war reconstruction.

In *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives* (1998), Summerfield makes use of oral history interviews with women who undertook different types of work in the Second World War (including one who was a WLA recruit). She examines their individual experiences and 'subjective understandings' of the meaning of this work, how it was influenced by their backgrounds and, in turn, how it might have influenced their lives to the 1990s. She concludes that there were two broad categories of experience, which she terms the 'heroic' and the 'stoic' (although there were occasions when the categories overlapped to some extent). The heroism of women was found in

public service, undertaken not for personal gain but for the greater good [and in] the unfeminine settings in which she was required to work and the signs that she was performing successfully there ... the woman war worker was stepping out of the conventionally feminine sphere and into a more masculine world than the one to which she normally had access.²⁶

The 'stoics' tended to adopt more conventional wartime roles by undertaking work associated with women such as clerical work. Summerfield suggests that this occasionally 'involved an explicit rejection of the heroism of wartime rhetoric, and the choice of an option that caused the least disruption to their feminine identities.'²⁷

Authors of WLA autobiographical work generally appear to have given little thought to whether they were performing tasks perceived as appropriate to women or whether they were being manipulated in any way as they worked on the land. However, Joseph does refer to the issue in suggesting that women ‘did not reflect ... that they were doing a man’s work on the land and that without their help it would be impossible to provide the country with all the food it needed.’²⁸ On the other hand, it occurred to Whitton that ‘we ponder bitterly on the old tradition that women are supposed to be the weaker vessels; so far on the farm we have met little to substantiate it.’²⁹

2. Policy Studies Approaches

This thesis examines the structure and function of the WLA by utilising the policy studies approach to present data on the formulation, implementation and outcomes of selected policy areas. The methodologies used to collect data on the different stages of the policy process, i.e. documentary evidence and oral history interviews, are discussed in Chapter Three. It should be emphasised here that the policy studies model has been adopted as a mechanism within which to present data in a coherent manner to illustrate the totality of the WLA organisation, rather than the WLA being used as an example to portray or explain policy studies approaches. Whilst the approaches themselves are not being researched, there is in existence an extensive body of literature on the subject. It is therefore appropriate to review this literature in order to understand the evolution of policy studies and to show how policy writers have been drawn upon for the purposes of this research. However, due to the volume and complexity of discourse within the theoretical models which have emerged, (for example, Parsons, *Public Policy*, 1995, lists in his bibliography some 1,400 books and journal articles on the policy process) it is possible only to review a small selection of the contributions available.

2.1 The origins of policy studies

Parsons (1995) suggests that the origins of policy studies can be traced to the work of several authors, the two most eminent of whom are Herbert Simon and Charles Lindblom.

Firstly, Simon (*Administrative Behaviour*, 1945) stated that decision making by individuals in organisations was undertaken in a rational manner through a series of stages. He later modified this view in recognising that it was impossible for people to attain a high degree of rationality given that political factors impinged on the decision making process and he introduced the concept of ‘bounded rationality’ to take account of this.³⁰

Secondly, Lindblom’s paper on the ‘science of muddling through’ (1959) is described by Parsons ‘as perhaps the single most important contribution to the formation of a theory of the policy-making process.’³¹ Lindblom considered that ‘muddling through’ decision making allowed for ‘incremental change’ to occur during the process as negotiation and adjustment take place.³² He also doubted that the policy process was simply a matter of proceeding through several stages and considered it to be more complex due to the pressures of bureaucracies, interest groups and politicians.³³

2.2 The growth of policy studies

Following the early contributions of Simon (1945 *et seq.*) and Lindblom (1959 *et seq.*), Parsons (1995) suggests that policy studies as an academic subject emerged in the late 1960s with textbooks being produced in the 1970s. He reports that numerous publications developing the approach appeared in the 1980s.³⁴

Parsons’ own publication (*Public Policy*, 1995) is an introductory text to the field of policy studies. He identifies the origins of various approaches and theories and traces their historical evolution offering critiques and discussions on the numerous models, directing the reader to original sources. Other publications follow a similar pattern by reviewing theoretical approaches to the policy process and examining how theories have been refined over time (e.g. Burch and Wood, 1990). Hill (ed., 1993) also addresses theoretical issues stating that his edited collection of papers ‘is concerned with analysis of policy and more specifically with analysis of policy determination ... [and] has been chosen to introduce readers to some of the terminology’ utilised in the policy process.³⁵

Some researchers adopt a different approach to the subject matter by offering an overview of various theories followed by examples of policy content on a wide range of issues. The policies under investigation are then evaluated in order to reach a conclusion about whether policy objectives have been fulfilled or how they might have been achieved more efficiently. The theoretical perspectives adopted might then be refined to take account of findings (e.g. Levitt, 1980, Barrett and Fudge, 1981, Lewis and Wallace [eds.], 1984, Younis [ed.], 1990). Authors often adopt an historical narrative to trace the evolution of a particular policy (e.g. Kogan, 1975, and Barber, 1996, on education policy and Levitt, 1980, on pollution policy). A more detailed examination of literature on policy studies theory and content follows.

2.3 Theoretical approaches within policy studies

Younis and Davidson (in Younis [ed.] 1990) and Parsons (1995), amongst others, provide an explanation of three theoretical approaches to the policy process.³⁶ These models may be applied to the implementation stage within the process but are also relevant to the policy process as a whole. They have been named as the top-down rational model, the bottom-up model and the policy-action continuum and are considered below.

2.3.1 The top-down rational approach

The top-down rational model was the first to be applied to the policy process being born out of Simon's (1945 *et seq.*) and Lindblom's (1959 *et seq.*) views of decision making. This model was conceptualised as a cycle or series of stages whereby policy is formulated at the top of an organisation, or at the peak of organisational structures, and is fed down to the bottom where it will be put into action by operatives. Levitt (1980) also considers that policy can be made at the centre of an organisation and implemented at its periphery.³⁷

The naming of the stages differs slightly between theorists. Younis and Davidson (1990) suggest the policy process traditionally commenced with *formation* and *design* which was followed by *implementation* and *evaluation*.³⁸ Burch and Wood (1990) consider the process starts with policy *initiation* which they deem to be the source, generation and early development of the policy proposal, and continues

with *formulation* or the development of policy in detail and *implementation* or the carrying out of policy.³⁹

This apparent rigidity in the various stages was, however, criticised. Lewis (1984) found it problematic because he felt it is often impossible to say 'where policy making stops and implementation begins.'⁴⁰ Levitt (1980) also disagrees with compartmentalising the policy process, pondering whether implementation is, in fact, separate from policy making or from policy impact.⁴¹ Burch and Wood (1990) suggest that using stages not only oversimplifies the policy process but also imposes artificial categories on data. Nevertheless, they appreciate that it is useful for analytical purposes.⁴² Parsons (1995) endorses this view stating that the rational approach gives a false picture in showing decision making taking place at the 'front end' of the process and evaluation at the other.⁴³ However, he also considers that 'given the sheer range of frameworks and models which are available as analytical tools, we need some way in which this complexity can be reduced to a more manageable form'⁴⁴ which the stagist approach provides.

Hyder (in Lewis and Wallace [ed.], 1984) Younis and Davidson (1990) and Parsons (1995) all identify research carried out by Pressman and Wildavsky in 1973 as a major work which showed drawbacks in the top-down rational model.⁴⁵ Pressman and Wildavsky studied a job-creation scheme for black people in Oakland, USA. Criteria applicable to the top-down approach were in place such as a policy statement, a trained workforce and a good chain of command. However, Younis and Davidson (1990) suggest that assumptions were made by decision makers on the simplicity of the implementation process and gave insufficient consideration to problems which beset both those responsible for implementation and to workers who appeared inhibited by the difficulty of task.⁴⁶ Parsons (1995) suggests that Wildavsky's later work with Majone (1978) and Browne (1984 and 1987) acknowledged that his original top-down position had been too simplistic; Wildavsky later recognised that 'implementation has to be understood as a more evolutionary, "learning" process, rather than as the kind of policy-implementation sequence which was originally put forward.'⁴⁷ Barrett and Fudge (1981) state that the top-down view of the policy process played down power relations and conflict in considering that 'implementers [are] agents for policy makers'⁴⁸ rather than being influential in their own right. They point out that the theory assumed all initiative emanated from the top

of an organisation and it was from there that subordinates were controlled, but research showed this was not necessarily the case.⁴⁹

The top-down model therefore has its uses as the starting point in examining the policy process but at the same time the weaknesses of the approach have been highlighted. As Dunsire stated in 1978, a number of elements which occur in the real world have been excluded from the perspective, such as:

all considerations of 'affect' of the struggle for power, of emotions like love, hate and envy, in fact of any motivational factors whatsoever. They exist of course, and they play an enormous part in the real world process: but for analytical purposes, we are simply leaving them out.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the model is still perpetuated due, according to Gordon, Lewis and Young (in Hill [ed.], 1993) to 'its status as a normative model.'⁵¹ However, Younis and Davidson (in Younis [ed.], 1990) consider that the approach 'suffers from the serious disadvantage of omitting the reality of policy modification or distortion at the hands of policy implementers.'⁵²

2.3.2 The bottom-up approach

The bottom-up approach grew out of criticism of the top-down model although was not necessarily offered as a replacement for it. It draws attention to the fact that while policy may be initiated 'at the top', its eventual implementation and successful outcome are very much dependent upon groups and individuals lower down the pecking order. Younis and Davidson (in Younis [ed.] 1990) suggest that the bottom-up approach starts with individuals in the organisation.⁵³ Both they and Parsons (1995) identify Weatherley and Lipsky's research (1977) as the seminal work within this perspective.⁵⁴ Weatherley and Lipsky examined the effects of a Comprehensive Special Education Law of 1972 implemented in Massachusetts which required a radical change in the working practices of teachers and welfare workers who, due to their contact with the public, were conceptualised as 'street level bureaucrats.' Although well-defined objectives, a chain of command, and adequate resources were in place, according to Parsons (1995) poor local planning and a failure to train classroom teachers to cope with special needs children resulted in a greatly increased

workload. The service was, however, maintained due to the dedication of individuals within the workforce as they fulfilled policy objectives as best they could by rationing services and prioritising tasks.⁵⁵ Weatherley and Lipsky show that operatives at 'street level' could play a part in achieving policy goals by acting in a proactive manner - something which the top-down approach failed to recognise. The bottom-up model also acknowledges that a workforce may not necessarily subscribe to policy directives or to all the values of the process and may not carry out policy solely in accordance with the preconceived notions of policy makers. In circumstances, where an organisation's members have contact with the public, they may be able to fulfil policy objectives as shown by Pressman and Wildavsky or even exert influence to subvert them.

Younis and Davidson (in Younis [ed.] 1990) suggest that the bottom-up approach offers food for thought for policy makers who 'should not seek control or compliance, rather they should capitalise on human resources and resourcefulness.'⁵⁶ Parsons (1995) considers that the model includes 'negotiation and consensus building' between organisations involved in the policy process within a politically sensitive environment, something which was often purposely excluded from the top-down model.⁵⁷ This is evident in a further example of the operation of the bottom-up approach put forward by Levitt (1980) in her study of noise abatement zones.⁵⁸ Here pressure was put on government by non-government organisations such as the noise abatement society to acknowledge the problem of neighbourhood noise. Under these conditions, the policy makers of central government undertook a more passive role, as local authorities became more responsive to local representations concerning neighbourhood noise.

However, Younis & Davidson (in Younis [ed.], 1990) suggest that the bottom-up approach does not in itself 'provide a satisfactory resolution to the problem of public policy, since one would question whether its complete rejection of the authority of policy makers, even in a pluralistic democracy, is desirable.'⁵⁹

2.3.3 Implementation as evolution - policy/action continuum

Younis and Davidson (in Younis [ed.], 1990) and Parsons (1995) state that the third approach to emerge in policy studies theory is known as the policy/action continuum.⁶⁰ Advocates of this approach consider that the policy process is more fluid than suggested in the two previous perspectives. For example Parsons states that the policy/action model shows that policy is not something that happens at the 'front end' of the policy process; it is something which 'evolves' or 'unfolds'.⁶¹ He identifies the work of Barrett and Fudge (1981) as one of the forerunners of this approach.⁶²

In their studies of urban and regional policy Barrett and Fudge consider that

the policy-action relationship needs to be considered in a political context and as an interactive and negotiative process taking place over time between those seeking to put policy into effect and those upon whom action depends. From this perspective, more emphasis is placed on issues of power and dependence, interests, motivations and behaviour...⁶³

The policy/action continuum not only incorporates an analysis of political factors but also recognises that these may change quite substantially over the period of time it takes to pursue policy objectives. Hyder (in Lewis & Wallace, 1984) states that the policy process is evolutionary as policy is 'continually clarified or altered or expanded during the various stages from initial definition of the problem to final evaluation.'⁶⁴ Younis and Davidson (1990) consider the approach enables the policy process to be viewed from either a top-down or bottom-up perspective yet it recognises and incorporates elements, such as the 'developmental nature' of policy, which the earlier models did not.⁶⁵ There are many examples of this from research in education such as Donnelly *et al* (1996), who suggest that their study of the science education curriculum shows policy implementation to be evolutionary due to negotiation and modification of the policy process.⁶⁶

Given that the formulation, implementation and outcomes of policies, together with their evaluation and possible redevelopment, are a continuous process over an unlimited period of time, many studies of public policy are historical in nature. In his comprehensive textbook, *Public Policy*, Parsons (1995) believes that 'historical

approaches to public policy have great strengths; not least, the way in which a detailed picture of what happened and why can be built up.⁶⁷

In *Educational Policy Making*, Kogan (1975) states that his approach to the subject is 'essentially historical'⁶⁸ but he also 'uses an orthodox model of the policy formation process' discussing the 'multiple objectives of education,' the 'role of interest groups,' parliament and central government decision makers.⁶⁹ He goes on to suggest that 'against this historical backdrop it is possible to analyse policy movements.'⁷⁰ Some 21 years later in another educational study, Michael Barber (1996) examines the historical background to the origins of the national curriculum controversy.⁷¹ Also, in researching the science education curriculum, Donnelly *et al* (1996) state that their study 'is to some degree a historical narrative' and that by examining policy realisation and utilising teachers' views and practices they are able to offer a 'historical, institutional and individual dimension.'⁷² An historical approach to the policy process is obviously not restricted to studies on education and is adopted by Levitt (1980), for example, to explain different aspects of pollution policy.⁷³ Policy studies, in particular the policy/action continuum together with an historical perspective have, therefore, complemented each other in a number of publications.

2.3.4 Evaluation literature

Researchers have often experienced difficulty in assessing the effectiveness of policies. How to measure success or failure and which persons are most qualified to make such judgements have been issues for debate.

Parsons (1995) considers that it is not only evaluation of policy which is important but also evaluation of people who are responsible for implementing policies within organisations.⁷⁴ He draws on Carol Weiss (1972) who argues that evaluation should be distinguished from other forms of policy analysis because it is judgmental in nature and may have political implications such as allegiance to funding agencies and implications for social change.⁷⁵

In order to adequately evaluate policy outcomes Burch and Wood (1990) consider that the issuing of a policy statement is important because 'unless we know

what was intended, we cannot judge whether or not a policy has succeeded.⁷⁶ They also state that ‘the assessment of policy success or failure has been impressionistic and anecdotal’ and point to a need for ‘systematic objective evaluation of programmes to measure their societal impact and the extent to which they are achieving their stated objectives.’⁷⁷ Lewis (in Lewis and Wallace, 1984) considers a policy can be judged as successful when ‘the cost effective use of appropriate mechanisms and procedures ... fulfil the expectations aroused by policy and retain general public assent.’⁷⁸ However, he is concerned that when policies are modified for various reasons such as a result of environmental influences, this could indicate either a successful resolution of policy or a policy which fails. He suggests this may be overcome to some extent ‘by treating implementation as a morally neutral concept’⁷⁹ but one questions how this can possibly be applied to most policy studies since it has already been determined that value judgements and political behaviour are inherent within the policy process. Lewis (1984) also draws attention to an aspect of the process which is ignored by supporters of the top-down rational approach, i.e. ‘the unintended consequences of a policy.’⁸⁰ This suggests that there may be some policy outcomes which formulators had not expected and had not planned for.

2.4 Policy studies theory and policy content

A further category of literature within policy studies identified by the researcher covers both policy theory and content and four examples are cited here to provide an insight into this classification. For example, Barrett and Fudge (1981) state that in the first part of their publication they review literature on policy implementation and then present several papers which, they suggest, mirror the top-down and bottom-up perspectives.⁸¹ They then discuss the relationship between the material presented and some of the themes and issues which emerged from their theoretical overview. They conclude that ‘the overriding impression ... is one of variety and complexity.’⁸²

Younis (ed., 1990) adopts a similar approach to that of Barrett and Fudge (1981). In the first chapter of his publication he and Davidson review theories and approaches on the implementation stage of the policy process. This is followed by a collection of papers concerning various policies such as the abolition of school councils in Scotland, asbestos pollution and traffic congestion in different countries.

It is shown that in the case of school councils the increasing political pressure of parents enabled them to participate more in school management and, in the evaluation of a council's asbestos policy, pressure groups made a substantial input. On the other hand, government was able to introduce the community charge despite resistance on all sides. Younis (ed., 1990) suggests that these and other chapters provide an insight into numerous problems arising during the implementation stage which exist no matter what the policy or country.⁸³ The policies he selected for inclusion reflect both the bottom-up and policy/action continuum models showing the involvement of individuals attempting to alter the course of the policy process over a period of time.

Lewis and Wallace (1984) also edit a collection of readings and analyse the subject matter by making comparisons between the implementation of policies in a variety of settings including race relations and public expenditure cuts. They also compare educational policies in California and the UK analysing ways in which policies are formulated, implemented and evaluated.

Burch and Wood (1990) adopt a slightly different approach within this category of literature in that they do not provide a selection of policies for consideration. They state that their main focus is the process of policy making and while they refer to and comment upon policy content it is purely secondary and illustrative.⁸⁴

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In summary, the different theoretical approaches reviewed above shows that the weaknesses of the rational or top-down model are evident in the lack of consideration given to pluralism and political behaviour at all levels of the policy process. The bottom-up approach indicates that people involved in the process have a part to play in the success or failure of a policy because they can either behave in such a way as to subvert intended policy outcomes or can dedicate themselves to ensuring a successful result. The evolutionary model would seem to be the most appropriate perspective to inform the policy process if the notion of 'evolution' informs the entire policy process from formulation through to outcome and evaluation. The totality of the approach can then become a useful organisational and theoretical tool taking account of the political behaviour of individuals, the different levels of operation and the need for

interorganisational negotiation. This will be revisited in Chapter Three: Defining Methodologies to discuss how it underpins this study of the WLA.

2.5 Case studies

The implementation and outcomes of the policy process within this study are located in the West Riding and Craven districts of Yorkshire and it is, therefore, important to consider some elements of case study literature. The following chapter also assesses how the case study literature informs this thesis.

The subject matter of case studies is diffuse and covers a variety of policies both within and between subject areas. For example, much has been written on various aspects of education and pollution policies.⁸⁵ Other diverse areas include race relations, agricultural policy, the community charge and many subjects under the heading of 'social policy'. Studies have been located in the USA, Britain, Europe and in developing countries, enabling cross-cultural comparisons to be made.

Barrett and Fudge (1981) suggest early case studies contained weaknesses as they failed to consider the micro structure of political and social systems concluding that future studies should consider a linkage between various levels of the policy process.⁸⁶ In order to move the approach forward, they offer one group of case studies which, they say, mirror the top-down approach and a second group which reflect the bottom-up approach.

The usefulness of the case study approach has also been considered, particularly in regard to whether findings are unique to an individual study, whether findings can be replicated if various studies are undertaken, or whether lessons learned from one case study can be applied to others. Levitt (1980) uses the case study method to identify problems in implementing pollution policy. She defines specific concepts such as 'instruments for policy' (people and organisations) and 'enforcement' (power to influence political implementation). She also identifies themes such as technical factors, administrative mechanisms and interorganisational relationships in case studies on waste disposal and noise. Levitt suggests these concepts and themes are transferrable to other policy processes within the evolutionary model.⁸⁷ Rose (1969) agrees that such transfer is possible within the case study approach but considers that

it may only be appropriate to particular classes of cases.⁸⁸ He edits a collection of case studies on the structure of government departments and their interaction, together with studies on public policy ranging from race relations to agricultural subsidies.

The plethora of case studies in existence means that it has not been possible to do justice to the range of subjects and approaches adopted. However, Burch and Wood (1990) argue that a multi-perspective approach to the subject matter is necessary although they also suggest that our choice of approach 'will be influenced by empirical evidence [and] will also be guided by our own moral views and our values.'⁸⁹

3. Summary and conclusion

A number of omissions have been identified within the categories of autobiographies, collections of reminiscences and official histories in WLA literature. As more records are released into the public domain it is evident that there is scope for a study to be made of the WLA organisation, its structure and modus operandi. Bearing in mind the aforementioned strengths and weaknesses inherent in the policy studies approach, its utilisation nevertheless facilitates an investigation of WLA policy formulation at national level, the implementation of policies through its county structure and the outcomes of policy locally. Such a study would provide a more detailed history of the WLA than is currently available, thereby enhancing knowledge of the organisation as a whole.

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CHAPTER THREE: DEFINING METHODOLOGIES

Previous chapters have outlined the reasons for the introduction of the WLA and the context within which it was established. Literature on the subject has been reviewed and the aims of this study identified. In order to assess policy and practice at different levels of the WLA it has been necessary to obtain data from a variety of sources which, by their very nature, demand different methodologies. This chapter, therefore, examines both the methods of data collection adopted in researching the WLA and the policy studies approaches used.

1. Background to the study

My interest in the WLA grew from the fact that two family members were former recruits and as a child I had enjoyed looking at photographs of them at work. This particular study began by discovering more about the background to the WLA through reading the autobiographical literature and 'official histories' discussed in Chapter Two. It became apparent that very little consideration had been given to the policy process within the WLA and that by investigating the formulation of policies at national level, their implementation through the Yorkshire county structure and policy outcomes in the Craven district, new information would be revealed.

2. Data Collection

In order to obtain information on the different stages of the policy process it has been necessary to adopt two methods of data collection. Documentary evidence has been utilised to obtain data on policy formulation and implementation, and oral history interviews have been undertaken with women who worked on the land to provide information on policy outcomes. The reason for adopting different methods of data collection is due to the types of evidence available. As the generation of government and WLA personnel responsible for decision making between 1939 and 1950 has passed on it has not been possible to use interviews in this part of the study. However, as official documents still survive, documentary evidence will provide most of the data on policy making and implementation at national and local levels. Conversely, little archive material is available on policy outcomes, i.e. the ways in

which policy decisions were realised through women operating on the land. It is, therefore, of crucial importance to be able to interview women of this generation to establish the local outcomes of national policies on recruitment, accommodation, welfare, training and work in the Craven district.

Prior to presenting this data, the advantages and disadvantages of utilising the dual methodologies of documentary evidence and oral history interviews will be discussed.

3. Documentary evidence

Several visits were made to the Public Record Office to examine documents in order to investigate policy formulation and implementation. Data were extracted from government files (particularly from the Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries and the Ministry of Labour & National Service) with photocopies being made of some pertinent lengthy documents such as organisation leaflets, minutes and circulars. Verbatim notes were also made of excerpts from these papers, file notes and correspondence. Some county records were also held at the Public Record Office and information relating to policy implementation within the county structure was obtained from Yorkshire WLA Committee minutes and from the former West Riding WAEC minutes. WLA minutes for other areas were perused to confirm that similar issues were raised and discussed within the Committees. The authenticity of the papers was confirmed by analysing a variety of MAF documents at government level, establishing their authorship and how and why they came into existence, and by cross-referencing some county records.

It must, however, be acknowledged that documentary evidence may contain bias. Lummis points out that it is the bureaucratic documentation which often survives and which 'has been generated by administrative and official processes.'¹ Given the emphasis placed on the use of MAF documentation for the provision of data on policy making and implementation in this study, it should be borne in mind that the views represented will tend to be those of government and other official agencies.

Furthermore, it is obviously only possible to access surviving documents and it is apparent that some written records important to the history of the WLA have not survived due to innocent or deliberate actions. For example, the MAF state that most of the personal records of WLA recruits were destroyed a few years after the organisation was disbanded in 1950 and the MAF currently hold only an incomplete card index of members.² Some local records are also incomplete with Iris Tillett, a former Norfolk WLA County Secretary, stating that, in fact, no Norfolk county records have survived.³ The unavailability of papers of this nature may result in bias of which we are completely unaware.

While recording data from the documents archived at the Public Record Office, the sheer volume of data available on the WLA became unmanageable and it was necessary for the researcher to make judgements to discard some information at source. Decisions were made to exclude, for example, certain data such as detail on the domestic arrangements in hostels in areas other than the West Riding. Immediately after visits to the Public Record Office, data were recorded on disk using word processing packages, the strategy being to refer to the notes on numerous occasions to extract information relevant to selected policy areas. Files from which data on the WLA were recorded are listed in the Bibliography.

In addition to the above-mentioned documents, the local Craven newspaper, the *Craven Herald*, was used extensively to provide an insight into the prevailing cultural and agricultural climates as it reported the problems faced by the farming community. In particular the *Craven Herald* covered meetings held by the major representative of the local farmers, the Craven Tenant Farmers' Association, and although the Association's minutes were made available to the researcher for perusal, they were found to contain very little discussion in comparison with the newspaper reports. However, the *Craven Herald* did appear to be most sympathetic to the difficulties facing farmers in reporting on the Association's meetings in such detail and may not have presented their situation in a neutral manner.

Nevertheless, as Lummis submits, the main issue is 'not whether documents are true or false ... but how they serve to confirm or deny the evidence of oral history.'⁴

The utilisation of oral history and documents complement each other in this study in an attempt to present a balanced view of the policy making process.

4. Oral history evidence

4.1 The need to undertake oral history interviews

As indicated above, very little material on policy outcomes, i.e. the realisation of policy decisions as evidenced by the experiences of women working on the land, has been recorded. As some of this generation of women are still alive it was of paramount importance to be able to interview them. The need to obtain information from this source was not only crucial in terms of this research, to enable policies to be traced from formulation through to practical outcomes, but was also significant in contributing to what Thompson terms ‘a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past, a challenge to the established account.’⁵ He also suggests that oral history evidence has been significant in the field of labour history and in agriculture⁶ and, therefore, input from women who worked in the WLA contributes to our knowledge in this area.

Lummis considers oral history to be ‘an account of first hand experience recalled retrospectively, communicated to an interviewer for historical purposes’⁷ and it is this definition which is utilised within this research. Several categories of data can be collected through oral history including ‘life histories’ and ‘single issue interviews’. The former covers ‘a wide range of topics, perhaps from birth to present’⁸ while the latter ‘seeks to gain testimony about a particular aspect or period of a person’s life. The object might be to hear about someone’s working life, perhaps with an emphasis on indigenous knowledge.’⁹ The aim in undertaking oral history interviews with ex-WLA members was to obtain information on their experiences during the time they were associated with the organisation in order to learn about the outcomes of its policies. Consequently it was considered appropriate to undertake single issue interviews rather than life histories. The interviews were not, therefore, extended to take account of how women’s subjective understanding of their wartime experiences affected their later lives, as was the case with Summerfield in *Reconstructing Women’s Wartime Lives* (1998).

4.2 Preparing the schedule of interview questions

Many factors were taken into consideration in preparing for the oral history interviews with former WLA members, one of the first being the appropriateness of the questions to ask. It became evident from reading MAF files and some WLA autobiographical material that several policy issues played a major role in the structure and function of the WLA. A decision was, therefore, made to ask questions relating to these areas, i.e. recruitment, accommodation, welfare, training, work, conditions of service and the disbanding of the organisation (a copy of the schedule is shown in Appendix I). The schedule, therefore, progressed chronologically, the first question relating to the informant's circumstances on joining the WLA, in order to evoke responses which would provide evidence on recruitment.

Question 2 concerned the quality and nature of any training programmes undertaken as it was WLA policy to provide an element of training in certain tasks. It was anticipated that responses would indicate whether this objective was achieved.

Question 3 related to the placing of recruits by the WLA to ascertain whether they had any choice in where they were located, the allocation of accommodation or in the type of employment they would undertake. The WLA was required to produce a mobile work force billeted in a certain standard of accommodation and the aim of this question was to determine whether the outcomes of this policy were successful.

Question 4 was also wide-ranging, concerning tasks carried out and working conditions experienced. The MAF stipulated that work undertaken by the WLA should be concentrated on increasing the production of home grown food and the intention was to elicit responses regarding the types of tasks carried out. Furthermore, throughout the early years of operations the WLA aimed to achieve terms and conditions of service for its recruits commensurate with those enjoyed by other war workers. The responses to this question would assist in assessing whether the WLA was, in fact, able to provide an adequate uniform, acceptable rates of pay and manageable working hours.

Question 5 was posed to ascertain whether WLA members felt the farming community considered them able to carry out the physically demanding work to as

high a standard as the male labourers they replaced. The answers to this question and Question 6 concerning the contribution of the WLA to the war effort would indicate how the WLA felt it was being portrayed and perceived by the community in which it operated.

Question 7 asked whether WLA members felt isolated in the countryside as many of them had been used to town life. The policy of the WLA was to provide adequate welfare provision and it was intended that the responses to this question would produce evidence on whether the WLA fulfilled its responsibilities in this sector.

Question 8 concerned aspects of leaving the WLA in order to ascertain the length of service of members, their reasons for leaving and any assistance provided by the WLA in helping its members in the post-war period.

Question 9 asked whether recipients of the schedule would be prepared to further discuss their WLA experiences and it was intended that the questions posed and responses received would form a basis from which to conduct future interviews.

Prior to circulating the schedule, the composition of questions was discussed with a former WLA member. Efforts were made to achieve an appropriate balance in questions while also considering the age of informants, which ranged from 70 - 85 years at the time of interview. The aim was to provide sufficient interest to elicit responses without requesting so much information that informants might feel outfaced and, therefore, not return the schedule. Thompson considers that questions should be phrased in simple, straightforward and familiar language, and attempts were made to adhere to this. He also states that leading questions must normally be avoided and that most questions should be carefully phrased to avoid suggesting an answer.¹⁰ In this research, some suggestions were in fact made on the type of material informants may wish to include in their responses, as the aim was to obtain data on specific policy areas. However, the intention was also to leave the questions sufficiently open to produce individual responses and show collective experience in numerous areas of WLA life.

4.3 Identification of former WLA members for interview

The researcher was aware of the existence of a group of former WLA members who had worked in the Craven district and who had attended annual reunions since 1949. In late 1995 contact was made with the reunion organising secretary to enquire whether she was able to provide the contact details for these women, the aim being to ascertain whether they would be willing to be interviewed regarding their WLA experiences. The reunion organising secretary circulated my letter of introduction to her members on my behalf in order to maintain the confidentiality of her peers at this stage. Sending out the correspondence in this way also meant that the recipients were assured that the approach was genuine and for the purposes of research. In addition, it gave them time to consider whether they wished to participate whereas an unexpected telephone call would not have afforded this opportunity. Enclosed with the letter of introduction was the list of questions which would form the basis of an interview schedule should the recipient agree to be interviewed at a later date (Appendix I). In the meantime, a limited amount of written information was requested from the questions posed, the intention being to assess the quality and quantity of any responses received, for without sufficient interest from the former WLA members, it would not have been possible for the study to proceed.

4.4 Composition of the oral history interview sample

The reunion organising secretary sent requests for information to 32 former WLA members who attended reunions and 28 of them responded. Twenty-four of the 28 respondents agreed to discuss their WLA experiences with the researcher and another referred me to articles she had written for the *Dalesman*. A decision was made to proceed with the study in view of the number of women willing to be interviewed and from the quality of written responses to the letter of introduction and schedule of questions. Some respondents who were interviewed gave details of friends whom they felt might be prepared to supply information on their WLA experiences. It was decided to contact these acquaintances, as some of them had worked in other parts of the country and could provide a limited comparison with WLA life in Craven.

The final sample appeared thus: 44 women were contacted, 38 of whom responded. Six of these declined to be interviewed and provided written information and 32 women were interviewed. Twenty-eight of the 38 recruits providing information worked solely in Craven, five worked in Craven and other areas and five worked solely in other areas. Thirty-three of the 38 respondents had at some time in their careers been employed by the WRWAEC and the remaining five had worked on private farms. Two WRWAEC foremen, both of whom attended reunions, were also interviewed.

As the sample of former WLA members interviewed for this study mainly comprised individuals who attended reunions, it should be borne in mind that the recollections of people who have had this affiliation for over 50 years may be more positive than those who have not been similarly involved. However, the geographical focus of the study is the Craven district which provided the agricultural environment within which the WLA operated and it is obviously necessary to obtain information from people who worked in it. The majority of those attending reunions had worked for the principal employer of WLA labour in Craven, namely the WRWAEC, and are therefore appropriate persons to provide information on policy outcomes in the area. Thompson states that 'for many projects, as on an event, or about a small group of people, the issue is not representativeness, but who knows best; above all, participants and direct witnesses'.¹¹ However, while the sample may be skewed towards women employed by the WRWAEC on tractor driving duties, a limited number of women interviewed had experience of working on private farms and in other geographical areas. The study does therefore show a range of work and conditions representative of the WLA in general. Biographical details of the women who provided information for this research are given in Appendix II.

4.5 The oral history interviews

Where former WLA members had expressed an interest in being interviewed on the return of written responses to the researcher, an appointment was arranged over the telephone.

In this study a decision had been made to use the list of questions/interview schedule in two ways: initially as a point of contact with the prospective interviewee so that she was aware of the nature of the research and could provide information in written form only if she so wished and, secondly, at the interview, where reference could be made to the written responses of the interviewee to enable her to expand on any issues. As Thompson states 'provided such a schedule is used flexibly and imaginatively, it can be advantageous; for in principle, the clearer you are about what is worth asking and how best to ask it, the more you can draw from *any* kind of informant.'¹²

Lummis suggests that some early oral historians favoured the use of unstructured interviews to enable informants to present their experiences in their own words rather than being guided in their responses by 'middle class academics'. However, as informants would not necessarily be aware of which details were important for recording, he suggests that most historians would now recommend the use of some form of interview 'schedule' or 'questionnaire' which he feels convinces informants that relevant questions are to be asked.¹³

Summerfield (1998) and her researchers used an interview schedule but they also spoke freely with the interviewees and presented themselves as 'open, friendly, relaxed, non-hierarchical and nice-to-talk-to.'¹⁴ She found that 'some [informants] had prepared notes or found photos, certificates and other memorabilia which indicated prior thought about the kind of narrative they wanted to tell'¹⁵ and this proved to be the case with a number of people interviewed for this study.

The majority of oral history interviews were held in 1996 at the homes of informants although four interviews were conducted by telephone due to the distance involved in travelling to undertake a personal interview. Lummis recommends interviews being held in the homes of informants so that they are comfortable in their own surroundings, with each informant being interviewed twice, the first meeting being introductory and exploratory.¹⁶ Summerfield points out that holding a number of meetings would place a severe demand upon project resources, particularly in terms of time and finance. She states that in gathering data for *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives* (1998), contact by letter and telephone enabled rapport to be

established.¹⁷ It was decided that for reasons similar to those expressed by Summerfield, and in view of the fact that the women had already provided me with written information, only one interview would take place. However, this was occasionally followed up by a telephone call if an issue required clarification and it was also possible to maintain contact with some informants at annual reunions, to which the researcher has been invited since making initial contact with the reunion organising secretary. The length of interviews varied from 45 minutes to over three hours when informants included discussion of matters other than the WLA and provided hospitality.

4.6 Recording the oral history data

The first few oral history interviews undertaken were recorded using shorthand because the first informant, whose reminiscences had previously been taped for her local Jubilee celebrations, preferred not to be recorded on tape on a second occasion. The second interviewee also preferred not to be taped and use was again made of shorthand with several other interviews also being recorded in this way.

Caunce suggests that shorthand 'seems to be a skill rarely possessed by collectors' and that its main use is to speed up transcription.¹⁸ He regards the aim of transcription as accuracy rather than speed and in stating that a 'misunderstood word could alter the sense of a whole section'¹⁹ appears to consider the usefulness of shorthand as marginal. However, in this research, some informants seem to have been inhibited by the use of a tape recorder and since the note-taker was a qualified shorthand writer and able to transcribe accurately, this method of recording was considered to be appropriate. Other oral history interviews were, however, taped, and while a tape recorder was used for telephone interviews, it was necessary to back this up by using shorthand notes due to the occasional poor quality of the tape recording. In reviewing Caunce's work, Lowerson makes the point that 'spoken responses are often accompanied by significant shifts in body language, yet these are rarely recorded in the end product'.²⁰ He suggests that oral historians could make use of visual as well as sound records. However, this must obviously meet with the approval of informants and was not considered in interviewing former WLA

members for this study since some of them expressed concern at the use of audio recording.

4.7 Transcribing the oral history interviews

Whilst oral historians such as Caunce (1994) and Portelli (1981) suggest the tape is the true historical record rather than the interview transcript, Portelli writes that more use is made of the transcript than the tape in preparation of the final study. However, he considers this 'implies reduction and manipulation'²¹ of the data because, as Thompson suggests, the transcript obviously does not record 'tone, intonation, volume, rhythm of speech carrying class connotations, [or] emotion.'²² Thompson describes these facets as 'social clues, the nuances of uncertainty, humour, or pretence, as well as the texture of dialect' and that 'in transcribing it on to paper some of this quality is lost'.²³ He suggests the 'real art of the transcriber [is] using punctuation and occasional phonetic spelling to convey the character of speech.'²⁴ Nevertheless, Samuel considers that however experienced a transcriber may be some distortion will inevitably occur by omitting pauses and repetitions in the interests of readability.²⁵

The strategy adopted in this study was to record verbatim speech as far as possible either on tape or using shorthand, although a record was not taken of general conversation when the informant provided hospitality. The researcher transcribed the tape and/or shorthand records as soon as possible following the interview for consultation when interpreting the data. Some of the information relating to policy issues was also recorded separately on a database for ease of reference.

Mention has also been made in the interview transcript of the demeanour of the informant, for example whether she was forthcoming with information or more reticent, whether personal artefacts such as photographs had been sought out for the benefit of the researcher and whether hospitality was provided. One informant had set aside the entire day for the interview in a more remote part of the Yorkshire Dales, providing meals and an accompanied visit to an ancient church. However, this has not been referred to in presenting the evidence as it could be argued that the relevance of such information in a study of this nature is minimal. Nevertheless, care has been

taken to interpret and present the evidence supplied by informants as accurately as possible, referring back to the schedules completed by informants and the interview transcriptions on many occasions.

4.8 Analysis of oral history evidence

As Thompson suggests, ‘the aim of the oral historian should be to *reveal* sources of bias, rather than pretend they can be nullified’²⁶ and it is necessary to consider a number of factors which may affect the evidence collected.

4.8.1 The nature of memory

Given that the age of the interviewees was between 70 and 85 years and they were being asked to recall circumstances some 50 years earlier, it is important to acknowledge the impact that memory might make on this study. Portelli states that recollections may be distorted due to their ‘distance from events’ and through ‘faulty memory’²⁷ although Lummis doubts whether the past can in fact be remembered as a ‘mirror image’ as it may be ‘reshaped and reconstructed through time.’²⁸ In discussing the nature of memory, Thompson found that immediate memory begins to decline beyond the age of 30 years when it becomes more difficult to keep in mind complex formula, although ‘the total memory store is increasing; it as if one pushes out the other.’ He therefore concludes that loss of memory is ‘not much more serious for interviews with old people in normal health than it is with younger adults.’²⁹

However, one difficulty which did arise in obtaining information on the WLA related to recalling events which occurred singly. For example, many women were unable to remember some single occurrences such as making their application to the WLA, details of their interviews, whether references were taken up of if they had a medical examination whereas they were able to recollect in great detail tasks undertaken on the land. This situation would reflect that described by Thompson who states that ‘one can observe a *general* tendency for recurrent processes to be better remembered than single incidents.’³⁰

However, both Thompson and Lummis highlight an advantage of the ageing process. The former suggests that there is 'a diminished concern with fitting the story to the social norms of the audience'³¹ and the latter considers that 'informants have no powerful reasons to conceal whatever was the genuine situation... [as] the motivation is nowhere near as strong as when it is a contemporary issue.'³² It is, of course, possible that the former WLA members providing data for this study may have chosen not to divulge certain information, although nothing has come to light through examination of Yorkshire county records.

In view of the above it is considered that the age of the interviewees participating in this study should not generally result in such a loss of memory that the information obtained is distorted. In fact, the volume of data made available to the researcher through interviews and the provision of personal artefacts was substantial.

4.8.2 The relationship between interviewer and interviewee

A further issue which might affect the credibility of oral evidence is the relationship between interviewer and interviewee and this has been the topic of much discussion by oral historians. The debate centres on the 'rapport' between the participants of the interview situation with, for example, Cutler suggesting that 'good rapport' between interviewer and interviewee can help to achieve the recording of authentic data but 'too much rapport' may result in interview bias.³³

Roberts also makes the point that bias exists where researchers select and interpret available material in a manner constrained by their own experiences.³⁴ Given that material conditions have changed greatly with taken-for-granted use of information technology today, attention has been given to the accurate portrayal of the context and comparative hardship in which women worked in the WLA, for example on farms which were not even supplied with electricity or water. However, in this study of the WLA, research, interviews and evaluation of data has, of necessity, been undertaken by one and the same person and value judgements have also been made on the allocation of evidence to particular policy areas. It must, therefore, be considered that some researcher bias may exist in this study, albeit

unintentionally. However, in perusing the documentation from government files regarding policy formulation and implementation and in interviewing women who worked on the land, the researcher had access to material which enabled her to present as far as possible the perspectives of those involved in the entire policy process.

4.8.3 Reliability and validity of the oral history evidence

It is of great importance to any oral history interview to ensure as far as possible that the data obtained is both reliable and valid. Reliability can be defined as ‘the consistency with which an individual will tell the same story about the same events on a number of different occasions. An oral history informant is reliable if his or her reports of a given event are consistent with each other.’³⁵

The information obtained from the oral history interviews in this study is considered reliable for two reasons. Firstly, during interviews the schedule of questions was adhered to, and the written responses given by the individual informant were discussed. This enabled the interviewer to check that the original written information was consistent with that being supplied at the interview. Secondly, reliability of evidence was also tested by comparing the data obtained from these interviews with that presented in the collections of reminiscences reviewed in Chapter Two.

The validity of evidence refers to the ‘degree of conformity between the reports of the event and the event itself as recorded by other primary resource material such as documents, photographs, diaries, and letters and cannot really be tested unless it can be measured against some body of evidence.’³⁶ The evidence presented in this research is deemed valid as it corresponds with personal material shown to the researcher such as enrolment cards, official letters, time sheets, photographs, badges and other items of uniform held by informants. The validity of the oral evidence was also confirmed by the documentation included in the MAF files in relation to government policy decisions.

Lummis suggests that the credibility of an interview can also be assessed by 'aggregating the data' in several interviews thus being able to make general assessments.³⁷ and this was also achieved in undertaking over 30 interviews with former WLA members.

4.9 Presentation of the oral history evidence

Numerous factors were taken into consideration in preparing for the oral history interviews with former WLA members in order to ensure that the evidence was authentic and would stand comparison against that obtained from documentary sources on policy formulation and implementation. The researcher was satisfied that, as far as possible, issues had been identified which may have affected the integrity of data, i.e. the nature of memory, the relationship between interviewer and interviewee and the reliability and validity of the material obtained.

The previously undocumented oral evidence obtained provides most of the material presented in the sections on policy outcomes in Chapters Six to Ten. Data from the transcriptions of the oral history interviews are presented in the thesis both as the direct speech of individuals and as an interpretation of collective evidence from several informants. Bearing in mind the concerns raised regarding the transfer of oral evidence to the written record attempts have been made to present the data appropriately to convey the context of the period and the environment being researched.

In presenting the data provided by informants, Caunce suggests that some collectors of material avoid using names. He does not feel that this is to 'protect contributors' but to 'depersonalise the oral material, or because they see the reiteration of names as disruptive.'³⁸ Summerfield gave pseudonyms to her informants 'to protect them from the embarrassment which my mediation between their words and "the public" might cause.'³⁹ Whilst informants were obviously aware that the purpose of my contact with them was to obtain research data, it was decided to use pseudonyms in presenting the evidence. This decision was reached to provide anonymity rather than to 'depersonalise the oral material' because it is considered the latter course of action would detract from the study of women's experiences in the

WLA. A record of the pseudonyms was kept, enabling evidence to be traced back to its source, and Appendix II provides brief biographies of the women who provided information.

Caunce suggests oral history is best utilised in conjunction with other methods of data collection thus giving a representative view of the subject under investigation. He states that oral history should be used 'as an alternative and complement to the documents on which historians normally rely.'⁴⁰ This study has made use of oral history interviews, personal records, official files and documents in an attempt to present data from a variety of sources to provide as balanced a perspective as possible on the various stages of the policy process. It remains the task of the researcher to investigate, analyse and interpret evidence in as judicious a manner as possible and to present the findings in an appropriate way.

5. The case study

The strengths and weaknesses of case study literature were briefly reviewed in Chapter Two. However, as this research focuses mainly on one geographical area of the operation of the WLA, namely Craven in the West Riding of Yorkshire, it is appropriate to consider the advantages and disadvantages of the case study as it applies here.

It is acknowledged that a case study will not mirror every county in which the WLA operated since many localities contained individual differences. However, as indicated earlier, the location(s) in which the autobiographical literature was based were not specified and one aim of this study is to rectify that omission by providing an example of an environment in which the WLA operated. This environment was not neutral but contained certain preconceived notions of both the nature of agriculture and the nature of women's work within the prevailing social and economic conditions. These are outlined in Chapter Four.

The usefulness of case studies has been debated and Rose considers that while valuable they are also limited because they concentrate on specific and unique situations although certain aspects may be replicated in particular categories of cases.⁴¹ Reinharz also suggests that it should be assumed a specific case study

typifies other similar cases.⁴² Aspects of this study are replicated elsewhere such as in the reminiscence literature, particularly Mant's *All Muck, No Medals*, and, for example, in the reluctance of farmers in other areas, such as Somerset, to plough up pasture land to grow arable crops.⁴³

6. Triangulation

Reinharz states that multiple methods of data collection are known as triangulation.⁴⁴ Cohen and Manion state that triangulation is 'the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of human behaviour' and that it is a technique which may be adopted to provide cross-checks in several aspects of methodology. For example, they consider that theoretical triangulation draws 'upon alternative or competing theories in preference to utilising one viewpoint only'.⁴⁵ Denzin suggests that triangulation may be used in a number of ways such as through investigators (i.e. more than one researcher), through time (studying a group over different periods), through levels (obtaining data on individuals, groups and organisations) and through space (cross-cultural studies). He considers that if it is possible to adopt triangulation in all or most of the above, then verification, refutation and generalisation of evidence may be made.⁴⁶

It has not been possible to use different methods of data collection to analyse the same stages of the policy process in this study. For example, data collection on the formulation and implementation of policy has relied on documentary evidence because people involved in those processes are no longer alive and obviously cannot be interviewed. On the other hand, while some personal documentation belonging to women working on the land has survived and will be referred to, most information on policy outcomes has been gleaned from oral history interviews. Methodological triangulation in the form of documentary evidence and oral history interviews has, therefore, been used to provide an overview of the policy process. It is felt that the combination of oral history interviews and documentary evidence produces valid data as, when used together, they describe the subject under investigation. If only one or other of the methods was adopted then that alone could not truly represent policy formulation, implementation and outcomes. If one adopts Denzin's view (above), then triangulation over time will be utilised in this study because reference is made to

the first WLA (1917-1919) and the organisation is studied between 1939 and 1950. The nature of the research also means that triangulation over levels will be achieved as data is presented on the WLA at the national level of policy formulation, at the county administrative level of policy implementation and at the local level of groups and individuals putting policy into practice. However, it has not been possible to use triangulation cross-culturally or by the use of more than one investigator.

7. The policy studies approach

7.1 Which approach to use?

The theoretical approaches within policy studies were considered in the previous chapter An Overview of Related Literature and the aim here is to identify which approach(es) underpin this analysis of the WLA. It is appropriate to reiterate, however, that it is the WLA which is the focus of this research and not the approaches to policy studies.

The policy studies approach has been selected to underpin the thesis as it facilitates the presentation of data on the complex organisation of the WLA by investigating the policy process at different levels. Policy decisions at government level, implementation in the counties, policy outcomes through obtaining data from women land workers and evaluation of the achievement of policy objectives are all undertaken. This conforms to the recommendations of Barrett and Fudge (1981) who stress the importance of linking levels of analysis within the policy process because of the plethora of issues involved at different stages.⁴⁷

Data will be presented utilising the stagist approach of policy formulation, implementation and outcomes, with evaluation being undertaken in the concluding chapter. Although the drawbacks of compartmentalising stages have been acknowledged in Chapter Two, Burch and Wood (1990) and Parsons (1995) consider that this is appropriate and necessary in order to manage the volume of data available and for the purposes of analysis.⁴⁸ It is for these reasons that this course of action will be adopted here. Furthermore, Burch and Wood (1990) indicate in their discussions of policy theories that

a clearly articulated approach helps make material more ordered, logical and hence easier to comprehend ... a clear approach is essential for analytical and practical reasons....

Analytically, it develops and deepens study by concentrating attention and giving focus to inquiry. It guides the observer and ensures the selection of relevant factual material from the vast range that is available ... an explicit approach makes analysis possible and productive whereas its absence leads to incoherence and muddle.⁴⁹

Having established the importance of presenting data in a coherent manner throughout different levels of the policy process, it is necessary to determine the most appropriate theoretical approach to adopt. In his examination of top-down and bottom-up approaches, Sabatier (in Hill [ed.] 1993) suggests at least two strategies can be utilised to achieve this.⁵⁰ Firstly it is necessary to consider the advantages and disadvantages of various approaches by indicating 'the conditions under which each is the more appropriate'. For example, Sabatier states that the top-down approach would be useful where a 'dominant piece of legislation structuring the situation' is in place whereas the bottom-up model would be more appropriate in examining 'local implementation structures and ... local variation'.⁵¹ Secondly, he considers it may be appropriate to 'develop one or more syntheses of the competing approaches'.⁵² In addition, Younis and Davidson (in Younis [ed.] 1990) state the policy/action continuum enables policy to be viewed from either the top-down or bottom up perspective while recognising that negotiative processes and interaction evolve over time.⁵³

Bearing in mind these issues and taking into account the overview of theoretical approaches outlined in Chapter Two, it became apparent when undertaking this research that the WLA organisation lent itself to the adoption of elements of the top-down, bottom-up and evolutionary models. In relation to the top-down rational perspective, for example, a dominant piece of legislation was in place, i.e. the decision by government to recruit a WLA in 1939, and in certain other policy areas under investigation, such as accommodation, a specific statement was made regarding policy objectives. In addition, policy was usually formulated 'at the top' by the MAF and influenced by other government ministries. Data is therefore presented in the thesis on the stages within each policy area commencing with decisions formulated at government level. An investigation will then be made on policy implementation in the counties, carried out through the county offices and personnel of the WRWLA

and the WRWAEC. Policy outcomes are examined by utilising the strengths of the bottom-up approach by obtaining data from interviewing women working on the land who were at the 'receiving end' of policy decisions and who endeavoured to put policy into practice. This perspective also enables consideration to be given to the extent, if any, to which women land workers influenced the policy making process or whether they were merely involved in policy outcomes. It will also be interesting to note whether MAF and WLA headquarters entered into dialogue with women and other interest groups such as the Women's Institute, Craven Tenant Farmers' Association, Young Women's Christian Association and unions concerning policy decision making and methods of implementation. The evolutionary nature of the policy/action continuum is also drawn upon by examining how the WLA organisation adapted to the changing wartime and peacetime conditions over a period of some 11 years. As indicated in Chapter Two, Parsons (1995) considers that the historical approach to public policy has great strengths⁵⁴ and has been adopted in tandem with policy studies by authors such as Kogan (1975), Levitt (1980) and Barber (1996). An historical narrative is also crucial to this research as the various stages of the policy process are described using government and county records of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s and through the use of oral history interviews to obtain information from former WLA recruits.

A synthesis of elements of approaches cited by Younis (1990) and Sabatier (1993) therefore enables a degree of flexibility to be incorporated within the study which the adoption of a single approach would not. Furthermore, the investigation of different levels in the policy process (Barrett and Fudge, 1981) enables a holistic approach to underpin this thesis.

7.2 Definition of terms

A number of concepts are employed within policy studies and these are defined below to clarify for the reader their use in this study. The terms are abstracted from authors alluded to in the previous section and in the review of policy studies literature outlined in Chapter Two. In particular the collection of papers edited by Hill (1993) is drawn upon. He states that the papers were 'chosen to introduce readers to some of the terminology, to sensitise them to some of the distinctions (which may or may not

be made in practice) and to highlight some of the key characteristics of the policy process.⁵⁵ The study will, therefore, make use of the following terms:

Policy. Gordon, Lewis and Young (in Hill [ed.] 1993) state that the term 'policy' can be used to describe several different activities, even within similar government departments. These activities include defining objectives, setting priorities, describing a plan and specifying decision rules⁵⁶ and use of the term 'policy' in this thesis incorporates these meanings. Within this study certain important issues such as the introduction of the WLA and the recruitment, training, work and welfare of its members have been identified as policy areas because they possess some of the objectives, priorities, plans and rules specified by Gordon, Lewis and Young. Lewis (in Lewis & Wallace, 1984) suggests that an explicit policy statement is necessary for the policy studies model to operate because it defines objectives by which to measure success or failure of policy.⁵⁷ However, it should also be borne in mind that according to Minogue (in Hill [ed.] 1993) government departments seldom identify precise goals and 'deliberately avoid a stark definition' so that they cannot be accused of failing to achieve objectives.⁵⁸

'Stages' within the policy studies approach. To assist with the analysis of the policy process it will be divided into certain recognised stages as indicated by Burch and Wood (1990), Younis (1990) and Parsons (1995).⁵⁹ As shown in Chapter Two, the stages of policy formulation and implementation are not clear-cut and often overlap due to negotiations and re-negotiations to deal with changes in the environment. Whilst the policy studies approach enables data to be analysed more easily if it is compartmentalised, it must be borne in mind that in reality such stages are not so easily discernible. The process is fluid and evolutionary, emerging over time rather than being static. Although the naming of these stages may differ slightly between policies and between studies, the following will be used in this thesis.

Policy formulation. Parsons' summary (1995) of policy formulation is incorporated in this study. He refers to formulation as the source of policy and its development, i.e. 'how policy is made, why, when and for whom.'⁶⁰

Policy implementation is described by Minogue (in Hill [ed.] 1993) as 'the crucial business of translating decisions into events: of 'getting things done.'⁶¹ Parsons

(1995) suggests this might involve many organisations and their interaction with each other.⁶² This study will, therefore, take particular account of the organisational networks at county level in the West Riding of Yorkshire which is where WLA policy was converted from decisions to action.

Policy outcomes according to Minogue (in Hill [ed.] 1993) are the 'results of decision-plus-implementation, or what actually happens.'⁶³ Data obtained from oral history interviews with women who worked on the land and foremen who supervised them will be presented as policy outcomes in Chapters Six to Ten.

Policy Evaluation. The policy process is not complete until evaluation has been undertaken. Lewis and Wallace (1984) believe that only when evaluation has taken place do we know whether policy was actually implemented and, if so, how efficient its implementation has been.⁶⁴ Minogue (in Hill [ed.] 1993) considers that it is crucial for governments to assess the results of policies and learn from them.⁶⁵ This can of course be controversial, with Burch and Wood (1990) stating that it 'gives scope to policy makers to manipulate the findings for political reasons.'⁶⁶ Furthermore, problems can exist in measuring such results for, as Burch and Wood also suggest, 'unless we know what was intended we cannot judge whether or not policy has succeeded ... objectives are commonly unstated, ambiguous or even in conflict with one another.'⁶⁷ They state that assessment of policy has traditionally been impressionistic and anecdotal and a 'systematic objective evaluation of programmes to measure their social impact and the extent to which they are achieving their stated objectives' is required.⁶⁸ For example, some agricultural policies could be measured using cost benefit analysis where judgements need to be made on the use, quantity, cost and output of machinery in which the WLA played its part. However, difficulties exist in evaluating policies where attitudes play a major part, for example in assessing the quality of work performed by women in wartime in previously male dominated roles. Nevertheless, the concluding chapter of this thesis aims to address issues relating to the success or failure of policy to introduce the WLA and will also evaluate those policies selected for analysis which are described in Chapters Six to Ten.

8. Summary and conclusion

This chapter has described the scope and limitations of the methods of data collection and approaches used in research into WLA policy. A combination of the policy studies perspectives adopted enables different levels of the complex processes of planning, organising and co-ordinating to be investigated. It also provides for examination of the network of organisations involved in the WLA decision making process and for assessments to be made to ascertain whether policies were effective. Chapters Six to Ten consider the formulation, implementation, outcomes and evaluation of WLA policies.

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CHAPTER FOUR: THE CRAVEN DISTRICT

The Craven district has been selected to provide the geographical location in which to assess the policy making process of the WLA. At the outbreak of war in 1939, the area came under the administrative jurisdiction of the former West Riding of Yorkshire and the Craven branch of the WLA was, therefore, subject to its governance. As indicated in Chapter Two, little account has been taken in WLA literature of the regions in which the organisation operated. It is suggested that it is only by reflecting upon the prevailing social, economic and ideological environments in an area of operation that an appropriate evaluation can be made of the achievements of the WLA.

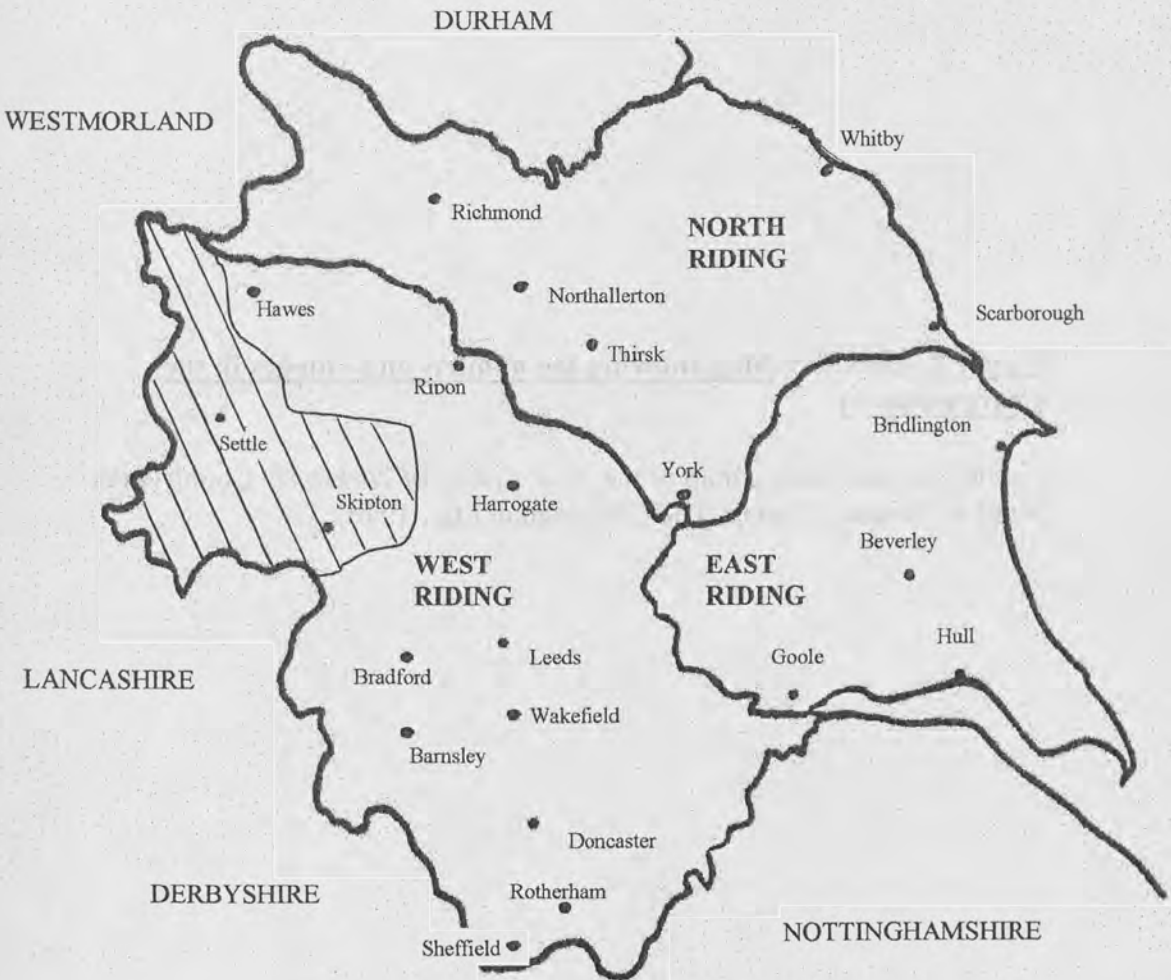
1. Geographical location and description of the Craven district


Figure 1 (page 64) is a sketch map showing the West Riding of Yorkshire (including Craven) and its location in the North of England. Figure 2 (page 65) is a more detailed map indicating Craven's numerous hamlets and villages.

According to Raistrick, the West Riding of Yorkshire covered some 2,800 square miles and extended a distance of 90 miles from its farthest north western point of Sedbergh (now in Cumbria) to its most south eastern point which he identifies as being near Doncaster (now in South Yorkshire).¹ The Craven district, with its centre in Skipton, is still in existence although in 1939 its boundaries extended further than the present day, reaching as far as Buckden in the north, Sedbergh in the north west, Bolton by Bowland (now in Lancashire) in the west, Bolton Abbey in the east and near Keighley in the south. However, these boundaries were not rigid as far as the WLA was concerned. Recruits who covered the Bentham area occasionally crossed the county boundary into Lancashire if a farm needed assistance and was more accessible from Yorkshire in very bad weather.

The appearance of the Craven landscape was not uniform. The area was characterised by the 'three peaks' of Penyghent, Ingleborough and Whernside in the north, each over 2,000 feet in height, the limestone crags of the Craven Faults through Giggleswick and Malham where fields were at an altitude of over 1,500 feet,

Figure 1: Sketch map showing the location of the Yorkshire Ridings



Key:  Approximate area covered by Craven

(Source: Adapted from Harwood Long, *op. cit.* p.1).

Figure 2: (opposite) Map showing the hamlets and villages in the Craven district

(Source: extract from a map of the *West Riding of Yorkshire*, Countryman Maps of Britain, London: The Countryman Ltd., 1946)



LANCASHIRE



Martin Frobisher Explorer, born at Altofts, 1535. Commanded 'H.M.S. Triumph' against the Armada.
Gen. Fairfax, born at Denton, 1612. - Victorious commander of Parliamentary forces at Marston Moor.
Charlotte Brontë, and her sisters born at the Vicarage in Thornton, early in the 19th century. Their father, the Rev. Patrick Brontë removed to the living of Haworth in 1820.



sweeping down to Skipton Moor at a height of 750 feet. A number of drumlins were visible around Horton-in-Ribblesdale, Long Preston, Hellifield and Skipton which Raistrick & Illingworth describe as 'elongated hills, somewhat like half an egg, with one end more rounded and blunter than the other.'² Drumlins measured approximately 1,300 feet in length, 650 feet in width and varied from 50 to 150 feet in height. Near Kettlewell, for example, some land was so steep that both WLA recruits and foremen reported it was possible only to plough downhill since in travelling uphill the plough had insufficient purchase into the ground to make a furrow.

Both Raistrick and Barringer state that the drumlins formed particularly difficult land to cultivate as they were set closely together and the land between them became saturated due to difficulties with drainage.³ This was particularly apparent in the area around Long Preston. However, Barringer also suggests that with the Aire and Ribble rivers meandering across this area, the relatively richer grass encouraged grazing for the dairy farmers of Skipton, Gargrave, Long Preston, Settle and Gisburn.⁴ Furthermore, the predominantly high altitude of the Craven district was appropriate for sheep grazing as the growth of grass was short, springy and sweet and contained nutritious wild plants.

Despite being in a limestone area the soil was, in fact, short of lime which was leached out by heavy rain. Wind and rain also resulted in erosion, leaving only a thin layer of soil which would have required a great deal of fertiliser to improve it sufficiently to cultivate arable crops. It was also generally too shallow in depth above the limestone to take roots. The heavy to moderately heavy rainfall to the west of the West Riding,⁵ accompanied by comparatively low temperatures and high altitude, precluded large scale arable cultivation as it was difficult for crops to ripen. Arable farming was therefore concentrated to the east of the Riding which had lower rainfall more evenly distributed throughout the year.

In the light of the combination of conditions described above, the Craven area had been deemed unsuitable for arable cultivation by both agriculturists and educationists. The environment proved more appropriate for livestock farming which was the mainstay of Craven agriculture. Nevertheless, at the outbreak of war the

government decreed that an additional 1,500,000 acres of land should be ploughed nationally, the West Riding's share of which was 50,000 acres. The decision to plough up pasture land to increase food production was based on the estimate that 'an acre of crops available directly for human consumption produces three or four times as much energy as an acre of grassland does in the form of livestock products.'⁶ However, land that could be ploughed in Craven was to be used for growing crops for cattle fodder, rather than for human consumption, as this would enable farmers in the area to be self-sufficient.

In order to achieve success in ploughing the Craven area, a number of difficulties needed to be overcome in addition to those of climate and soil previously described. These included the negotiation of dry stone wall boundaries, constructed at least 150 years ago, which were a feature of the Craven landscape. Entrances to enclosures had been constructed for horses and carts and were, therefore, too narrow for tractors and trailers to pass through.⁷ A further disadvantage for mechanised ploughing was the small size of fields reducing the speed at which an area could be ploughed. Harwood Long points out that in the west of Yorkshire there were no fields over 10 acres and the majority were under two acres.⁸ This was also indicative of the small size of farms in the West Riding generally. Long shows there were 3,916 farms of between one quarter of an acre and four acres in area and 4,102 farms of between five and 14 acres but only 1,289 farms of between 700 and 999 acres⁹ in the area.

One of the WLA foremen interviewed commented on the size of farms saying 'you had so much on your plate especially with these smaller fields and there were so many more farmers you see. I mean, I can't remember how many farms. I had a hell of a lot of farms.'¹⁰ He covered Upper Wharfedale, ploughing at Bolton Abbey, Barden, Appletreewick, Hartlington, Burnsall, Hebden and Grassington. In comparison, operations in Gargrave were easier and quicker as the fields were much larger.¹¹

The requirement to plough, albeit to provide fodder for their own animals, met with reluctance and hostility by the farming community towards the WRWAEAC and the government. The Craven Tenant Farmers' Association (CTFA) was founded in

1901, with a membership of several hundred, to oversee the interests of tenant farmers in the area. It jealously guarded the right of its membership to continue livestock farming and was particularly vociferous in its condemnation of the government's edict to plough up grassland in the area. CTFA monthly meetings were comprehensively reported in the *Craven Herald* with items of discussion covering the agricultural spectrum from crop growing to rationing and from prices to cattle fodder. Between 1939 and 1945 the ploughing up of land, labour and wages were the CTFA's prime consideration. The CTFA appeared to be a more prominent body in Craven than the National Farmers' Union (NFU) although much time was spent in negotiating a marriage between the two which resulted in union in October 1942.

The theme of the 1939 CTFA annual meeting's guest speaker, Mr Thomas Levy, MP for Elland, was the precarious national economic position of agriculture prior to the outbreak of war. He bemoaned the lack of investment in the industry, suggesting it was

being beaten to its knees by foreign competition and we find for it not £400 million, not £40 million but £12 million a year ... money put into agriculture was not like money put down the sink of armaments, for the land never became obsolete, like a fleet of warships or an airfleet. It was always there, capable of giving healthy and profitable employment to hundreds of thousands more than were now employed on it, and at the same time affording the best defence of all against the strangulation of sea-borne food supplies.¹²

This statement raised issues which affected the farming system in Craven. Whilst there was a national need for an increase in production of home-grown food due to the volume of foodstuffs being lost at sea, the issue being addressed in Craven was whether this target could best be met by increasing livestock and milk production or by arable cultivation. In order to determine the feasibility of ploughing, the WRWAEAC was expected to visit every farm in the West Riding to ascertain which land was appropriate to plough. It appeared that individual farmers in Craven would be required to plough up 10% of their land but, given the small size of farms, the amount of acreage each farm could produce towards the ploughing up campaign was minimal. Although the government agreed to pay a subsidy of £2 per acre to farmers for each additional acre ploughed, it was considered unlikely that this sum would

adequately reimburse farmers for expenditure incurred. Mr J R Dodgson, CTFA President, stated at a meeting of the CTFA on 25 May 1939 that

there is the cost of implements, labour, seed and fertiliser and I very much doubt whether farmers could stand the financial strain of such work ...how can we best play our part - by ploughing or producing beef, milk and mutton products which in the event of war would be a national asset?¹³

CTFA members from Upper Wharfedale, Bolton Abbey and Hetton and Cracoe branches also took the view that compulsory ploughing in their areas was not practical since the land, climate and buildings were all unsuitable. The Bolton Abbey branch remained resolute in its view that it was more appropriate to improve grassland by the application of lime or other fertiliser than by ploughing. In fact it considered that ploughing would 'be more detrimental than otherwise to production, by restricting the rearing and grazing capacity of most of the smaller farms as the pasture is utterly unsuitable.'¹⁴ Whilst Mr Dodgson did not wish to give the impression that the farming community was shirking its responsibilities, there was a good deal of rhetoric being uttered in defence of its views. He stated that

the country had taken on a tremendous task to beat Hitlerism; the government had taken off their jackets in face of the task; the community generally, many of them soldiers, were prepared to do their bit, and ... the farming industry, the yeoman of England, were prepared to stand up and do theirs. My contention is this. If the government can convince me that I can best serve the country by ploughing and that this is an urgent national necessity then off comes my jacket and into ploughing I go.¹⁵

A member of the West Riding NFU blamed Whitehall for being out of touch with the local meeting. He considered

this is typical of the way in which London bureaucracy views agriculture. They look at land only from the point of view of building factories and other buildings or of pleasure and sporting activities. They never think of it as a national asset or a treasure house for the nation.¹⁶

In defence of the decision to plough, the WRWAEAC reported that

the greatest care is to be exercised in the ploughing of grassland

to ensure that the land is suitable for corn production. We have set up 34 district committees in the West Riding agricultural area. No land will be ploughed without the approval of a Leeds University adviser.¹⁷

On occasions when farmers failed to plough when instructed, they were dealt with by the courts. For example, it was reported in June 1940 that a Bradley farmer did not plough up four acres of scheduled land from a five-acre field even though he had been offered the use of a government tractor and other machinery. He was fined £20 with four guineas costs, which was a lenient judgement due to his age, state of health, and unsuccessful experience of ploughing in World War I.¹⁸ This was only the second such case in the West Riding but more were later reported in Craven, a clear indication that the courts took seriously the failure to plough.

However, reluctance to plough continued well into the war. Foreman Donald, in charge of Craven recruits, stated that he joined the WRWAEC in early 1940 as a tractor driver when many farmers were unwilling 'to allow a tractor on their land, so ploughing was done at first on those farms where [they were] accepted.'¹⁹ He also recalled that 'farmers used to say: "Well, no, I want my sheep to eat that," and I have ploughed with the farmer driving sheep in front of me to eat the grass before [it was ploughed up].'²⁰ This indicates that a genuine aversion existed in the farming community to anyone ploughing the land, regardless of gender.

Foreman Donald said he had a constant battle with the Craven farmers because he felt 'they were ever so sort of settled in their beliefs' but 'you could sort of beat all the hassle you got ... it was a really good challenge for you.'²¹ He was of the opinion that it would have been more appropriate if farmers could have continued with sheep and milk production rather than having to plough their best land. Although it was possible to grow corn it often failed to ripen successfully because of heavy dews, high rainfall and too few hours of sunshine. In fact, grain often turned musty due to dampness, and grain dryers were eventually introduced by the WRWAEC at Addingham and Hellifield in 1944.

Whilst this type of mechanisation was of obvious benefit to farmers, they continually lobbied the WRWAEC with requests to abandon ploughing. They arranged mass meetings against additional ploughing out of grassland, threatening to

withhold milk supplies from Leeds and Bradford. However, this caused Mr Tom Williams, Minister of Agriculture, to comment that ‘protest meetings do not help the war effort and are to be deplored.’²² Nevertheless, farmers were not enamoured with the Minister whom they had met in Leeds, stating that ‘he showed a lamentable inability to understand the position as put before him.’²³ Some members of the farming community even considered the strength of their protests on ploughing had resulted in the defeat of the Conservative candidate at the 1944 by-election held at Skipton. The by-election occurred due to the death of the sitting MP, Mr G W Rickards (Conservative), and resulted in the election of the first Common Wealth candidate in the area. According to the *Craven Herald*, the rejection of the Conservatives had been ‘directly due to the unsatisfactory way in which the Craven ploughing out protest had been dealt with by the Minister.’²⁴ On the same page of the newspaper ‘a Candid Reader’ expressed a different view, however, suggesting that farmers were ‘rather despicable’ in ‘taking advantage of the result, made possible, not by the farmers but by railway and textile workers.’²⁵

Alongside the strident arguments against ploughing, some members of the farming community began to make requests for additional labour to assist in the ploughing up campaign. The numbers of agricultural workers had, in fact, been declining as farm work no longer appeared to be attractive to young male workers who were moving to more lucrative employment such as quarrying and the building of aerodromes and military camps. Farmers also expressed concern that labour was being called up to serve in the fighting forces and the CTFA passed a resolution ‘that the government could not take men from the land and at the same time have increased food production, and ... the government must choose whether it wanted men or food.’²⁶ The WRNFU argued in January 1940 that ‘there should be a total exemption from military service for farm workers as for any other industry that was vital to the successful production of the war.’²⁷ Farmers were, however, criticised for suggesting agricultural labour should be a reserved occupation as they were charged with protecting their sons from call-up. A CTFA member himself remarked ‘Why talk so much only about farmers’ sons? They are as much entitled to go as anyone else.’²⁸

Despite this concern, women do not appear to have been seriously contemplated as a possible pool of labour. In fact, the CTFA reported in September 1939 that there

had been no applications from its members for the WLA as 'girls would not be of use to a farmer unless they would undertake all duties on the land.'²⁹ This lack of consideration of women as land workers is likely to have resulted from the reluctance to plough together with the prevailing culture of the area, particularly in regard to the roles of women in general and more specifically in Craven.

2. The position of women in the Craven district

The manner in which women in the Craven district were perceived is reflected in the *Craven Herald*. The newspaper appears to have catered for their readership by the inclusion of a column entitled 'Mainly for Women' which, in April 1939, comprised articles on Fashion ('Waists must be tiny: an examination of the daytime silhouette' by a Fashion Expert), Beauty, Cookery and Household Management.³⁰ The column had progressed by September of that year to tacitly acknowledging women's growing involvement in the war with an article entitled 'Maidens in Uniform'. However this was restricted to 'some hints on how to keep them smart and trim' rather than examining any contribution made by women to the war effort.³¹ In fact a month later the columnist took the view that one reason why women joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) was the colour of the uniform, although he/she was not enamoured with all women's uniforms stating 'No khaki! Not even British women's admiration for their soldiers can make them take to khaki as a feminine shade for it is the world's most unwelcoming colour.'³² Articles in the column continued in a similar vein with the addition of a large number of recipes and hints on how to make food go further in times of shortage.

The newspaper tended to convey the view that women needed to rely on male rural and urban leaders to look after their interests. For example, in May 1939 a report of a West Riding National Service Committee meeting included the issue of women driving ambulances. It had come to the Committee's attention 'that ambulance driving was too hard for women although they could drive small box ambulances.'³³ One male Committee member felt that ambulances were so heavy and steering so difficult that many women would not be able to manage them. However, Lady Allerton, on behalf of the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS), expressed an alternative view. She considered that women were capable of driving wearing gas

masks, in a convoy and without lights and, since two people worked on each ambulance, they could offer relief when working long hours.³⁴

It was not necessarily the case that women were unwilling or unable to carry out this type of work due to lack of physical strength. The fact that the community also expected them to take on roles which accorded with their perceived status as carers restricted the amount of time they could commit to such activities. It was anticipated that some 2,000 - 3,000 Bradford children would be evacuated to the Skipton area to be cared for and women were, therefore, concerned how they could act as carers as well as volunteering for the services, staffing first aid posts or driving ambulances. Furthermore, Skipton WVS made an appeal in January 1940 for auxiliary nurses to be trained for emergency work in Skipton hospitals. The training requirement was to undertake first aid and home nursing courses, spending 90 hours in hospital in order to qualify.

Other traditional roles carried out by women were in knitting and sewing circles such as Young Mothers' groups, the National Spinsters' Pensions Association, Halton East and Coniston Cold Knitting Circles and the Congregational Guides, Skipton, all of which made comforts for the forces. These activities were widely reported upon and the columnist for the 'Craven Man's Diary' in the *Craven Herald* wrote that

one must pay tribute to the womenfolk in Craven villages for a desire to do their bit in war activities. It is on them in the main that the numerous ARP [Air Raid Precaution] First Aid points depend, and not only do they give their services willingly but they provide in the main the supplies they will need if an air raid occurs.³⁵

It appeared that the roles women were expected to undertake accorded more closely with their 'natural role' as carers. It was appropriate for them to care for evacuated children and take on nursing commitments but less appropriate for them to drive ambulances and tractors. However, in early 1940, Sir Reginald Dorman Smith, Minister of Agriculture, announced in London that farmers had been slow to absorb women land workers but there was no doubt that eventually they would be badly needed.³⁶

The only women's voices to be heard in Craven were those belonging to women of higher social status. These included women such as Lady Allerton, Lady Bingley, Chairman of the WRWLA Committee, and Miss Pam Preston of Flasby Hall, Gargrave, who was appointed to take charge of local recruitment to the WLA in June 1939. She was also a member of the Staincliffe Panel of the National Service Committee and the WVS and later became a member of the CTFA. Nevertheless, it took a period of time before their message was acted upon in the Craven district.

3. The Women's Land Army as a possible labour force

When the Craven farming community realised ploughing up of land could not be avoided and trained labour was required for the task, many remained reluctant to take on WLA recruits. The *Craven Herald* reported that Bentham NFU considered the WLA could be of value 'due to the labour shortage but they could not expect farmers to take girls on to their farms and pay them high rates. There should be hostels provided in suitable towns and suitably managed from which they could go out to the farmers each day'.³⁸ In any event, farmers in the area were unaccustomed to ploughing and were not necessarily in a position to take on training themselves. The *Craven Herald* 'Special Correspondent' in the column entitled 'The Rural World' wrote

I would not think anyone will now dispute that recruits were accepted for the WLA with far too little discrimination. A farmer remarked to me of one of his trainees that her head was all right but it would take at least 6 months for her hands to be fit for a farm. I think it will hardly be questioned by anyone now that the calling up of young men between 20 and 21 was a mistake ... where these young men are tractor drivers the hardship is a real one, for I do not think that farmers will be persuaded that the WLA can effectively supply this class of labour. There seems still to have been too much of a lingering idea that agricultural work is unskilled and that anybody who can drive a motor car can drive a farm tractor.³⁹

In the same column in November 1939 criticism was levelled at the manner in which the WLA had been recruited. It was stated that 30,000 recruits had been accepted, of whom 24,000 had been trained while only 2,000 were said to be in employment.⁴⁰ The writer suggested a preference for a Boys' Land Army which he

considered could be made available in springtime when labour was required whereas WLA recruits had to be found work for the entire year.⁴¹

Lady Bingley and Miss Grace Harrison, Honorary Secretary of the WRWLA Committee, were, however, eager to expound the merits of the Women's Land Army and addressed a meeting of the WRNFU on the subject on 1 December, 1939. Lady Bingley indicated that it was anticipated the WLA would provide a trained body of women to replace men being called up. Whilst it was appreciated that 'women could not fully replace a man ... members of the Land Army could do a good many essential tasks on the farm.'⁴² At that time there were only 69 fully trained women in the West Riding who were prepared to go anywhere in the country and 41 who wanted to work in Yorkshire. Miss Harrison said

I think you will be pleasantly surprised by the type of girl in the Land Army. We have been astounded at the type and splendid physique of the girls we have enrolled and they are as keen as mustard.⁴³

4. Summary and conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to provide information regarding the district upon which this study will focus. It has been shown that the new agricultural labour force of the WLA was entering an area which was not neutral but contained certain preconceived notions concerning agriculture and the nature of women's work.

The reluctance of Craven farmers to ploughing up grassland was based on evidence which showed that livestock farming was most appropriate in the prevailing conditions. This was not necessarily the situation in every county in which the WLA operated. There was little aversion to ploughing additional land in more southerly counties where arable crops were usually grown and even the Sussex Downs came under the plough. There were, however, doubts in the counties concerning the feasibility of women undertaking ploughing although this was not solely a gender specific issue. Craven farmers resented both male WRWAEC employees ploughing their land and male conscientious objectors undertaking agricultural work. Foreman Donald summed up the farming community by saying

there were a lot of good farmers who used to provide food for the 'land girls' and look after them well - you had a lot of good friends and others who were just damned plain awkward. And right from the start, the farmers, there were some that were really dogmatic; they were just anti-something and they didn't care what it were so long as it were anti.⁴⁴

In April 1942 the WLA entered the Craven district in increasing numbers due to the opening of a purpose-built hostel in Skipton. A hostel was also built in Settle and various houses were requisitioned in the district to provide hostels, such as Cappleside at Rathmell and Holden Clough near Slaidburn. The experiences of WLA recruits in Craven are explored in the following chapters.

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CHAPTER FIVE: THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE AND ORGANISATIONAL NETWORK OF THE WOMEN'S LAND ARMY

This chapter examines the formulation of policies leading to the foundation of the WLA, the creation of its administrative structure and the nature of its organisational network. The interaction between the various bodies at both national and local levels was complex due to the status and relationships of negotiating agencies and individuals. Their discussions involved a range of decisions which required revision throughout the duration of the WLA.

The WLA, 1939-1950, was preceded by the founding organisation which operated between 1917 and 1919. The development of the WLA 1917-1919, from its roots in voluntary associations through to its formalisation under government jurisdiction, provided the platform for launching the new administrative structure in 1939. In order to understand the genesis of the WLA it is appropriate to take account of progress made during World War I.

1. Policy formulation

1.1 The founding of the WLA

Several private voluntary agencies existed prior to 1917 with the purpose of assisting the general war effort. For example, the Women's Legion, founded by Lady Londonderry, was divided into Canteen, Ambulance, Cookery and Agricultural Sections. The Women's National Political League, the Women's Defence Relief Corps, and the Women's Farm and Garden Union (WFGU) were also formed to increase the number of educated women working on the land. It is from these latter groups of volunteers that the WLA of 1917 emanated. Both during the period in question and more recently, commentators have interpreted differently the usefulness of the volunteers. Ernle considers that women 'specially trained in various branches of agriculture paved the way for others, and, as instructresses of the unskilled recruits of the Land Army, they did valuable work.'¹ However, the number of workers actually placed on the land was relatively small, leading Horn to comment that 'most of these organisations were of little value' and that the Women's Defence Relief Corps was

‘almost as useless as the Women’s National Political League.’² Marwick suggests that the voluntary bodies in general operated along military lines by adopting a uniform and a hierarchical structure. He considered each group to consist of

an odd, but not necessarily ineffective mixture of Girl Guides, County Charity and Territorial Army [led by] strong-willed women whose motives seem to have consisted of a genuine desire to help the National effort, a liking for uniform, an urge to boss other people around, and a passion to compete with anyone else who had the temerity to set up an organisation of their own.³

The work undertaken by these volunteers also received mixed reactions from the Board of Agriculture (BoA). The BoA Parliamentary Secretary wrote in 1916 that he was

inclined to think the scheme is being run by the wrong people. It is all very well for, say, the local duchess to be brought into a new movement on its inception, mainly because her name is of value as an advertisement and because her purse is useful to provide the necessary funds, but when the movement has once been started, unless the duchess has the good sense to efface herself as quickly as possible, and to allow the project to be carried on by people who are primarily interested in it, in nine times out of ten the scheme is bound to fail ... get the farmers to run the show ...⁴

However, due to the reluctance of farmers to engage female labour it was necessary for the volunteers and the government to take matters forward. The BoA offered little encouragement to either the Women’s Legion or the Women’s National Political League. It considered that the former had ‘done a little mischief to the broader interests of the movement in some localities’ and the latter had ‘pursued methods which the Board considered to be mischievous and of very little practical utility’⁵ although the nature of the ‘mischief’ was not indicated. The Board was, however, impressed by the Women’s Farm and Garden Union (WFGU) which appeared to offer better examples of good practice in recruiting, training and distributing labour. In January 1916, the government set up its own organisation, the Women’s National Land Service Corps (WNLSC) adopting some of the WFGU policies and procedures. The aim of the WNLSC was to arrange ‘training and mobilisation of non-resident women mostly not of the agricultural class, who, when properly skilled, would be drafted into employment on farms.’⁶ Nevertheless, despite

government support, the WNLSC was unable to meet the substantial demands made upon it in placing female agricultural labour on the land. This resulted in Mrs Wilkins, head of the organisation, writing to the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, in January 1917, stating the need to organise ‘a recruiting campaign for women’s labour in readiness for sowing to produce food for the nation.’⁷ This appeared to spur the government into action to introduce a larger and more structured organisation to deal appropriately with female agricultural labour, rather than relying upon volunteers and an inadequately equipped government agency.

To facilitate this transition, several administrative changes were put in place within the BoA and other ministries. The BoA’s Food Production Department, under the leadership of Lord Ernle, created a Women’s Branch, appointing Miss Meriel Talbot as the first woman inspector in charge of several other female inspectors. This was a significant innovation as Miss Talbot herself wrote, Lord Ernle ‘entrusted to them the somewhat novel task of organising a woman-staffed division within a government department.’⁸ (Miss Talbot was later appointed Director of the Women’s Branch and was awarded the DBE in recognition of her services). The aim of the Women’s Branch was to provide a labour force different from that of the private and voluntary agencies, i.e. ‘a full-time, mobile, trained and disciplined force of women which would be available throughout the year’⁹ and ‘ready to go where and when it was most needed.’¹⁰

The WFGU and WNLSC remained operative to recruit women who were not mobile or who were unable to give the time commitment required by the Women’s Branch. In addition, the National Federation of Women’s Institutes (WI) was attached to the BoA during the war with the government providing funding to enable the movement to contribute towards improving the rural economy and assisting in educating the agricultural population.¹¹ Although the Board relinquished these responsibilities in 1919, the WI continued in its attempts to ‘improve and develop conditions of rural life.’¹²

The BoA favoured the adoption of an official name for its new female agricultural labour force as it was considered that counties might otherwise use different titles, thus causing confusion. Several names were suggested, such as Lord Selborne’s Army (Lord Selborne at that time being President of the BoA), Women

War Workers and the Women's Land Army.¹³ The last name was adopted although the utilisation of the word 'Army' in the title was to be the subject of discussion in years to come, particularly in debates concerning the status of the organisation (see Section 4).

1.2 The growth of the WLA organisational network to 1919

The Women's Land Army began accepting recruits in March 1917. They were allocated to one of three sections: Agriculture and Forestry, which was administered by the BoA, Forage, which came under the auspices of the War Office, and Timber Cutting, which was under the jurisdiction of the Timber Supply Department of the Board of Trade (BoT).¹⁴ Prior to accepting recruits and during the period when the administrative structure was being introduced, disagreement and duplication were inevitable as different ministries managed the WLA. Although the BoA had already set up Women's War Agricultural Committees in each county with a team of inspectors headed by Miss Talbot, the BoT also appointed women organisers with a similar remit of forming women's county committees and speaking at public meetings.

Whilst many BoT organisers and BoA inspectors worked together, it was noted that women's committees in some counties worked independently of each other and the BoA realised an error had been made in officially recognising and allowing involvement by several women's groups. It was considered that the BoA Women's War Agricultural Committees 'should be the sole authorities dealing with the issue' as some BoT inspectors had 'got out of hand' and their views were 'not sound from the point of view of agriculture.'¹⁵ It was, therefore, decided that the BoA should be responsible for women's county committees¹⁶ which should 'establish a uniform system of organisation' by having sub-committees dealing with recruitment and selection, training, placement of volunteers, billeting and welfare, all of which reported to an executive committee.¹⁷ The Board also required each County Council to appoint a War Agricultural Executive Committee (WAEC) to have oversight of local agriculture (see Section 2.2).

Potential female agricultural labour was supplied through the existing system of labour exchanges under the Ministry of Labour, and the Army Clothing Department

advised on the distribution of uniform following the BoA's decision that the WLA should 'adopt a special costume.'¹⁸ In July 1918 Miss Talbot recorded that approximately 16,000 women had been recruited for farm work in addition to those in the Timber and Forage Departments.¹⁹

In early 1919, the Secretary of the Food Production Department reported on a meeting of members of Women's War Agricultural Committees and WAECs. It had been agreed that as the wartime emergency had ended, it was no longer necessary to retain either the WLA or women's committees and all were wound up. A sub-committee of the WAECs was charged with looking after the interests and conditions of women working as farmers, market gardeners, smallholders and members of WIs after the war.²⁰

1.3 Further expansion of the WLA organisational network 1939-1950

With the possibility of a second World War on the horizon, the MAF (previously the BoA) reintroduced the WLA and the first volunteers were recruited in June 1939. The MAF was able to utilise those parts of the organisational structure retained from 1919, particularly the WAECs, in each county.

Certain lessons had, however, been learned from past experience. Private agriculture with its countrywide dispersal, different farming methods and relatively poor economic state was not in a position to make suitable labour provision for itself. In fact, the farming community was still not sufficiently predisposed towards women workers to organise its recruitment despite greater acceptance of female labour in World War I. Furthermore, it had proved inappropriate to have several uncoordinated associations (whether voluntary or formal) vying to place and maintain women workers on the land. The government, therefore, decided to reintroduce the WLA and its impetus was essential in providing the resources to deal with the scale of operation required. As the official historian of wartime 'manpower' states:

it was apparent that nothing short of the total mobilisation of the woman power of the country would avail, if victory were ultimately to be won. This could not be left to patriotic volunteering ... it could only be achieved if control was firmly exercised by government.²¹

Lady Gertrude Denman was therefore approached by the MAF and requested to act as unpaid Honorary Director a year prior to the outbreak of war to set up the WLA administrative structure. Her appointment was considered to be most appropriate as she had been an Assistant Director in the WLA during World War I and was also President of the National Federation of Women's Institutes.²² Mrs Inez Jenkins, who had also been involved in the WI movement, was appointed as Assistant Director at a salary of £600 per annum. The MAF appointed a member of their own personnel, Mr JA Sutherland Harris, as Chief Administrative Officer to the WLA, and Mr HJ Johns of the Ministry's Manpower Division, also played a major administrative role. The MAF was responsible for the financial upkeep of the WLA which, in turn, was officially recognised as a unit of the Ministry.²³ From 1941, the MAF confirmed that the WLA Director and Assistant Director should make day to day administrative decisions concerning the organisation.²⁴

The MAF, the WLA hierarchy and other ministries participated in WLA policy formulation. For example the Ministry of Labour and National Service (MoLNS) played a major part in recruitment policy (see Chapter Six) as it tried to balance the needs of various forces and services in wartime. In addition, in 1941 the Minister of Labour set up a Women's Consultative Committee whose brief was to advise the government on issues affecting the employment of women, for example conscription and the movement of large numbers of women away from home. The Committee comprised both male and female members of MoLNS together with other female members such as Irene Ward, Conservative MP, Edith Summerskill, Labour MP, and Lady Violet Astor, and was chaired by Mr Ralph Assheton, Bevin's Parliamentary Secretary.²⁵ Parker suggests that 'the informality of the proceedings made for a free and honest exchange of opinions and members of the Committee felt their advice was fully used in the making and implementing of policy.'²⁶ However, Summerfield is of the view that the Committee was introduced because there were no women in the War Cabinet and the House of Commons put pressure on the MoLNS to consider women's views²⁷. She also records that Assheton advised that it would 'be impossible to avoid a women's committee of some sort' and told Bevin 'perhaps I could help by presiding over the ladies on your behalf ... I think I could resist their charms'.²⁸

Little mention is made in primary and secondary sources consulted of any input by agricultural labourers' unions in the setting up of the WLA administrative structure,

although they did make some contribution to policy making when the organisation was operative (see Chapters Six to Ten).

WLA headquarters was installed at Lady Denman's home in Balcombe, Sussex, and seven regional officers were appointed to have oversight of different areas of the country. For example, Miss M Arneson of Penrith covered the large geographical area of Northumberland, Durham, Cumberland, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cheshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire.²⁹ The following are examples of personnel appointed to act as chairmen of WLA County Committees and are representative of the country as a whole. (The term 'chairmen' was used at the time whether or not the chair incumbent was male or female. Chairmen of WLA County Committees were, without exception, female, but in keeping with the period will be referred to throughout the study as 'Chairmen'.)

Derbyshire:	Her Grace, the Duchess of Devonshire, Bakewell.
Kent (East):	The Lady Cornwallis, Plovers, Horsmonden, Kent
Lancashire:	Lady Worsley-Taylor, JP, Townhead, Near Clitheroe.
Nottinghamshire:	The Lady Sibell Argles, White Lodge, Ollerton.
Northamptonshire:	The Countess Spencer, Althorp, Northants.
Yorkshire, East Riding:	Mrs Carver, Ryland Hill, Brough.
Yorkshire, North Riding:	Lady Katharine Graham, Norton Conyers, Melmerby, Ripon.
Yorkshire, West Riding:	The Lady Bingley, Bramham Park, Boston Spa. ³⁰

As in World War I, most appointments as chairmen were offered to members of 'the landed classes' to the exclusion of high ranking practical male agriculturists who were more likely to serve on the WAECs. The appointments were usually contacts of Lady Denman through her previous WLA and WI work and were often the only members of the community who could make a significant contribution in terms of time, without receiving remuneration for their efforts. Furthermore, their positions in their respective communities enabled them to have the ear of local farmers and landowners to put forward the benefits of WLA labour. Nevertheless, the administration was criticised for being 'too county'³¹ by both Labour MPs³² and by recruits themselves. Some indications of the differences in outlook between recruits and the hierarchy appear in later chapters. However, the WLA merely reflected the situation apparent in many other wartime organisations which were arranged along militaristic lines not only in uniformed organisations such as nursing and the forces but

also in civilian operations such as munitions factories.³³ Upper class and/or professional women assumed decision-making roles (as far as possible in male dominated policy formulation) whereas middle class and educated women were often trained for supervisory positions. Working class women tended to be allocated to manual employment tasks.

2. Policy implementation – the county structure

WLA policies formulated at the level of government and WLA headquarters were implemented and administered through a complex national county structure. This usually comprised a WLA Committee, a War Agricultural Executive Committee, farmers' unions such as the NFU and local associations such as the CTFA in Craven, the WI and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) a Christian social services society. This structure evolved over a period of time becoming particularly complex as shifts occurred to accommodate the variations in wartime requirements.

In the early years of operation, however, the MAF records show that the county structure was fragmentary. For example, in 1916 women's committees in Devon apparently did not co-operate with other agencies, and in Northamptonshire there were no official women's committees in existence. This presented difficulties due to the 'action of three ladies who are members of the War Agricultural Committee and insist on keeping the whole work in their hands.'³⁴ However, following the work carried out by Miss Talbot, her fleet of women inspectors and the WAECs, the WLA was able to call upon a more experienced and stable county structure on its reintroduction in 1939.

2.1 Development of WLA County Committees

In 1939 each county WLA Committee had a maximum number of eight voluntary members, one of whom was affiliated to the WFGU, a chairman and a paid organising secretary. The first meeting of the WRWLA Committee held in June 1939 included in its membership Lady Bingley (Chairman), Miss Jacob Smith (Organising Secretary), Professor MacGregor (Leeds University) and Mr Richardson (County Land Agent). There were also seven representatives present from the seven geographical areas into which the West Riding had been divided, with Miss Pam Preston

representing the Craven area.³⁶ The organising secretaries were often appointed by committee chairmen through social contacts. For example, Iris Tillett was invited to meet Dowager Lady Suffield, JP, the President of Norfolk WI, but rather than discussing WI business was asked to consider becoming organising secretary of the WLA.³⁵ Assuming this role did, however, require more than simply being a member of a particular social circle and Miss Tillett was described by a recruit as being

greatly respected by both the County Committee and her own staff at the Norfolk WLA county office, for her efficiency, tempered with an acute understanding of human nature... dealing with cautious farmers, who ridiculed the idea that a girl could take the place of a man, then less than a year later trying to recruit sufficient land girls to fulfil the many job vacancies ...³⁷

In September 1939, the organising secretaries for the three Yorkshire Ridings were as follows:

East Riding:	Miss Crotrian of Roos, near Hull
North Riding:	Miss W Jacob Smith of Knaresborough
West Riding:	Miss G Harrison of Harrogate

All organising secretaries were paid a salary of £200 per annum (the maximum payable being £250) based on the number of volunteers and the training provision being made in their counties. Their duties were particularly onerous and included interviewing volunteers, arranging their training and work placements, organising the interviewing of farmers by committee members, inspecting farms, ensuring government regulations were adhered to, organising welfare provision, distributing uniforms, corresponding with recruits and WLA headquarters, arranging recruiting campaigns and publicity and conducting committee meetings. It is hardly surprising, then, that some secretaries found it necessary to employ additional help, using their own salaries to pay for clerical assistance.³⁸ However, when war was declared, the MAF required counties to increase the salaries of organising secretaries in recognition of their responsibilities and the increased volume of work due to higher recruitment levels.³⁹ By July 1940 the MAF and WLA headquarters decided that organising secretaries should become answerable directly to them as policy makers rather than to the WLA County Committees which assumed more of an advisory role.⁴⁰

County committees appointed voluntary district representatives who had oversight of particular geographical areas in large counties. These numbered some 3,000 nationally and their brief was to visit prospective employers, inspect billets and work conditions and act as 'the Land Girl's friend.'⁴¹ As indicated, Miss Pam Preston, herself a landowner, was the representative in charge of the Skipton area of Craven.

WLA headquarters maintained contact with its county committees regarding policy implementation through meetings with chairmen and organising secretaries but mainly via numerous circulars which were discussed at regular county committee meetings. Lady Denman stressed to county chairmen the need for WLA committees to work with other organisations, including the farmers' and agricultural labourers' unions, to ensure that women were well-prepared to work on the land as soon as they were needed.⁴² The YWCA also became involved when hostel accommodation was introduced.

Relationships between MAF and WLA headquarters and the counties were sometimes strained. It appears that when WLA county committees occasionally tried to enter the realm of policy making they met with a swift reprimand from Lady Denman, although WLA headquarters often interfered in county administration. For example, Lady Denman wrote to chairmen and organising secretaries in 1940 suggesting it was

not helpful for county committees at this juncture to pass resolutions or send suggestions as to how Land Army regulations may be improved ... it is the urgent duty of every county committee to perfect its machinery and deal with its immediate task in the most efficient way it can.⁴³

Conversely, in 1941, when the Yorkshire administration was divided into three Ridings, WLA headquarters suggested that the entire Yorkshire WLA should be administered from one county office in York. It was thought this would improve and strengthen area organisation by replacing weaker personnel with more efficient administrators. Given the large geographical area to be covered, it unlikely that one central office would have been more efficient. However, it was proposed to make Miss Jacob Smith Yorkshire organising secretary but dispense with the services of Miss Harrison 'since although she is popular with her present chairman and committee, she does not handle her work well and in spite of a great deal of help from our

headquarters' organisers, does not show signs of improvement.⁴⁴ The next decision made by WLA headquarters was to have one central WLA committee for the whole of Yorkshire with a sub-committee for each Riding, to deal with the increased number of recruits. Yet another decision was made by the WLA in 1943 to revert to the original three Riding model of local government, and the Ministry of Works was asked to find premises for three regional offices.⁴⁵ It is not known on what basis the last change was made, but reorganisation was certainly apparent within the WLA administrative structure.

There were also occasional differences in personal relationships between the counties and headquarters. For example, Lady Hermione Cobbold, Chairman of Buckinghamshire WLA, indicated to Lady Denman that she was critical of some aspects of WLA organisation (her request to hold a meeting with other counties had been rejected). Lady Cobbold stated that she did not feel the 'overworked staff and voluntary helpers' were adequate and if Lady Denman felt that 'holding this view makes it impossible for me [Lady Cobbold] to retain my position I should more than understand and I am quite willing to place my resignation in your hand at any time.'⁴⁶ Lady Denman responded that Lady Cobbold must find it

most unsatisfactory to work with a chairman who feels that she has schemes for the organisation of the Land Army which would lead to greater efficiency than those now put into practice ... I am sure you will agree that a great deal of our time would be taken up if any number of chairmen propounded schemes for reorganising the Land Army on various lines and we had to enter into all the pros and cons of all their suggestions.'⁴⁷

Despite several similar spats over the years, given the complexity of the county bureaucracy and the range of policies to be implemented, the task of placing a new and mobile female labour force on the land was undertaken with remarkably little animosity between WLA headquarters and its county committees.

2.2 The role of County War Agricultural Executive Committees

The brief of the county WAECs included assisting and advising the farming community on food production, obtaining information on the requirements and supply of agricultural machinery, fertiliser, foodstuffs and farm labour and informing the

BoA/MAF of any particular difficulties.⁴⁸ As well as the WLA, WAECs also had soldiers, prisoners of war (PoWs), school children and townspeople on summer holidays all contributing to the replacement of experienced agricultural labour in their area at various times of the year.

The WRWAEC had oversight of the farming operations of the entire West Riding of Yorkshire including Craven and, in fact, took greater responsibility for certain WLA operations than did the WRWLA Committee. For example, the WRWAEC had responsibility for hostel accommodation (discussed in Chapter Seven) and supervised work undertaken by recruits on farms (explained in Chapter Eight).

WAECs were powerful members of the county agricultural scene both during and beyond the war years. The committees comprised unpaid members appointed by the Minister of Agriculture and were usually farmers, landowners, representatives of farm workers and representatives of the WLA, and this was reflected in the composition of the WRWAEC. The West Riding was divided into 34 agricultural districts, each with a district executive officer although some officers covered more than one area. District committees were formed to maintain contact with the local farmers and their changing priorities as it was envisaged such an arrangement would be more advantageous to all parties than instructions being received by farmers directly from Whitehall.⁴⁹ Craven itself was further divided into four areas, i.e. Sedbergh, Settle, Bolton by Bowland and Skipton.

The WRAEC was responsible for implementing the MAF agricultural policies within its locality and, in the same way as the WLA committees, received most of its information and instructions through circular letters from the Ministry. These covered a wide range of subjects resulting in a number of sub-committees being set up (and disbanded) as the need arose. The sub-committees reported regularly to the executive committee and included the following: Buildings, Cultivations, Drainage, Farm Supplies and Transport, Finance and General Purposes, Foodstuffs and Agricultural Requisites, Horticulture, Insects and Pests*, Labour*, Machinery*, Milk Production, Milk Testing and Advisory, and Technical Development (*Committees with particular responsibility for WLA personnel).

3. Policy outcomes

The relative success or failure of the WLA and its policies can be determined, in part, from the performance of its uniformed recruits working on the land. By ascertaining from former recruits their experiences at the 'receiving end' of policy decisions it will be possible to gain some indication of the success of policy outcomes. Specific policies are discussed and analysed in Chapters Six to Ten with evaluations being made in the final chapter.

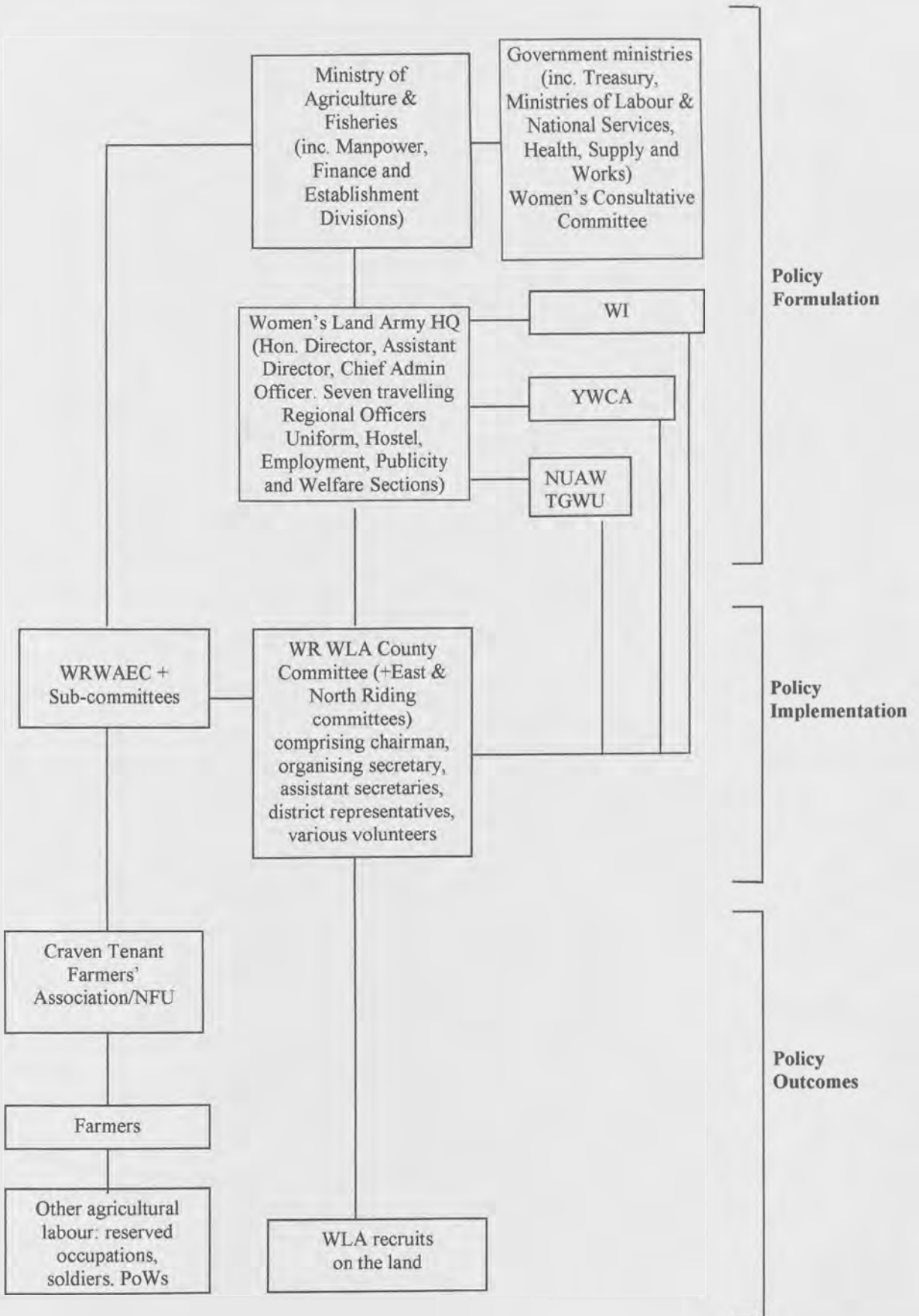
The above account indicates the complex network of organisations involved in WLA administration and the necessity for the structure to change from time to time. However, although fluidity within the policy process is acknowledged, it is possible to show diagrammatically the parties involved in the different stages of the policy process. This is indicated in Figure 3 (page 91).

4. The status of the Women's Land Army

The status of the WLA was debated during both World Wars and, in fact, the British Women's Land Army Society has continued lobbying the Blair government for greater recognition of WLA achievements (see Chapter Ten which includes an overview of policy on disbanding the WLA). Discussions regarding status centred on whether or not the WLA was on a par with other women's services, or, more particularly, forces such as the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF), Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) or the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS). Parties disagreed on whether the WLA was a state operation, run in a similar manner to the forces, or whether it was operated as a civilian concern in the same way as munitions industries and alternative sources of agricultural labour.

The issue of the status of the WLA had far-reaching implications for recruits in relation to their conditions of employment and also for the image they presented and which was presented of them in newspapers and on film. The matter does not appear to have been satisfactorily resolved during the early years of the WLA, with no definitive statement having been made on the matter. Thus, on the cessation of hostilities in

Figure 3: The WLA organisational network 1939-1950



1945, argument ensued as to the gratuity benefits which WLA recruits should receive in comparison with male and female workers in the forces. This will be discussed in Chapter Ten.

The inclusion of the word 'Army' in the title caused confusion in some circles because of its connotations with military organisation and discipline. Whilst wartime organisations were often structured along military lines, Miss Talbot recorded in 1918 that the WLA had not been introduced on a military basis. She made comparisons between conditions of agricultural employment and other work performed by women in wartime, indicating that in agriculture the employer was a private individual whereas in the services the state was the employer. Furthermore, she suggested that as WLA workers were (at that time) more often employed singly or in small groups on separate farms it would be impracticable to attempt to impose military discipline.⁵⁰ Women's forces were perceived to have higher status than the WLA because of the relative position held by their male counterparts. Agriculture was not held in the same esteem as the Navy or Air Force and had been considered as 'derogatory employment for women'.⁵¹

The status of the WLA remained unclear on its reintroduction in 1939. Once more the crux of the argument was whether it was on a par with state-controlled services or whether it was a 'poor relation', being denied privileges afforded to other women's services. On the other hand, concern was also expressed that the WLA was actually privileged in relation to other agricultural labour as recruits were provided with a uniform and accommodation. The problem was compounded by the fact that MAF personnel themselves offered differing opinions on the status of the WLA. In 1941 Mrs Jenkins wrote that

although the WLA is not as a whole State employed in the same way as are the women's auxiliary services, it is recruited by the State, equipped by the State with uniform free of charge, placed in employment by the State and when in employment generally supervised by the State in matters of welfare. Further, approximately one sixth of the total strength of the WLA is in fact on the State payroll, being employed by the WAECs in the different counties.⁵²

However, in 1943 Sir Donald Fergusson, Permanent Secretary to the MAF, stated that the WLA was

primarily a recruiting agency for agricultural labour and the conditions of the members must approximate to those of other workers in the industry; otherwise there would be created a privileged class of worker within the industry, with unfortunate results.⁵³

Conversely, at the very meeting during which Sir Donald made this statement, Mr Johns of the Ministry's Manpower Division, reported that following discussion of sick pay, holidays and a contract of service for the WLA, 'the view of the Minister of Labour is clearly that the Land Army should be looked upon as a State service.'⁵⁴

The debate continued in government circles with the MAF Manpower Division indicating that differences between the WLA and other women's auxiliary services remained. It was stated that the latter were set up as ancillaries of the three fighting services, were therefore formed on the same basis and worked along military lines. The WLA, however, was ancillary to the agricultural labour force, which was not a military organisation. It was acknowledged that the title of the organisation included the word 'Army', but this was considered to be misleading because the WLA was not, of course, armed. The name had been used during World War I and the MAF felt it had the 'advantage of encouraging a sense of corporate responsibility.'⁵⁵

5. Summary and conclusion

The government decision to introduce the WLA during World War I evolved gradually following the limited success of some voluntary agencies in placing female agricultural labour on the land during the early years of the twentieth century. The network of agencies involved in administration, policy making and implementation was complex leading to the formation of an extensive bureaucracy, but this was streamlined by placing the three branches of the WLA within the remit of the BoA. On its reintroduction in 1939, the WLA came under the jurisdiction of the MAF and its administrative structure was extended due to the increase in recruitment.

The MAF and WLA generally welcomed the contributions made by the WAECs and other associations, whose personnel were often more appropriately qualified to deal with issues such as agricultural employment and social services. The large,

voluntary, unpaid force within the WLA also made a vital contribution to the functioning of the organisation through its knowledge of the local community.

Women themselves were involved in the setting up of the WLA, its structure and in policy making and while their governance was under the umbrella of MAF, women at least made a contribution to policy formulation and implementation as well as carrying out land work. It is accepted that those women involved in decision making were of a particular class and social standing but, nevertheless, their input was innovatory within the predominantly male composition of the cabinet and various ministries. The WLA hierarchy was not particularly well-disposed towards accepting advice from its sisters on county committees in terms of policy making or how it should manage operations and it was left to counties to modify policy implementation within their localities as they felt appropriate.

Formulation and implementation of specific policies, together with their outcomes, are considered in later chapters. The lack of consensus on the status of the WLA organisation in relation to other agricultural labour and women's services, as perceived by interested parties, is a recurrent theme.

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- 42 *PRO MAF 59/7 1939 Organisation to Outbreak of War.* Notes of proceedings of a Conference of Chairmen and Organising Secretaries of WLA County Committees, 1.6.1939.
- 43 *PRO MAF 59/20 op. cit.* WLA circular 42 of 30.5.1940.
- 44 *PRO MAF 59/10 op. cit.* Letter from Mrs I Jenkins to Mr DB Toye, Treasury, 20.6.1941.
- 45 Yorkshire Central WLA Committee minutes, 18.6.1943.
- 46 *PRO MAF 59/20 op. cit.* Letter from Lady Cobbold to Lady Denman, 6.5.1942.
- 47 *Ibid.* Letter from Lady Denman to Lady Cobbold, 8.5.1942.

- 48 *PRO MAF 59/1 op. cit.* Women's County Committees.
49 Anthony Hurd, 'War Agricultural Committees - Why and How', *The Land Girl*,
Vol.4, No.11, 1944, p.2.
- 50 *PRO MAF 42/8 op. cit.* First World War Constitution. Memo by Miss M Talbot
on welfare, 3.7.1918.
- 51 *Ibid.* Need for More Effective Control. Report of Food Production Department,
19.2.1917-1.6.1918.
- 52 *PRO MAF 59/4 op. cit.* Letter from Mrs I Jenkins to Mr HJ Johns, 20.5.1942.
- 53 *PRO MAF 59/25 Conditions of Employment 1943.* Report of meeting held
between Officers of MoLNs and MAF, 23.3.1943.
- 54 *Ibid.* Letter from Mr HJ Johns to Mrs I Jenkins reporting on meeting, 23.3.1943.
- 55 *PRO MAF 59/20 op. cit.* Memo to Minister's Liaison Officers, Land
Commissioners and Labour Advisory Officers from MAF Manpower Division,
8.3.1943.

CHAPTER SIX: RECRUITMENT POLICY AND THE PROVISION OF A WOMEN'S LAND ARMY

This chapter considers policy on recruitment to the Women's Land Army together with related issues of eligibility of membership and the need to publicise the organisation to potential recruits and the farming community. As recruitment to the WLA in 1939 was influenced by experiences gained in World War I, reference will also be made to the period from 1917-1919 to establish some basic principles.

1. Towards a recruitment policy: the WLA 1917-1919

Chapter Five showed that the Women's Land Army grew from several private organisations such as the Women's Legion, the Women's Farm and Garden Union and the Women's National Land Service Corps, their common aim being to increase the number of women working on the land during World War I. In order to attract women to the new WLA organisation, a poster and leaflet campaign was conducted under the direction of the National Service Department. National Service Committees throughout the country were required to participate in bringing the WLA to the notice of the general public.¹ Despite some success with this method, Twinch suggests that new ideas were required to advertise the viability of the WLA in 1918 and that 'rallies became a vehicle of persuasion and literally of demonstration'.² She refers to an article in *The Landswoman* in early 1918 which describes members of the Warwickshire WLA marching through Birmingham. It was stated that

the procession attracted much attention, and to many of the watchers it was a novelty to see the girls in their working clothes, and to realise that the girls of England are really working on the land, and not merely playing about in print frocks in the haymaking time.³

The WLA wished to attract a particular type of recruit to its ranks by these publicity campaigns. According to the General Secretary of the National Service

Department, Mr Arthur Collins, there was an immediate need for 10,000 'strong and suitable' women to work on the land.⁴ He considered many recruits might

be found among girls living in the suburbs of large towns. Women of good physique and intelligence who are not already making any definite contribution to the national interest at this time of stress will doubtless respond to the appeal when they realise that service on the land supplements and supports the service of men in the trenches.⁵

The Board of Trade 'Notes on War Service for Countrywomen' suggests that the class of recruit required by the WLA would be

women and girls of high standing socially [who] will at once learn to milk and let the other inhabitants see them going, in suitable working dress, to and from their work day after day. Then their social inferiors will not be slow to follow their example.⁶

Dewey suggested WLA members working on the land 'tended to be middle class, comparatively well educated, and of urban origin.'⁷

Thus, from its introduction in 1917 to its disbanding in 1919, the WLA aimed to recruit educated women willing and able to undertake training to work full-time on the land anywhere in the country.⁸ This formed the basis of recruitment policy on the reintroduction of the WLA in 1939.

2. Formulation of a recruitment policy: the WLA 1939-1945

A variety of sources reiterate the fundamental purpose of the WLA following its reintroduction. For example, a MAF Explanatory Note dated February 1939 states that the WLA was intended to be primarily a mobile, trained force of women prepared to undertake various kinds of farm work in any part of the country in the event of war. The intention was for the majority of recruits to be employed and paid by individual farmers although it was anticipated that some volunteers could be organised into travelling gangs at harvest time.⁹ The need for workers to be

mobile stemmed from small local rural populations being unable to provide the volume of agricultural labour required and it was emphasised that the WLA would be a new agricultural labour force. The Minister of Agriculture, Mr RS Hudson, stated in the House of Commons that the WLA had been introduced to provide ‘an additional force of mobile women workers’¹⁰ and Mrs Jenkins, Deputy Director, wrote that ‘it was always recognised that the real purpose of the Land Army was to provide a body of new workers for the land, full-time and mobile.’¹¹

The *raison d'être* of the WLA was therefore established as providing *a new, mobile, agricultural labour force of women specially recruited to assist in increasing the production of home-grown food* and it is on this basis that success or failure of WLA recruitment policy will be judged. However, in order to fully evaluate the policy, it is appropriate to consider a number of factors which impinged upon it.

2.1 Publicising the WLA to potential recruits

In order to both attract potential recruits to the WLA and persuade the farming community to employ them, it was necessary for the organisation to publicise its aims. WLA personnel present at a meeting of Chairmen and Organising Secretaries of WLA County Committees on 1 June 1939 gave an indication of methods used so far to publicise the WLA to potential recruits.¹² These included marches, stands at agricultural shows and appeals in local cinemas and newspapers. The meeting agreed that intensive recruiting campaigns would need to be instituted if the organisation was to meet enrolment targets set by government. It was decided that attractive posters and propaganda leaflets should be prepared, examples of which are shown in Photographs 1 and 2 on the following pages.

Two aspects of the posters are worthy of consideration: the pictorial representation and the language used. Some posters were somewhat unrealistic in their portrayal of work and climate, depicting work as physically invigorating but

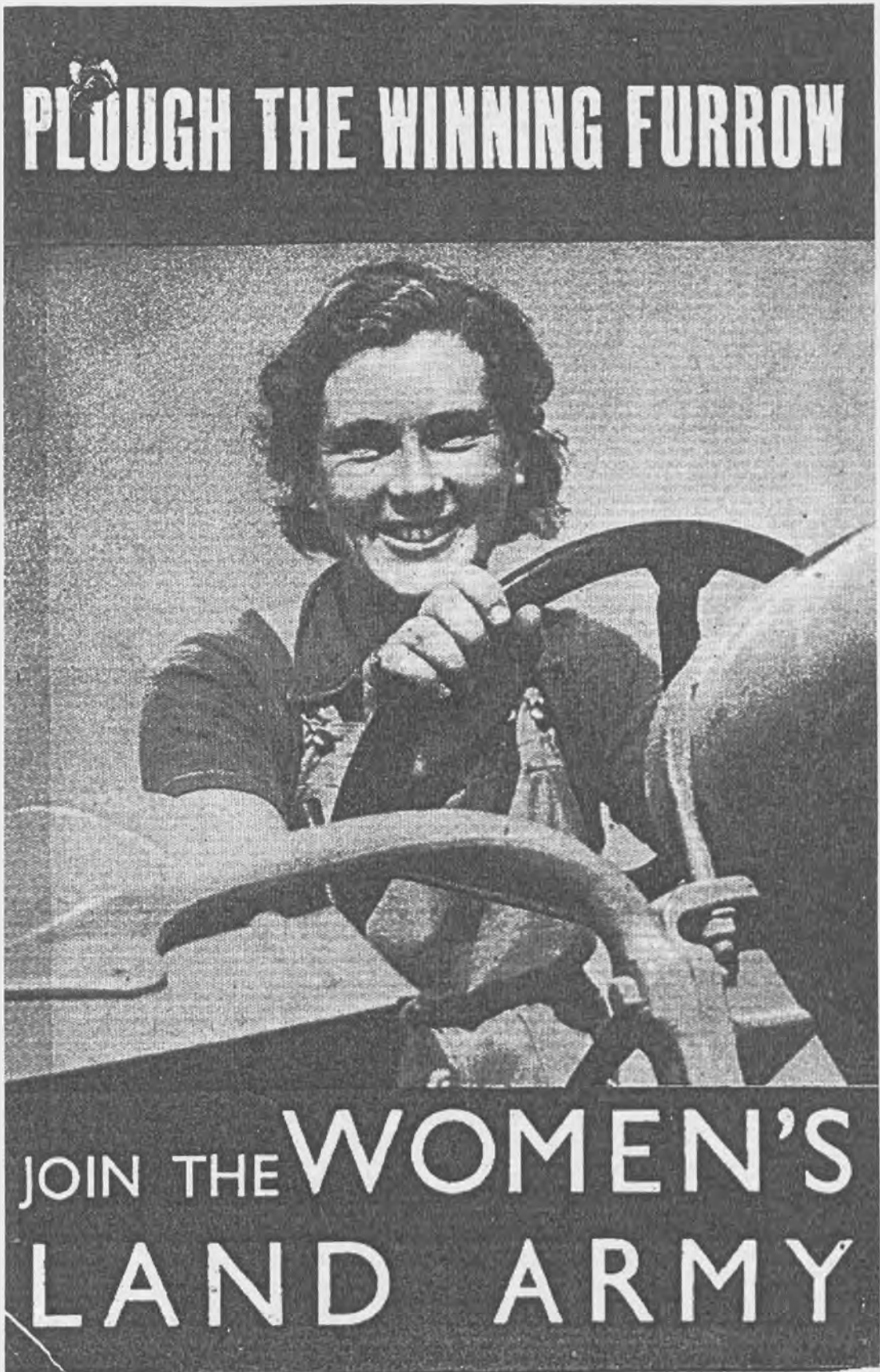
REAP THE HARVEST OF VICTORY



IN THE WOMEN'S LAND ARMY

Photograph 1: WLA recruitment poster 'Reap the Harvest of Victory'

(Source: *Pro MAF 59/17 op.cit.*)



Photograph 2: WLA recruitment poster 'Plough the Winning Furrow'

(Source: *PRO MAF 59/17 op.cit.*)

manageable, carried out in warm, sunny weather by women obviously happy in their surroundings. The captions on the posters appealed to the caring nature and patriotism of women's characters by associating the winning of the war to participation in the WLA and the production of home-grown food, for example, 'Reap the harvest of victory in the WLA.' Furthermore, the MAF was anxious to present the WLA in the best possible light and leaflets used to attract volunteers inevitably led potential recruits to believe that conditions of service such as the provision of accommodation and uniform would be unproblematic.

As the WLA organisation developed, lessons were learned in relation to the most productive form of publicity to use although it will be shown that this was affected by an irregular pattern of recruitment forced upon the WLA by the MoLNS. In this regard, Mrs Jenkins reported upon a national recruitment campaign to the Interdepartmental Committee to Correlate Requirements for Women of the Services and Industry. The response to the campaign had been a rush of volunteers when a steady flow would have been more manageable. It was found that the most appropriate results were obtained from periodic radio announcements combined with other recruiting efforts targeting specific local areas.¹³ Radio broadcasts took a variety of forms ranging from announcements from the Honorary Director to inviting recruits to submit scripts for examination by the BBC for use in appeals to persuade listeners to volunteer for the WLA.¹⁴ The MoLNS considered that a 'systematic press campaign' on behalf of the WLA was inappropriate in view of the need to maintain recruitment to the ATS. The Interdepartmental Committee endorsed this approach after hearing of the methods used by other services requiring female labour. For example, the Nursing Services utilised explanatory articles in women's papers but required no special publicity. The Air Ministry obtained the bulk of its recruitment from press adverts but stated its willingness to drop this for four weeks in order to allow other services to explore this medium.¹⁵ However, the WLA publicity machine occasionally reverted to national campaigns of posters and press advertisements placed by the MAF, particularly when the availability of local labour was in decline as young women chose better paid alternatives such as the services and munitions industries.

2.2 Publicising the WLA to the farming community

It was necessary not only to convince women to join the WLA but also to persuade farmers that the WLA was an appropriate source of agricultural labour. The WLA suggested three methods of publicity which might be directed towards farmers to make known to them the availability of the WLA. These were large display notices at important markets, notices in the local press and notes included in NFU circulars.¹⁶ In addition, local WLA dignitaries attended NFU gatherings (and CTFA meetings in the Craven area) to speak about the work of the WLA. In counties where WAECs were particularly active, members and officials visited local farms to explain to farmers the work of the WLA and why they should consider employing their members, particularly if they were to meet targets set for the ploughing up of land.

2.3 WLA publicity in Yorkshire

Whilst counties received instructions from WLA headquarters to implement a national publicity policy, there was also a need to consider local conditions. Thus, when the first WLA circular was received suggesting the widest possible display of posters and leaflets,¹⁷ it was left to county committees to decide the most appropriate forum for publicity. For example, Lady Bingley, Chairman of the West Riding branch of the WLA, and Miss Grace Harrison, Organising Secretary, attended a meeting of the WRNFU in Leeds in December 1939 to talk to farmers about the advantages of employing WLA labour. Lady Bingley suggested that 'it was realised that a woman could not fully replace a man but the members of the Land Army could do a good many essential tasks on the farm.'¹⁸ The three Ridings also took turns at providing personnel for a WLA Stand at the Yorkshire Show in Halifax to bring the service to the notice of farmers.¹⁹ In addition, the North Riding Committee decided that recruits themselves could attend agricultural shows and demonstrations to provide a visible presence within the farming community. Other events, such as ploughing contests between WLA members and other WAEC

employees, took place in the West Riding before audiences of farmers and members of the local community (see Chapter Eight).

Different forms of publicity used included dressing up dummies in WLA uniform for display in shop windows,²⁰ writing letters to local newspapers in support of the WLA and contacting headmistresses of West Riding Schools asking if they would allow a representative to talk to pupils about the WLA.²¹ Contact was also made with the welfare supervisor of Rowntree, York, as staff numbers were being reduced and it was hoped to attract women to the WLA.²² An unusual location chosen for publicity by the North Riding WLA Committee involved an approach to the West Yorkshire Bus Company with a request to place posters in empty timetable cases and at bus stops in the area.²³

In Yorkshire, the 'excellent quality' of the Yorkshire character was also used for publicity purposes in an attempt to attract labour. Miss Winifred Jacob Smith, a Yorkshire County Organising Secretary from 1939 to 1945, stated 'we always thought Yorkshire was more superior [*sic*] to anywhere else.' She also suggested that pride was taken in the appearance of Yorkshire recruits at various events and attempts were made to ensure that they were 'a credit to Yorkshire. We could not do with Yorkshire girls looking scruffy.'²⁴ Under the heading of 'Yorkshire News' *The Land Girl* reported that Yorkshire farmers had at last recognised the value of the WLA by employing 1,500 recruits compared to only 300 a year earlier. It was considered that Yorkshire recruits were working in most counties and in April 1942 alone over 300 were exported to other counties.²⁵ The quality of Yorkshire recruits was also commented upon by the Minister of Agriculture, Mr R S Hudson, who, at a rally in Northallerton said he 'only wished there were more Yorkshire girls available for export to other counties where they had such a good reputation for being excellent workers.'²⁶

WAECs also contributed to publicising the WLA in Yorkshire with the WRWAEC providing a pictorial map of the area featuring places of historical

interest.²⁷ As well as publicising the WLA and the West Riding, the profit of 2s.6d. on each map was donated to the WLA Benefit Fund.²⁸

As the WLA drew towards disbanding in 1950, and the county committees were no longer involved in propaganda campaigns, the WRWAEC Labour Sub-committee directed its own publicity drive towards WLA members to encourage them to remain in its service. The sub-committee wrote to hostel forewomen asking them to display notices on hostel notice boards conveying the message that opportunity existed to continue to work for the WRWAEC following the disbanding of the WLA.²⁹

2.4 Eligibility for membership of the WLA

Whilst it was established that the WLA would provide a new and mobile agricultural labour force, decisions had to be made regarding the women most eligible to provide this service. As the condition of mobility was of major importance, volunteers were enrolled who were able to offer themselves for 'service in any part of the country where they may be wanted.'³⁰ Recruits were placed in their home county wherever possible but were asked to move elsewhere if there was no available local employment. Furthermore, counties were instructed not to promise volunteers the possibility of working in a particular area or with a friend or relative.³¹ These requirements, therefore, lent themselves to the recruitment of a certain type of individual, i.e. one who had no dependants, whose general physical health was of a sufficiently high standard to cope with agricultural work and who was mature enough to undergo a possible move some distance from family and friends. The general view was that no volunteer under 18 years of age was old enough for mobile work although the minimum acceptance age was eventually reduced to 17 years.³²

It was advantageous for volunteers to have some experience of agricultural work, but this was not a condition of employment and there was 'no reason why urban workers should not apply for enrolment.'³³ However, the eligibility of

potential recruits with agricultural experience was subject to much discussion as it was considered more appropriate for women already employed in agriculture to remain in post rather than join the WLA. The debate commenced when Lady Denman suggested that the WLA had been embarrassed by the influx of applications from volunteers who, although not registered agricultural workers (having been employed on the land for six months or more³⁴), had been in agricultural employment for some time. Applications were also received from farmers' daughters who wished to join the WLA but wanted to work at home. Lady Denman felt that some applicants with agricultural experience wished to join the WLA to obtain a uniform and practical clothing in exchange for a limited number of coupons, having no intention of becoming mobile but hoping to remain in their present employment on a full-time basis.³⁵

Questions were asked in the House of Commons concerning the refusal to allow women with experience of agriculture to join the WLA and Mr RS Hudson, Minister of Agriculture, was asked to reconsider his decision. He felt unable to do so and indicated that the WLA was an additional force of mobile women workers whose conditions of employment, general welfare and accommodation were regulated by the state, whereas this was not the position with regular agricultural workers.³⁶ It was put to Mr Hudson that female agricultural workers who were denied the opportunity to join the WLA were often completely lost to farming communities as they tended to enter other forms of war work.³⁷

After much discussion it was established that women had to fulfil three general criteria to be eligible to join the WLA. Firstly, they should be aged between 17 and 40 years with a requirement to be mobile. Secondly, they should be in good physical health and be mentally mature. Thirdly, while experience of agricultural work was advantageous it was not a pre-requisite since the WLA was a new workforce, in fact women who had worked in agriculture for over six months were ineligible.

The major responsibility of the WLA county administration was to enrol appropriate recruits. Counties obtained information from four sources to enable them to ascertain the eligibility and suitability of potential recruits to join the WLA. These were forms of application, interviews, references and medical examinations.

2.4.1 Forms of application

Forms of application were available from post offices or labour exchanges. Applicants were required to supply their name, address, age, occupation and brief particulars of any agricultural experience or training. They could not be considered for service until application forms had been sent to the local employment exchange to ensure that they were not already registered in 'reserved occupations' which would have made them ineligible to join the WLA.³⁸ Application forms were then forwarded to WLA county offices from where local representatives arranged interviews.

2.4.2 Interviews

The MoLNS issued 'Notes for Ministry of Labour Interviewers' which included information to be passed to potential recruits on qualifications for enrolment and conditions of membership.³⁹ More detailed information was issued in WLA Organisational Leaflet III of March 1941, which indicated that a form should be completed by interviewers in order to assess each volunteer.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, no examples of these forms seem to have survived and it is difficult to draw conclusions on the process used to accept and reject volunteers.

Counties appear to have been at liberty to exercise some licence in the interview process but this did not always lead to consistency of approach. Whilst WLA Organisational Leaflet III stressed the importance of good interviewing by interviewers who were said to be 'carefully selected and fully instructed' it also mentioned that a preliminary interview could be conducted in the volunteer's home.⁴¹ The WRWLA Committee felt this was appropriate as much can be

learned of the girl's health record and normal environment and where it could be ascertained that volunteers had the permission of their parents to join and see first hand the cleanliness of the home.⁴² The WRWLA also requested interviewers to ascertain additional information such as the class of the volunteer, details of her education, whether she could drive a car or ride a bicycle and had lived or stayed in the countryside, whether she was frightened of animals and whether she might be needed at home at times of emergency. Furthermore, the WRWLA agreed that volunteers should be made aware that they would be expected to make their own beds, keep their rooms tidy, wash their own cups and saucers and be responsible for their personal laundry.⁴³ Perhaps more information on the nature of living and working conditions on private farms and in the employ of WAECs should also have been included. The North Riding WLA Committee reported that, 'despite careful interviewing', seven volunteers who had undertaken a course of training at Askham Bryan College or on farms had left after a few weeks' work on farms 'for the most trivial reasons.'⁴⁴

2.4.3 Medical suitability

Volunteers could not be placed in training before county offices had received medical certificates confirming their fitness for work.⁴⁵ Women with a poor physique or suffering from physical disability were not accepted even if they were able to produce a medical certificate of fitness. Medical certificates were regarded as a check on, and not as a substitute for, the interviewers' judgement, as the Yorkshire Central WLA Committee reported a number of 'dubious certificates [were] being received.'⁴⁶ The Chairman, Lady Graham, appended a note to each medical certificate sent to doctors asking for their co-operation in completing the forms appropriately,⁴⁷ as some of them appeared to feel that a spell in the WLA would 'build up' weaker girls.⁴⁸ WLA headquarters issued a circular on the subject noting that doctors should be made aware that potential WLA members should be

capable of undertaking a long week of arduous and sustained physical labour in all weathers. The certificate should not, therefore, be signed if there is anything in the applicant's present

condition of health ... which is likely to render her unfit for full time work on the land.⁴⁹

On receipt of a satisfactory medical certificate by their counties, recruits were presented with a WLA membership card, which it was considered would remind them of the obligations they had undertaken. However, the cards were discontinued in 1942 because this did not prove to be the case in practice. The wording was as follows:

You are now a member of the Women's Land Army,
 You are pledged to hold yourself available for
 service on the land for the period of the war.
 You have promised to abide by the conditions of
 training and employment of the Women's
 Land Army; its good name is in your hands.
 You have made the home fields your battlefield.
 Your country relies on your loyalty and welcomes
 your help.⁵⁰

2.4.4 References

Each volunteer was expected to provide names and addresses of two persons such as a doctor, clergyman, magistrate or previous employer who knew her personally and who could provide a character reference.

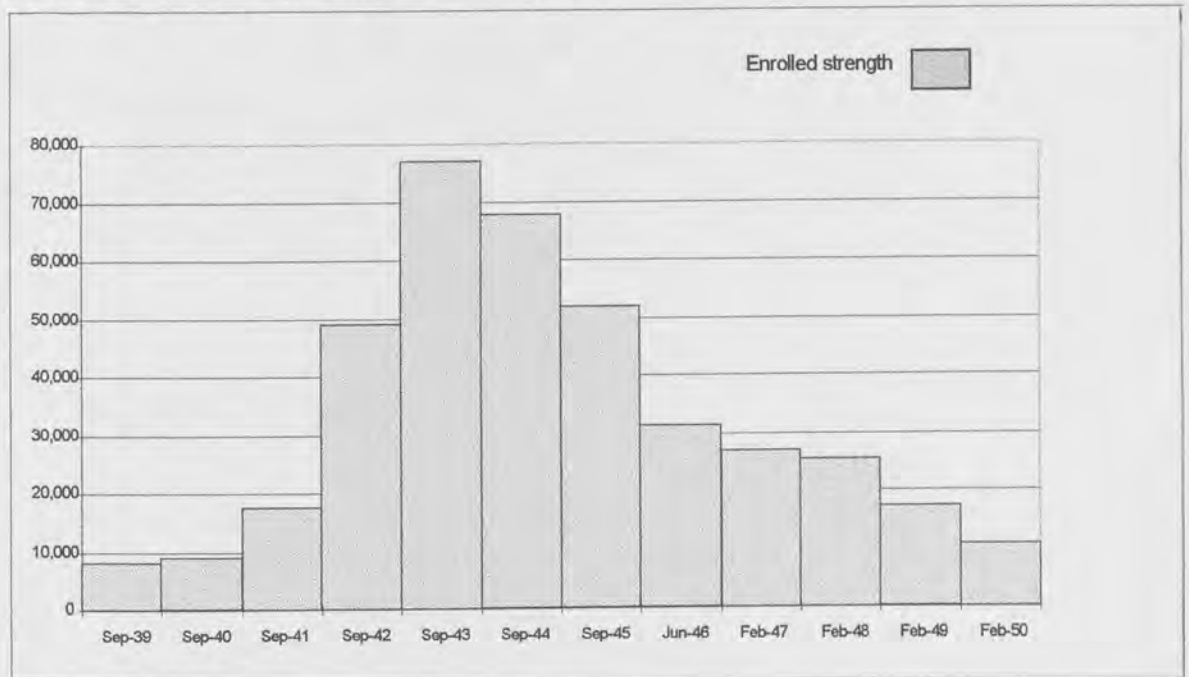
Little mention was made of the refereeing process in Yorkshire WLA County Committee minutes but the North Riding suggested that where committee members were undecided whether to accept a volunteer after interview, then two references should be obtained on 'capabilities and character.'⁵¹ The same committee also decided to obtain references 'for all volunteers not personally known to its members.'⁵² These two instances suggest that references were not obtained in every case and even though it was later decided that each volunteer should provide two references, it would appear that this policy was not strictly adhered to in the counties.

Although it might have been expected that the four elements of the application form, interview, medical and references might combine to provide a 'safety net' to ensure that ineligible or unsuitable volunteers were not recruited, there were occasions when the system was bypassed. The Labour Sub-committee of the WRWAEC reported a case which came to light where a recruit had enlisted in the WLA in 1946 indicating that her age was 18 years when she was, in fact, 16 years old. She gave her age incorrectly, as she was anxious to join the WLA.⁵³

3. Pattern of recruitment to the WLA

Whilst Figure 4 shows an apparently symmetrical pattern to the enrolled strength of the WLA (i.e. membership working on the land) it belies the uneven nature of recruitment.

Figure 4: Enrolled Strength 1939-1950



(Sources: 1939-1947 figures obtained from *The Land Girl*.
1948-1950 figures obtained from *PRO MAF 59/28 op. cit.* WLA Advisory Committee Meeting, 1.12.1949: Recommendations of working party on women's supplementary labour - enrolment strength of WLA).

Between 1939 and 1945 recruitment to the WLA was irregular due to the impact of the changing war situation on the nation's economy and manpower. This 'stop-start' characteristic commenced immediately upon the reintroduction of the WLA and can be traced to two main sources. Firstly, policy making in relation to the WLA was subject to intervention by various government departments, principally the MoLNS, as numerous industries and services were 'in competition' with the WLA for female labour. Secondly, the very nature of agricultural work, namely seasonal requirements and the initial reluctance of the agricultural community to employ WLA labour, meant that the engagement of labour was intermittent. Following the cessation of war, the nature of recruitment to the WLA altered yet again to meet the challenges presented by reconstruction.

3.1 The impact of governmental intervention on recruitment to the WLA 1939-1945

A meeting of Chairmen and Organising Secretaries of WLA County Committees held in London in June 1939 heard that the government had been concerned to keep financial expenditure to a minimum, confining it to 'essential forms of war preparation.'⁵⁴ Whilst increased food production was considered important, it was not expected to be in full swing when war was declared whereas defence and air raid precautions would be required immediately. The MAF was, therefore, criticised for its initial reluctance to recruit to the WLA in peacetime and for not taking the WLA as seriously as it might. However, the passing of the Military Training Act resulted in the Territorial Army doubling in size thereby reducing the number of men available for agricultural labour. This situation resulted in a change of heart by government concerning recruitment of female labour, as it now considered women could work on the land, particularly as tractor drivers. WLA County Committees, set up to begin recruitment, reported that some 8,000 women had already enrolled for the WLA with a view to commencing training.⁵⁵

The Select Committee on National Expenditure anticipated an influx of recruits to the WLA in 1940 as it indicated that the organisation was set up to

provide a labour force of around 50,000 within 12 months of the outbreak of full scale war.⁵⁶ However, as Figure 4 shows, this target was not reached until September 1942, partly due to the WLA being in competition with other services for female labour. For example, at the meeting of the Select Committee in January 1940, representatives from the Ministry of Health, the Air Ministry and War Office heard that 30,000 women were needed for nursing and domestic work in hospitals with a further 4,000 women needed to replace men in first aid posts and ambulance services. Furthermore, Ministers felt that on no account should ATS recruitment fall short of its proposed target and all possible steps should be taken to increase enlistment.⁵⁷

Concern was still being expressed regarding the level of the agricultural labour force in mid-1942 as the country approached one of its most crucial harvests. In the House of Commons the existing labour force was referred to as 'the old remnant of our permanent personnel in the industry, sadly depleted by voluntary enlistment and calling up' and a plea was made for an increase in the numbers employed by the WLA.⁵⁸ However, only two months later MoLNS was pressing for restrictions to be placed on recruitment owing to a substantial WLA labour reserve.⁵⁹ The situation changed again within a further two months, when it was intimated there would be a 'partial opening of recruitment' at which time county organising secretaries should take 'steps to stimulate recruitment'⁶⁰ due to the 'greatly diminished reserve and increased demand for volunteers suitable for more responsible kinds of employment.'⁶¹ This was followed in early 1943 by a suggestion from Lady Denman that the WLA was short of 4,000 workers as recruitment had not picked up following a stoppage imposed by MoLNS.⁶² As a result of various appeals, the rate of recruitment reached 1,000 per week in England and Wales⁶³ but *The Land Girl* reported in August 1943 that a decision had been made by the War Cabinet to close recruitment to the WLA until further notice although no specific reason was indicated.⁶⁴

This irregular recruitment pattern continued throughout the war years. On 30 July 1943 the employed strength of the WLA in England and Wales stood at

72,408⁶⁵ and instructions were received that this figure should not exceed 87,400 by December 1943.⁶⁶ However, MoLNS instructed that WLA recruitment should be suspended in September 1943⁶⁷ when enrolled strength stood at 76,961,⁶⁸ 'in order to meet the urgent needs of the aircraft industry.'⁶⁹ A similar situation occurred later in 1944 when a ceiling of 75,878 was set only to be rescinded in a letter to county chairmen and secretaries which stated that 'for various reasons, government has found it necessary to reduce the 1944 ceiling to 71,800.'⁷⁰ As the enrolled strength at the end of August was given as 71,731 it meant that for the remainder of the year the WLA could only recruit in order to replace wastage.⁷¹

The MoLNS exercised the greatest degree of influence upon recruitment policy of any ministry other than the MAF as it had an overview of the requirements of different industries. Unfortunately, the relationship between the two ministries proved somewhat uneasy. Correspondence in February and March 1943 suggests the WLA felt the MoLNS was giving 'low priority' to WLA recruitment. The evidence for this assertion was based upon letters of complaint from county organising secretaries to Mrs Jenkins concerning various labour exchanges. Accusations were made that interviewers were sometimes 'difficult over allowing - to say nothing of encouraging suitable women to opt for the Land Army.'⁷² The differences between the two ministries spilled over into the House of Commons where Sir Percy Hurd and Mr Bevin, Minister of Labour, disagreed not only with regard to directions the latter might have given to labour exchanges for recruitment to the WLA, but also on the amount of assistance MoLNS had afforded the agriculture industry generally.⁷³

3.2 The impact of agricultural conditions on recruitment to the WLA 1939-1945

A further complication in recruitment to the WLA concerned the seasonal nature of agricultural work. Whilst farmers had regularly employed full-time labour, they had also engaged additional temporary, local or itinerant workers at haytime and harvest. The problem facing the WLA was how to match available WLA labour to the requirements of the agricultural cycle. Its initial response was

to provide a pool of women recruited on a seasonal basis alongside the full-time mobile force. This arm of the WLA was known as the WLA Auxiliary Force and appears to have operated only in the summers of 1940, 1941 and 1942. Its success was dependent upon farmers guaranteeing employment and providing accommodation.⁷⁴

A recruitment pamphlet for the Auxiliary Force dated 5th March 1940 stated there was an urgent need for volunteers for short term seasonal work of four weeks or more continuous service on the land.⁷⁵ In 1941 and 1942 circulars were sent from WLA headquarters to county committees regarding the recruitment of women university students. Students were expected to provide their own working clothes and receive payment at the county rate. However, they experienced problems in obtaining accommodation which made it difficult for labour to be imported into country districts for short term work.⁷⁶ In view of this predicament, it was not deemed practical for the Auxiliary Force to continue, even though it might have been expected that the seasonal nature of agricultural work lent itself to the provision of such a force.

Difficulty was also experienced in providing the WLA's full-time mobile workforce with work for the entire year because of the agricultural cycle. Reserves of labour therefore formed at certain times of year when agricultural work was not so labour intensive. At such times it was necessary for the WLA to advise volunteers not to give up peacetime occupations for Land Army training, and to be prepared to wait a considerable time before their services were required.⁷⁷

On the reintroduction of the WLA in 1939, it was again necessary to convince some agriculturists that female labour was appropriate in the new wartime situation. Lady Denman wrote to WLA Organising Secretaries in October 1939 stating that despite the likelihood of a large number of male agricultural labourers being called up, it seemed that they would be replaced by unemployed men rather than by WLA labour. She urged counties to co-operate with WAECs and the NFU to make farmers aware of the WLA and suggested that articles and advertisements

be placed in local papers.⁷⁸ However, the situation underwent a marked change in early 1943 when the Minister of Agriculture, Mr RS Hudson, stated that ‘prejudice that had once existed [towards the WLA] has disappeared and that proof can be found in the fact that there are 6,000 vacancies today which we cannot fill and for which we want recruits.’⁷⁹

The change in the outlook of farmers towards recruiting WLA labour was due to a number of reasons. These included the need to adopt more labour-intensive farming methods, particularly in ploughing previously uncultivated land for arable crops, the compulsory call-up of male labour and the use of materials to publicise the WLA. The generally high standards of performance on the land by WLA labour also proved to agriculturists that it was, in fact, worthy of employment.

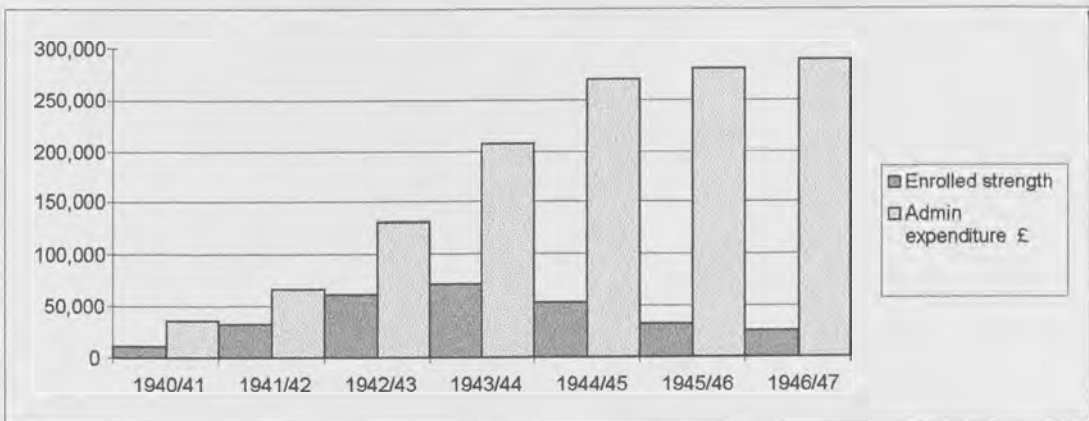
4. Reformulation of a recruitment policy: 1945-1950

Following the end of the war and the need to continue the production of home-grown food, debate ensued as to the future of the WLA. As the release of men from the services was not immediate, and the gradual withdrawal of PoW labour was envisaged, the WLA was an important source of agricultural labour. Mr Tom Williams, Minister of Agriculture, therefore announced in the House of Commons that a recruitment campaign for the WLA would commence in April 1946 at a cost of some £30,000.⁸⁰ However, many members of the WLA who had worked on the land felt they had ‘done their bit’ towards the war effort and, as Figure 4 shows, there was a substantial reduction in membership on the cessation of war. The Minister suggested this was mainly due to members ‘claiming release on fulfilment of the undertaking which they gave on enrolment to serve for the duration of the war.’⁸¹ It is also likely that many women chose this option in view of the lack of gratuity offered them by government (see Chapter Ten) and it was put to Mr Williams that the new recruiting campaign might not be successful ‘in view of the shameful treatment that has been meted out to them [the WLA] by the government both during and since the war.’⁸²

As an inducement to existing members to remain in the WLA, and to potential new recruits, consideration was given to improving conditions of service. However, the small concessions made, such as two additional travel vouchers, would have appeared ridiculous if used for publicity purposes.⁸³

The Minister stated that he expected the WLA to remain in existence until after the 1948 harvest although he was asked whether, in view of the spiralling cost of maintaining a reduced membership, it would be more prudent to disband the organisation immediately.⁸⁴ Figure 5 shows the increasing administrative expenditure set alongside the declining enrolled strength. This is explained by the withdrawal and resignation of county representatives who, like the membership working on the land, felt they had made their contribution to the nation, particularly since their work was voluntary and unpaid. This resulted in the decision to employ paid welfare officers (see Chapter Seven) thus increasing running costs.⁸⁵

Figure 5: Enrolled strength and administrative expenditure by financial year (1940-1947)

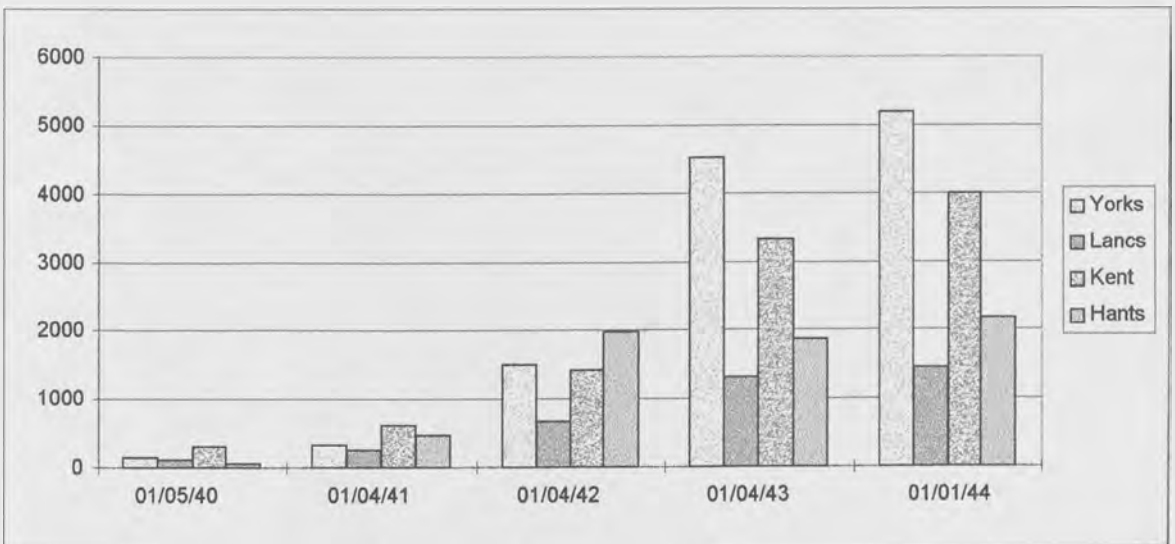


(Source: *MAF 59/11 Staff Files, 1942-47*. Table of enrolled strength and administrative expenditure by financial year [1940-1947]).

5. Implementation of recruitment policies

Figure 6 shows the enrolled strength of the WLA in selected counties between May 1940 and January 1944 compiled from statistics in *The Land Girl*. (Unfortunately the magazine does not provide information on a county basis beyond this date).

Figure 6: Enrolled strength in selected counties 1940-1944



(Source: *The Land Girl*, 1940-1944).

Figures 4 and 6 respectively show that enrolled strength peaked nationally in 1943 and locally in Yorkshire in 1944. In general, recruitment began slowly followed by a gradual increase in enrolled strength (with some exceptions at particular census dates. For example, Hampshire shows a slight dip in the number working in April 1943 compared with April 1942). Yorkshire had the most substantial increase in enrolled strength between 1940 and 1944 whereas Kent had a higher early recruitment figure, which was not maintained in terms of enrolled strength through to 1944.

From information given by the 34 respondents recruited to work in Craven, 22 enrolled in 1942, four in 1943, three in both 1941 and 1944 and one each in

1945 and 1946. The highest figure reflects the opening of hostels in the area in 1942, which is to be expected given the nature of the sample.

Miss Winifred Jacob Smith, County Organising Secretary, suggested that Yorkshire acquired many recruits from mills in Leeds and industrial works in Hull and Middlesbrough. As their numbers greatly exceeded the number of farmers in Yorkshire requiring their services, 100 recruits per week were exported to other areas.⁸⁶ It was also reported in August 1943 that 884 recruits had been exported⁸⁷ (the period over which this took place is not indicated), as Mr Bevin had emphasised that reserves of labour should not be held at county level but must be dealt with nationally⁸⁸ and the House of Commons was told that recruitment from 'industrial parts of the country' was 'being carefully watched.'⁸⁹ The situation reached serious proportions in Yorkshire, London, Middlesex and Essex, where large pools of surplus labour existed although the counties did not have a big placing demand themselves.⁹⁰ The MoLNS expressed particular concern at the high reserves of labour held in Yorkshire and Lancashire which were being absorbed at a slow rate.⁹¹ The Ministry felt this labour would be more useful in Lancashire munitions factories but did not enforce such a move as it was considered that once in the factories workers would be reluctant to return to join the WLA where wage rates were lower.⁹²

Thus, the impact of the MoLNS was not only evident at national level but also permeated through to individual counties where specific issues needed to be addressed. A further example of MoLNS intervention occurred in October 1942 when the Central Yorkshire WLA Committee received a report that Yorkshire had a waiting list of 1,312 volunteers and, in view of the large national WLA labour reserve, the MoLNS had restricted recruitment.⁹³ However, this was followed six weeks later by a note in the *Craven Herald* that Mr Hudson, Minister of Agriculture, indicated the need to double numbers working on the land which should 'lead to an extensive recruiting campaign in Yorkshire in the spring.'⁹⁴ By February 1943, the WLA was concerned that it may not be able to meet the needs of North Riding farmers who required a further 500 WLA recruits before 1 May

1943. As this was a rural area with no major towns, it was unable to provide such a large labour force from within its own boundaries and requested special dispensation to enrol in the WLA all women currently employed in agriculture including domestics.⁹⁵ This was counter to WLA policy which decreed that recruits already working in agriculture should not be enrolled.

Despite the falling WLA membership at the end of the war, the WRWAEC faced difficulties in placing remaining WLA labour, as some farmers preferred to employ PoWs. As a result, the WRWAEC Labour Sub-committee received a suggestion that PoW labour should be withdrawn to ensure full employment of the WLA.⁹⁶ In Yorkshire, recruitment to the WLA continued until the closure of the organisation although membership declined alongside the reduction in hostel accommodation throughout the area. By mid-1949 the Labour Sub-committee was required to give an undertaking that it would close hostels and reduce pool labour where possible. However, in view of the low numbers available for agricultural work, the committee found it necessary to employ 'mentally subnormal males' in the Goole area to fulfil its commitments. Farmers were said to have found 'this type of labour extremely satisfactory.'⁹⁷ Recruitment to the WLA ceased on 31 March 1950 with WLA county offices and labour exchanges being instructed to remove all posters and leaflets from public display.⁹⁸

6. Outcomes of recruitment policies

6.1 Did recruits prove to be a mobile labour force of women?

An assessment will be made as to whether respondents proved to be a mobile labour force of women, firstly by examining their place of origin (the location from which they joined the WLA) and their destination on posting and, secondly, by ascertaining whether they were mobile within the geographical area in which they worked.

Table 1 shows the origins and destinations of the 38 respondents from whom information was obtained, their destinations on first posting and any subsequent transfers.

Table 1: Origins and destinations of recruits

(* – destinations outside the Craven district)

Place of origin	Number recruited	Destination
Ackworth, Pontefract	1	Cappleside hostel, Rathmell; transferred to Skipton hostel
Barnsley	1	Skipton hostel
Batley	1	Skipton hostel
Bradford area:	(4)	
Bradford Moor	1	Skipton hostel
Eccleshill	1	Wetherby hostel*; transferred to Skipton hostel
Thackley	1	Skipton hostel; transferred to Bradford and lived at home*
Thornbury	1	Howden Hall hostel, Silsden; transferred to Skipton hostel
Doncaster	1	Settle hostel; transferred to Lakenheath hostel, Suffolk*
Halifax	1	Private farm Saxton, East Riding*; transferred to Skipton hostel; transferred to Howden Hall hostel, Silsden
Harrogate	1	Cappleside hostel, Rathmell; transferred to Settle hostel; transferred to Skipton hostel
Hebden Bridge	1	Wellingore hostel, Lincolnshire*; transferred to private farm, Goole*
Huddersfield area:	(6)	
Clayton West	2 (sisters)	Skipton hostel
Holmfirth	1	Skipton hostel
Huddersfield	1	Luckington hostel, Chippenham, Wiltshire*
Lockwood	1	Cappleside hostel, Rathmell; transferred to Settle hostel; transferred to Aylesbury and Stoke Mandeville hostels, Buckinghamshire*
Meltham	1	Skipton hostel
Ilkley area:	(3)	
Addingham	1	Skipton hostel; transferred to Settle hostel
Ilkley	1	Settle hostel; transferred to Skipton hostel; transferred to Holden Clough hostel, Bolton by Bowland
Langbar	1	Skipton hostel; transferred to Settle hostel
<i>Continued over</i>		

Keighley area:	(3)	
Haworth	1	Skipton hostel
Keighley	1	Skipton hostel; transferred to Corner House hostel, Gisburn
Oxenhope	1	Skipton hostel
Leeds	(3)	
	1	Skipton hostel; transferred to Settle hostel
	1	Skipton hostel; transferred to Settle hostel; transferred to private farm Settle area
	1	Skipton hostel
Linton, Grassington	1	Lodged with friend in Skipton
Pickering	1	Private farm Scotch Corner*; transferred to school for evacuated children, Pateley Bridge*, transferred to private farms Northallerton* and Weatherall*; transferred to hostel, Carlisle*.
Scunthorpe	1	Private farm Market Rasen*; transferred to private farm St Bees, Eskdale, Cumberland*
Sheffield	1	Women's Timber Corps Wetherby*; transferred to Harrogate WTC*; transferred to WLA near Clitheroe, Lancs*
Skipton	(5)	
	1	Estate cottage Parceval Hall; transferred to WRWAEC employment and lived at home in Skipton
	1	Settle hostel; transferred to live at home in Skipton
	3	Lived at home in Skipton
Wakefield	(3)	
	1	Howden Hall hostel, Silsden; transferred to Settle hostel
	1	Howden Hall hostel, Silsden; transferred to Skipton hostel
	1	Howden Hall hostel, Silsden; transferred to Gisburn hostel; transferred to Skipton hostel
TOTAL	38	

Of the 38 respondents providing data for this study, 36 originated from within the West Riding boundary, the principal industrial catchment areas being Huddersfield (five), Bradford (four), Wakefield (three) and Leeds (three). This was reinforced by Miss Pam Preston, Skipton area WLA representative, who was reported in the *Craven Herald* as stating that 'we have quite a number in the district from Bradford, Leeds, Huddersfield, Keighley and other industrial centres - and they are absolutely new to farming. Yet the percentage of girls who do not settle down to wartime work on the land is remarkably low.'⁹⁹ Local communities also

provided recruits with the majority coming from Skipton (five) with a further three from both the Ilkley and Keighley areas.

An investigation of the locations of employment of the 38 respondents working in the WLA showed that 28 worked solely in the Craven district, five worked in Craven and in other areas and five worked solely in other areas. Seven of the 10 who worked beyond the Craven district worked outside the county of Yorkshire in areas ranging from Cumberland to Wiltshire.

It therefore appears from this evidence that while the requirement was to provide a labour force prepared to work anywhere in the country, the WRWLA did not send young women long distances from home unnecessarily. Several recruits who originated from Skipton were, therefore, able to live at home and travel to work at outlying farms with work-mates accommodated at Skipton hostel. Whilst local recruits were generally happy to be located relatively near their families, as they were often allowed home at weekends, some would have preferred a move further afield. For example, Laura, from Keighley, applied to work in Arundel, Sussex, but was sent only as far as Skipton and Gisburn,¹⁰⁰ while Edie, from Leeds, requested work on a fruit farm in warm weather in the south but found herself in the Skipton and Settle areas. However, Table 1 shows that two respondents were 'exported' from the West Riding to rural areas, presumably at a time when local vacancies were unavailable. Rosie, from Huddersfield, had applied to join the WLA following the example of a friend, Florence, but unlike Florence, who was posted to Cappleside hostel at Rathmell, near Settle, Rosie was sent to a hostel at Luckington, near Chippenham, Wiltshire. Similarly, Peggy was sent from Hebden Bridge in the West Riding to a hostel at Wellingore, Lincolnshire.

The need for mobility was, in fact, far greater than merely the distance between place of origin and location of billet. Whilst Table 1 reveals that several recruits made transfers both within and outside the Craven area, it does not indicate the full extent of mobility in work on a daily basis. As Chapter Eight (Policies on Training and Work) will indicate, recruits billeted in hostels were transported to

various depots from where they were allocated to farms to carry out specific tasks. For example, Elizabeth worked out of Linton depot, which covered an area including Buckden, Kettlewell, Grassington, Bolton Abbey and Barden and she worked in every village between Hubberholme and Ilkley during her five years of service. Irene and Daphne, who were billeted at Skipton hostel, recall catching the 7.30am Pennine bus from Skipton to Gargrave depot from where a van collected them to transport them to outlying farms. However, as Millie commented, it was sometimes as late as 11am before she started work because of the distances involved in travelling from Skipton depot to her place of work and perhaps this was one disadvantage associated with the mobility issue. Women working from Settle travelled to Bentham in the north (a distance of approximately 12 miles) and regularly worked on farms around Ingleton, Clapham, Austwick, Otterburn, Wigglesworth, Hellifield, Stainforth and Malham. Poor road conditions and modes of transport also added to journey times. Hazel Driver recalled that

some farms were so far away from a road, let alone a bus route, that the only way to get there was by the War Ag's [WRWAEC's] own transport. At Steeton we had an old van that did service as a personnel carrier ... we would pile into it and, with Frank at the wheel, be taken and dropped off, one by one, at the nearest point to the farm where we were working. It was a hair-raising experience. Frank had a warped sense of humour, taking a delight in braking suddenly on a hill and sending us sliding helplessly along the wooden benches down each side of the van.¹⁰¹

Linda remembered being conveyed to work by the WRWAEC in the Settle area in a van so decrepit that workers had to disembark at the bottom of some steep hills while the van was driven to the top. They then had to walk up the hill and regain their seats, which was not an entirely appropriate preparation for the day's work ahead. In the same area Florence recalled feeling 'absolutely frozen' when transported to work in an old bus with only canvas covering some windows.

Mobility in the workplace also extended to recruits being employed by different WAECs. This was sometimes through personal choice if an individual wanted to work in a different environment, and occasionally due to WLA

organisational changes. For example, Hazel Driver began her WLA service on a private arable farm at Saxton in the East Riding which she recalls as being a valuable experience. However, she became lonely on the isolated farm and made a request to the regional WLA in Harrogate for a transfer, being posted to the WRWAEC in Skipton to take up tractor driving.¹⁰² Florence and Jessie were both at Settle hostel in 1947 when closure was imminent. Neither wanted to leave the WLA at that stage so Florence made a request for transfer to Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, where she had relatives and was posted to a hostel there. Jessie transferred from Settle to Skipton and then to Lakenheath in Suffolk as she ‘thought it would be a bit of fun.’

Table 1 indicates that recruits in areas other than Craven were also mobile. For example, Libby from Sheffield, joined the Women's Timber Corps (an offshoot of the WLA under the remit of the Ministry of Supply) in 1942 and was sent to Wetherby. She trained at Bramham Woods, transferring to High Birstwith, near Harrogate, where she was billeted on a small private farm, cycling to work in the surrounding area. She left Harrogate in 1944 to work in the Women's Timber Corps in the Clitheroe area but due to the organisation winding down in 1945, transferred to the WRWAEC and became a tractor driver.

From the evidence presented, it appears that the WLA did indeed operate as a mobile force as intended by policy makers with recruits making themselves available for transfer away from their home environments. In Craven, the WLA was also mobile in the work environment, as farms were widespread across the district. The requirement for mobility was, therefore, fulfilled in a manner not directly envisaged by the MAF and WLA policy makers. Travelling around the widespread farms made the work so much more difficult for recruits to undertake.

6.2 Did recruits form a *new* labour force of women to work on the land?

Table 2 has been compiled to show the occupations of the 38 respondents prior to joining the WLA. Other than those who lived in a farming or rural

community, such as Jane from Langbar, near Ilkley, the majority appear to have been unaware of the nature and requirements of agricultural employment. The most common occupations occur under the headings of ‘office work’, ‘shop work’ and ‘sewing’ although a variety of tasks were undertaken within these categories at several different companies. None of the jobs appear to have equipped potential WLA recruits with appropriate agricultural experience although Miss Jacob Smith was of the view that hairdressers often made good agricultural workers because they were used to standing all day¹⁰³ (and presumably the same might be said of shop assistants).

Table 2: Occupations of recruits prior to joining the WLA

Occupation prior to joining	Numbers
Office work: includes book-keeping, shorthand/typewriting, clerical work in companies such as Halifax Building Society, British Rail, Wool Control, Ministry of Supply	10
Shop work: includes shop assistant in a variety of shops, e.g. grocers, confectioners, jewellers and silversmiths	8
Sewing: includes dress-making, shroud-making, tailoring, burling and mending.	8
Factory work: includes glass packing, weaving	2
Other:	
Companion-help/private service	2
Bus conductress	1
Hairdresser	1
Munitions worker	1
Waitress	1
Not known	3
Total	38

It is, therefore, apparent that this relatively small sample fulfilled the criterion of being a labour force new to agriculture. It appears to have had a different class base from its World War I counterpart, which actively sought recruits with a private income and/or university education.

6.3 Did experiences of the recruitment process comply with WLA policies?

In order to consider further the outcomes of WLA recruitment policy, information was obtained from respondents concerning their experiences of the recruitment process to ascertain whether these were in accord with the various instructions passed from WLA headquarters and the MoLNS to the counties. It is evident, and no doubt inevitable, that recollections of joining the WLA are less detailed than those relating to issues such as accommodation and work undertaken. This is likely to be due to the fact that the former consisted of single occurrences such as interviews and attending medical examinations, which were less memorable occasions than those of living and working over a period of several months. Moreover, it would not appear that records of the recruitment process have survived within the West Riding so that more detailed information cannot be obtained. Only an incomplete index card system is held by the MAF, from which it is possible to verify some occupational data and dates of joining and leaving the service. However, the information gleaned from respondents is consistent with that provided by Mant in *All Muck, No Medals*.¹⁰⁴

6.3.1 Interviews

Of the 38 respondents providing information for this study, 24 recalled being interviewed on applying to join the WLA, seven did not have an interview although two recalled completing application forms, one could not remember whether she was interviewed and six did not provide this information. Few respondents remembered completing application forms.

Florence wrote to the WLA County Office in Leeds expressing an interest in joining the WLA. She received a response stating that at that time the WLA 'was full' but wrote a second time and was directed to her local recruiting office in Huddersfield for interview. She knew she had been accepted as she was immediately measured for her uniform. Other recruits also recollect attending local WLA recruiting offices in Halifax, Bradford and Leeds. Ginny remembered being asked about her interests and felt that she was accepted partly because she enjoyed outdoor pursuits such as cycling and walking. Maggie was asked if she knew anyone who farmed for a living and although she had family who farmed in Scotland she admitted she knew little about it. She did, however 'have a cousin interested in poultry and was offered that.' Jane was one recruit who was interviewed at home, possibly because her family farmed (although her own occupation was that of dressmaker) and, as suggested by the WRWLA Committee, it afforded the local representative the opportunity to assess whether Jane would settle into WLA life. On this basis it would also have been appropriate for recruits from urban areas to be interviewed in the home though it is unlikely this would have been feasible in terms of time available. In fact, Joy completed application forms but was not interviewed at all because she felt that in 1942 'they were jolly glad to get you because it released the men.'

The time involved in the interviewing process was commented upon by Mrs Inez Jenkins, Deputy Director, when she pointed out to the MoLNS that on average only one in four applicants was acceptable so that to secure 15,000 satisfactory volunteers, 60,000 persons would have to be interviewed.¹⁰⁵

6.3.2 Medical certificates

A satisfactory medical certificate was expected to contribute to the selection process but could be over-ridden by interviewers where it was apparent that potential recruits were unsuitable for agricultural work. This was noted by Ginny when her interviewer (Mrs Tetley) left her to speak to a colleague. On Mrs Tetley's return Ginny was told that 'one pale looking little weak thing' had been advised by

her doctor to join the WLA 'to build her up' as she was asthmatic. Mrs Tetley complained at the apparent lack of understanding held by some doctors in proffering this advice when the work was so physically demanding. On the other hand, Jane had suffered from childhood chest infections and within weeks of joining the WLA was returned home by ambulance suffering with bronchitis. The illness did not in fact, recur until 1951, some four years after Jane left the WLA, which is rather surprising given the type of work carried out in the dusty conditions caused by threshing. However, she was informed that if she had been given a thorough medical by her own doctor it was unlikely she would have been passed medically fit to join the WLA. In the event, the doctor had merely said: "Oh, you are all right - get off." Similarly, Hazel Driver suffered from a congenital hip disorder which she felt a full medical would have uncovered. She managed to obtain a medical certificate from a doctor who was not aware of her history and she gave two years' service to the WLA. Another respondent with an unusual medical history was Peggy who was born blind in one eye but passed her medical because her doctor said she had exceptional sight in the other eye to compensate.

Whilst these examples show that it was possible to make a major contribution in the WLA with certain physical disabilities, it also indicates that the WLA was correct in expressing concern at some recruits with health problems being passed medically fit by their doctors. This concern could apply equally to the ability of recruits to cope with agricultural work and also to the possibility of any physical disability contributing to accidents - although there is no evidence to suggest that this was the case.

6.3.3 References

This aspect of the recruitment process produced very little information from respondents and, in fact, only two former recruits recalled that vicars from their local churches provided references on their behalf. Few conclusions can be drawn as to whether the WLA succeeded or failed in this particular area and it may be that this aspect was merely a victim of uncertain memory on the part of respondents.

6.3.4 Age of recruits

Whilst the MAF instructed that the age of recruits should be restricted to 17 - 40 years, the age of the youngest respondent was 16 on joining the WLA. Maggie said she chose the WLA because she was eligible to enrol at 16 whereas other services required a volunteer to be 17 or 18 years old. It would appear that an error may have occurred in this particular case or that some counties 'bent the rules' to obtain recruits. The age of the oldest volunteer in the sample was 30 years at the time of joining and the average age of joining of those who gave information (35 of the 38 respondents) was 19 years and six months. Neither county nor national average ages of new recruits on joining the WLA are known, due to the unavailability of records.

6.4 How and why did recruits choose the WLA in preference to other forms of war service?

One item which does not appear to have been included in application forms and interview schedules but which must have been a consideration of some importance is the reasons women were attracted to the WLA in preference to other forms of war service. On attaining the age of 18 years women were directed to join the WRNS, WAAF, ATS, WLA or munitions industries and many potential recruits wished to volunteer for the service of their choice rather than being compulsorily directed to work in a service to which they did not aspire. In reaching their decisions, respondents appear to have been influenced by three major factors, namely, the wishes of their parents, their preference for outdoor life and avoidance of the forces/munitions industries.

6.4.1 Preference for outdoor life and avoidance of the forces/munitions industries

As indicated in Table 2 the previous occupations of respondents were restricted to indoor work and it was the prospect of working outdoors in beautiful scenery which drew some women to the WLA in preference to the forces or

industry. For example, Ann was attracted by WLA publicity. She felt it was ‘a more healthy sort of life. I went for the brochure because it was beautiful, the sun was shining and everyone looked lovely. Mum said, “It’s not like that but I’m not going to stop you.”’ Hazel Driver wanted to join the WLA because of her long-standing love of the countryside, although she did have a realistic outlook appreciating ‘that a sentimental approach was of little value.’¹⁰⁶ Peggy ‘wanted the land and never considered the Army or Air Force because I didn’t want regimentation.’ Some WLA volunteers had already experienced limited involvement with the forces which influenced their views of what life would be like if they joined on a more permanent basis. Dorothy decided on the WLA because she ‘had been in the Junior Air Corps, which really put me off - we did a lot of marching and polishing and I wouldn’t want to do that all the time.’ Doris had initially been interested in the ATS because it had a considerable presence in her home town of Bradford but decided against joining because her peers had ended up in the Pay Corps and she felt this would not be very interesting. Her Guide instructor recommended the WLA as offering the challenge she was seeking. Whilst Gloria did not want to join the forces because she ‘didn’t want to salute people’, she was also unhappy at the prospect of working in munitions, having ‘seen those from the powder room with yellow skin and didn’t fancy that.’ Meriel joined the WLA after working in the Royal Ordnance Factory at Steeton, being able to transfer out of one reserved occupation into another because of the effect munitions work had on her health. Joy was one volunteer who saw the WLA as a pacifist occupation. She did not want to remain at home ‘but didn’t believe in military things like the Army so thought this [the WLA] was something I could do.’

6.4.2 Parental influence

Some recruits would have preferred to join the WRNS or WAAF rather than the WLA as the former were seen as the elite services. However, parental consent was required to join up and most young women were not prepared to rebel against their parents if they were opposed to them joining the services. Rosie would have liked to join the WRNS but her parents were not in favour. They felt that

munitions and the forces were seen as daring and she 'didn't really have a say' in the outcome. Similarly, Constance had wanted to follow a friend's example by joining the WAAF but her cousin's view that the WAAF were 'just playthings for pilots' set the seal on her parents' refusal to allow her to join this service and she chose the WLA instead. Nor did Nancy's parents want her to join the forces, as they did not like the prospect of her being 'with all those rough men.' Rosie thought her father was very protective since he would not allow her to join the forces and she became tired of not being allowed any freedom. However, he permitted her to join the WLA as her friend, Florence, had done so but Rosie was posted from Yorkshire to Wiltshire and had to adjust to her new-found freedom, travelling on the train for the first time on her own at the age of 18. Sisters Millie and Jean both joined the WLA because their mother preferred them to be together on a farm rather than joining the services where her two brothers had been killed in action.

7. Summary and conclusion

This chapter has shown that the MAF and the WLA defined a specific policy objective for recruitment, i.e. the provision of a new and mobile labour force of women to work in agriculture to assist in the production of home-grown food. Whilst this objective was evident throughout the lifetime of the WLA, three periods have been identified when recruitment policy underwent reformulation. Firstly, between 1917 and 1919 when policy was established and decisions made on the type of recruits most eligible to undertake the work required. Secondly, between 1939 and 1945 when recruitment policy was re-established, initially being driven by earlier experiences, and then developing to meet the new challenges presented by World War II. The process of recruitment during this stage was particularly complex due to other wartime services requiring female labour and the government had to perform a balancing act to ensure labour was distributed between the various services at appropriate times. This resulted in intervention by the MoLNS, which instructed the MAF to periodically suspend WLA recruitment and also limited numbers to be enrolled at other times. The seasonal nature of agricultural work,

and some reluctance by the farming community to employ WLA labour, also affected the situation causing an irregular pattern of recruitment throughout the entire period. Thirdly, between 1945 and 1950 the nature of recruitment was again affected, this time by post-war reconstruction and the need to retain a WLA when many of its members who had served during the war wished to return to their homes. Thus, while the objective of recruitment policy did not waver, the nature of recruitment policy was subject to continuous change.

Recruitment policies were implemented through the county WLA structure, which was subject to intervention from government and WLA headquarters. The counties had also to adapt to conditions specific to their own localities in relation to enrolment of WLA recruits and the vagaries of the farming community.

Membership of the WLA was restricted to educated middle class women between 1917 and 1919 whereas women who worked on the land between 1939 and 1950 were enrolled from a variety of backgrounds. Appropriate volunteers were recruited although there appears to have been some inconsistency in adhering to the stringent eligibility requirements. However, the outcomes measured by the data supplied in Tables 1 and 2 suggest that recruitment policies in the West Riding and Craven were successful in that a new and mobile labour force was provided.

References

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- ² Twinch, *op.cit.* p.32.
- ³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴ *PRO NATS 1/1308 op. cit.* Letter from General Secretary, National Service Department to Secretaries, National Service Committees, 20.4.1917.
- ⁵ *PRO NATS 1/1308 op. cit.* Letter from General Secretary, National Service Committee to Secretaries, Local National Service Committees, 26.6.1917.
- ⁶ Quoted in Twinch, *op. cit.* p.29.
- ⁷ Dewey, *op. cit.* p.115.
- ⁸ Enrolled strength peaked at 16,000 in September 1918 (Dewey, *op. cit.* p.115) although Sackville-West suggests a figure as high as 23,000 (Sackville-West, *op. cit.* p.9).
- ⁹ *PRO MAF 59/4 op. cit.* MAF Explanatory Note on WLA, February 1939.

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- 38 *PRO MAF 59/4 op. cit.* WLA Organisational Leaflet III, March 1941.
- 39 *PRO MAF 59/5 op. cit.* Notes for Ministry of Labour Interviewers, 1943.
- 40 *PRO MAF 59/4 op. cit.* WLA Organisational Leaflet III, March 1941.
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 West Riding WLA Committee minutes, 1.11.1940.
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- 44 WLA Yorkshire Committee minutes, 20.3.40.
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- 46 *Ibid.*
- 47 Yorkshire Central WLA Committee minutes, 29.1.1943.
- 48 Interview with Ginny, 14.11.96.
- 49 *PRO MAF 59/15 Instructions issued to County Committees, 1939-44.*

- WLA circular 140 of 22.1.1943.
 50 Extract from copies of membership cards supplied to researcher by Ann, Kate and Doris.
- 51 WLA Yorkshire Committee, minutes 14.9.1939.
 52 *Ibid.*, 18.1.1940.
 53 WRWAECLabour Sub-committee minutes, 9.10.1947.
 54 *PRO MAF 59/7 op. cit.* Notes of proceedings of Conference of Chairmen and Organising Secretaries of WLA County Committees 1.6.1939.
 55 *Ibid.*
 56 *PRO MAF 59/20 op. cit.* Select Committee on National Expenditure, Sub-committee on Trade, Agriculture and Economic Warfare, 23.1.1940.
 57 *PRO MAF 59/4 op. cit.* Minutes of the Standing Interdepartmental Committee to Correlate Requirements for Women of the Services and Industry, 28.8.1941.
 58 *Hansard, op. cit.* Vol.382, Col.374. Debate 28.7.42.
 59 *PRO MAF 59/5, op. cit.* WLA circulars 123 of 18.9.1942 and 132 of 27.11.1942.
 60 *Ibid.* WLA circular 139 of 19.1.1943
 61 *Ibid.* MoLNS circular 136/92 of 6.1.1943.
 62 *Ibid.* Note of a discussion between Lady Denman, Minister of Agriculture, Mr JA Sutherland-Harris and Mr HJ Johns, 3.2.1943
 63 *Ibid.* WLA circular 146 of 16.3.1943.
 64 *The Land Girl*, Vol.4, No.8, 1943, p.6.
 65 *The Land Girl*, Vol.4, No.5, 1943, p.6.
 66 *PRO MAF 59/5 op. cit.* MAF Manpower Division note 10.7.1943.
 67 *Ibid.* MoLNS minute 17.9.1943.
 68 *Ibid.*
 69 *Hansard, op. cit.* Vol.392, Col.419. Written answers 23.9.43.
 70 *PRO MAF 59/6 Enrolment of Volunteers 1944-50.* Letter from WLA headquarters to County Chairmen and Secretaries, 25.9.1944.
 71 *Ibid.*
 72 *PRO MAF 59/5 op. cit.* Letter from Mr HJ Johns to Mr DF MacDonald, MoLNS, 25.2.1943.
 73 *Hansard, op. cit.* Vol.386, Col.1955. Written answers 18.2.1943.
 74 *PRO MAF 59/14 Reports of Conferences 1939-42.* Letter from Mr JA Sutherland Harris to Mr HJ Johns, 2.12.1939.
 75 *Ibid.* Auxiliary force recruitment pamphlet, 5.3.1940
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 77 *PRO MAF 59/20 op. cit.* Select Committee on National Expenditure, Sub-committee on Trade, Agriculture and Economic Warfare, Statement of points, 23.1.1940.
 78 *PRO MAF 59/4 op. cit.* Letter from Lady Denman to WLA Organising Secretaries 2.10.1939.
 79 *Hansard, op. cit.* Vol.386, Col.1938. Oral answers, 18.2.1943.
 80 *Ibid.* Vol. 420, Col.769. Oral answers, 11.3.1946.
 81 *Ibid.*
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 87 Women in Agriculture. Report on Women's Supplementary Labour,
 88 December 1947.
 89 IWM Sound Archive, Miss W Jacob Smith, *op. cit.*
 90 WRWAEC minutes, 19.8.1943.
 91 *Hansard, op. cit.* Vol.387, Col.386/387. Oral answers, 11.3.1943.
 92 *Ibid.* Vol.386, Col.1938. Oral answers, 18.2.1943.
 93 *PRO MAF 59/5 op. cit.* Letter from Mrs I Jenkins to Mr WC Tame
 94 16.7.1942.
 95 *Ibid.* Report of Meeting on Woman Labour for Agriculture, 28.10.1942.
 96 *Ibid.*
 97 WLA Yorkshire Committee minutes, 30.10.1942.
 98 *Craven Herald*, 18.12.1942, p.2.
 99 *PRO MAF 59/5 op. cit.* Letter from North Riding WAEC to Secretary, MAF,
 100 15.2.1943.
 101 WRWAEC Labour Sub-committee minutes, 25.4.1946.
 102 WRWAEC Labour Sub-committee minutes, 21.7.1949 and 4.8.1949.
 103 *PRO MAF 59/6 op. cit.* WLA circular of 1.3.1950.
 104 *Craven Herald*, 14.5.1943, p.4.
 105 As indicated in 'Notes on Style, on page vi, where data is presented on the
 106 experiences of individual recruits who are referred to in the text under their
 pseudonyms, references will not be cited again in the reference sections at the
 end of each chapter. Details of interview dates and biographies of recruits
 providing information for this research can be found in Appendix II.
 101 Hazel Driver, 'Women on the Land', *Dalesman*, Vol.37, No.5, 1974, p.376.
 102 Hazel Driver, 'Land Army Girls', *Dalesman*, Vol.37, No.6, 1974, p.442.
 103 IWM Sound Archive, Miss W Jacob Smith, *op. cit.*
 104 Mant, *op. cit.* p.23 *et seq.*
 105 *PRO MAF 59/5 op. cit.* Letter from Mrs I Jenkins to Miss Stopford, MoLNS,
 20.12.1941.
 106 Hazel Driver, 'Land girl in Yorkshire', *Dalesman*, Vol.36, No.6, p.442.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ACCOMMODATION AND WELFARE POLICIES IN THE WOMEN'S LAND ARMY

This chapter will consider accommodation and welfare policies *in tandem* as the two areas were frequently inter-related, the type of billet to which a recruit was allocated often determining the quality of welfare provision received.

The process of policy formulation at government level and the nature of implementation at county level will be examined. An assessment of the outcomes will also be made by examining the experiences of women living in different types of accommodation. In addition, the WLA attempted to address the welfare of its recruits in spheres other than accommodation and some of these areas will also be examined.

1. Accommodation policy

1.1 Formulation of accommodation policy

A publicity leaflet issued by the WLA¹ shows that recruits could be allocated to one of three categories of accommodation: farms, billets and hostels. Although the leaflet is undated, it is likely to have been issued at least two years into the operation of the WLA as hostel accommodation is mentioned. In 1939 attempts were made by the WLA to find accommodation on farms which the leaflet describes as being in 'a family atmosphere as a general rule.' Billets, such as a spare room in a village house, were also offered. The leaflet includes comments on different types of accommodation, for example, 'billets are chosen carefully, and, on the whole are very popular. For some women they best satisfy the desire to "call your life your own" when the day's work is done,' and hostels were said to offer a 'friendly community life.'² Hostels were purpose-built or requisitioned premises and began to appear in 1941 when it became apparent that farms and billets did not necessarily live up to the expectations indicated in the leaflet.

Accommodation first became an issue during World War I when, in 1918, Miss Meriel Talbot, Director of the Women's Branch of the Food Production Department at the BoA, drew to the attention of the Board the need for hostel accommodation in addition to billeting on private farms.³ She suggested that more accommodation was

required to cope with the then 7,000 WLA membership (which it was envisaged would increase to some 12,000). Miss Talbot reported the 'urgent necessity for adequate supervision and control over the women working on farms as members of the Land Army'⁴ as farmers had complained that neither they nor the government were able to exercise control over the women. It is difficult to imagine how much havoc could have been caused by women located singly or in twos and threes on isolated farms in rural areas. Nevertheless, there was cause for concern in that 'reports of bad behaviour are becoming more frequent and we are seriously alarmed that at any moment some scandal about the Land Army may break out and the Department be blamed for its inadequate supervision.'⁵ Mention was also made that recruits themselves had complained that they did not receive any care or assistance.

Miss Talbot therefore put forward hostel accommodation as the answer to an increased WLA membership which was perceived as beginning to pose problems of control. It was envisaged that hostels would satisfy both the farming community and the WLA. The intention was to set up hostels wherever possible to feed several farms, provide transport for labour in the same way as that provided for PoW labour and appoint a Land Army Controller, paid by the government, at certain hostels which were designated 'centres of influence.'⁶ In addition, by July 1918, Miss Talbot was able to advise Women's War Agricultural Committees that the appointment of women officers with specific responsibility for the welfare of recruits had been authorised.⁵

However, the call for hostel accommodation in 1918 came too late for women recruited to the WLA during World War I as the organisation disbanded in 1919. When the WLA was reintroduced in June 1939, women were again placed on private farms as no hostel accommodation existed. Once more there was reluctance on the part of many farmers at having to train, employ and accommodate female labour, which, as has already been indicated, was deemed inferior to male labour. The issue was raised in the House of Commons when the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries was asked about arrangements being made in rural areas for women land workers in emergency situations. The response was merely that in the event of war, WLA Committees should be responsible for local accommodation arrangements for their members and local authorities should bear this in mind when preparing plans for

evacuation into rural areas. The questioner was advised that the MAF and the Ministry of Health were considering whether any further steps were necessary or desirable.⁷

Craven farmers spoke out against accommodating the WLA on their own farms. Although they felt the WLA could be of value, they did not consider that farmers should be expected to employ girls and house them. They echoed Meriel Talbot's view, expressed some 20 years earlier, in suggesting that suitably managed hostels should be provided from which recruits could travel out to farms each day.⁸

The national and local debates prompted Sir Donald Fergusson, the MAF Permanent Secretary, to emphasise to WAECs that the need for increased food production should not be jeopardised by lack of accommodation for agricultural workers. He urged committees 'to put personal pressure on farmers ... to provide accommodation in their own farm house.'⁹ Despite these pleas, the *Craven Herald* reported some two years after the inception of the WLA that only 230 recruits were employed on farms in the West Riding due to the housing shortage.¹⁰

The need for hostel accommodation became increasingly important, therefore, but its provision was problematic. Much correspondence was entered into between the MAF and the Ministries of Works and Supply as to which of them was responsible for acquiring accommodation. This resulted in Mr Sutherland Harris, WLA Chief Administrative Officer, suggesting that the Ministry of Health should take over the whole affair¹¹ and the following responsibilities were eventually decided upon. The Ministry of Works would take on the building and maintenance of (new) hutment hostels; WAECs or the WLA would be responsible for the adaptation of requisitioned premises; WAECs and the WLA would work in close co-operation on issues concerned with work, living conditions and welfare and the YWCA or WLA would oversee the running of hostels.¹²

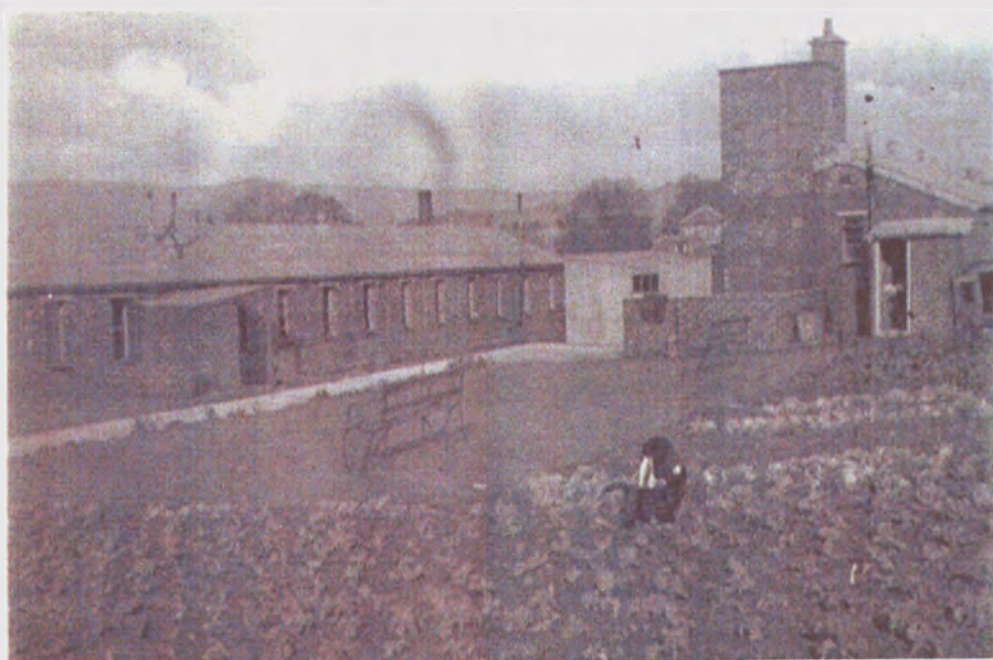
1.2 Implementation of accommodation policy

In view of the relatively few WLA recruits employed in the West Riding up to mid-1941, the Minister of Agriculture wrote to the WRWAEC in May of that year

stressing the need to increase the number of WLA workers and to provide accommodation. District Committees were, therefore, asked what accommodation could be provided locally by farmers, in empty houses or other suitable premises in the district, or in hutments to be erected if other accommodation could not be secured.¹³

The *Craven Herald* reported in August 1941 that sites had been selected for the construction of purpose-built hostels for women land workers in Settle and Skipton.¹⁴ Photograph 3 shows the finished article in Skipton.

Photograph 3: The purpose-built hostel at Skipton (c. 1944)



(Source: Gloria 18.5.1996)

These hostels were mass-produced in one design to speed up construction. They consisted of a single storey of three blocks containing a partitioned dormitory of two-tier bunks, ablutions comprising sanitary accommodation, baths, wash basins, a linen room and a drying room. In addition there was a welfare block containing a dining room and recreation room, kitchens, larder, sick bay and warden's living quarters. Heating was by slow combustion stoves. All furniture was supplied including rugs, kit boxes, chairs, tables, cupboards, sideboards, bookcases, mirrors, bedding, kitchen equipment, cutlery, crockery and cleaning materials.¹⁵

Suitable premises in the area were also being requisitioned for conversion to hostel accommodation and the WRWAEC urged the Ministries of Works and Supply to expedite work to make premises ready for occupation by the WLA as early as possible.¹⁶ These included the requisitioning of a private house at Cattleside, Rathmell, near Settle, a former nursing home at Holden Clough near Slaidburn and the Corner House Cafe near Gisburn, each of which accommodated 40 recruits¹⁷ (although according to interviews with recruits accommodated at Cattleside, the capacity there was between 16 and 20). Miss Pam Preston, West Riding WLA local representative, stated that the hostels were 'beautifully situated and will make excellent homes for land girls'.¹⁸ Facilities were similar to those provided in purpose-built hostels. Cattleside, for example, had two dormitories each accommodating between eight and 10 persons, three baths, 10 or 12 wash basins, six toilets and a large kitchen and recreation room.¹⁹ It was agreed that in all cases the YWCA should be asked to take over the running of hostels for WLA in Yorkshire.²⁰

Photograph 4: Cattleside at Rathmell, a requisitioned hostel (c.1944)



(Source: Gloria, 18.5.1996)

In addition, Howden Hall Hostel, Silsden, opened in May 1942 for approximately 180 workers including 'teachers, artists, Army and Navy cadets, office workers, weavers, labourers, welfare officers and bombed-out elderly refugees from London.'²¹ It was also passed as suitable accommodation for WLA recruits.²²

By 1943, six hostels had been set up in the Craven area,²³ and, with the exception of Howden Hall, all were known as 'machinery hostels.' This was because the WRWAEC Labour Sub-committee resolved that WLA tractor drivers and machinery personnel should

be accommodated together in hostels apart from general workers as it is considered that a certain amount of discontent would prevail where machinery personnel and general workers are accommodated in the same hostel.²⁴

The reason for this 'discontent' is not specified and seems curious given that WLA members not employed on tractor driving duties often undertook general farm work. Indeed, the recruit who later transferred to Buckinghamshire WAEC reported that WLA workers employed on a variety of duties were billeted together in hostels in that area.²⁵

Accommodation was continuously reviewed and monitored due to the fluctuation and, at the end of the war, diminution in WLA membership. A circular was issued by the WLA to the counties in 1943 stating that hostels should be used fully and others freed altogether rather than a large number kept open but only partially occupied.²⁶ Each recruit contributed towards her upkeep so a half empty hostel was not financially viable and WAECs and the WLA could not afford to keep open hostels which were not fully operational. The WRWAEC Machinery Sub-committee therefore agreed to recruits employed on forestry work being accommodated at Holden Clough machinery hostel if vacancies became available. The WRWLA Committee maintained it was essential for a nucleus of labour to be retained in all areas of the Riding where hostels operated.²⁷ Proposals to establish new hostels at Sedbergh and at Aireville, Skipton were abandoned.²⁸

Cappleside hostel was shut down for the winter months²⁹ as it was too remote in bad weather for recruits to travel easily to outlying farms. It closed completely in

February 1944 with the 19 recruits accommodated there being transferred to hostels at Settle, Skipton and Holden Clough. Corner House hostel was also closed in 1944 and taken over by PoW labour.³⁰ Settle hostel was under threat of closure as early as December 1945 but the WRWAEC Machinery Sub-committee resolved that 'every effort should be made to maintain the hostel for its present use and purpose.'³¹ However, at a meeting of the WRWAEC in May 1947, Lady Bingley raised the issue of WLA recruits at Skipton, Holden Clough and Settle (machinery hostels) being accommodated in two hostels freeing one for the use of general WLA workers. At its meeting on 15 May 1947 the WRWAEC announced the closure of Holden Clough with recruits being transferred to Settle and Skipton. In early 1948 both remaining hostels became redundant as machinery accommodation and were transferred to the responsibility of the Labour Sub-committee. Settle hostel closed in 1949 although Skipton remained open for a period to accommodate men on drainage and open cast restoration work.

2. Welfare policy

Prior to examining the outcomes of policies concerning accommodation, the formulation and implementation of welfare policies will be examined. Other aspects of welfare, such as the introduction of the WLA Benevolent Fund and availability of canteens were not related to the type of accommodation to which a recruit was allocated and these aspects of welfare policy will be addressed separately later in the chapter.

2.1 Formulation of welfare policy in relation to accommodation

WLA Organisation Leaflet No III, issued in March 1941, states that county offices were 'responsible for the supervision of moral and social welfare in Land Army training or in employment in their counties.'³² Although one of the many tasks of county secretaries was organising the provision of welfare,³³ the actual monitoring of conditions was the responsibility of voluntary workers. Their brief was to check the standard of billet³⁴ and pay recruits monthly visits to check whether employers were satisfied with the work carried out by the WLA.³⁵ Voluntary workers usually came from amongst the membership of the Women's Institute and tended to have

middle class backgrounds. The Women's Institute magazine, *Home and Country*, included a letter from Lady Denman to its rank and file members suggesting that they might encourage employment of Land Army recruits and make newcomers welcome.³⁶ The WLA had over 4,000 part-time voluntary representatives at its busiest period³⁷ (presumably at the height of recruitment in 1943) but it was this aspect of welfare provision which elicited criticism.

At a meeting of MAF and MoLNS officers in March 1943, the latter suggested that 'welfare arrangements were inadequate and those responsible for them did not understand the minds of urban girls drafted into the countryside.'³⁸ It was deemed that the 'supervision of welfare appears to be somewhat haphazard and unreal. It is delegated to county officers who seem in some cases to have neither the time nor the qualities for the task.'³⁹ The meeting discussed the possibility of appointing more qualified supervisors from amongst experienced members of the WLA, and MoLNS welfare officers undertook to assist in the process. However, Sir Donald Fergusson felt that 'whilst it was quite impossible to do much for the welfare of girls on isolated farms, reasonable provisions were made for the welfare of members in hostels.'⁴⁰ If recruits accommodated on private farms were aware of this statement it must have had a damaging effect on their morale, as they were the foundation of WLA provision.

Further criticism of some voluntary workers was recorded in the Report on Women's Supplementary Labour of December 1947 on the grounds that 'their own social position and personal contacts with the farming community caused an element of unfairness in the system which was resented by recruits.'⁴¹ According to the Report it had been suggested that the welfare system should either be dropped altogether or be staffed by paid welfare workers in whom recruits may have had more confidence. However, the Report acknowledged that on the whole recruits had valued the welfare service.

Despite the call for experienced paid welfare workers it was not until the cessation of war, and the exodus of voluntary welfare workers from the WLA, that paid county staff were introduced. Nevertheless, voluntary workers still had a part to play in the WLA as the Report considered recruits in their teens and early twenties

needed support. Some volunteers were, therefore, invited to continue as 'friends of recruits' with a responsibility for the 'non-statutory side of welfare work.'⁴²

2.3 Implementation of welfare policy in relation to accommodation

The issue of 'welfare' visits to recruits is recorded only intermittently in WRWAEC and WLA minutes. However, a meeting of West Riding representatives in July 1942 agreed that all recruits must be visited on farms during their first fortnight in employment. Following this initial contact, recruits could be visited regularly or call on representatives at their homes.⁴³ It is not known whether this arrangement also applied to hostel-based recruits although women at Skipton hostel were very aware that Miss Pam Preston, WLA representative for the area, visited the hostel to ensure that conditions were acceptable. Whilst she was described as 'a county type' by several recruits, they also considered her to be approachable if they had any problems and the same was said of the Settle representative. In relation to arrangements made for recruits on private farms, Lady Bingley suggested that local committees hold tea parties which would enable volunteers to meet and find out where other recruits were billeted.⁴⁴

Welfare issues were considered by local WLA committees alongside a multitude of other topics ranging from petrol allowances to publicity and it was not until 30 October 1945 that a North Riding Welfare Committee was introduced. The Chairman, Lady Celia Coates, suggested that a committee had been in existence at some point previously but had been discontinued.⁴⁵ It appears that the West Riding Welfare Committee first met in 1948⁴⁶ with the objective of 'making country life more attractive to the town girl.'⁴⁷ There would, in fact, have been a place for these committees in the WLA constitution at a much earlier date. Given their late introduction, the extent of their brief was much reduced, being restricted to provision of entertainment rather than being concerned with conditions of service. This caused Lady Bingley's resignation from the Welfare Committee as she felt 'others would be able to carry out the duties more efficiently.'⁴⁸ Some useful work was, however, undertaken such as approaching Young Farmers' Clubs to ask them to encourage isolated recruits on individual farms to join.

3. Outcomes of accommodation and associated welfare policies

The issues of accommodation standards and associated welfare provision were aired in correspondence between the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Works when it was suggested that the Land Army expected a higher standard of accommodation than other classes of war worker. It was considered that the MAF should not agree to a special standard of billet for recruits who, according to one Ministry of Health civil servant, should be prepared 'to put up with a little hard lying.'⁴⁹ In order to assess whether this was the case, it is appropriate to consider the experiences of women who worked on the land.

3.1 **Hostel Accommodation**

3.1.1 **Material provision**

During the early days of hostel life, some basic facilities at Settle, Skipton, Howden Hall and Cappleside hostels appeared to be in short supply. At Skipton only two large boxes pushed under the bottom bunk were available in which to keep belongings, followed, eventually, by more appropriate furniture. Bunk beds consisted of pieces of wood with holes drilled in for ventilation, and palliasses which were reported to be rather uncomfortable. Although the WLA did not receive as many 'comforts' as some of the services, recruits in Skipton were pleased to receive quilts sent from the USA including names and addresses of those who had made them to enable the recipients to correspond.

Some recruits had experience of more than one hostel and were able to make comparisons between them. Although ablutions, recreation and dormitory facilities were all provided, the varying sizes and construction of hostels made them different environments in which to live. One recruit described Cappleside as a 'lovely old house with all amenities' but another found that the part of the house in which she lived was very cold and water was scarce. When first accommodated there it was necessary for her to go home for baths at weekends.⁵⁰ A similar situation was apparent in Shirley Joseph's written account of life in a requisitioned hostel where

she indicated the difficulties encountered in supplying water to a house which accommodated 30 people but was only built for six.⁵¹

At the other extreme, Howden Hall at Silsden accommodated some 200 persons. There were more social amenities such as a games room where darts and table tennis were played, a 'busy room' where one night a week an instructor taught craft and leather work, a branch library with over 400 books, and a large concert room with a dance floor.⁵²

3.1.2 Comestibles

As Dorothea Abbott wrote, 'since joining the WLA food had taken on a much more important place in my life. I had acquired an enormous appetite from working outside at hard manual work and was always hungry.'⁵³ The food issue was also raised in the House of Commons with questions being asked of the Minister of Agriculture as to the average daily menu of recruits. It was, of course, a straightforward question and answer with the Minister stating that

a cooked breakfast was provided ... a packed morning 'snack', a packed luncheon consisting of sandwiches or pasties and drink; a main meal on return at 6pm consisting of a meat course with pudding and finally a light supper of cocoa, biscuits, bread and jam or cheese.⁵⁴

In reality, however, the situation was somewhat variable. At Skipton hostel, Laura recalled queuing for porridge and a cooked breakfast being passed through a large hatch from the kitchen. (Photograph 5 shows the dining room at Skipton.) Meat paste or beetroot sandwiches were then collected to take out for lunch to be eaten during the day's work.

Recruits forced to transfer from Skipton to Settle hostel were most unhappy because food was so scarce there. One of them had to gather mushrooms for breakfast and Laura said they 'wondered what was going on.' Jane recalled starting to smoke because she did not receive enough food when based at Settle. She often took her sugar ration home to allow her mother to bake. Recruits found it necessary to go to the 'Naked Man' cafe for something to eat before returning to the hostel for



Photograph 5: Skipton hostel dining area (c.1946)

(Source: Rene December 1995)

their evening meal which was by then usually dried up. On the other hand, Ginny recalled putting on two stones in weight during her first year in the WLA, resulting in her looking like 'a little russet apple - round and red.' This was due to eating packed lunches, dinners offered by farmers' wives and then returning to the hostel for her evening meal. Dorothy said that at threshing or haymaking times farmers had to take in farm workers for one meal a day or bring 'drinkings' to the field. There were, however, reports that on occasion some farmers would not even provide water to drink. Maisie stated the food was 'variable' during her time in the WLA. There were good breakfasts but packed lunches were 'dreadful.'

Irene and Violet recalled sending food home to their families. During the war the Post Office made a charge of sixpence to deliver a dead rabbit wrapped around its middle in brown paper with an address tag on its leg. However, Violet once sent home a pheasant incurring her father's wrath because it was out of season. Nevertheless, Christmas time in the Craven area proved a festive occasion and recruits remembered there were always decorations and a Christmas tree at Skipton Hostel. Mary Sykes wrote that at Settle 'the tables were put end to end down the room and looked gay with crinkled paper and holly sprigs. The staff joined us to partake of roast beef and veg, Christmas pudding and trifle.'⁵⁵

Outside the Craven area, Rosie found that at Luckington, near Chippenham, Wiltshire, she often had to cook her own dinner on returning to the hostel after a day's work. Although the warden was allocated food rations for recruits, they did not appear to receive them. Their packed lunches consisted of cold toast because they were not provided with sandwich fillings. Joan Mant's collection of reminiscences includes far worse stories with a farmer in Canterbury reporting a hostel to 'head office' because he was so concerned at the lack of food given to recruits. It transpired that the cooks were taking away suitcases of food to their homes or to the black market. Other WLA members reported eating raw vegetables or anything they could get their hands on because they were always hungry.⁵⁶

3.1.3 Other aspects of hostel life

The staff at Skipton Hostel consisted of Mrs Rolston, the YWCA Warden, whom recruits spoke of warmly as a ‘wonderful person’ who would ‘defend “her girls” against hell and high water.’⁵⁷ Miss Clough, who later took over as warden, was the cook and Miss Crabtree, who had previously been a high school teacher in China, took care of linen. ‘Little Edie’ was a general help and was described as ‘having the mentality of a child ... she stood at the sink washing interminable dishes and peeling unending potatoes. She dearly loved to be teased but there were no recollections of anyone being unkind to her.’⁵⁸ Similar staffing establishments, such as a warden, under-warden, cook and assistant, were in place at requisitioned hostels. Cleaners went into the hostels each day and men were employed to look after the boilers and clean stoves in dormitories.

When the Settle hostel opened in 1942, the WRWAEC transferred several recruits from Skipton with the aim of establishing a presence in the area. However, having become used to the facilities at Skipton they found Settle Hostel ‘poor’ with insufficient food and bedding. They pleaded their case with Mr Dodgson, Craven Area Machinery Officer (and President of the CTFA), and organised a petition requesting their return to Skipton on the grounds that, following their transfer, new recruits were being placed at Skipton who could have gone directly to Settle. Mr Dodgson agreed to their request and the ‘protesters’ returned to Skipton although one or two were happy to remain at Settle.

Florence said ‘there was good camaraderie when you got to know everyone’ and recruits tended to form cliques with others who were in the same bunk cubicle. Marie felt some of the girls were ‘very rough’ and she was terrified when they came in late from the local public house, hiding her head under the bed-clothes. However, she also said she met some ‘lovely girls.’ Joy appreciated the fact that they were all doing the same job at different depots, which helped when they needed to talk things over. Conversely, Peggy did not enjoy hostel life at Wellingore, Lincolnshire, as she did not like being ‘herded together.’ Nevertheless, she did play the occasional joke on her friends such as collecting baby mice in a cigarette tin and letting them out on the hostel dinner table.

3.1.4 Social Life

Most of the recruits accommodated in Craven hostels thoroughly enjoyed their social lives. As Ginny said: 'We worked hard and played hard. We were lucky to be billeted at Skipton, who took us to their hearts, and a few even slipped rings on our fingers.' Skipton was a garrison town and several women had boyfriends in the forces. There were rules and regulations governing leisure hours with recruits having to return to Skipton Hostel by 10pm with a weekend extension to 11pm or even midnight at Cattleside. Occasionally some returned through the window with the help of friends if they were unable to make the deadline. Recruits were able to visit home at weekends when it was not harvest time, although Nancy returned home without permission one weekend and as a disciplinary measure was forced to be billeted at home on a permanent basis. This caused her transfer from the Craven area to the Bradford WLA.

There were picture houses in Settle and Skipton which were often patronised by recruits. Those based at Cattleside were able to visit Settle, travelling 10 in a taxi as only two buses a week operated. Dances were held at Skipton Town Hall and the warden often arranged the use of a gramophone and sometimes a local band to enable dances to be held at the hostel to which the local community was invited. The RAF built a hut with a dance floor and stage alongside the Falcon Hotel in Settle, where dances were held every Saturday. At Corner House near Gisburn, recruits were issued with bicycles for work but they also used them for transport to dances at Clitheroe. When they first joined the WLA, recruits were often almost too exhausted to have a social life but once they became used to physical work they were able to cycle a few miles in an evening to attend social activities. Evenings were often spent in each others' company knitting and sewing round the hostel stoves or playing cards.

As the hostels were operated by the YWCA a little time was set aside for religious observance. At Skipton the warden said a prayer each evening and a short service was held on Sunday evenings. However, one recruit noticed that a particular hymn was sung on every occasion - 'Dear Lord and Father of Mankind, forgive our foolish ways.' She was unsure whether this was the only hymn the warden knew or if it had a specific message for recruits.

The WLA became part of the local community. As Mary Sykes wrote:

one evening recruits were 'at home' in the hostel providing whist, supper and entertainment ... to the kind people of Settle who have done so much this winter to entertain and help us.⁵⁹

At Skipton and Howden Hall hostels sales were often held to raise money for the Red Cross and Great Ormond Street Hospital, and at Skipton charges were made for people to attend plays and sketches performed by the WLA. Recruits were particularly imaginative in how to spend what free time they had available. Rachel Knappett described her participation in a tap dancing troupe known as The Landolettes who travelled by bicycle to isolated villages where

in extraordinary dressing-rooms piled high with cups and saucers and tea urns ... we would throw off our heavy boots, don skimpy cabaret costumes and perform on remarkable stages made of tables which bent and groaned under the appalling weight of 14 hefty Landolettes...⁶⁰

A *Craven Herald* article on Howden Hall hostel stated that 'hostels have turned out to be valuable experiments in the art of communal living.'⁶¹ This generally proved to be the case in Craven where the WLA, WRWAEC and YWCA were involved in operating six hostels. After some teething troubles due to late delivery of necessary items and a problematic settling in period at one hostel, daily life appears to have operated relatively smoothly. This was due, in part, to the three agencies mentioned above but was also attributable to the flexibility and camaraderie of recruits and their acceptance into the communities in which they were located.

3.2 Private Billets

3.2.1 Some experiences of life in private billets

Few of the ex-WLA members interviewed had experience of living in private billets as most were employed by the WRWAEC and accommodated in hostels. The very limited sample of recruits allocated to private accommodation shows that conditions can only be described as variable.

Maggie's experience of private billets was somewhat extreme. She came from outside the Yorkshire area and transferred voluntarily from her first placement in Market Rasen to a farm at St Bees, Cumberland, where the household consisted of a bachelor son, spinster sister and elderly mother. She was able to take a bath only once a week on the farm but managed others at a local school where staff took pity on her. From St Bees she transferred to Eskdale, also in Cumberland, living with the farmer and his family on a fell farm. Bathing here was more frequent as it was possible to use hot water left over from washing dairy utensils although baths were draughty affairs when the wind whistled through the wash house. Nevertheless, she looked back upon her WLA experience as 'gaining a family' through this particular placement and has returned there with her own children for holidays. Peggy's experience of living on a farm was also positive. She was treated as one of the family where the farm owners were only a few years older than herself and 'where I did the lot; at slack times I got the baby to sleep for the farmer's wife.'

However, accommodation allocated to Madge in private billets was found badly wanting. She was initially placed on a small farm with a market garden at Middleton Tyas near Scotch Corner. Here she was expected to share the bed of the 'old lady' of the house which was separated by a curtain from a sleeping grandson. This situation, coupled with the very hard work she was expected to undertake, caused her to lose two stones in weight and to leave after six months. It was difficult for her to believe that the WLA had checked this billet and found it to be satisfactory. She eventually acquired superior lodgings with a young woman and her three children and remained there for approximately three years. Madge had a further unfortunate experience when, in 1945, the North Riding WAEC/WLA would not allow her time off from harvesting to see her boyfriend. As she had not seen him for four years she went absent without leave to meet him. On her return, and no doubt as punishment, she was not allowed to return to her billet (although she later learned that she could have done so had she written a letter of apology). She was therefore billeted with a family near Weatherall, Carlisle, where she was expected to look after three or four ill-behaved children and where greyhounds roamed freely around the accommodation. She told her WLA representative that she would leave but received the response: 'you can't do that.' Madge firmly stood her ground saying: 'I can you know. It is you who are not doing your job.' Following this exchange she transferred to a local hostel

where she was told that the family in question ‘had had land girls galore and their job appeared to be baby sitting.’ Rosie noted a distinct improvement when she transferred from hostel accommodation to private lodgings. She described the food as ‘marvellous - you wouldn't have known there was rationing’ but perhaps this was because her landlady had a smallholding as well as a public house.

Sylvia had a different experience of accommodation on entering the WLA. She and a colleague worked at Parceval Hall, Sir William Milner's estate near Appletreewick. They lived in a cottage which consisted of a large stone flagged kitchen and living room, two bedrooms and a bathroom although water ‘came from further up the road supplied from a dam in the valley.’ She said that although ‘the nights were our own we still had the place to clean’ and ‘during the first few weeks we were exhausted.’ In relation to welfare, Sylvia remembered that the ‘WVS person was there if you needed anything’ but ‘she didn't come round to you.’

Millie and Jean were sisters who both lived at home in Skipton and were fortunate in that they were included in hostel activities but were not subject to the same rules and regulations. Elizabeth was initially sent to Settle Hostel in 1941, but was then asked by WLA local representative, Miss Preston, if she would be prepared to live at home in Skipton and work in that area as accommodation for girls from further afield was becoming scarce. She agreed but felt that she ‘missed quite a bit of fun by not being at the hostel.’

3.2.2 Social Life

Social life in private accommodation was very different from that in hostels. This was partly because hostels were often located in more populated areas where entertainment was provided. Furthermore, WLA recruits were able to arrange their own social lives if a number of them were housed together. However, if recruits in private accommodation were sufficiently tenacious they were able to attend social functions. Maggie described the situation in Cumberland where dances were held to raise money for soldiers' comforts. She would make seven to ten mile journeys by bicycle (without lights) to remote village halls where she was called upon to take her turn singing or clog dancing. She was able to take time off once a month, leaving the

farm on Saturday afternoon and returning on Monday morning. Once Madge had secured acceptable lodgings for herself she often baby-sat to allow her landlady some leisure time. She also attended village whist drives and visited her family.

There were insufficient respondents working in Craven with experience of private billets to enable conclusions to be drawn on whether this type of accommodation was a success. Recruits from outside the area who were able to provide evidence had mixed experiences. Tyrer (1996) and Mant (1995) both provide recollections from recruits indicating similar treatment. As Tyrer suggests:

it seems incredible, when the whole country was facing the most serious threat to its survival in a thousand years, that the land girls, many of whom were only teenagers, should have encountered such mean and shabby treatment ... though there must have been some kind landladies ... complaints poured into county offices in their thousands via the reps.⁸³

Whilst this may be an exaggeration, there is no doubt that Sir Donald Fergusson's statement that little welfare support could be provided for women on private farms proved correct. Such recruits could therefore be forgiven for feeling somewhat let down by the MAF and WLA.

In view of this criticism of accommodation and associated welfare policies it should be pointed out that other welfare policies were also implemented. These will be considered under the heading of 'supplementary welfare policies' in order to complete an assessment of welfare provision.

4. 'Supplementary' welfare policies

4.1 WLA Benevolent Fund

The WLA Benevolent Fund was formed on 30 July 1942 as a registered War Charity. It was administered by a management committee comprising Lady Denman, several WLA county chairmen, the Vice-President of the NFU and the General Secretary of the National Union of Agricultural Workers. The main objectives of the fund were to help recruits who experienced illness or accident when assistance was

not forthcoming from elsewhere. Bursaries, grants or loans were also awarded to recruits who wished to remain on the land, return to pre-war occupations or to retrain after the war.⁶³ The fund was dependent upon voluntary contributions, much of it raised by recruits themselves. The Treasury also promised £10,000⁶⁴ and later awarded a further £170,000 as a placebo in place of gratuities to the WLA at the end of the war (see Chapter Ten). Profits made from the sale of *The Women's Land Army* by Vita Sackville-West were also donated to the fund.

In relation to the implementation of Benevolent Fund policies, the WRWLA Welfare Committee reported on 20 November 1950 that £11,000 had been awarded to West Riding recruits in the previous six years and the county of Yorkshire had subscribed £7,040 to the fund. At that time there were 12 cases in Yorkshire who would require help for approximately a further two years. However, it would appear that no respondents from the Craven area received an award from the Fund and, indeed, several recruits seemed unaware of its existence. One recruit from Craven who suffered a severe accident received compensation from the WRWAEC as she worked under their supervision.

4.2 Canteens

Concern for the welfare of WLA recruits was occasionally expressed in the House of Commons by individual MPs, for example in relation to conditions at a specific hostel. However, the majority of questions on welfare-related topics asked between 1941 and 1944 regarded the use of canteens by WLA members. This was an important national issue for two reasons. Firstly, many women were billeted long distances from home which, when home leave was possible, involved them in overnight travel, often with hours to wait between connections. Unfortunately on these occasions they were prohibited from using canteen facilities made available to servicemen and women. Secondly, this situation had implications for perceptions of the WLA in relation to other women's services. Navy, Army and Airforce Institute (NAAFI) canteens were not made available to the WLA because, the Minister of Agriculture stated, they were 'provided to meet the needs of Service personnel ... it is not generally practicable to extend them to WLA, who, although they are performing most valuable national service, are civilian and not service personnel.'⁶⁵ No doubt

partially due to the constant lobbying on this subject, approval was eventually given for WLA personnel to be admitted to service canteens operated by voluntary organisations⁶⁶ (but not the NAAFI) although, surprisingly, they were still refused entry to YWCA canteens.⁶⁷ Furthermore, a somewhat bureaucratic exercise for a period of emergency was the requirement of the WLA to 'submit a detailed list of all canteens in England and Wales to which admission is desired with figures showing the number of volunteers employed in the vicinity and likely to use the canteen.'⁶⁸ The situation had still not been resolved by late 1944 with the Minister of Agriculture confessing that the situation was 'highly unsatisfactory especially in view of the admirable work which members of the WLA are doing and the existing absence of facilities.'⁶⁹

Recruits located in Settle were grateful for the use of the local Settle Services Club. This was formed in 1940 by ToCH, the Rotary Club and the British Legion to provide facilities such as a canteen, recreation room, and small library for the benefit of the RAF. However, it was also used by WLA and other service personnel passing through the town and 'during the peak period over 1,500 meals were served each week.'⁷⁰ However, the use of canteens was perhaps of less importance to recruits sent to Craven as most of them originated from Yorkshire and would not need to travel great distances to return home. However, when Rosie travelled home to Huddersfield from Wiltshire, she could certainly have made use of this additional comfort.

4.3 *The Land Girl* magazine

The first issue of *The Land Girl* magazine was published in April 1940 and appeared monthly thereafter until March 1947. It followed the pattern of the World War I journal *The Landswoman* and its aim was to help WLA members keep in touch with each other. As Lady Denman wrote in the first issue:

Unlike other women's war services, it is rare for members of the Land Army to work in groups. Most have to carry on their jobs without the comradeship of fellow members and often in particularly lonely circumstances. But it is just as important for us, as for other war workers, to remember that we are a national force ... the magazine will help us all to keep in touch with one another.⁷¹

The content of the magazine over the years included articles on training and work, such as threshing and ploughing, uniform and how to obtain maximum wear from it, the role of the WAECs, various aspects of the countryside, news from counties, articles, poems and letters from recruits, recruitment figures, tips on first aid, long service awards, conditions of service and a plethora of other subjects.

In the West Riding, efforts were made by local representatives to advertise *The Land Girl* when visiting recruits⁷² as the magazine did not have a high circulation in Yorkshire as a whole. In April 1942 the magazine recorded a national circulation of 11,000 copies whereas the employed membership of the WLA was 28,000.⁷³ The Yorkshire Committees did make efforts to increase interest and the joint North and West Riding Committees of 1941 appointed a magazine secretary. Miss Jacob Smith, county organising secretary, also introduced a county newsletter, the content of which was similar to that of *The Land Girl*.⁷⁴

Many recruits from the Craven area who were interviewed had not heard of the magazine and when told about it felt it was probably more visible in southern counties. Nevertheless it did contain a letter from a Craven member about the work of the area.⁷⁵ As the majority of Craven recruits were housed in hostels perhaps the camaraderie apparent there reduced the need for a magazine to keep recruits together.

Whilst Craven recruits had little direct experience of 'supplementary welfare policies' it is appropriate to include them to show that some efforts were made on their behalf by the WLA to ease their service years.

5. Summary and conclusion

In the Craven area of the West Riding hostel accommodation was provided by both the WRWAEC and the WLA in 1942. This was due to the reluctance of the farming community in general to accommodate the WLA on their own farms, rather than as a result of the need to control recruits as in World War I. Hostels were either purpose-built or requisitioned properties and attempts were also made to provide a limited number of private billets. The introduction of hostels was delayed due to the inability of ministries to agree on the division of responsibilities, but once these had

been resolved hostel accommodation in the Craven area was generally successful and enabled the number of recruits working on the land to be greatly increased. This type of accommodation appeared to provide a better standard of living than that experienced by many recruits in private billets due, almost certainly, to statutory requirements being monitored in hostels by the WLA and WAECs. Safety in numbers of recruits and the camaraderie this engendered also formed part of the welfare system, which provided support in addition to more formal arrangements. Recruits billeted singly in private accommodation were often unable to alter the direction of policy-making and suffered extreme hardship in the process. The blame for this was laid at the door of the voluntary representatives, some of whom were said to possess neither the experience nor inclination to provide appropriate welfare services. It would, however, be unfair to label all volunteers in this way and the system remained in place until the end of the war because the government was unable to provide funded or trained personnel. When a recruit was allocated to inadequate accommodation, however, there appeared to be little sympathy from WLA headquarters. Writing in *The Land Girl* Margaret Pyke suggested that recruits 'have got to accept this fact as part of the fortunes of war. Soldiers cannot choose whether they will be housed in the ancient homes of England or in tin huts, nor where or how or when they will be sent to fight.'⁷⁶

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CHAPTER EIGHT: POLICIES ON TRAINING AND WORK IN THE WOMEN'S LAND ARMY

This chapter examines policies on both training and the nature of work in the WLA. The focus is on the Craven district, where most of the work carried out by the WLA was under the auspices of the WRWAEC. The tasks described, therefore, relate primarily to tractor driving and machinery work associated with the need to plough up grassland for the cultivation and harvesting of crops. Other recruits, whether employed by WAECs or on private farms, also undertook this type of work and many other tasks including milking and working with horses and timber, but the latter were less in evidence in Craven and are, therefore, only referred to in passing. First-hand accounts of most of the jobs carried out by the WLA can be found in the autobiographical and reminiscence literature.¹

1. Formulation of training policies

Prior to the inception of the WLA in 1917 women had been involved in agricultural training courses provided by state and private agencies across several counties. In 1915 the Board of Agriculture entered into an arrangement with various agricultural colleges and farm institutes to train milkers and farm workers, and labour exchanges were responsible for recruiting women and placing them in employment.² For example, the Yorkshire Council for Agricultural Education conducted five courses of two weeks' duration for women workers resulting in a total of 150 women undertaking practical training in milking, dairy work, feeding calves, pigs and poultry, loading hay, cleaning turnips and other seasonal work.³ Women's War Agricultural Committees also provided candidates for farm training centres and the West Riding Committee reported that two such centres had opened in its area in 1916 offering free training courses for two weeks.⁴

Agencies such as the Women's National Land Service Corps and Women's Farm and Garden Union had between them placed approximately 1,200 women on the land, some 600 of whom they had trained. The latter also placed around 239

professional women whom they had not trained but who had many years of farm experience. A BoA file note indicates that they were ‘a far more valuable element than the war trained women’⁵ presumably because of their greater knowledge acquired over a longer period. Some women even paid for their own training or worked on farms without wages until competent, suggesting they were not recruited from the working classes.

Two issues arose from these initial courses of training, which continued to be debated when the WLA was instituted in 1917 and again in 1939. These were the most appropriate types of training to offer and the duration of courses.

1.1 Types of training available to WLA recruits

In 1916 the Board of Agriculture recorded a preference for training on farms where the trainers were ‘skilled practical men with some knowledge of teaching methods.’ It was also held that ‘the farm itself is the proper place for training, that the farmer himself is much better qualified than anyone else to teach a woman to do the work he requires of her, and that in the large majority of cases he would prefer to do so.’⁶ The Board suggested agricultural colleges should ‘confine themselves to the better educated class of girl, who intends to make agriculture or some branch of it her career’⁷ yet also roundly criticised college courses ‘as being a sheer waste of public money.’⁸

As the Board of Agriculture decided to place 2,000 women in immediate training, different methods of instruction were absorbed by the newly formed WLA organisation in 1917. This resulted in three training schemes being offered.

- (i) Placement on a farm for three weeks where the farmer provided training and employment and the WLA paid maintenance costs. The main drawback was that in many cases farmers only trained recruits in one job and when the season was over they were no longer required.

- (ii) Training at a practice farm where a farmer trained several women for four to six week periods in return for the labour of the trainees with the WLA paying for the maintenance of recruits. At the end of training, recruits were transferred to paid employment on other farms and the farmer was allocated new recruits. Success appears to have depended upon whether farmers were skilled in training methods (although they did not receive any pedagogical training themselves), had sufficient time to supervise the work of trainees or, indeed, whether recruits were trained and not exploited.
- (iii) Training at an organised centre/agricultural college where recruits resided together in a hostel under the supervision of an instructress and housekeeper.⁹

Training centres were also set up to instruct women in tractor driving, the operation of tractor-drawn implements, and in general cultivation. Other specialist training was given in tree planting and 'efficiency tests' were introduced to motivate recruits and give an indication of their suitability for particular placements.

Between 1917 and 1919, therefore, further formal training was introduced and Miss Meriel Talbot, Director of the Women's Branch of the BoA, felt that the newly-trained women of 1918 had greater practical value than their predecessors, particularly as trainers had benefited from the experience of running earlier courses.¹⁰

On the reinstatement of the WLA in 1939, the government decided not to commence training in peacetime and was content to leave the Women's Farm and Garden Union to make arrangements for women to 'gain initial experience by taking holidays on farms'.¹¹ The House of Commons expressed concern at this decision, as MPs felt steps should be taken to prepare for an emergency situation. The Minister of Agriculture responded that it was simply not practical for volunteers to relinquish employment to take up training.¹² However, owing to the seriousness of the food situation and the pressure placed upon the government by MPs and the WLA, Lady Denman was able to announce on 1 June 1939 that the

MAF had decided after all to provide training for WLA recruits. The methods of instruction were to be similar to those previously described. In addition, some specialist training was introduced which included a fortnight of tractor driving for potential new recruits of suitable physique, with preference being given to those with the ability to drive.¹³

A revision in policy soon followed with an offer of free courses of four weeks' duration either on approved farms or at agricultural colleges and farm institutes. Potential recruits were offered 10s. per week for personal expenses and payment of their board and lodging,¹⁴ presumably in an attempt to attract greater interest. However, MPs then began to question not only the cost of training but also of recruiting and employing the WLA as a whole.¹⁵ In the event, MAF decided to reduce the numbers in training during the early months of 1940 due to the lack of demand by farmers for WLA labour.¹⁶

Between 1940 and 1945 training policy was discussed at national and county levels but few changes were made to the schemes described above. On occasion, the major factor determining the nature of training was the need to place as many WLA members as possible on the land and this resulted in most training taking place 'on the job'. However, in 1947 the Committee on Employment of Women in Agriculture reported that 'a good deal more should be done about training in the general agricultural interest and in the interest of the girls themselves and their employers'.¹⁷ Commenting on training provision during World War II and beyond, the Committee stated that even experienced women were perceived as relatively untrained. It recommended that WAECs should ensure that all their WLA employees should be given at least one month's training and, indeed, that the scope of the training should be extended. These recommendations appeared somewhat idealistic by 1948 as WLA recruitment was falling and the farming community anticipated the re-employment of male labour returning from war service.

1.2 Duration of Training Courses

The length of training courses was also an aspect to which policy makers gave much thought. In 1916 it was felt that two weeks' training at a private farm or agricultural college was appropriate. However the period was soon extended to four weeks which was considered to be a suitable period of time to provide an introduction to farm life for a recruit with no previous experience. When the WLA was introduced in 1917, training was further extended to six weeks as this was felt to be the minimum period in which women could harden muscles, become accustomed to climatic changes or become sufficiently skilled to produce satisfactory work.¹⁸ However, Miss Meriel Talbot accepted that a training period of some four to six weeks had limited value as, ideally, experience of the different seasons would be beneficial; short courses merely introduced recruits to agricultural work and farmers would have to complete the process. She accepted that women sent to work on the land were 'far from the finished article but they were eager and there was a freshness and alertness about them which was acknowledged by farmers as being an asset in the labour market.'¹⁹ In comparison, male 'farm labourers in counties where wages were low and conditions bad had lost their sense of initiative and individual judgement.'²⁰ However, as debate continued, the Select Committee on National Expenditure joined certain MPs in suggesting it might be inappropriate to devote public funds to such an expensive product as extended periods of training.²¹

2. Implementation of training policies

2.1 General Training

Between 1915 and 1917 most training of women on the land came within the remit of private agencies such as the Women's Farm and Garden Union. However, in 1917 the Secretary of the West Riding Women's War Agricultural Committee wrote to the *Craven Herald* regarding an appeal on behalf of the Board of Agriculture for 40,000 women to serve as mobile workers on the land. She stated

that her committee was extremely anxious to have in readiness a prepared training scheme for WLA recruits and requested that farmers willing to take one or two suitable women should contact her.²² The *Craven Herald* stated that the scheme had been explained to the CTFA and, although farmers said they could 'do with any amount of women of the right sort', the reporter was sufficiently in tune with the farming community to write that this 'generally meant women of high education to whom they were only prepared to give labourers' wages'.²³ This attitude resulted in few recruits being located either in the West Riding or in Craven between 1917 and 1919.

In 1939 when further consideration was given to the implementation of training policy, Professor McGregor of Leeds University did not offer a positive report to either the North or West Riding WLA Committees, commenting that they could not expect any immediate assistance from the University as 'existing lecturers were too busy'.²⁴ In any event, he considered a two week course would not even give a passing acquaintance of farm work. He suggested that it might be possible for an instructor to take 10-12 students at Askham Bryan Agricultural College and that temporary instructors might be appointed to take charge of groups of recruits undergoing instruction on farms.²⁵ Meanwhile, the WRWAEC was also encountering difficulties in providing training for its WLA recruits within various branches of agriculture as follows.

2.2 Tractor driving

In view of the shortage of tractor drivers to undertake the ploughing campaign in the West Riding in early 1940, the WRWAEC Labour Sub-committee reaffirmed its decision that the training of personnel should not only be continued but considerably extended. However, at the same time, the Machinery Sub-committee was informed by the MAF not to utilise members of the WLA to drive tractors. Counties were instructed to employ male tractor drivers until opportunities arose for WLA members to undertake this work.²⁶

The Labour Sub-committee therefore lobbied MAF for an extension of the training scheme to enable the WLA to provide a reserve of trained personnel to replace men being called up. It was also recommended to the Ministry that, as far as possible, training should take place in districts where the greatest demand for tractor drivers existed. By mid-1942, however, there were only 40 semi-trained members of the WLA at Skipton and Settle hostels²⁷ and at the end of 1942 the Sub-committee resolved to train between 120 and 140 recruits as tractor drivers.²⁸ In fact, the labour position in Craven was particularly serious as ploughing was so far behind schedule that it became necessary to train as many recruits as possible.²⁹

2.3 Pest control

The Insects and Pests Sub-committee resolved that approval be given to the allocation of two WLA recruits to each district for work on pest destruction. The intention was to train them in rat extermination and landowners were asked to undertake training in 'rabbit destruction'.³⁰ Whilst a number of recruits were trained in this method of work, the Labour Sub-committee reported that no openings were available to them and they were, therefore, found work in threshing.³¹ However, at the same time, the Insects and Pests Subcommittee resolved to proceed with further training of recruits in the extermination of moles, rabbits and rats.³²

2.4 Forewoman training

In April 1943 the WRAEC Labour Sub-committee decided to allocate 20-30 recruits for immediate training in van driving.³³ The task of driving recruits to places of work formed part of a forewoman's duties and shows that the WRWAEC was prepared to give women increased responsibilities. Recruits from Skipton hostel were selected as suitable for forewoman training and if they completed the course satisfactorily, it was intended that two of them would be allocated to hostels at Holden Clough and Corner House and one to Cattleside with the remainder being kept in reserve for other vacancies.³⁴

2.5 Training after 1945

After 1945 the WRWAEC confined itself more to the placement and employment of the dwindling WLA membership and less to the training of remaining recruits, although the WLA did attempt to provide for recruits leaving the WLA some vocational and educational training in agriculture. However, the North Riding WLA Committee was informed that recruits wishing to undertake a degree in agriculture must be of the required educational standard and must be able to pay their own fees if they were successful in securing a place at training college. Professor Comber of Leeds University reported that there were insufficient well-paid positions in agriculture for men with university degrees and for this reason the University was discouraging women from taking courses.³⁵ The double-bind situation of recruits being discouraged by university personnel and also having to support themselves through any training they were able to obtain, no doubt led to few women being able to follow these courses. However, the WRWLA Welfare Committee did report one success of a privately employed recruit obtaining a year's educational training at Moulton Agricultural College.³⁶

In addition to formal training, educational classes were also offered at hostels, with recruits choosing to undertake courses such as handicrafts, cookery, dressmaking, leather work, drama, home-craft and elocution.³⁷

3. Outcomes of training policies

3.1 Methods of training

Irrespective of location, the quality and quantity of training received by respondents appears to have been variable. Their experiences of training programmes are described in the following paragraphs.

3.1.1 Agricultural College

Maggie was one respondent who was sent from Scunthorpe to Sutton Bonnington Agricultural College for one month's instruction in poultry keeping. This consisted of lectures and the requirement to pass an examination, but also included practical experience through working with poultry in various pens and checking the health of birds for evidence of pests. If disease was detected, the chickens were removed and the pens creosoted. Recruits learned about incubators and the hatching, collecting, weighing and packing of eggs. Unfortunately, poultry work was not available to Maggie on completion of her training and she was usually employed on general farm duties.

3.1.2 Fieldwork

Fieldwork covered a multitude of general farm tasks and there appeared to be little opportunity for recruits in Craven to undertake any training in the tasks prior to being placed in employment. Most training in general farm work was, therefore, 'on the job' for both WRWAEC employees and for those employed on private farms in different areas. Rosie did not receive any training prior to taking up general fieldwork on farms in Wiltshire: 'We were just thrown into it. Thrown in at the deep end.' The men she worked with 'just told you: "Do it and get on with it."' Joy used the following words to describe her recollections of WLA training: 'That's a shovel. That's a hoe. Those are potatoes - shovel 'em. Those are weeds - hoe 'em.' She spent some time on a farm near Wetherby but had a low opinion of the quality of training provision.

3.1.3 Milking

Jean learned milking on a farm at Eastby, near Skipton, using a specially constructed bag with the farmer telling her the order in which to pull the 'teats'. She was later able to put her newly acquired knowledge into practice on a live

animal. This was, in fact, a common method of instruction and is shown in photographs of training courses issued by the MAF.³⁸

3.1.4 Tractor Driving

The majority of WRWAEC recruits allocated to the Skipton area undertook a tractor driving course held at the 'tractor school' which consisted of 'a barn in a field near the Skipton to Bolton Abbey road.'³⁹ The period of training lasted for about four weeks although Hazel Driver arrived at the end of a course when harvest was in full swing and was given only two days' intensive tractor driving tuition 'on the job.'⁴⁰ However, the four week course proved very beneficial to recruits, none of whom had previously worked with tractors and, although some of them already held driving licences, they found tractors to be very much heavier to drive than cars. They were taught how tractors worked, how to drive and maintain them and how to use various implements such as ploughs, disc harrows and rollers. After initial instruction recruits took turns at the wheel with another recruit sitting on each mudguard. Violet felt this was an unsafe practice, as she fell under the discs being towed and suffered severe bruising from which it took her two weeks to recover.

Recruits who were sent directly to Settle reported having received no formal training. Florence was taught to drive by a man giving instructions while standing behind her on the tractor. Unfortunately neither she nor Gloria were advised how to stop the vehicle, resulting in Gloria driving round and round a field until the tractor stalled. She returned home in the evening leaving the tractor *in situ*. When she returned the following morning the engine had flooded and it was then explained to her how to turn off the fuel. The remainder of Gloria's training consisted of a diagram of the gears being drawn for her on a toolbox. The reason for the disparity in training offered to Settle and Skipton trainees is not known because during the early years of operation training facilities for tractor drivers had existed in Settle.

Tractor training was followed by a practical test which consisted of recruits being presented with a row of tractors and having to identify the reasons why they would not start. They were also tested on their ability to reverse tractors with implements attached and Doris remembered her test being held on a very wet day when the ground became so rutted it was impossible to manoeuvre the equipment. Marie recalled passing her reversing test at Batley with flying colours which, she said, was due to 'sheer luck' as she closed her eyes when reversing her tractor and trailer through a narrow gateway.

3.1.5 Thatching

Thatching courses appear to have been offered to experienced recruits based at Skipton hostel. Once again those at Settle appear to have been overlooked. Joy recalled being taught basic thatching with a piece of string, pegs and straw and shown how to thatch a stack from bottom to top. The instructor was an old man whom she did not think had previously taught a group like the 'pert young women' with which he was confronted and she felt that they did not take the course seriously. However, Elizabeth found the whole process 'quite entertaining. It was a dear old man showing us what to do'.

3.1.6 Women's Timber Corps

Libby was the only respondent who spent some time in the Women's Timber Corps. Her training involved spending a month at Wetherby where she received instruction on tree felling, measuring and loading timber and preparing it for use as pit props. Following their training, some recruits were placed in sawmills and others in billets from where they went to work in various woods, undertaking the tasks for which they had been trained. They moved frequently as the job dictated.

3.1.7 Pest Control

Florence's training with the Buckinghamshire WAEC consisted of spending several days working with two experienced WLA members learning how to check rat runs. Food was placed at appropriate points near the runs for two consecutive days and, on the third day, cyanide powder was mixed with the food, thus poisoning the rats.

-oOo-

The WLA and WAECs were faced with attempting to provide training in an emergency situation when other issues, such as government production targets and the demands and expectations of farmers, impinged on the process. In order to gauge the success of training methods and policies, and to assess the roles of WLA recruits, the work undertaken by both trained and untrained members of the WLA will be examined.

4. Formulation of policies on work undertaken by the WLA

In August 1916 Women's War Agricultural Committees listed the work already being undertaken by women land workers prior to the inception of the WLA. This read as follows:

clearing land, stone picking, weeding, thistle cutting, manure spreading, singling and hoeing turnips, potato setting and lifting, vegetable planting and transplanting, milking, stock tending and rearing, butter and cheese making, poultry rearing, hay making, harvesting, sheep shearing, thatching, stacking, ploughing, loading and unloading, threshing, fruit and hop picking, reed stripping, bark peeling, timber felling, gardening.⁴¹

Women's War Agricultural Committees initially encountered difficulties in persuading farming communities to accept female labour undertaking these types of work. The Committees expressed the view that this was due to the 'conservative attitude' of farmers, but were soon able to report on the 'gradual breaking down of

opposition to the idea of employing women as well as hearty appreciation of the quality of work done by those farmers who have overcome their reluctance in engaging such labour.⁴² This scenario was to be repeated on the introduction of the WLA in both 1917 and 1939 when it was again necessary to prove to farming communities the proficiency of women's labour on the land.

However, policy makers did accept that, irrespective of any training provision, the employment of women presented certain problems. Two aspects in particular were addressed: the qualitative differences in the work produced by women, and the quantitative differences between the work of women and men.

In 1918 Mrs Alfred Lyttelton, Deputy Director of the Women's Branch of the BoA, attributed the variable quality of labour produced by women to educational and class differences. She stated that

the girl of the less educated class is quick to see what is wrong [but] she is strangely reluctant to go the direct way of setting the trouble straight ... this applies as a rule to the class of girl who is only suitable for unskilled or gang work. The better educated class of woman is reasonable enough, and frequently gives great help in the way of controlling her less steady companion.⁴³

Such a view resulted in the WLA of 1917-19 attempting to recruit women with a university education and it thus became known as a middle and upper class organisation in comparison with the working class associations of other industries such as munitions.

Both Mrs Lyttelton and Miss Talbot also pinpointed what they defined as the 'temperamental differences' between men and women. Mrs Lyttelton considered that women exhibited 'what may be termed 'temperamental surprises' but it did not follow that it [female labour] lacked technical ability or the willingness to work.⁴⁴ Miss Talbot suggested that while 'a woman's working methods are different temperamentally from those of a man,' she has proved to be 'capable in many kinds

of farm work of achieving the same ends' and claimed that 'women's labour was worthy of substituting for male labour in an emergency situation.'⁴⁵

In Craven in 1917 the CTFA not only considered the aptitude of women working on the land, but also debated whether, on their return from the fields, women should be expected to undertake domestic work for the farmer. However, it was explained to the CTFA by Mrs Rowe of the West Riding Women's War Agricultural Committee that while farmers' wives might be short of domestic help, it was not expected that WLA recruits should undertake additional work in the home, although they should be prepared to 'make beds and do other little odd jobs.'⁴⁶ A CTFA member made a plea for farmers to consider women in the same light as men and not expect them to work from 6am to 6pm in the fields and then undertake domestic work until 10pm. He went on to say that 'women had always done double work in this respect, but having proved that she was equal, and in many respects superior to man, she ought to be placed on the same footing.'⁴⁷

The perceived qualitative and quantitative differences in work output were taken forward as the WLA strove to keep pace with the changes confronting it on its reintroduction in 1939. In particular, comparisons continued to be made between work carried out by men and women. Writing in *The Women's Land Army*, Sackville-West referred to a list of agricultural tasks carried out by women and men where male output was given as 100.⁴⁸ This indicated that women excelled men in tending poultry (101) and cutting, bunching and packing flowers (101-106) and achieved scores of between 95 and 100 for picking fruit and 101-103 for gathering peas and beans. However, the output of women on certain physical and 'technical' work was deemed inferior to that of men, their score in some instances dropping to half that of males. For example, women were given scores of 49 for driving and repair work on tractors (although a score of 73 was achieved for driving tractors, excluding repairs), 46 for loading dung and 44 for loading potatoes. Some tasks, such as harvesting operations, were divided up and scores for women ranged from 92 for turning hay and 91 for cutting threshing bands down to 61 for loading sheaves.

Whilst some women accepted that men's physical strength was superior to their own (including some of the ex-WLA members interviewed) there was no indication by Sackville-West on how the scores were achieved. Nor was any evidence presented on how the tests were undertaken or of the numbers participating in them and no mention was made of any factors which might distort results. Despite the problematic nature of the findings, the necessity to pay special attention to the strength and fitness of WLA recruits was recognised at governmental level. In 1941 it was suggested that 'the special feature of the WLA as compared with other women's services was that nearly all the work was heavy and demanded a high standard of physique.'⁴⁹ It was suggested again in 1943 that the 'manpower and women power position is now so acute it is impossible, as a matter of national policy, to allow able-bodied young women to take jobs below their capacity.'⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the WLA was subject to criticism for not allowing recruits to undertake domestic and clerical work which was the case in the women's auxiliary services. It was suggested the services were in an exceptional position, however, as even clerks and domestics had to be mobile and live under hard conditions whereas WLA members were selected for hard work and must not be used for less exacting tasks.⁵¹

A further issue which affected the employment of WLA recruits and the nature of work undertaken on the reintroduction of the WLA in 1939 was their employment by WAECs. Due to the reluctance of individual farmers to employ WLA recruits, steps were also taken by WAECs to employ them and allocate them to farms when jobs needed to be done and when the seasons demanded. This was a more economical use of available labour especially for small farmers who may not have had sufficient year-round work to employ a full-time WLA member. Recruits could, therefore, be employed in three categories: private farms, WAECs and the Women's Timber Corps. As Table 3 shows, by September 1943, WAECs employed 26,374 or 34.75% of the total current WLA membership (75,884).

Table 3: Employment of WLA recruits at September 1943*In private employment*

(a)	Milkers/in milking and general farm work	20,159
(b)	In other farm employment (excluding milking)	12,521
(c)	Horticulture	10,817
(d)	Other jobs	<u>1,674</u>
		45,171

In WAEC employment

26,374

Women's Timber Corps

4,339
75,884

(Source: *The Land Girl*, Vol.4, No.9, 1943, p.3).

5. **Implementation of policies on work undertaken by the WLA**

In the West Riding, the implementation of policies on work was undertaken by two county bodies: the WLA and WAEC. WLA representatives would place recruits with local farmers to be employed and directed by them, or the WRWAEC would arrange for recruits to work on different farms on specific tasks. In Craven, the work was usually associated with ploughing and by 1943 there were approximately 120 tractor drivers in the area employed by the WRWAEC with a further 40 WLA personnel on private farms.⁵²

The WLA and WRWAEC liaised over common issues and received instructions from WLA headquarters and the MAF in relation to accident compensation, discipline and the status of certain tasks. On one occasion, for example, a possible disciplinary issue arose when recruits accommodated at the Holden Clough and Corner House hostels refused to carry out drainage work and the matter was resolved through discussion by both the WRWLA and the WRWAEC.⁵³ As outlined in Chapter Five, there also existed a network of various committees, officers and recruits within the community making an input at local level. For example, Settle Rural District Council expressed concern to the

WRWAEC Machinery Sub-committee that road bands had not been fitted to the Committee's tractors, thereby causing damage to the road surfaces.⁵⁴ Attempts were also made by the Committees to encourage recruits by recognising their achievements. On one occasion, a letter of congratulation was sent to Muriel Coates on her success at winning a ploughing competition in the Craven area⁵⁵ and thanks were also issued to recruits who had assisted a colleague who suffered a serious accident which resulted in her having a leg amputated.⁵⁶

The WRWAEC was more likely than the WLA to implement policy of a technical nature as it had control of agricultural machinery. It deliberated on the way in which certain operations could be undertaken, such as the possibility of hitching a 16-tooth harrow behind a set of rollers to be drawn by the same tractor, or hitching an eight-tooth harrow behind a corn drill to be drawn as one unit⁵⁷ thereby undertaking two operations simultaneously.

6. Outcomes of policies on the work of WLA recruits

Recruits employed by private farmers and by WAECs carried out similar tasks. The procedures and work described in the following sections are, therefore, representative of the WLA in general and are not only applicable to Craven and the West Riding. Whilst the intention is to provide a flavour of the tasks carried out and an insight into the difficulties encountered in particular local conditions, it should be borne in mind that descriptions of procedures adopted, tasks undertaken and mechanical operations carried out are not definitive, being based upon recollections of life some 50-60 years ago. However, the inclusion of these descriptions is considered to be crucial, since the work carried out by the WLA on the land was the very reason for its existence.

6.1 The foreman

The role of foreman was undertaken by a male employee of the WRWAEC and was particularly important as he had oversight of the work of WLA recruits at

various depots, liaised with local farmers and had an administrative function. It will be shown in Section 6.3.2, that there were limited opportunities in Craven for recruits to achieve the position of 'forewoman' but this role was very different to that of 'foreman'.

Each foreman took charge of a depot to which recruits were allocated. Of the two foremen interviewed for this study, Foreman Donald was based at Linton and Foreman Bert at Gargrave. Depots were located throughout Craven and were similar to farmyards where equipment was stored in barns or buildings leased by the WAEC for the purpose. Some depots, such as Gargrave, had few facilities. According to Violet, there was a fireplace in one corner but recruits had to go to the railway line to find coal to burn. Toilets were seldom provided, so when Irene went to a new field the first thing she and many women did was to find an appropriate place 'to spend a penny.' Depots were located at Langbar, Wigglesworth, Settle, Airton, Hellifield, Clapham, West Marton, Gargrave, Grassington, Beamsley, Thornton, Lothersdale, Holden and other villages. Foreman Donald found the location of Linton depot particularly useful being at the centre of roads which, he said, led out 'like the spokes of a wheel' to Skyrethornes, another road went 'up the dale', a road ran to Grassington, another 'up the moor' with other roads leading to Hebden and Burnsall. There was occasionally competition between depots to achieve the largest acreage ploughed with Gargrave often winning because the biggest fields were in that area.

Before recruits were sent from depots to work on farms, foremen required from farmers signed contracts that they would pay the WRWAEC for the work to be done as some of them were reluctant to plough and/or put pen to paper because of their financial concerns. The foreman kept a record of work carried out by recruits, ensuring that the farmer was charged the appropriate amount for the acreage ploughed. If he had been overcharged, relationships between the farming community and the WRWAEC could have been seriously damaged, but the contracts also protected the WRWAEC. As Foreman Donald suggested 'they'd twist you left, right and centre would farmers ... it was a sort of battle all the way

with them.’ Foremen also kept records of the mileage of each tractor, ensuring that oil was changed regularly and that sufficient ploughshares and fuel were in store so that work was not delayed. Foreman Donald said he often worked all weekend ‘mind you, you just took it automatically in them days. But you worked damned hard, you did.’

The foremen interviewed were protective of the recruits for whom they were responsible and attempted to ensure farmers did not exploit them. Foremen were occasionally asked by concerned parents to ‘look after their girls’ and expressed pride in their charges when they produced good work or performed duties outside their usual roles, for example when one recruit stayed with a farmer’s wife and helped to deliver her child. The recruits themselves appear to have formed good relationships with their foremen, and appreciated niceties such as not being sent out from the depot in pouring rain, or being allowed home early in poor weather, although not all foremen made these concessions. However, the foreman’s job was to get as much work as possible out of recruits and Linda recalled her foreman telling her that from a certain point in Bentham, he could see every field in the area. She could not be sure whether this was so ‘but had to keep going, just in case.’

6.2 Work undertaken by the WLA in Craven

Figure 7 gives an indication of the timing and effects of climate upon various tasks carried out by the WLA. A brief description of the jobs undertaken is also given in the following paragraphs.

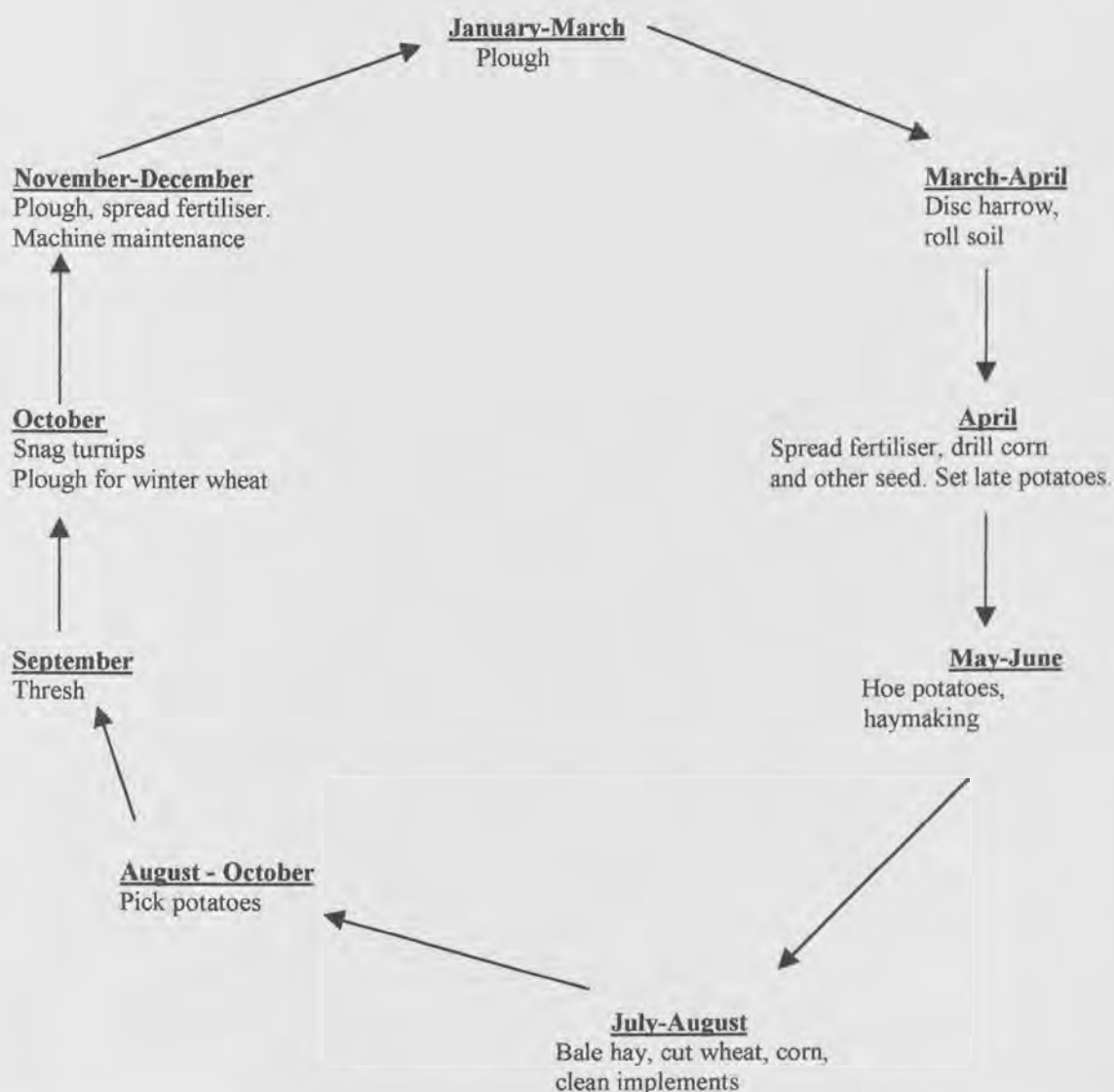
Operating the Tractor

The majority of the WLA in Craven are employed by the machinery section of the WRWAEC. They are a sort of panzer division equipped with tractors and all the paraphernalia of modern agricultural machinery which can be operated in conjunction with them.⁵⁸

Few people in Craven had seen tractors when Bert became foreman in charge of operations in 1942 and when the fields were green with pasture grass.

Consequently, few male labourers had tractor driving experience and the possibility of women driving tractors had not been broached. Within a few months, however,

Figure 7: Approximate agricultural cycle in Craven
(dependent upon prevailing weather conditions)



the Fordson had become the most popular make of tractor used by the WRWAEC in Craven. Smaller Massey Ferguson tractors were also used as they were easier to manipulate in small fields. Tractors provided the power to draw other implements such as ploughs, harrows and binders, some of which required operation by the

tractor driver at the same time as she drove the vehicle in either a standing or sitting position to obtain better control of both machines. Nancy recalled that she drove her tractor sitting on the mudguard to balance the vehicle when grass cutting. Other complex equipment was operated by a worker sitting on the implement, (such as the binder) thus enabling the tractor driver to concentrate on driving her vehicle.

Tractors were fitted with different types of wheels to suit different terrain. Tractors with lug wheels (large iron spikes) were more appropriate to power through heavy ground although it was illegal to drive them on the road as they tended to dig up the road surface. In fact it was reported that Rennie Whiteoak, a tractor driver of Settle, was fined £5 for driving a land tractor on the road without protective tyres.⁵⁹

Photograph 6: The lug wheel tractor and recruits (c. 1944)



(Source: Jane, 1.6.96)

If these tractors were to be moved they were conveyed on a trailer by a tractor with rubber tyres or, alternatively, wooden bands were bolted on the lug wheels. Both methods were problematic however. The former could be a slow process, with Florence requiring an overnight stay at Settle Hostel as she transported a tractor from Bentham to Airton (a distance of approximately 21 miles). The latter method of fitting the bands was physically very hard work and the bands quickly disintegrated as the tractor moved along the road.

In order to start up the tractor the ignition was turned on and the engine started up on petrol by means of a starting handle. Recruits found it necessary to ensure their thumbs were placed in the correct position, as the handle had a nasty habit of springing back and breaking the thumb. One recruit even suffered a broken nose when the starting handle kicked back. Difficulty was also experienced in getting the engine to turn over on mornings when the oil had thickened during a cold night. When the engine was sufficiently warm it was switched over from petrol to tractor vapour oil (TVO), a paraffin-based substance, which vaporised at a higher temperature than petrol. To test whether the engine was sufficiently hot to switch to TVO, Nancy used to spit on the hot plate and if her saliva sizzled then it was hot enough to switch over. The engine could be switched off at break times and restarted on TVO if the engine remained warm, otherwise it would have to be restarted on petrol. TVO had the appearance of water and on one occasion a recruit put water into the tractor instead of TVO because she was unaware of the correct procedure. It took some considerable time to draw off the water and clean out the engine, indicating that some training in tractor maintenance would have been of benefit in these circumstances.

The brake on the Fordson tractor was operated via the clutch pedal and this procedure could cause difficulties if not done correctly. In order to stop the vehicle, it was firstly put out of gear by depressing the clutch, which was then pushed down further and fastened with a hook to ensure it stayed in position. When moving off, the hook was removed and, keeping the pedal down, the tractor was put in gear and the pedal gradually released.

The cold weather of the winter months and the construction of the tractors of the period combined to provide some uncomfortable working conditions. On arrival at work recruits often found the iron tractor seat in a block of ice which had to be chipped away before work could commence. It was occasionally necessary for recruits to stop work to lean on the radiator to warm themselves or to keep the engine running at lunch time and sit on the tractor wheel for warmth. At the end of each day's work between the months of October and March, tractors were drained of water to prevent them from freezing, as antifreeze substances had still to be introduced. Some recruits and male workers may have assumed the frost was not hard enough to warrant the draining of the 10-gallon tanks which had then to be refilled each morning, but the WRWAEC deemed failure to drain the tanks a serious offence, particularly if a cracked cylinder block resulted. Five-gallon oil-drums full of water had to be hoisted shoulder-high in order to refill the tanks. However, these drums of water doubled as central heating when travelling to work in the mornings, as some hostel recruits were able to fill them with hot water and convey them in the WRWAEC transport. On other occasions water was drawn from nearby streams.

During the 1940s tractor drivers were exposed to the elements as there were no hoods or cabins to afford protection. Daphne recalled suffering from chilblains on her knees due to the tight breeches which had to be worn becoming wet and cold and her knees being jammed against the cold metal of the tractor. She managed to protect her hands by wearing old socks.

The 'flyer' driver

The job of 'flyer' driver was usually allocated to an experienced WLA member. It involved driving a rubber tyred tractor drawing a tank of TVO to refuel tractors working at outlying farms. It would have obviously been uneconomical for tractor drivers to break off from their work to travel long distances to refuel. The tractors used by the 'flyers' were similar to those used for fieldwork except that they had a faster gear for road travel. The drivers were affected by bad weather in

the same way as the other tractor drivers, for example when the padlock to the TVO tank froze, often holding up refuelling.

Ploughing

Ploughing usually took place between November and March and was a single person operation. Despite the aforementioned concerns of farmers and others at the ploughing up of grassland, many recruits found the art of ploughing to be the most enjoyable and rewarding aspect of their work in the WLA. Hazel Driver mentioned the satisfaction of ‘breaking into virgin grassland and seeing it roll so straight and even’ off the plough.⁶⁰ She described how an experienced ploughman paced out the field into even sections marked by twigs and a stone placed on a wall; a marker half way across the field enabled a straight furrow to be ploughed. Hazel knew she needed to keep the tractor wheel adjacent to the edge of the last cut at the same time as watching for stones and tree roots over which to lift the ploughshares to avoid damaging the implement. There were, however, many occasions when this was unavoidable. Joy suggested that while no glamour was attached to this kind of work (other than as depicted in the somewhat inaccurate recruitment posters) she particularly enjoyed the experience of being out on her own in the often rugged countryside with only wildlife for companionship. She drove a caterpillar tractor to negotiate the steep fields and drew a three-furrow plough. Multiple furrow ploughs were used in Craven with two or possibly three ploughshares as indicated in photograph 7. The operation of levers enabled the depth and direction of the plough to be altered if necessary and also pulled up the ploughshares to allow turns to be made at the headland (the land between the field’s boundary and the main ploughing area).

Disc harrowing

Fields were usually disc harrowed several times between March and April after ploughing had ended, the tractor driver performing the operation at the same

Photograph 7: Ploughing using a two-furrow plough drawn by a lug wheel tractor (1944)



(Source: Doris 15.7.1996)

time as she drove the tractor. The implement consisted of a frame holding sets of between eight and 10 discs placed at an angle. The discs cut through the ploughed furrows breaking down the land further although not to the extent that the ploughed

grass was brought back to the surface. A lever enabled the harrows to be set at different angles thereby achieving a variety of cuts required by different surfaces.

Spreading fertiliser

Fertiliser, consisting of basic slag from blast furnaces and lime, was spread on the ploughed land in November, December and April. Initially it was delivered loose and deposited in a pile ready to be shovelled on to a trailer and WLA recruits had to master the art of balancing on the moving tractor-drawn trailer, digging out the lime with a flat shovel and dispersing it across the fields. Recruits were more concerned not to fall off the trailer than to ensure an even distribution of lime. In addition, if the lime blew back it could affect the eyes and mouth and, according to Ginny, if ‘you licked your lips and the lime stuck, before you finished your mouth was like a pudding.’

With the further introduction of mechanised implements, the lime was delivered in bags from which WLA recruits transferred it into a lime spreader. The lime was poured into a trough (as indicated in photograph 8) from where it was fed on to saucers which spun round when the tractor was in gear, thus spreading the lime.

Madge had a different experience of spreading fertiliser when working on a private farm. This took the form of cutting ‘muck’ out of the farm fold yard, the volume of which necessitated the use of a wagon or horse and cart to remove it into a field to harden in the frost; it would then be spread across several fields to act as fertiliser.

Drilling seed⁶¹

The most usual method of sowing seed (usually in April) was via a rubber-tyred tractor drawing a seed drill. This was a two-person operation with a recruit or labourer driving the tractor and a second recruit sitting on the drill platform. The

Photograph 8: Preparing for lime spreading in the Bentham area (c. 1944)



(Source: Florence, 1.8.1995)

task of the latter was to work levers allowing the seed to travel down 10-12 pipes into rows made by cutters at the bottom of the pipes, the size of which varied according to the size of seed. The drill operator also ensured the pipes were kept clear and, on reaching the headland, pulled a lever which prevented seed being sown.

It was also known for grass re-seeding to be undertaken by hand with a 'fiddle drill' which consisted of a bag carried round the shoulders containing seed

which dropped on to a pulley system across which was drawn a leather thong thus scattering the seed. Some fields were re-seeded with grass after a corn yield to improve the land and to provide hay for the following year.

Chain harrowing

After seed had been sown the field was chain harrowed, usually in April. The chain harrow was a tractor drawn implement consisting of a square metal frame within which were fastened metal chains and/or spikes. When drawn over the ground, the chains disturbed the soil and covered up the seed.

Rolling

The ground was rolled after being chain harrowed in an attempt to ensure that only the minimum amount of soil (and seeds) blew away. Rubber wheeled tractors drew cylindrical shaped ridged iron rollers over the ground. Corn was also rolled when the seeds had sprouted in order to firm the roots.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork covered a multitude of tasks including stone picking (the removal of stones from fields), stubbing thistles, hoeing, snagging turnips (pulling from the ground and chopping off the roots and tops with a knife), gathering potatoes and other general work. WRWAEC recruits undertook some fieldwork when tractor driving duties were out of season or when tasks such as potato gathering took priority. Recruits employed on private farms often carried out fieldwork jobs.

Potato picking

Potatoes were usually planted in April and, rather than being hoed manually, were often hoed by a machine similar to a plough drawn by a small tractor. The

hoe was drawn between the rows of plants pushing the soil up around them as it travelled up and down each side of the row.

One of the jobs most hated by recruits was that of picking potatoes (usually between August and October) which involved them working in groups following behind tractors drawing 'spinners'. The tractors travelled up the rows of plants and the spinners threw the potatoes out in different directions. The job of recruits was to gather the potatoes in sacks and buckets with the latter being particularly heavy when empty, let alone when full of potatoes. Noreen described the work as 'back breaking' as it involved so much bending and, if the ground was heavy, recruits became bogged down in the mud. Ann and Linda recalled picking potatoes in October when the soil was particularly wet causing many of the potatoes to go bad and disintegrate when picked up. Gloves and hands became wet and cold and if working in pouring rain with no shelter, recruits could barely stand at the end of the day. The fact that the tractor drivers were usually male and the potato gatherers female remained an irritation for respondents some 50-60 years after the event.

Potatoes were often stored in 'clamps' or, as they were also termed locally, 'potato pies'. These consisted of a one-foot thick layer of straw placed round the potatoes banked with six inches of earth with a ridge around it to act as a gutter. It was necessary to check the structure periodically for cracks to ensure frost and rain had not penetrated.⁶² However, as Maggie mentioned, this did not always work as her first job was to dismantle a massive 'pie' which had gone rotten with the potatoes having been reduced to yellow slime.

'Snagging' turnips

Turnips were planted via a seed drill and when around four inches high the plants were hoed manually to get rid of weeds and poor plants thus allowing the stronger specimens to flourish. Once again the harvesting or 'snagging' of turnips was hard physical work and it took great effort to pull them out of the ground, particularly in the harsh October weather. The roots and tops were chopped off

with a knife and the vegetables placed in piles to be collected. As Ginny said: 'You wrapped paper and all sorts round your legs to try and keep them dry but ended up being wet through to the knees; your hands were cold and you could hardly move them. It was the most hateful job, turnip snagging. Yes, it was terrible.'

Haymaking

Grass was usually cut in July and August but it was still often necessary to use machines to dry it out. The machine would pick up the grass and spin it in the air, thus allowing the grass to dry. It was then raked into rows, by labourers and farmers, and occasionally by women who also did the baling.

Binding or cutting corn

This complicated operation was carried out in July and August in partnership between tractor driver and binder operator. The latter operated a lever, which lowered and highered the 'sails' depending on the height of the corn and the inclination of the ground. Photograph 9 shows the intricate binding machine. As the sails rotated they flattened the corn which was then cut by a blade, thus causing it to fall on to a belt from where it was fed between the rollers into a box. When there was sufficient corn in the box it was spun round to form a sheaf which was bound with string and then ejected to the ground. The tractor and binder would travel round the field cutting the corn from the perimeter edges. As the strip of corn in the middle of the field became narrower, small animals such as rabbits and field mice ran out and were often killed by farmers or by the binder blade, which distressed many recruits.

The consequences of poor weather were recalled by Nancy when farmers and labourers had to walk in front of the corn cutter lifting up the crop to be cut as it had been flattened by rain. On occasion, stooks of corn were so wet that harvesting was not immediately possible and grass grew up into them making them extremely

Photograph 9: Operating the binder (c. 1944)



(Source: Violet 14.8.96)

difficult to harvest when the weather finally improved. Approximately six sheaves were stooked into a pyramid to dry out and were then stacked ready for threshing.

***Threshing*⁶³**

Threshing was usually done in September, by which time rats had often moved into the stacked sheaves. When threshing time approached men with pitch forks surrounded the stacks watching for rats to come out of their holes. Hazel

Driver and Noreen described their distress in hearing the rats squeal as they were caught by the pitchforks or worried by dogs. An enjoyable aspect to threshing mentioned by Ginny and others was the more plentiful food supply as farmers were responsible for providing meals for threshing gangs as they travelled round to each farm.

The huge threshing machine was again tractor-powered and the 'threshing gang' consisted of several members. A WLA recruit threw the sheaves up to the 'bondcutter' standing at the top of the thresher. She caught the sheaf string with a hooked knife thereby cutting the string in one movement. Another recruit (known as the 'feeder') caught the sheaf before it disintegrated and held it head down into a drum where a set of bars beat out the grain. The straw was then conveyed to the front of the machine for collection and baling to be used for animal fodder and bedding. The grain, broken straw and chaff fell through sieves from where the grain was transported to the back of the machine to run through spouts, at the bottom of which were fastened sacks. The chaff was blown out in a heap to be swept up and taken away. The whole process was extremely dirty and dusty and recruits tended to wear a scarf round their heads or mouths as their uniform provided insufficient protection.

*Baling*⁶⁴

Both straw and hay were baled in July and August for storage purposes and for ease of transportation. The tractor engine powered a pulley belt, which was operated by a lever on the tractor. The straw or hay was sent down a chute from where it was compressed to form a bale. Two grooved wooden boards were then inserted through which a recruit threaded wires for another recruit placed opposite her to tie round the bale. The boards were returned to their starting point to enable the process to recommence. Several recruits found the manipulation of wire particularly difficult and some of the machinery was said to be rather ramshackle.

Maintenance of machinery

Machinery was cleaned, greased and put away after each seasonal task such as ploughing and harvesting. When equipment was needed for use again recruits had to ensure no deterioration had taken place while it was in store. Daphne described painting and cleaning implements and plugs with recruits wanting to use the grease gun to keep their hands soft in the absence of toiletries. Millie and Jean also recalled putting tractor oil on their arms to prevent being burned in very hot sun despite the awful smell which emanated from them as a result. In addition, general machine maintenance was undertaken in depots when the weather was too poor to work outdoors and some recruits also occasionally helped out in the farmhouse, sheltered in a barn or sat round a fire made in an old bucket.

Pest Control

Marie was one of several pest control officers in Craven responsible for rat and mole catching. She travelled to farms on a very heavy bicycle with the tools of her trade - large boxes of poison - strapped to the back. Rats were a particular problem in the Settle area where the rural district council paid 1½d. per tail delivered to the Sanitary Department.⁶⁵

In Buckinghamshire Florence recalled two recruits working together and being sent to farms identified by the WAEC to exterminate rats and moles. The gassing of moles was also necessary when, for example, molehills appeared in a field sowed with linseed. The procedure was to place cyanide powder as far as possible into the mole tunnel via a long-handled spoon and seal up the tunnel. Another method described in *The Land Girl* was to fit a length of rubber tubing to a car exhaust pipe with the other end of the tube being placed in a rat hole. Rats were killed by a blow to the head on their emergence from the hole with the sentiment that 'one more of Hitler's helpers was removed.'⁶⁶

Work with horses

Horses were not used by the WRWAEC so that the experience of respondents in this type of work was very limited. Hazel Driver offered some insight into her efforts at operating the horse-drawn plough during her time on a private farm near York and was soon 'initiated into the jargon of bellybands and britchings, headpieces and saddles.'⁶⁷ However, she described the difficulty, particularly during the early days, of persuading the two giant horses to put their feet just where she wanted them due to the lack of a disciplined handler. Nevertheless, after two months she felt she had made great progress and could harness and yoke the horses with relative ease. Muriel Coates was placed on a private farm near Gargrave and became an expert in working with horses, winning several ploughing competitions. Peggy also had experience of working with cart horses when ploughing and harrowing on a private farm in Goole. However, Madge felt some trepidation when working with hunters at a Northallerton farm, for while she was able to prepare one side of the animal, she was unable to conquer her fear of moving round its back or front to prepare the other side.

Work with timber

Libby was the only respondent who worked for the Timber Corps. Her duties were to measure timber after it was felled and transport it to local railway stations such as Darley near Harrogate and Clapham, near Settle, where it was unloaded on to railway trucks and dispatched to collieries to be used as pit props.

Dairy work

Linda worked on a private farm at Stackhouse near Settle and was responsible for a milk round, working in the dairy and bottling milk. She also took milk kits round in a van (although other milk rounds used horse power) from which people would obtain their milk in a jug. In many other areas the ability to milk was a great advantage. A number of recruits were employed on this work as dairy herds

played a major role in food provision, and ‘milk for the babies’ was a phrase used in recruitment literature. The government, in particular, saw milking as a responsible job in the WLA.

6.3 Issues arising from work undertaken

Several issues relating to the work carried out by the WLA merit further examination, as they contribute towards achieving a greater understanding of the prevailing circumstances. These are discussed in the following sections.

6.3.1 Did recruits take pride in their work?

In *If Their mothers Only Knew*, Shirley Joseph suggests that it was possible only for recruits employed on private farms to take pride in their work.⁶⁸ This statement was put to recruits employed by the WRWAEC and while their responses were perhaps to be expected, indicating that they did take pride in their work, they were able to provide evidence in support of this. Joy suggested that pride was taken in the quality of work produced especially when working in pairs and partnerships were built up. Dorothy felt that recruits worked as well as they could, stating that if their work was not up to standard a foreman could refuse to have them in his team. Elizabeth said farmers themselves would soon complain if recruits ‘made a mess,’ particularly as they were paying the WRWAEC for the work undertaken.

Several recruits also mentioned participating in local and regional ploughing competitions as an example of taking pride in their work. They performed to a sufficiently high standard to win prizes in competitions with men who had many more years ploughing experience than the WLA. Such achievements were well documented, not only in the local newspapers but also nationally, which no doubt drew to the attention of the general public the type of work at which recruits could excel. For example, the *Bradford Telegraph & Argus* reported that Doris, formerly a cashier in the city, represented the Skipton and Bowland areas in the final of the

West Riding ploughing competition for the WLA and WAEC.⁶⁹ The competition field was measured out into plots of land which were allotted to participants to plough. Judges gave marks on whether the furrows were straight and of an appropriate depth. The national *Sunday Express* reported that the ‘ploughgirls’ were praised by judges in the Yorkshire Ploughing Championships who felt that ‘on the whole they are better than the men ... they take more time, more pains, and are more tidy with their work.’⁷⁰ Such competitions were not restricted to tractor ploughing for, as the *Yorkshire Observer* stated, Muriel Coates won a ploughing match in Craven against ‘crack ploughmen’ using a horse drawn plough after previously ‘working in a Leeds hairdressing parlour [where] permanent waves were her speciality.’⁷¹

In some cases, however, recruits did find their new vocation too severe to cope with and made an early dash for freedom. Peggy said that in Lincolnshire two or three colleagues absconded through the hostel bedroom window and were eventually sent to Cornwall for strawberry picking duties, which must have caused the more hardy members to question their own loyalty. Although Daphne recalled ‘some little thin ones leaving because they couldn’t cope with the hard work,’ on the whole in Craven they seemed to be in the minority, and a number of recruits were unaware of anyone dropping out, not realising this may have been an option.

There were, of course, occasions when the WLA found it necessary to dismiss recruits for behaviour which it deemed unacceptable, such as consorting with locally-based soldiers, being too tired for work or being worse the wear for drink.⁷² However, from the documentary and oral evidence available, these instances appear to have been relatively few given the number of members in the WLA and recruits generally appear to have taken pride in the work carried out in the employ of the WRWAEC.

6.3.2 Were recruits in the WLA eligible for promotion?

There appears to have been very little opportunity for promotion within the WLA. As Ginny said ‘there was no promotion really, not in farming. I mean how can you promote anybody?’ and Doris pointed out ‘you were supposed to be capable of doing the same things.’ Whilst the issue was aired at government level, it was in response to criticism that no mechanism for promotion was in place in the WLA.

According to MAF notes on WLA organisation, opportunities for promotion in the WLA did exist, although not to ranks as in the military services. The notes suggest this would be inappropriate given that many WLA recruits were employed individually some distance apart and it would also be unreasonable for an employing farmer to pay a recruit at a higher rate for a ranking conferred upon her by the WLA. Nevertheless, the MAF suggested that individuals could be recompensed for taking additional responsibility such as being in charge of a dairy herd⁷³ or becoming a forewoman who could

preserve good discipline and efficiency in working hours and sometimes check wage sheets and make wage payments. This practice should be encouraged by Land Army Offices. Gang forewomen occupy a position of responsibility and are therefore paid a wage above the county minimum.⁷⁴

In the WRWAEC, however, experienced male agricultural workers appear to have been allocated foreman roles and, given their involvement with the farming community and initial reluctance by farmers to employ WLA labour, this seems to have been an appropriate decision.

Somewhat belatedly, perhaps, the 1947 Report on Women's Supplementary Labour stated that prospects for promotion in the WLA could be enhanced and put forward three areas in which this could be achieved.⁷⁵ It firstly recommended that competent workers should be given opportunities for acquiring additional skills and

thus qualify for better paid employment. Some recruits in Craven were afforded opportunities for additional training as previously indicated. It was also possible to take proficiency tests which were available in the following areas of work: Fruit; General Farm Work; Market Gardening and Fieldwork; Milking and Dairy Work; Outdoor Gardening and Glasshouse work; Poultry Keeping; Tractor Driving. Doris took the tractor test which, she recalled, consisted of practical tasks of servicing and maintaining the tractor, setting out the land for ploughing, setting the plough, ploughing, reversing with a trailer and use of binder, disc harrow or drill. The oral part of the test included describing the use of various implements such as the roller or chain harrow, the principles of ploughing, naming the main tractor parts and giving probable reasons for engine stoppage.⁷⁶ Marks were awarded out of 100 with Dora achieving a figure in the nineties, for which she was given a Bakelite badge and paid a minimal sum in excess of the basic salary.

The second recommendation made in the Report was that suitable recruits should be trained for and appointed to supervisory posts, especially in WAECs. Those women in WRWAEC employment in Craven who had experience of the limited promotion opportunities available had mixed feelings about them. Maisie undertook a forewoman course but, along with others, was refused permission to take up a post because she was needed for ploughing. She did, however, carry out one of the forewoman's tasks, that of taking recruits round to outlying farms in a van, but found herself a little unpopular as the women being transported did not want to be friends. Maisie consoled herself at this lack of opportunity by saying 'it would have been a different life, we would have been more tied and they would have been able to send us where we were needed.' Peggy expressed a similar view when she was made 'sub-leader' in Goole. She said 'I wish I hadn't got sub-leader because I did lose friends. They said they weren't having me bossing them about.' It therefore appears that recruits themselves were not always at ease with the prospect of having women in charge and were more willing to receive direction from men.

A third recommendation made in the Report on Women's Supplementary Labour was that women with appropriate ability should be appointed to salaried positions within the WLA, the WAECs and in agriculture generally. This was a progressive view but, given the structure and composition of the WLA and WRWAEC, it appears likely that only recruits with a good education and middle/upper class background would have been appropriate to qualify for a salaried position within the WLA. Furthermore, it was unlikely that recruits would achieve such a position within agriculture generally due to the reluctance in accepting women for training, particularly in universities and agricultural colleges.

6.3.3 Were health and safety policies in force to protect recruits?

Central government accepted liability for compensation to WLA recruits in respect of accidents which occurred during training⁷⁷ and debate ensued in the House of Commons regarding comparative disability pension schemes in the WLA, WRNS and WAAF.⁷⁸ The response was that the WLA were civilian employees and, as such, were not entitled to parity of treatment with the auxiliary services.⁷⁹ These issues were further discussed in the specific case of Kathleen Giles who, in WLA training, lost an eye after it had been penetrated by a cow's horn. In comparison with an ATS member who sustained an eye injury, Miss Giles received substantially less compensation.⁸⁰ Whilst government had a policy on compensation for the WLA, in certain circumstances it appears this was of a different standard to that afforded to some other women's war work, and neither the MAF nor the WLA formed a policy on training in accident prevention in the workplace or provided much information on health and well-being. The WLA Benevolent Fund was, of course, in existence to provide financial assistance and the WRWAEC also offered support to recruits who were injured in their employment - provided it was sure the farmer was not to blame.

On occasion, consideration was given by the WRWAEC to ways in which it could assist recruits in making their working lives more comfortable, such as issuing goggles while working on threshing and by providing thermos flasks.

However, this equipment was by no means available to all recruits, some of whom were completely unaware of it. In a further concession towards the general health of recruits in 1949, the WRWAEC agreed to their attendance at the Mass Radiography Scheme for detection of tuberculosis for which they were allowed special leave and payment of travelling expenses.

Several recruits interviewed experienced the general lack of health and safety provision while serving in the WLA or in later years. Jean suffered a tractor accident when on active service, for which the WRWAEC awarded her approximately £1,000 compensation, a sum which, in the 1940s, reflected the severity of her injuries. The accident occurred when she was disc harrowing with an Italian PoW whose tractor became bogged down. Jean went to assist him and when she climbed on to the tractor it tipped over and pinned her down. Her left leg was burned and her right leg almost amputated. She later contracted tetanus as dirt and grass had infected the wound. However, she was determined not to lose her leg and managed to walk again after treatment lasting two years.

Another tractor accident occurred when Constance and others were told by a foreman to manually move a trailer carrying a tank of TVO instead of hitching it to a tractor. Some recruits were at the rear of the trailer with Constance and a colleague at the front. However, the combination of the inclination of the ground and the weight of the trailer caused it to become too heavy to hold and the trailer ran over Constance. She suffered a leg injury which became ulcerated and septic and caused muscle damage. She, too, received compensation from the WRWAEC as they presumably acknowledged that the foreman's judgement was at fault on this occasion.

Maisie recalled working with a male partner on a farm near Silsden. The farmer directed them to a location where a deep pothole was concealed from view, becoming visible only at the last moment. As the tractor began to teeter, Maisie's partner shouted at her to jump and he pushed her off the vehicle as it rolled over and landed a foot away from them both. Maisie felt that on this occasion the

intention had been to cause an accident rather than prevent one because the farmer was so reluctant to plough up his land.

Florence suffered illness whilst working on pest destruction for the Buckinghamshire WAEC. As she placed cyanide powder into mole tunnels, a strong breeze blowing throughout the day periodically blew back fumes from the powder causing her to have severe stomach cramps and sickness which she feels caused her illness in later years. This cannot be proved, of course, but several recruits have had illness in the years following their service in the WLA which they feel were caused by the conditions in which they worked.

Both Joy and Gloria contracted asthma from the dust produced by threshing. Joy lost two stones in weight and initially received sick pay but no compensation, having to leave the WLA and find herself alternative employment. Nancy was also 'invalided out' of the WLA having developed fibrositis in her shoulder through ploughing. She became physically sick and was told that if she did not give up the work she could become disabled; the condition continues to 'flare up' over 50 years later. She received no assistance in finding other work, stating 'you were left to fend for yourself'.

It appears, therefore, that although the WRWAEC and WLA did what they could for recruits in health and safety by providing limited compensation when accidents occurred, assistance was given 'after the event' with few preventative measures being taken to protect recruits in their working environment. Whilst appreciating that operations were carried out in a war situation, it is unfortunate that policy makers could not have offered more adequate preventative measures.

6.3.4 How was the quality of WLA labour perceived in Craven?

When most WLA recruits entered Craven under the auspices of the WRWAEC in 1942, a degree of prejudice existed towards them from farmers who did not want their land ploughed. This resulted in relationships between farmers

and recruits initially being somewhat strained. Farmers resented intrusion by the WRWAEC, preferring to be left to their own devices and continue livestock farming. As Foreman Donald said, 'It was a time when the girls and the farmers had an entirely new type of life.' Recruits recalled these early days with Maisie stating that one farmer filled her tractor petrol tank with sand so that she and her partner could not work at all that day. Dorothy remembered that 'the old farmers could not understand how girls not much more than 20 years old could do it and didn't treat you with respect ... these were the old sticklers.' Violet felt 'the farmers regarded us as a joke because they weren't used to women on the land driving tractors and they made fun because some of us were from the town.' However, both Dorothy and Violet went on to say that in time the farming community changed its view of the WLA as recruits proved they could carry out the work required of them. They were also accepted because the farmers eventually realised that they were not going to be allocated skilled male labour.

Lincolnshire farmers adopted a similar attitude as Peggy found, suggesting 'they didn't want us. It was a case of tolerating us. The old men looked at us with contempt. At first we were just a joke - but then again, some of the old boys were a joke to us as well.' It must, however, have been easier for recruits to cope with this unpleasantness if living with others in hostel accommodation rather than when billeted alone on a farm.

Some resentment held by farmers may have been due to their own lack of understanding of new working methods and some situations had to be explained to them. Foreman Donald remembered an occasion when corn was ready for cutting but because of very heavy dew the start of work was delayed. He was advised by a farmer to 'catch up on yon two buggers; they've done nothing this morning at all.' Donald replied that it was necessary to wait until some moisture had drained away otherwise the binding equipment would skid over the grass instead of cutting it. 'Oh, oh,' responded the farmer, 'I thought they were larking about.' Some recruits did appreciate the farmers' viewpoint concerning the ploughing situation. As Ginny recalled, 'some farmers resented a woman (me) ploughing some of their best

pasture land.’ She felt ‘really sorry’ for one farmer ‘because there I was ploughing his best field out, a blinking girl, and then perhaps a man who’d been doing it all his life would have made a better job.’ However, Peggy felt that as the WLA became established in Lincolnshire, farmers were more positive about their presence and Jane said that in Craven ‘farmers came to realise we could do a man’s job - lifting and twisting through gateways’. Elizabeth agreed, suggesting that after a year or so WLA recruits were accepted and Doris felt farmers were convinced after a few samples of efficient work that WLA recruits were worth employing. Initially, recruits felt farmers’ wives were a little dubious about having girls around but Daphne thought some of the men were very pleased that the WLA was in the locality!

Respondents were asked whether, once recruits had been accepted, they felt they were treated as the equals of male labourers. Answers invariably made reference to the physical strength of male and female labour but also included their relative reliability in carrying out various tasks. Violet said that the muscles of women unused to physical work soon developed and it was possible to lift heavy loads although the men were prepared to show them what to do. Recruits occasionally worked with a male partner on two-person tasks such as binding and seeding. Many male labourers (although by no means all) tended to be older than recruits and deemed unfit for the forces due to health problems. Others had always worked in agriculture and were exempt from call up. In his capacity as foreman, Donald felt that although physically less able to do certain tasks, recruits could adapt themselves to each situation and were equal to men except for strength. He also considered that at that time they were better educated than men. He said that he ‘was sort of pleased that you hadn’t to favour either gender; you had to be careful because you needed the men to support the girls and you didn’t boost one up against the other.’ In fact, Foreman Bert tended not to place male labourers to work together as ‘if you had two men together they would do half as much work as one man and if three together a third as much.’ Donald occasionally found it necessary to keep an eye on some farmers, however, saying, ‘I used to say to this girl if they try anything with them, I said “Get your knee up!” As far as we were

concerned they [the WLA] were our mainstays - we needed them - so you weren't going to offend them.' Both Violet and her sister, Daphne, said they were treated well and there was no harassment, only one or two suggestive remarks.

Hazel Driver, writing in the *Dalesman*, found the men had two things in common - the ability to handle a tractor and their kindness.⁸¹ Recruits were generally appreciative of the support of their male partners in showing them how to perform tasks. Maisie said there were also times when the physical strength of men was particularly helpful, especially in trying to manipulate heavy machinery through narrow gateways which had been constructed for the use of horse and cart rather than machinery. Edie felt that while initially some labourers were rather cynical and laughed at the efforts of recruits from the city, they began to admire them for their determination to learn and do a good job. Daphne felt the recruits were the equals of male labourers because they 'were doing a job a man would have been doing when he was sent to the Front.'

Several women worked with PoWs, Hazel Driver stating that the Italians were 'great charmers and tried hard to chat up the girls.'⁸² Millie and Jean thought they were 'nice lads who didn't want to be in the war'. Ginny worked with German PoWs and, contrary to the usual scenario where men drove tractors and female recruits picked up potatoes, Ginny drove the tractor and potato spinner and had six German PoWs picking up the potatoes. She recalled 'they were an arrogant lot ... [and] I was quite pleased making them pick these potatoes up!'

The efforts of women were sometimes acknowledged by being 'masculinised'. Ginny operated a binder with Hazel driving the tractor and the all-female partnership was referred to as 'Fred' and 'Basil'. In recognising the achievements of recruits the *Craven Herald* stated

the girls are the boys for land work ... but it is not only in the cowshed, dairy or farm office that the land girl has proved her worth ... she is equally at home in the lambing pen or on a tractor, or as a member of a threshing team.⁸³

Despite the initial reticence of some members of the Craven community in acknowledging the efforts of the WLA in the often harsh working environment, Ann best sums up the achievements of recruits. She said that ‘at first we were looked on very much as the weaker sex, but gradually we gained their respect, and also the respect of the men with whom we worked.’

7. Summary and conclusion

Policy statements were issued to the effect that three types of training could be offered to recruits although policy makers failed to agree on the most appropriate duration of such training. The WRWLA and WRWAEC experienced some difficulty in implementing standardised training programmes and it is possible there may have been confusion over responsibilities and facilities for training in areas where both the WLA and the WRWAEC employed recruits. Indeed, some WLA members appear to have received little training in tasks such as tractor driving which the MAF deemed to be important.

On occasion, courses do not appear to have been co-ordinated with available work. This resulted in recruits receiving training as forewomen, pest exterminators, thatchers and in poultry care not being able or allowed to take up work in the branch for which they were trained. The WRWAEC was also frustrated in its efforts to provide recruits with tractor training with the result that it was forced into lobbying the MAF, it’s own policy-making body, for authorisation to train more recruits. Furthermore, while it was not necessarily the intention of policy makers to equip recruits with skill levels equal to those of experienced male labourers, farmers often expected direct replacement labour, resulting in confusion for recruit and farmer alike. This situation, combined with the reluctance of farmers to accept new working methods, meant that WLA recruits had to overcome barriers to gain acceptance as a useful and reliable workforce. The fact that they managed to do this after a period of time was due in no small measure to their commitment to undertake hard physical work in difficult conditions in order

contribute to the war effort and increase food production. Despite the quantitative differences in the output of men and women, mainly due to the greater physical strength of the former, the work of recruits came to be valued, especially their role in the operation of mechanised implements, much of which was new to the farmers themselves.

In recognising that many issues impinged upon policy-making processes, particularly in wartime, it is unfortunate that, in view of the relative success of the WLA, recruits were to some extent failed by policy makers in work-related areas. These included promotion opportunities and health and safety provision. The very nature of the agriculture industry provided little opportunity for promotion and it seemed that even recruits themselves were averse to having their peers promoted. Only token gestures were made by policy makers to try to redeem the situation. In relation to health and safety issues, scant regard appears to have been given to accident prevention in a newly mechanised industry resulting in frequent injury and illness.

Nevertheless, despite the difficult conditions experienced in terms of physical labour and poor climate, respondents enjoyed the work and camaraderie of their WLA service years. They took pride in their achievements, which has been carried forward to the present day.

References

- ¹ For example: Market Gardening - Mant, p.258 *et seq*; Knappett, p.190 *et seq*. Livestock: Knappett, pp. 101, 111/112, 119, 140, 152, Barraud, pp.11/12, Mist p.51. Milking and dairy work: Knappett, p. 122 *et seq*; Iddon, p.58 *et seq*.; Sackville West, p.27 *et seq*. Pigs: Mant p. 282 *et seq*.; sheep: Mant, p.299 *et seq*.; Sackville-West, p.50 *et seq*. Poultry: Abbot, p.42, Mant, p.287 *et seq*. Timber: *Women's Timber Corps*).
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CHAPTER NINE: POLICIES ON CONDITIONS OF SERVICE IN THE WOMEN'S LAND ARMY

Earlier chapters examined selected major policies of recruitment, accommodation, welfare, training and work in the Women's Land Army, together with some associated issues. This chapter covers several policy areas which have not previously been addressed, such as provision of uniform, wages, hours of work, sick pay and holidays. These items appeared in both MAF and WLA documentation under the headings of 'Terms and Conditions of Service' in 1917/18 and, variously, 'Main Rights of Full Members', 'Conditions of Employment' and 'The Land Girl's Charter' between 1939 and 1950, and are included here to provide a more complete picture of policy making in the WLA.

The WLA ideal was to guarantee minimum conditions of service with a contract. However, this rarely proved possible as continuous employment for recruits working on privately owned farms was difficult to ensure due to the inability of many farmers to provide year-round work. Whilst more favourable conditions of service were achieved between 1939 and 1950, the government felt that 'more substantial improvements [to WLA conditions of service] could not be made without causing grave dissatisfaction among other agricultural workers and thus doing more harm than good'.¹ Although such a situation may well have been divisive within the industry, the government could have used the situation to improve conditions for all categories of agricultural workers. However, it chose instead to maintain the *status quo*, achieving small gains for agriculture but also perpetuating the wage differential between agriculture and other industries. Nevertheless, some MPs urged the government to consider improved conditions of service to make the WLA 'more attractive in order to stop the exodus of female workers from the land at a time when the nation's food production requires stimulation'.² It is, therefore, against this backdrop that negotiations for improvements to various conditions of service for the WLA took place.

1. Policy formulation on provision of uniform

The WLA was first issued with a uniform in 1917, and those recruits enrolling for a year's work were issued with two pairs of boots, two pairs of gaiters, one pair of clogs, three overalls, two pairs of breeches, two hats, one jersey and one mackintosh.³ This clothing was worn for work rather than as a dress uniform.

The 1918 WLA Handbook explained to recruits what their uniform represented, suggesting that although they were 'dressed rather like a man', and doing a man's work, they 'should take care to behave like an English girl who expects chivalry and respect from everyone she meets. Noisy or ugly behaviour brings discredit not only upon yourself but upon the uniform and the whole WLA'.⁴ In general, women had seldom been seen in this type of garment and there appears to have been an expectation that their behaviour would become more masculine through wearing a uniform previously associated with male workers. Recruits were, therefore, urged to 'respect the uniform and make it respectable', behave quietly, avoid entering the bar of a public house and not smoke in public.⁵ The new costume drew comment from the *Craven Herald* newspaper which, during 1917, reported that large stores were opening clothing departments to cater for women who intended to work on the land. Attention was given to fashion as well as practicality with suggestions being made on how collars and cuffs could be brightened by chintz and other material.⁶ However, a columnist later pointed out that while women had taken up men's work it was still illegal to 'wear the attire of the opposite sex' and he/she was of the view that the authorities may not be content to allow the law to be disregarded. The writer, nevertheless, felt that 'within the shelter of one's own home and garden ... there appears to be no reason why 'land dress' should not be donned by those who prefer it'.⁷ Women were desirous of retaining the new fashions between the wars 'for country wear' as, according to the same article, 'land dress' was comfortable for housework, gardening, sport and rambling.

When the newspaper returned to a consideration of women's uniform in 1939, it suggested that

air force blue is going to be the colour rage of the year ... [which] is one reason why there is such a rush to join the Women's Auxiliary Air Force'. [However] 'not even British women's admiration for their soldiers can make them take to khaki as a feminine colour ...'⁸

It was, however, decided at a meeting of Chairmen and Organising Secretaries of WLA County Committees held on 1 June 1939, that the new WLA uniform would include khaki breeches, shirts and stockings (although the Committee did bow to fashion by having some of the uniform designed by the fashion house Worth).⁹

In 1942 WLA recruits were entitled to the following uniform: one hat (in brown felt), three shirts, two pullovers (green), two pairs of breeches, two pairs of dungarees, two overall coats, six pairs of stockings, one pair of shoes, one pair of boots, one pair of gumboots, one oilskin/mackintosh, one sou'wester, one greatcoat, one armlet, and a badge. Service badges, i.e. half diamonds in felt material, were issued after each six months of good service and sewn on to armbands.

Photograph 10: Portrait of Maisie in uniform (1942)



(Source: Maisie, 8.9.1996)

Photograph 10 is a portrait of Maisie showing off her uniform. Many recruits took the opportunity of having individual photographs taken in this way.

The path which the WLA had to follow to obtain and distribute the uniform was far from smooth. The cost of providing an individual uniform rose from £3 in 1939 to almost £4 in 1940 and continued to rise, particularly as the price of raw materials increased.¹⁰ Furthermore, the shortage of rubber and metal resulted in the WLA experiencing difficulty in acquiring some essential items such as wellington boots and waterproof oilskins and mackintoshes, and even extended to discontinuing the provision of metal badges.¹¹ Shortages in various items of uniform occurred for several reasons: the increase in WLA membership, the need for replacement uniform due to wear and tear, and other services, particularly the Army, requiring similar issue to the WLA. A correspondent to *The Daily Telegraph* in 1942 suggested that 'such a state of affairs would not be tolerated by the ATS, WAAF or WRNS.'¹² It was also claimed in the House of Commons that 'the shortage [of uniform] was giving rise to undue sick leave' because recruits were not adequately protected from the elements and conditions in which they worked, resulting in illness. Demands were, therefore, made for immediate steps to be taken to remedy the situation.¹³

In view of these difficulties, both the WLA hierarchy and recruits themselves gave tips on how to obtain maximum use from the uniform which was available. Many hints were published in *The Land Girl* with the WLA urging that there was 'NEVER plenty more where this came from ... Your uniform (excepting your great-coat) is due for replacement every 12 months, but it is your duty to make it last longer than this if you can.'¹⁴ Good practice included stuffing the hat with paper or a bag of sawdust to ensure it kept its shape, frequently washing shirts (as 'perspiration tended to rot the material'), ensuring dirt was not left on breeches, darning heels and toes of stockings and wearing all pairs in rotation. When items were worn out recruits were advised to put the less worn parts towards making socks or gloves.¹⁵

The 'ordinary' agricultural worker did not receive any special clothing allowance and the issue of uniform to the WLA was seen by some as a concession which disadvantaged women agricultural workers who were not WLA members. Alongside this, however, complaints were made that WLA members received less clothing than women in the ATS, WAAF and WRNS who had all their uniform and boots provided. In addition, the WRNS also received a kit upkeep allowance.¹⁶ The MAF responded by stating that the uniform working kit issued to WLA members was

not intended to meet all their clothing needs but to equip them for work on the land on the assumption that they had previously been in an occupation which did not require such garments.¹⁷

2. Policy implementation on provision of uniform

Counties often experienced difficulty in issuing uniform to recruits. The Yorkshire Central WLA Committee agreed in January 1942 that a protest should be made to WLA headquarters concerning delay in deliveries of uniform sent to Yorkshire. It made further representations in September 1942 regarding the lack of certain sizes of items, badges and armbands and the poor quality of mackintoshes and leather boots, which were unsuitable for very wet weather. In early 1943 the Committee reported that the uniform position was still bad but large orders had been placed and supplies were slowly coming in. It was, however, necessary for the WLA to employ salaried packers as voluntary helpers could not keep pace with demand.

The administration of a coupon system meant that clerical assistance was needed to deal with the surrender of coupons for certain items of uniform. Recruits did not surrender coupons during the year in which they joined the WLA but were then required to surrender a number of coupons in each succeeding year for which they could obtain the equivalent appropriate replacement items.¹⁸ Whilst the Yorkshire Central WLA Committee was aware that it was essential for each volunteer to surrender the required number of coupons, in October 1942 it found that 500 recruits had failed to do so and a decision was made that further measures should be taken against those who had still not sent in their coupons. The issue of uniform and the associated coupon-surrender system therefore presented the already over-burdened county administration with further time-consuming tasks.

3. Policy outcomes on provision of uniform

Most of the former recruits providing information were proud of their uniform and found it practical in their working environments. The hat, greatcoat, shoes and breeches were often worn at parades or when recruits were attending social and formal occasions.

Several recruits felt the quality of the greatcoats was too good for working on farms but Doris bought an extra coat in which to work because of its warmth. She recalled buying second-hand uniform from her own money and also modified her cord breeches by taking them to the local tailor 'to have a lot of the bag taken out because they were really elephantine.' Noreen and Ann purchased second-hand uniform, which they thought had been handed in by recruits leaving the WLA. However, Ginny found her uniform very difficult to replace, resulting in much patching and mending of the original issue. She soon found her dungarees were bursting at the seams as she put on two stones in weight after joining the WLA through eating meals provided by both farmers and her hostel. Maisie did not consider her uniform to be very appropriate for the harsh winter weather and purchased ex-army battle dress for warmth. Recruits often found it necessary to wear their own clothes out in the fields due to the uniform having worn out or to augment the uniform in very bad weather.

Individual items of uniform were commented upon by respondents. Marie said she 'loved all the clothes apart from that dreadful hat. I couldn't keep it on, and no way would I put a string under my chin as some of the girls did. I thought that was common.' Joy found that if she spilled paraffin on her mackintosh it dissolved the garment and grease and fuel oil were particularly difficult stains to remove. However, those women billeted in hostels did at least have facilities to enable them to wash and dry clothing, although there were occasions when some items of uniform 'went missing' after having been left to dry. Dorothy felt that although recruits were not given a lot of uniform, one accepted the situation because it was wartime. She did not recollect having any of her uniform renewed during her four years of service.

In addition to the problems encountered in supplying uniform, the WLA also experienced difficulties in providing other minimum conditions of service. However, some progress was made which benefited not only the WLA but also other agricultural labour.

4. Formulation of policies on wages, sick pay, hours of work, and holidays

4.1 Wages

A 1917 WLA recruitment notice stated that volunteers would receive wages of 18 shillings (18s.0d.) per week or at the district rate whichever was the lower.¹⁹ However, despite the introduction of the Agricultural Wages Board in 1917 to monitor and review farm wages for agricultural workers, the WLA still found it necessary to fight for a national minimum weekly wage for its members, many of whom were in private employment and subject to variable local conditions.

In fact, standard weekly wage rates had not been achieved on the reintroduction of the WLA in 1939. In an attempt to overcome this, Lady Denman proposed that farmers be made subject to regulations concerning deductions for board and lodging and for pay during periods of sickness.²⁰ By November 1940, she was able to report that 20 of the 47 County Agricultural Wages Committees had fixed a weekly wage rate for women, based on a variety of hours worked ranging from 44-54 per week (with a WLA recommendation of 48 hours per week).²¹ Although many differences remained, the WLA was able to influence the revision of minimum conditions as it grew in size and importance. By July 1943 The Land Girl's Charter showed that recruits were entitled to a minimum wage of £1.2s.6d. at 18 years of age for a 48-hour week with board and lodging amounting to approximately £1.0s.0d. per week being paid on their behalf by the WLA. The overtime rate increased accordingly from 7d. per hour on weekdays in 1939²² to 1s.9d. per hour in 1948.²³

Table 4 indicates the widespread differences between the wages of men and women and also the disparity between wages in agriculture and manufacturing industries. It shows that in 1938 male agricultural wages were between half and two-thirds of the levels of those in the clothing industry and compared even less favourably with chemicals and metals industries. By 1945 male wages in all industries had almost doubled their 1938 figure and women's wages had more than doubled in metals though not in the clothing industry or in agriculture. In 1938 women's wages were approximately half of those of men in most industries but the

differential was not reduced to one-third given that the output of women was supposedly two-thirds that of men. Male agricultural wages were approaching male

Table 4: Comparison of weekly wage rates in selected industries

Year	Gender	Age	Agriculture	*Chemicals, explosive, paints, oils	*Metals, engineering, shipbuilding	*Clothing
1938/9	M	21 and over	£1.10s.0d. to £2.2s.0d.	£3.9s.3d.	£31.15s.0d.	£3.4s.0d.
	F	18 and over	£1.8s.0d. (from which 14s.0d deducted for b&l) †	£1.12s.8d.	£1.13s.4d.	£1.12s.9d.
1943	M	21 and over		£5.16s.3d.	£6.18s.3d.	£4.18s.9d.
	F	18 and over	£2.2s.6d. (from which £1.0s.0d. deducted for b&l) ‡	£3.3s.7d.	£3.9s.10d.	£2.10s.3d.
1945	M	21 and over	£4.0s.0d. to £4.15s.0d.	£6.2s.10d.	£6.13s.0d.	£5.10s.8d.
	F	18 and over	£4.8s.8d. to £4.18s.8d. (from which deductions made) #	£3.2s.10d.	£3.9s.1d.	£2.15s.7d.

(Sources: * *Statistical Digest of the War*. Extract from Table 189 Average Weekly Earnings in Certain Industries.
† *Craven Herald* 4.8.1939, p.7 and 22.9.1939, p.7.
‡ *The Land Girl*, Vol.4, No.4, 1943, p.6.
WRWAEI Insects and Pests Sub-Committee minutes, 1.3.1945)

wages in other industries but the difference between women's wages in agriculture and metals remained.

However, Lady Denman's aim of achieving a minimum wage was impeded not only by concerns over local variations but also by the direct opposition of Sir Donald Fergusson, Permanent Secretary of MAF. He stated that his Ministry was not in favour of a standard WLA wage, which he termed a 'special condition' for the WLA.

As indicated in Chapter Five, he considered the organisation as ‘primarily a recruiting agency for agricultural labour and the conditions of the members must approximate to those of other workers in the industry.’²⁴ However, he had little option but to agree to ensure that a guaranteed minimum wage should operate due to the eventual introduction of a national minimum wage for agricultural workers.

Whilst Tyrer, writing in *They Fought in the Fields*, considers that Lady Denman ‘fought every inch of the way to secure a minimum wage of £1.8s.0d. a week for the Land Army,’ she also felt ‘there was no question of equal pay as the Land Army Administration did not believe a girl could do as much as a man.’²⁵ However, Tyrer should not be too critical for, as Table 4 shows, the WLA was not starting its fight from a position of equal pay. Women’s pay was substantially below that of men throughout industry in general and agriculture in particular, and this situation was unlikely to change immediately in an industry with weak union traditions.

4.2 Sick pay

Despite an emergency situation prevailing, the WLA, MAF and MoLNS strove to provide conditions of service which offered recruits a modicum of normality and some security. At a meeting of MoLNS and MAF personnel in March 1943 it was decided to improve the ruling on sick pay from one week’s notice or payment in lieu thereof (which afforded little protection if long-term illness occurred) to payment of three weeks’ wages at the full rate and three weeks wages’ at half rate. However, differences between the WLA and the women’s services still remained. For example, if a member of the ATS, WRNS or WAAF were discharged on medical grounds, she received 56 days’ paid leave plus an additional payment for overseas service.²⁶

4.3 Hours of work

Braybon and Summerfield suggest that workers willingly worked a 70-hour week in manufacturing industry during the war although ‘such a frenzied burst of activity could not be sustained’.²⁷ The number of hours worked weekly by the WLA often greatly exceeded their suggested standard of 48 during the war, reaching as many as 75, particularly during harvest time when recruits were expected to work

until 11pm on occasion. Table 5 shows that even when operating a 48-hour week the WLA worked more hours than women in other industries and more than the average for all operatives in 1945.

Table 5: Average weekly hours worked

Year	All operatives	Men 21 and over	Women 18 and over
1938	46.5	47.7	43.5
1943	50	52.9	45.9
1944	48.6	51.2	44.6
1945	47.4	49.7	43.3

(Source: *Statistical Digest of the War, op. cit.* Extract from Table 188, p.204)

Working outdoors in daylight until a late hour was possible due to the introduction of ‘double summer time’ when clocks were put forward by two hours (instead of the usual one hour) between April and October. The MAF stipulated that farmers and farm workers should agree on any changes made to hours of work, but confusion resulted when some farms maintained single summer time operation and others operated on double summer time. Railway companies and road hauliers occasionally had to re-time milk collections to coincide with some single and some double summer time operations.²⁸

The MAF and MoLNS decided to reduce as far as possible Sunday work so that WLA recruits could ‘count upon a weekly half holiday and an occasional long weekend’.²⁹ By 1948 this had been further extended to having at least a third Sunday free each month and a definite weekly half day. If it was necessary to work during these periods because farmers were especially busy, overtime rates were paid to recruits.

4.4 Holidays

Recruits were entitled to one week’s paid leave after not less than 6 months’ service and although recommendations were made from time to time to increase the holiday period, the entitlement remained at one week plus Bank Holidays. However, the WLA was in self-congratulatory mood in 1944 when it suggested in *The Land Girl* that it had given the lead to the agriculture industry as the Agricultural Wages

Board now made a week's holiday with pay the legal right of every agricultural worker.³⁰

5. Implementation of policies on wages, sick pay, hours of work, and holidays

5.1 Wages

The WRWAEC was responsible for ensuring that WLA recruits in their employment received the appropriate wage. The Committee minutes showed from time to time a note of the wage increases received by individual WLA members, for example on attaining 21 years of age. There appears to have been no dissent by the WRWAEC at the wage levels set by the Agricultural Wages Board other than in July 1949 when the Committee employed mentally subnormal personnel. The Labour Sub-committee then approached the West Riding Committee of the Agricultural Wages Board to propose that there should be four basic weekly rates of pay according to the standard of individuals.

5.2 Sick Pay

Recruits employed by the WRWAEC received sick pay for the stipulated period when absent due to illness. However, when illness, injury or accident resulted in recruits being discharged from the WLA and forced to obtain other work, they were left very much to their own devices in trying to find something which suited them. Alternatively, they were directed by MoLNS to undertake specific work whether or not it was something they particularly wished to do.

5.3 Hours of work

In attempting to implement policies on working hours, the WRWAEC found it necessary to yield to certain local arrangements. For example in March 1943 the WRWAEC Machinery Sub-committee reported that tractor drivers at both Settle and Skipton hostels were working very long hours (possibly having fallen behind with ploughing operations due to bad weather) but suggested this was the case only during busy seasons. In contrast, during November 1943 the WRWAEC Labour Sub-

committee approved a 44-hour working week for the winter months, subject to acceptance by the WLA.

The number of hours worked by the WLA and others did not go unnoticed in the local community. For example, the *Craven Herald* reported criticism by the WRNFU of conscientious objectors working on the land who, the NFU felt, were working fewer hours than the WLA and other agricultural workers. The WLA was reported as starting work at 7.30am whereas COs ‘came scrambling into the farm ... even as late as 9 o’clock ... if Land Army girls have to put in certain prescribed hours why should not these bounders work the same hours?’³¹

5.4 Holidays

Some aspects of the holiday arrangement of one week’s paid leave a year and occasional weekend leave proved contentious. A meeting of the Central Yorkshire WLA Committee on 16 September 1942 resolved that frequent holidays and weekend leave given to WLA recruits employed by them were ‘a privilege and not a right’. Furthermore, the week’s leave should be taken during slack periods and not allowed during harvest. However, according to WLA headquarters, one week’s paid leave each year was, in fact, a legal right. The confused situation apparently resulted from a number of recruits working on private farms requesting transfer to hostels because they considered WAEC employees had better holiday arrangements.

6. Outcomes of policies on wages, sick pay, hours of work, and holidays

6.1 Wages and sick pay

There were varied reactions from former WLA members interviewed regarding the wage policy. The majority were employed by the WRWAEC and appear to have accepted their level of pay, being unaware of any ‘struggle’ with which policy makers might have been involved to achieve minimum wage rates. Rosie, who joined the WLA in 1944, recalled receiving a wage of 18s.0d. net per week in Wiltshire, her board and lodging having been deducted at source. She found it difficult to manage on that sum away from home, having to buy her non-uniform clothes and other essential items. Gloria received a gross wage of 1s.0d. an hour (i.e. approximately

£4.8s.0d. per week) from which £1.5s.0d. was deducted for board and lodging and she also sent 10s.0d. a week home to her mother, leaving her with 13s.0d. a week. As her fare home to Ackworth, near Pontefract, amounted to 10s.0d, she was unable to return home at weekends which some recruits managed to do.

Both Florence and Daphne found their WLA wages to be in excess of their earnings in their previous occupations. Florence's net weekly wage of £1.0s.0d. in 1944/45 was an improvement on her confectioner's shop assistant wages of 15s.0d. (from which was deducted 7s.6d. for board and lodging). Nancy's diary for 1943 showed a variation in income dependent on the hours worked. She received £1.8s.3d. during the week commencing 16 January 1943 but was paid £4.6s.0d. for the week commencing 29 August 1943, due to the extra hours worked on harvesting. Maisie's diary for the same year also showed increases in the summer months although on one occasion she recorded a 75-hour week and a wage of only £1.11s.3d. Not surprisingly she commented that the 'wages were really poor for all the very hard work we did in comparison to the munitions workers.'⁹ Ann and Dorothy endorsed this, although they also pointed out there was little they could do about their complaint 'in those days'.

Some recruits who were unable to work following accident or injury when in the Committee's employment received compensation. Jean received compensation following a tractor accident, but Doris was not entitled to any financial assistance on having to leave the WLA because of sciatica, as she had little hope of proving this was due to driving the heavy Fordson tractors. Sylvia also left the WLA on the advice of her doctor after pulling muscles down her right hand side and was instructed by her local labour exchange to work at the Johnson & Johnson factory in Gargrave.

6.2 Hours of work and holidays

Former recruits endorsed what MAF and the WLA tried to do in restricting working hours to 48 per week and giving time off on Sundays wherever possible. Maggie reported that when working on a private farm in Cumbria she undertook only

essential work on Sundays and took one weekend's leave per month, finishing on Saturday lunchtime and returning on Monday morning.

However, it would appear that while efforts were made to keep within the 48-hour limit where possible, at harvest time the figure was greatly exceeded although perhaps this is understandable given the WLA objective of increasing home production of food. Rosie worked from 8am to 5pm from Monday to Friday and 8am to 12noon on Saturdays in Wiltshire, receiving overtime payments for exceeding these hours at haymaking and harvesting. Irene recalled working a 14-hour day in Gargrave when double summertime was in operation and Florence remembered returning to Settle hostel at around 11pm during double summertime having worked on corn cutting until darkness descended. This was confirmed by Foreman Donald who said he 'got a rollicking [from the hostel warden] for keeping them out'. Many recruits found consecutive 12- and 14-hour days of physical work almost too much to bear, however, with Maisie stating 'how I remember the long walk up Shortbank Road [to Skipton hostel] when I was so tired I could have wept.'

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In addition to the specific conditions of service mentioned in the Land Girl's Charter, policies on resignation and dismissal of recruits in the WLA will be considered. An assessment will also be made of the contribution of trades unions in achieving the conditions of service to which the WLA aspired.

7. Formulation of policies on resignation/dismissal

WLA headquarters issued guidelines to county committees on the resignation and dismissal of recruits in 1939 and 1941.³² Both documents stated that county offices could ask a volunteer to resign if she proved to be not interested in, or unsuited to working on the land, and that an explanation should be given to the recruit that this was in her best interests. It was stressed to county committees that care should be taken before dismissing any recruit and to use discretion in deciding whether or not there was a case for dismissal. Reasons for dismissal from the WLA were given as unsuitable conduct by the recruit, repeated dismissals from

employment or refusal to resign although invited to do so. The guidelines directed county secretaries to write to recruits advising them of their dismissal without indicating the reason and also asking for the return of uniform.

8. Implementation of policies on resignation/dismissal

Both the WRWAEC and the WLA County Committees were responsible for implementing these policies. However, the WRWAEC Labour Sub-committee received a report that the WLA were dismissing recruits (presumably employed by the WRWAEC) without consultation although it had been informed after the event. The Labour Sub-committee therefore resolved on 5 October 1944 to ask the WLA to consult with it prior to any further discharges. The types of 'offences' considered by the WRWLA County Committee as requiring dismissal were recorded in minutes of meetings but the reasons given do not necessarily correspond with the guidelines issued by WLA headquarters. For example, the minutes of the WRWLA meeting held on 2 August 1940 state that since accepting one recruit a committee member had heard that she was not a desirable person to be a member of the WLA, although no reason was given in the minutes on why this was considered to be the case. It was therefore decided to write to the recruit suggesting that as few vacancies existed and her friend had resigned, she might like to take the same course of action.

Another recruit declined to accept an offer of market garden work on completion of her training and, having also tried forestry work, had returned home because she did not enjoy it. The WRWLA Committee sitting on 3 January 1941 decided to dismiss her following a report from her employer 'that she was so small she could not lift a wheelbarrow' begging the question as to why she was initially considered employable. Two more recruits were dismissed by the Committee on 4 July 1941 as they had been employed by Leeds Corporation to work in the parks although 'neither girl had the slightest idea of working to time and had frequently left their employment without permission.'

The recording of cases also occasionally left something to be desired although it was possible to understand the gist of the argument. For example, the WRWLA Committee minutes of 4 July 1941 noted that

this girl ... had hurt her foot and though she claimed it was given her by a cow who had kicked her, she never reported this to the farmer, and though she never came to report for work while her foot was bad, she was able to go out to the pictures with various men, and made no effort to rest her foot and get it better again, and by her actions she was causing unrest amongst her fellow workers.

Similar cases of lack of discipline were considered by the WRWAEC which received a report at its meeting on 8 October 1945 that two WLA members in its employment had been seen in Torquay while supposedly absent on sick leave. Investigations were to be made to ascertain whether the recruits were in Torquay for legitimate convalescent reasons.

9. Outcomes of policies on resignation/dismissal

Very few former WLA members interviewed were aware of dismissals within the Craven area although it is possible they may have chosen to protect the good name of the WLA out of loyalty to the organisation. However, one recruit recalled her transfer from the employment of the WRWAEC to a local private farm being due to the dismissal of a recruit from the farm for acts of theft. There were, of course, cases of which the recruits interviewed were unaware, such as misconduct by two Skipton WLA members who 'during working hours were in the habit of meeting German PoW' and who were therefore dismissed.³³

10. Union involvement with the WLA

An important issue arising from the achievement of minimum conditions of service is the extent to which agricultural unions were involved in their relative success. Prior to the introduction of the WLA, agriculture was not noted for such strongly unionised labour as manufacturing. This was due, in part, to there being fewer employees in the former industry and their wide dispersal across rural areas which resulted in difficulty in collectivising the membership.

On the reintroduction of the WLA in 1939 a conference of WLA organising secretaries held in June stressed the importance of establishing links with local union representatives of the National Union of Agricultural Workers (NUAW) and

Transport & General Workers Union (TGWU).³⁴ However, an executive meeting of the NUAW on 23 June 1939 expressed concern that it had not been consulted regarding the setting up of a WLA in peacetime and it considered the organisation as a threat to existing agricultural workers if not properly co-ordinated. It viewed the WLA as a scheme 'which may degenerate into providing still cheaper alternative labour paid even less than current farm wages'. The NUAW Executive were suspicious of the WLA, seeing it as a diversionary tactic by the government away from the general shortage of labour on the land and the poor wages and living conditions associated with it. With this in mind, the NUAW Executive regretted it could not participate in, or be represented on, any committees organising the WLA, nor could the WLA rely on any co-operation from local NUAW representatives although contact could be maintained with those of the TGWU.³⁵

The NUAW stance appears to have perplexed the WLA somewhat, for in June 1939 it appeared unlikely that the organisation would be fully operational in peacetime and therefore should not adversely affect agricultural wages. The WLA also called into question one of the Union's assertions that experienced manpower would be available if the issue of low wages was addressed, as male labourers would be called up from agriculture once war was declared.

Whilst it is accepted that the NUAW may have wished to protect its long-standing membership of labour permanently engaged on the land, it also appears to have been disabled by its concern for its general workers and not sufficiently inspired to join with the WLA to take forward issues which would benefit all ranks. The NUAW suggested there was 'a danger which should be faced of creating a disparity between the treatment given to the WLA compared with the ordinary women workers and male workers in the industry.'³⁶ The NUAW Committee felt it 'important that care should be exercised so that a balance is maintained between the interests of the three groups of workers in such a way that the ordinary women workers and the regular male workers are not aggrieved'.³⁷ The Union, therefore, chose to divide the agricultural workforce into three categories of male labourers, female workers and the WLA, rather than putting forward the interests of agricultural labour in general.

Interestingly, however, union representatives did serve on the WLA Benevolent Fund Committee and attempts were made by the unions and their representatives to persuade WLA recruits to join their ranks. *The Land Girl* included a letter from a former Labour Party organiser suggesting that recruits might wish to join a trade union ‘for a very small weekly contribution’ to receive help and advice if they had been involved in an accident.³⁸ The journal also included an article by an NUAW representative suggesting that ‘all along the Union has fought for the rights of Land Girls, while not forgetting its obligations to other wartime land workers, local women labour, and the skilled and experienced male workers.’³⁹ It continued that the Union ‘constantly takes action, often in co-operation with the WLA, to improve conditions’ and that wages had recently been raised. The article also praised women agricultural workers who had formerly been looked down on by men as

helpless creatures who have to be sheltered and protected. Some women have contributed to this delusion by posing as clinging vines, but the day has gone by when men worked and women wept. It is a tribute to the intelligence and good sense of the women now working on the land that they appreciate the efforts of the Trade Union movement on their behalf.⁴⁰

It would appear that the NUAW ‘played up’ its contribution in achieving minimum conditions of service in an attempt to attract WLA recruits to its membership. There was little mention of Trade Union involvement either in Craven or in several other areas indicated in the reminiscence literature, although Florence remembered one individual from the TGWU in Settle trying to persuade recruits to join. A small number of them joined for a short period before withdrawing because they did not understand what the benefits might be. One foreman felt that whilst there was scope for union involvement on larger farms with tied cottages, he did not consider this was the case in Craven saying ‘it was not a time for unions’ as everyone was working in an emergency situation. He did not think that recruits received protection from unions, suggesting that ‘it was just a case of getting their money off them, that’s all it was’.

There were occasionally incidents where, under different circumstances, unions might usually have become involved. For example, Laura recalled some of her colleagues at Gisburn striking because they were given ditching work which they felt

was 'a man's job' as it had previously been undertaken by Italian PoWs. Those who went on strike were sacked and presumably had no leave for appeal and reinstatement.

11. Summary and conclusion

The WLA met with general success on all fronts as it aspired to achieve certain minimum conditions of service for its members in providing them with a uniform and standardised wage structure including rulings on sick pay, hours of work and holidays. There were, however, difficulties to be overcome in certain policy areas.

Provision of the ideal quality and quantity of uniform proved problematic due to competition from other services for similar materials and this situation occasionally resulted in the wearing of civilian clothing by WLA recruits when working in the fields. This drew criticism from various quarters as Vita Sackville-West wrote when an ATS officer said to her 'if one of our girls were seen dressed half in uniform and half in civvies, with her hat nearly falling off the back of her head, she would very soon get ticked off.'⁴¹ WLA recruits expressed general satisfaction with most of the uniform provided although the discontinuation of badges through shortage of metal appeared rather petty. However, it seems that it was not only the WLA which suffered from questionable decisions on uniform, as nurses serving on the front line were unable to take their uniform with them due to the speed with which they were called up⁴² and were even forbidden to wear trousers by their patron, Queen Mary.⁴³

The WLA progressed as far as it was able in relation to wage rates, given the combination of peacetime and wartime conditions, none of which were conducive to the introduction of equal pay for men and women. Agriculture had at least not fallen further behind other industries and the WLA had contributed to the achievement of a week's holiday with pay. Some progress was also made with regard to sick pay provision.

These gains were, in fact, achieved in the face of opposition not least by the MAF itself, partly due to the reluctance of Sir Donald Fergusson to consider any improvements in WLA conditions, which he viewed as being detrimental to existing

agricultural labour. The NUAW also appeared to adopt this philosophy which suggests that in evaluating any policy it is appropriate to reflect on the interests of the parties involved in the decision making process and where their real interests might lie.

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CHAPTER TEN: POLICIES ON DISCHARGE FROM THE WOMEN'S LAND ARMY AND DISBANDING THE ORGANISATION

The Women's Land Army was disbanded in November 1950, having been operational for some 11 years. However, policies on the release of members from the service and the possible award of gratuities proved to be contentious, resulting in the resignation of Lady Denman as Honorary Director in February 1945. A further five years and nine months elapsed before the WLA was finally disbanded, the winding up of the organisation being a lengthy and complex procedure. This chapter traces the policy processes associated with disbanding and the destinations of some of the women who had worked in the Craven area.

1. Formulation of policies on the award of gratuities to members of the WLA

In mid-1944 views were exchanged between WLA headquarters and the MAF regarding discharge from the WLA when the war with Germany ended. Lady Denman wanted her members to receive on discharge 'conditions not less favourable than those applying to Civil Defence services.'¹ The WLA was advised that the most appropriate course of action was for the MAF to write to the Treasury stating that a gratuity should be paid to WLA members when they left the organisation. The MAF was also asked to enquire about conditions of discharge for the services and Civil Defence so that when these had been decided similar gratuities could be requested for the WLA. It was not deemed appropriate for the WLA to demand their own special arrangements at this stage because its position could be undermined should such claims fail.² As a result of communication between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Treasury, the WLA was informed that the Treasury did not favour any financial grant being made to WLA members leaving the service at the end of the War. The Treasury suggested that any award offered was likely to consist of a period of paid leave.³

The proposed awards devised by the government's Reconstruction Committee were eventually presented to a meeting of WLA County Chairmen in February 1945.⁴ The main points were as follows:

- Resettlement in civilian life, i.e. the right to return to pre-war jobs, was given to members of the forces, the three women's auxiliary services (ATS, WRNS and WAAF) and to certain Civil Defence workers. WLA members were given no such rights (although Section 6 shows that some members of the WLA employed in Craven were able to return to their former employment both in the immediate area and further afield).
- Resettlement grants of up to £150 were available for servicemen and women and Civil Defence workers to assist in restarting a business. The WLA was not included.
- A number of civil service vacancies were reserved for ex-servicemen and ex-members of the three auxiliary services. No mention was made of the WLA.
- The women's auxiliary services were given a clothing grant of £12.10s.0d. on discharge (after a certain period of service) plus pay and allowances for a short period. A WLA member who received an approved discharge even after four or five years' service received none of these.
- A further education and training scheme was to be introduced, mainly for the benefit of the forces, the Merchant Navy, Civil Defence, police, auxiliary and civil nursing services. A number of vacancies were reserved for other civilian war workers, including the WLA, but those first-named services were to take priority.

The Chancellor also announced a scale of financial war gratuities to be made to members of the services, the ATS, WRNS and WAAF. No indication was given that the WLA was included. (For the purposes of this study, the entire package described above will be termed 'gratuities').

Following the February 1945 meeting, WLA County Chairmen made a statement urging the Minister of Agriculture 'to press for adequate benefits for members of the Land Army on demobilisation in recognition of their services.'⁵

For Lady Denman, who had been trying to obtain the best possible conditions for her members, this scenario amounted to a lack of recognition of the WLA by the government. She resigned from her position as Honorary Director on 17 February 1945 in protest at what she described as the ‘government’s ungenerous attitude to the Land Army.’ However, she urged County Chairmen and land workers not to resign as this would ‘strike at the foundation on which the Land Army organisation has built.’⁶

The resignation of Lady Denman, who was so closely associated with the WLA in the public domain, brought to national attention the position relating to awards for her members. As outlined in Chapter Five, the position and status of the WLA in relation to other wartime services had not been reconciled on the introduction of the organisation. Following Lady Denman’s departure, there was extensive debate in the House of Commons and lobbying of the Minister of Agriculture and Prime Minister on behalf of the WLA. Some extracts from the many documents and parliamentary questions on the subject are presented below to provide an insight into the discussions taking place at the time. Those selected for inclusion are similar in content to others which were discarded due to the volume of papers available and the constraints placed on this study.

Lady Denman’s letter of resignation to Mr RS Hudson, Minister of Agriculture, in which she gave a full explanation of the reasons for her departure, set the scene for future discussions. She stated:

The Land Army is a uniformed service recruited on a national basis by a government department and the work which its members have undertaken, often at considerable financial sacrifice, is in my view as arduous and exacting as any branch of women’s war work and of as great importance to this country. Yet they have been refused post war benefits and privileges accorded to such other uniformed and nationally organised services as the WRNS, the ATS, the WAAF, the civil nursing reserve, the Police auxiliaries and the Civil Defence Service

This position is a serious one for Land Army members who have as great need as those in other services of government assistance in the problems of resettlement. As you know, I have protested against omission of the Land Army from various government schemes and also against the decision, now announced, that capital grants to assist in restarting business enterprises will be available after the war to men

and women who have served whole time in the forces, the Merchant Navy or the Civil Defence Services but not to members of the WLA. It is this latest decision which has led me to feel that I must resign my present appointment and that I can no longer appear to be responsible for a policy with which I do not concur.

... I have reached the decision to resign only because I have held the view that one of my chief functions has been to get a square deal for members of the Land Army and I have felt personally responsible for policy affecting their welfare. The latest decision of the government therefore made me decide that my position had become untenable.⁷

Lady Denman also issued a message to rank and file WLA members through *The Land Girl*, saying:

I am indeed sad to say goodbye to you, but I hope that my resignation may draw public attention, including the attention of the House of Commons, to the privileges and rewards given to the Forces and Civil Defence which are not extended to you...⁸

The Land Girl responded in the form of an editorial which stated that Lady Denman's resignation came as

a shattering blow to all who have been connected with the Land Army during nearly 6 years of honourable history ... The WLA has been very fortunate to have as its director one with such wide experience of public work and intimate knowledge of country life and ways. Lady Denman's wise leadership has guided the Land Army through many doubts and difficulties. She has fought its battles with valiant determination and faced its problems with the steady impartial judgement for which she is famous... She has felt and expressed the warmest admiration for the cheerful and steadfast spirit in which volunteers tackled hard and unfamiliar jobs in every kind of circumstances and all sorts of weather. For *their* interests and well being she was always the first to fight, for her own the last.⁹

A similar view of Lady Denman's contribution to the WLA was held in the counties although some Chairmen (including Lady Bingley, West Riding, and Lady Graham, North Riding) felt that Lady Denman should have confided in them prior to announcing her resignation. However, a letter was sent to Lady Denman expressing the gratitude of the WLA administration for her

unfailing understanding of the human needs and care of the girls, both from the physical and welfare standpoint and their appreciation of your constant efforts to obtain ... government concessions whilst in Land Army employment, so as to bring them more into line with other government recruited services; and finally to express their profound regret on your resignation...¹⁰

The WLA decided not to replace Lady Denman as Honorary Director but appointed Mrs Jenkins as Chief Administrative Officer because she had 'worked untiringly and with unfailing brilliance for six years.'¹¹

During a debate on the WLA in the House of Commons in February 1945, Mr H Stewart (MP for Fife East) reiterated what he considered to be the crux of the difficulties in relation to awarding gratuities to the WLA. He told the House that

all the trouble really arises out of the fact that the WLA is in a very anomalous position. It is called an army, it is uniformed, it is looked after, to some extent by the State, it is in a special position, and the girls are subject to a measure of special control. It is, in a sense part of the uniformed Services of the State. Yet it is in practice no more than an industrial group, doing work alongside other industrial workers on the farms. Most of the girls live in the farmers' homes and cottages, being paid a weekly wage, the same as other land workers. Therefore, they are both soldiers ... and industrial workers. The Government can scarcely escape blame for that anomalous position, because they chose the word "Army" and they put the girls into uniform. It is that anomalous position that creates so much misunderstanding and ill will. It is because of the title of the force, it is because the girls are in uniform, it is because they are recruited as a separate force, that there has been built up a psychological condition in the minds of the girls which, however, one cares to explain it away, can be ignored only at the expense of the continued good will of the Land Army and at the expense of the production of food.¹²

Mr Butcher (MP for Holland with Boston) then made the point that the government treated WLA members as civilians in not allowing them to take advantage of service privileges such as NAAFI canteens but 'when it suited the Ministry, the WLA were treated as members of the Services and required to move from one part of the country to another.'¹³ Mr Tom Williams (then Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture) countered this by saying that the position of the WLA differed from that of the auxiliary services in several ways. For example, in the main, the WLA was not a state-employed service, receiving the

same rates of pay as other employees in the industry, and the government drew a distinction between the auxiliary services and the WLA.¹⁴

Further lobbying continued in February and March 1945 with Mr Stewart questioning Mr Hudson on details of future employment, payment of gratuities and demobilisation of the WLA.¹⁵ Mr Churchill, Prime Minister, eventually reported in March 1945 that remuneration for members of the Civil Defence throughout the war was related to armed forces rates of pay and the basis adopted for settlement was 'not comparable with those normally existing in industry.'¹⁶ The government therefore decided to give gratuities to those who had served under Civil Defence conditions for not less than six months from 3 September 1939. This included the Civil Defence who had served on a 'watch and wait' basis, local authority Fire Guards, Auxiliary Police and the Auxiliary Fire Service. Gratuities were also paid to the Royal Observer Corps and Auxiliary Coast Guards who were paid on the same principles as, but at three-quarters the rate of, that paid to the Armed Forces. After 'sympathetic thought' Mr Churchill said the government could not

justify the extension of such benefits in any form to classes who are employed under recognised conditions for the industry or profession to which they belong and who receive an industrial or professional rate of pay. ... When we listen to ... all the arguments in favour of making a payment to the WLA, we should realise how very strong must have been the argument which led us to take the opposite view'.¹⁷

The argument expressing 'the opposite view' appeared in an undated document under the heading 'Preparation of reports and points for War Cabinet meeting to consider gratuities for the WLA' held in a MAF file on WLA demobilisation.¹⁸ The report included the following points:

- If gratuities were paid to the WLA the government could not refuse men and women in other war industries being paid at rates of wages common to those industries. Comparison should be made with women working in other war industries rather than with Women's auxiliary services and Civil Defence.
- Neither the title's inclusion of the word 'Army' nor the wearing of a uniform provided by government was regarded as warranting recognition of the WLA on a

parity with Women's auxiliary services; the WLA was not subject to the same discipline as members of the auxiliary services.

- The WLA was in the direct employment of farmers and received rates of pay appropriate to the agricultural industry (although Table 3 on page 160 shows that one-third of WLA membership was employed by the state, i.e. by WAECs).

In view of the above points, the document went on, the position of the WLA was more comparable with that of women in munitions and other national war industries. Schemes for post-war rehabilitation should, therefore, be identical to theirs.¹⁹ In addition, awarding cash gratuities to the WLA on the same scale as those being awarded to the women's auxiliary services was said to amount to approximately £1,500,000.²⁰ The financial implications of such an award would obviously have been of crucial importance for the government.

However, those supporting the WLA's cause were not to be thwarted and the Prime Minister was asked 'if he had noticed' that 135 members of nearly all parties in the House of Commons had put their names to a demand for better treatment for the WLA.²¹ The Prime Minister responded that 'nothing would be easier and, if I were so base, nothing more tempting, than to offer large and unconsidered concessions at the public expense' and that 'further representations in respect of special war time gratuity must be considered to have fallen into that sphere of decisions which have already been taken'.²² When asked if he would consider another form of recognition of the WLA if he could not give a gratuity, the Prime Minister said he had

looked around very carefully for something that would be suitable and would not open too wide a door, but one must be very careful, in a Parliament which is in its closing phase, not to embark on a competition for winning popularity, for any party, without due regard to the public and financial consequences.²³

Great pressure had been placed on the government by MPs in favour of the award of gratuities to the WLA and a total of 236 petitions and communications had also been received by the Minister of Agriculture supporting the organisation and its members.²⁴ These included a request by Mr TH Hodgson, TGWU National Secretary, for WLA members to retain their uniform.²⁵ This was denied by Mr

Hudson because it was inappropriate for former members to wear the same uniform as those still in service. However, it shows that the agricultural unions were now also offering some support to the WLA, which had not always been apparent in the past.

Following these demands, the Minister of Agriculture made a statement in the House of Commons on 16 May 1945 which, he hoped, would benefit the WLA. He said that although it had not been possible to accede to requests that the WLA be treated in the same way as the Civil Defence and Auxiliary Services because of the repercussions on other classes of workers, the government had decided to adopt the following new proposals for the WLA.

- Specialised training in agricultural work would be provided at government expense for those who wished to pursue a career in agriculture. The Further Education and Training Scheme would allow suitably educated women to undertake agricultural training for future work in advisory or research services. Those with at least two years' experience could take up posts such as milk testing.
- WLA members not wishing to continue in agriculture could now take up government training under the same conditions as the women's auxiliary services and Civil Defence and would be entitled to financial assistance in cases of hardship where there were problems in returning to previous occupations.
- On release after six months' service, members could retain their greatcoat (dyed navy blue), one pair of shoes and a shirt. On final disbanding of the organisation members could retain their badges.²⁶

Further piecemeal offers followed with the House of Commons being told that the WLA was now eligible for four free travel warrants per year instead of two. A member of the House suggested that this was 'completely inadequate' and asked 'whether it is not time that adequate justice was done to these splendid young women who have been treated as the Cinderellas of the women's forces?' Mr Tom Williams (the new Minister of Agriculture) responded that he was 'repeating the action in regard to these gallant women that was performed by my predecessor.'²⁷

The government also offered £150,000 to the WLA Benevolent Fund to assist members in hardship on their return to civilian life (although few recruits working in Craven were aware of its existence, as indicated in Chapter Seven). However, the point was made by one MP that instead of making appropriate provision for the WLA, the government was asking the House of Commons to approve a charitable fund as a substitute. He stated 'although I cannot vote against the contribution from public funds towards the Benevolent Fund, I do so with an unwilling heart because I feel this is not the type of reward I should like them to receive.'²⁸

The Land Girl editorial stated that although no concession had been made on the issues of gratuities and clothing grants, the retention of some uniform (even though it would not 'adequately clothe a volunteer'), the possibility of training and the £150,000 grant to the Benevolent Fund were 'practical gains'. It also pointed out that a 'very satisfactory feature of the prolonged struggle ... was the universal praise of the WLA which was expressed by all, even by those who oppose its case for gratuities.'²⁹

2. Implementation of policies on the award of gratuities to members of the WLA

Following their meeting under the chairmanship of Lady Astor in February 1945, and the resignation of Lady Denman, County Chairmen returned to their district committees to explain the prevailing situation. Lady Graham informed a meeting of North Riding WLA district representatives in June 1945 that the 'great obstacle' preventing the WLA from receiving gratuities was that it was not a state service. She informed her committee that this was a position which Lady Denman had purposely avoided and, because of this, Lady Graham had declined to join her chairmen colleagues in giving Lady Denman a vote of confidence.

Lady Worsley Taylor, Chairman of Lancashire WLA Committee, told her members in March 1945 that she had received a personal letter from Lady Denman suggesting that local MPs be lobbied in an effort to get the government to change its position on the gratuities issue. The meeting decided that any committee member who wished to do so should write a personal letter to her MP asking him/her to support the award of gratuities to the WLA when the matter was discussed in the

House of Commons. However, while most Lancashire committee members felt the WLA warranted government recognition, they did not consider awards should be made 'on the same grounds as the fighting forces.'³⁰

As a result of the improved awards announced by the Minister of Agriculture to the House of Commons on 16 May 1945, a system of 'willing release' was granted to WLA members in recognition of their service. Mrs Jenkins advised the counties that the WLA would release its members if they wished to begin a training course in agriculture, nursing or teaching, where the recruit had a qualification in nursing or teaching and the Ministry of Labour requested release for this work. Where members had served for two or more years they could be released, if they so wished, to undertake employment such as milk testing or veterinary assistance. Other criteria for release from the WLA included the need to undertake domestic responsibilities and for health reasons. WLA members granted willing release could keep their shoes, one shirt and overcoat provided it was dyed navy blue. In addition they were entitled to a refund of clothing coupons amounting to two coupons for each remaining month of the clothes rationing year.³¹ Willing release would not be granted where members had proved unsatisfactory for work or their conduct had been inappropriate.

This information was conveyed to WRWLA members in October 1945 when the county organising secretary wrote to each recruit outlining the scheme.³² It was pointed out that on release they would still be subject to instruction by the Ministry of Labour to work in any industry. The WRWLA hoped that its members would remain on the land to finish the job they started. Those women who had served for two years and were prepared to continue for a further year were offered one week's holiday at government expense, with a further three days for each year of additional service. WLA members were advised to discuss their case with their local representative if they felt this would be beneficial. They were then required to return a completed *pro forma* to the county secretary indicating their desired course of action. Following receipt of the forms county staff had the huge task of releasing members from the WLA under the appropriate conditions or assisting in arrangements for the correct amount of holiday to be awarded.

3. Outcomes of policies on the award of gratuities

3.1 The national situation

Recruits generally accepted the gratuities finally offered to them without necessarily agreeing that they were of an appropriate standard. Like their permanent counterparts in agriculture, rank and file WLA members were ill-equipped to make a mass protest against perceived injustices, although pockets of resistance were apparent. Tyrer states that a number of militant WLA members who had joined the Agricultural Workers' Union set up a fighting fund of £1,000.³³ They used this finance to lobby church leaders and to protest at Westminster, carrying placards announcing that ATS members received 160 coupons and had six weeks' paid leave whereas the WLA received only 20-35 coupons and one week's paid leave. She also states that Prime Minister Churchill agreed to receive a deputation of three WLA members to put their case for the award of gratuities. On entry to the meeting room the women found themselves flanked by MPs (all male) with Churchill and Eden at the top table. One recruit later stated 'some were clearly on our side but clearly not enough as we didn't persuade them.'³⁴

The Fighting Fund Committee attempted to raise more money to fund a national hearing, and gave an explanation of the WLA's situation in a 'Charter' presented to the nation. The committee adopted a rhetorical style in support of the position of WLA members stating

May our "Charter" bring you a clear realisation of the difficulties with which we are now battling. Faced with a sudden revelation of our tragic position in relation to post-war conditions we could not fail ourselves, but went forward with high resolve to face them with the same "spirit" which stimulated us when we chose for our field of war service "the Land" - a "spirit" embodying patience, courage, stamina, endurance, enthusiasm and high resolve to fit ourselves and rise equal to any task ... Today duty calls us to be a vanguard in the fight to ensure that the "Promises" made to "Youth which Serves" shall be fulfilled. We ask your help to win Round 1 in that struggle towards the envisaged "New World".³⁵

The Charter reminded

the people of these islands that we are their daughters [who] renounced the possibilities of high wages in industry and accepted cheerfully Service upon the Land bearing its hardships, the roughness of heavy manual work, the exposure to the vagaries of the British Seasons ... believing that by doing so we were giving a vital service, combating the U-boat Menace, releasing Vital Shipping and feeding our people through critical days, providing the vital materials to effect the miracle of production which alone could banish the dark days of defeat and usher in the dawn of Victory...³⁶

The Committee also mentioned that WLA members themselves

had no say in setting out the original terms and conditions of Womens' [*sic*] Land Army enrolment and service, and have borne the shortcomings and deficiencies therein from a realisation that service without complaint was the greatest contribution we could make to the war effort.³⁷

The Charter goes on to claim a gratuity for WLA recruits in acknowledgement of the 'financial sacrifice' made by them. A request was also made for those who suffered 'impaired health' as a result of WLA service to receive a pension. Further claims were made for 'a system of demobilisation, similar to the Armed Forces' and for the MoLNS to arrange with former employers for ex-members to return to their former posts if they wished.³⁸

It is difficult to assess the impact of this emotional plea by WLA members as a separate issue from the lobbying of MPs and other protests which were also ongoing. It is not known how many recruits were involved in preparing the Charter although at least two WLA workers appear to have been committee members. It can only be assumed that the Charter was considered along with other forms of protest. Had it been submitted in isolation, however, it seems likely that it would have been discounted given the government's reluctance to accept the arguments put forward on behalf of the WLA.

The perceived continued lack of recognition of the WLA did not die out with the disbanding of the organisation and, until very recently, efforts were still continuing to try to obtain gratuities for WLA members. In 1964 the British Women's Land Army Society (BWLAS) was set up with a membership of former WLA and Women's Timber Corps recruits from around the world.³⁹ In August 1999

it still had 1,000 members. The Society describes itself as a non-political body and all its workers are voluntary. Its aim is to 'offer friendship' to former members but it does not have funding to provide financial assistance.⁴⁰ Two newsletters are issued each year by the Organising Chairman, Mrs EM Jean Procter, MBE, of Marple, Cheshire, and include news from local area branches and help in tracing past WLA members.

The March 1997 newsletter reports that Mr Geddes, a retired farmer, had worked for some years to bring the WLA gratuity issue to the attention of the government (as had Mrs Procter and her Society). Mr Geddes had gained the support of 100 MPs and the BWLAS Chairman urged members to contact the three main political parties to explain the WLA position. She then forwarded a petition of 2,000 names in support of an award to the WLA to a government review group set up to examine the issue of recognition of the WLA and Women's Timber Corps. However, in the March 1999 newsletter, Mrs Procter informed BWLAS members that she had heard from the review group that a retrospective award would be impractical, even if this were to take the form of a defence medal rather than a financial contribution. The review group reiterated the arguments put forward by previous governments, suggesting that trying to 'draw the line' through six to eight million workers engaged on the land in mines, munitions and other essential services would 'still lead to felt injustices.'⁴¹ Their recommendation was, therefore, to erect a plaque at Coventry Cathedral dedicated to all civilian services. BWLAS felt this was not the type of recognition it had been seeking but while the review group acknowledged the disappointment of many former WLA members, the Prime Minister's final decision was to establish a national memorial to all home front workers. This acknowledgement was 'due in no small degree to the high regard which is felt due to the WLA'⁴² but it was important not to underestimate the contribution of those who worked in munitions, the dockyards and in mining who had also pressed their claims for recognition.⁴³ A further recent acknowledgement⁴³ of the WLA is that its members are now allowed to march with ex-service personnel in Armistice Day Ceremonies.

3.2 The local situation

None of the women who provided information for this study said they went on strike or made similar protests to demand gratuities. Several of them suggested that during the 1940s people did not make themselves heard in appealing for better conditions, whether it be in terms of individual compensation for injury or for collective awards. They also deemed it inappropriate to make demands during a period of national hardship, which continued for a number of years after the war had ended.

Respondents did not accept their position without question, however. They felt their contribution to the war effort was no less important than that of any other service and took pride in the fact that they ‘helped to feed the nation,’ but the reality was that they felt their efforts had not been recognised by the government. Numerous comments were made concerning this lack of recognition. Maggie felt she received no recognition at all, working in isolation on a private farm. She said that the only gratuity she had was that she gained a family who looked after her. She thought ‘the Bevin Boys had the worst of things, having to go into the mines. In the Land Army you could make your own choices.’ Peggy did not feel the WLA was considered at all by the government, saying ‘the NAAFI would not serve us - that tells all.’ Mavis said she knew from friends in the armed services that the WLA worked much harder than a great number of them.

Ginny’s award for six years’ tractor driving service was a horse brass. She said

I’d been struggling all these six years for a horse brass. I mean, you’d have thought they’d have more gumption wouldn’t you and given us something a bit different ... I thought, yes, that’s what we are, horses ... I thought, ye gods, others get medals and we get that.

However, she made the point that the public did not actually see much of what the WLA did on the land. She mentioned difficult working conditions such as standing on trailers throwing out lime, lifting heavy machinery, being out in the cold and wet and suffering from coughs and colds when baling and threshing. These tasks were

away from the public eye whereas people saw newsreels reporting on the actions of soldiers.

Linda also thought that people in towns did not realise there was such a thing as the Land Army and therefore the WLA was not acknowledged because of this. However she, Gloria and Daphne said they were doing jobs which had previously been carried out by men and though this was recognised by farmers, it was not acknowledged by those further afield. Maisie felt the WLA made the same contribution as other women's services although she said her friends in other services 'rather envied the fact that we could get home more often than they could and I suppose we had more freedom.' Violet felt the WLA was never made to 'feel equal to the main service.' She recalled an Armistice Day church parade when the WLA was placed last behind the boy scouts which she considered to be demeaning.

WLA members occasionally experienced the feeling that some of the women's services 'looked down' on the WLA. For example Peggy suggested that 'other service women considered us rather low caste and smelly' but she thought 'they didn't know what work was.' Irene and colleagues from Gargrave managed to get their own back on some of their peers from the Johnson & Johnson factory who 'looked down their noses at us in our dirty uniforms and unkempt appearance. So we made a point of sitting next to them [on the bus] if we were a bit smelly.'

Linda felt that at the time recruits did not think about recognition because they were young and 'just got on with it.' Other respondents also mentioned this aspect and it would appear that in the war years when most of the work was being undertaken, WLA members made fewer comparisons with other services. The issue has perhaps been considered more deeply after the war because of the debate over gratuities.

On leaving the WLA, some recruits received a 'certificate of merit' signed by the Queen, which they still treasure. This included the following sentiment:

By this personal message I wish to express to you [Doris] my appreciation of your loyal and devoted service as a member of the Women's Land Army from [27th July 1942] to [1st Jan. 1946].

Your unsparing efforts at a time when the victory of our cause depended on the utmost use of the resources of our land have earned for you the country's gratitude.⁴⁴

However, other recruits such as Florence, who did not receive this acknowledgement, felt they were simply 'not gathered into the fold' of appreciation for their contribution to the war effort.

4. Formulation of policies on disbanding the WLA

In addition to considering the gratuities issue as the war with Germany drew to a close, the MAF was also examining several possibilities regarding the future of the WLA. These ranged from winding up the entire organisation to giving it a permanent role in agriculture.⁴⁵

The Ministry considered that a permanent organisation could recruit, train and place women to work on the land, supply specialist workers such as milkers and provide a national association for women land workers with oversight of conditions of employment. However, another view was that in peacetime a female workforce was unlikely to provide the most appropriate source of agricultural labour and a specific body to recruit and train women was therefore unnecessary. It was considered that male adults were more suitable for agricultural labour and there was also a need to attract boys and girls to the industry. The MAF did not indicate whether boys and girls were seen as a source of cheap and casual labour or whether this was an attempt to secure the future of agriculture. If the WLA was to be disbanded, women who wished to remain in agriculture would be absorbed into the traditional labour force of the industry, which would not have the 'special privileges' of uniform and welfare support allocated to the WLA in wartime.

The MAF eventually decided to 'aim at keeping in being the organisation that has served us so well during the war for as long as it is necessary and possible to do so' with no appreciable changes being made to existing conditions of service.⁴⁶ The decision on a date to finally disband the WLA was left in abeyance, dependent upon the number of new recruits wishing to join, natural wastage and the need for milkers and general workers on farms. It was envisaged that the WLA would continue until 1947 but it could be brought to an end earlier if recruits numbered less than 15,000 -

20,000, or extended if this was beneficial to the industry. However, the Minister of Agriculture considered that maintaining WLA membership at a practical level would not be straightforward. This was principally because individual farmers still preferred male workers, only a limited number of women wished to undertake farm work on a longer term basis and difficulty had been encountered in the past in attempting to provide year-round gang work.⁴⁷

The need to retain the WLA in some form was related to the government's agricultural expansion programme, which was introduced due to the changed conditions brought about by the war. The programme aimed for greater efficiency in the industry and increased food production through greater numbers of livestock and acreage of crops such as cereals and potatoes.⁴⁸ A considerably increased labour force was required to fulfil these targets, particularly in 1948 as the numbers of PoWs working on the land reduced as they were repatriated.⁴⁹ However, Mr Tom Williams, Minister of Agriculture, informed WLA members that as he was

faced with the difficult task of finding enough workers to plant, tend and harvest the heavy crops ... and to keep up our milk supply, I do not want to lose you. I want to assure you that the Land Army has still a big part to play on our farms; and even when the time comes to wind up the present organisation I hope that many of its members will continue to find a livelihood on the land.⁵⁰

Mrs Jenkins, WLA Assistant Director, issued a message in *The Land Girl* to the effect that the Minister of Agriculture had said the Land Army would be needed 'at least until the harvest of 1948.' She wrote that the WLA needed 'to find its second wind', that it had 'won a fine reputation and must finish in style the job that it has carried through triumphantly so far.'⁵¹

The WLA was, however, in general agreement with the MAF to eventually wind up its operation. As indicated in Chapter Six, many voluntary representatives who had worked unpaid for several years could not be asked to continue on this basis indefinitely. The Minister of Agriculture himself felt it would 'put a hardly justified tax on their willingness and loyalty' if the WLA continued until 1948.⁵² Mr HJ Johns, MAF Manpower Division, also informed government ministers that townswomen in particular regarded their work in the WLA as 'their form of war

service and as an interlude to their normal lives. With the passing of the war emergency and its aftermath, it will be much more difficult to evoke the same spirit.⁵³

In the 10-month period from January to October 1947, WLA membership declined from 30,000 to 26,000. The Minister of Agriculture therefore entered into discussions with the NUAW regarding the future of the organisation, particularly as the number of male workers in agriculture had risen by 14,000 between June 1946 and June 1947.⁵⁴ However, in order to fulfil the requirements of the agricultural expansion programme, the Minister decided that the WLA should continue for at least a further two to three years with as high a membership as possible.⁵⁵

Given successive governments' consideration of the financial implications of operating a WLA, the need for its continuation to provide female labour must have been paramount at this time. In fact, the Minister of Agriculture informed a private conference of WLA County Chairmen on 21 January 1948 that the two previous years had been 'almost as grim as the war itself' because of rationing and the harsh snowbound winter of 1947. It was suggested by his advisors that he congratulate WLA members for their continued hard work and tell County Chairmen that 'they can look back with pride on their achievement' which had drawn praise from overseas at their ability to maintain the organisation in peacetime. The new arrangements for paid county representatives and the manner in which they worked had involved very little organisational change, which indicated approval of the way in which the WLA had been administered in the past. There was much to be grateful for to Lady Denman and Mrs Jenkins, and the Minister was advised 'on behalf of himself, and the government and the nation to thank everyone of them [WLA members] for their notable contribution - a contribution that will never be forgotten...'⁵⁶

However, June 1949 saw a decline in the number of WLA members to 16,000⁵⁷ resulting in the MAF advising the House of Commons on 31 October 1949 that the WLA would be disbanded on 30 November 1950 with recruitment ceasing on 31 March 1950.

5. Implementation of policies on disbanding the WLA

The reduction in WLA membership between 1945 and 1949, together with the introduction of paid county representatives, resulted in a changed county structure to deal with disbanding the WLA. In the West Riding, this affected both the WLA and the WAEC. Alternative structures were discussed including dissolving WLA County branches altogether with WAECs becoming responsible for WLA affairs.

In January 1948 Mrs Jenkins advised the WLA county organisations that they would be 'modified to become less dependent on voluntary help and more suited to peacetime conditions.' Their committees would cease and voluntary chairmen, district and local representatives would no longer supervise operations. They would be replaced by paid and qualified staff who would undertake visits to members working on the land.⁵⁸ After only three months' operation, however, the welfare committees realised that the new arrangements caused a great deal more work for county organising secretaries and their staff resulting in 31 resignations in this period.⁵⁹

As indicated in Chapter Five, the Yorkshire Ridings had been subject to some reorganisation during the war and when the WLA entered its winding down period, the North and East Ridings were again combined under a chief office in York. The West Riding Committee remained independent and was based in Leeds. The tasks undertaken by county staff at this time were as varied and time-consuming as they had been during the war years albeit on a gradually reducing scale. Their brief was to maintain the service which remained and deal with issues of disbanding as they arose for individual members.

The North and East Riding Welfare Committee decided in August 1950 to have a joint party to mark the disbanding of the WLA for which the Rowntree Company in York agreed to provide their canteen, tea and a band for 3s.0d. per head. It was anticipated that the top table would comprise Lady Celia Coates, Lady Katherine Graham and Lady Isobel Dunnington-Jefferson, all past chairmen of the two Ridings. The West Riding Welfare Committee also decided to hold a separate farewell party for its members, to be held in Leeds on 30 September 1950. Lady Bingley accepted

an invitation to the West Riding party and advertisements were placed in local papers inviting recruits who had completed one year's service in the WLA. The decision to hold two functions appears typical of the division within the Ridings, the reasons for which are not always clear. However, the West Riding Welfare Committee did consider a form of togetherness in that should it find itself unable to afford the total cost of the function then it felt the North and East Riding Committee might give it a small grant from its funds.

It was reported at the final meeting of the North and East Riding Welfare Committee that 770 guests attended the disbanding function on 7 November 1950. The West Riding Welfare Committee at its final meeting on 20 November 1950 also announced that its party was a great success. Following both functions, members requested that reunions of WLA staff be held in subsequent years and both committees agreed to examine the possibility. In fact reunions did take place both nationally and locally with the Craven branch of the WLA having met annually since 1949.

The gradual diminution of WLA numbers also had implications for the WRWAEC, particularly regarding the closure of hostels. Settle WLA hostel was closed in September 1948 with remaining members being drafted to other West Riding hostels. It was intended that it be reopened as a men's hostel for displaced persons who would work in the district.⁶⁰ With the end of the war, Irish labour was also becoming available and the MAF informed WAECs that over 1,000 labourers were currently useable with the possibility of a further allocation of 2,000.⁶¹

Although a form of County Agricultural Executive Committee continued in existence until the mid-1950s, the responsibilities held by sub-committees were re-focused due to the reduction in the acreage of crop cultivation and a return to livestock farming in some areas, including Craven. This change in farming methods resulted in the sale of agricultural machinery by public auction in Skipton in March and October 1948. The latter included some 60 tractors and associated ploughing equipment which had been purchased especially for arable farming and were, therefore, no longer of use.

6. Outcomes of policies on disbanding the WLA

The dates of departure of recruits from the Craven area were much earlier than the final date of disbanding of the national organisation in 1950. This was partly due to farmers returning to livestock farming from the more labour-intensive arable methods and their preference for male labour. Many recruits also felt they had fulfilled their roles during the war period and wished to resume their peacetime lives. In fact, of the 38 respondents in this study, 15 left the WLA in 1945, with 10 of these having completed three years' service, five recruits left in 1944, nine left in 1946, five in 1947 and three in 1948. (The date of departure of one respondent is not known). The average length of service of respondents was approximately three years and three months, which compares favourably with national figures issued by *The Land Girl* indicating that the majority of long service members served for between three and four years.⁶²

22 of the 38 respondents in this study mentioned marriage as one of the reasons for leaving the WLA, but this was often accompanied by the fact that the WLA was winding down in the area. Others felt they had completed sufficient WLA service and wished to return to work in their old jobs or were required to care for sick relatives and a number of former members were forced to leave for health reasons. Those who had to take up employment on discharge appear to have been offered little assistance to find alternative posts. Mavis said that as soon as the war ended recruits were 'given their marching orders' as 'returning males required the jobs.' She took a correspondence course, sat a civil service examination and, after working at the local Inland Revenue office, transferred to the Ministry of Health in London. Maggie, who left the WLA in early 1945, found her own job driving a van for the Post Office, as she did not want to work indoors each day. Violet found her new job by responding to an advertisement in her home town local paper. Daphne said she also had to find her own work and took a part-time post doing alterations in a dress shop. Ann was one recruit who married a farmer on leaving the WLA although as it was a dairy farm the work was different from the arable and fieldwork she was used to.

Other recruits underwent very different employment experiences on leaving the WLA. For example, Marianne married a police officer and as officers' wives were

not allowed to work at that time she had to remain at home. On the other hand, six WLA members left the service due to personal illness or injury sustained while at work, some of whom were told by the MoLNS to obtain alternative jobs. Joy developed asthma from dust caused by threshing, losing two stones in weight. She had to leave the service and find her own work. Sylvia, Maisie and Doris left the WLA because of muscular injuries sustained through manipulating heavy equipment and ploughing. Sylvia was directed by the Ministry of Labour to work at the Johnson & Johnson factory in Gargrave, Maisie had to report to a labour exchange to obtain lighter work and Doris was able to return to her post as a secretary in Bradford. Maisie was another former recruit who worked for the Post Office as a van driver but she later had to leave 'so the men could have their old jobs back. We had no choice in the matter.' Jean was unable to work for two years on her discharge because the very severe tractor accident in which she was involved required a great deal of after-care. She was awarded some compensation and was later able to take up a sewing job. Like Doris, other women were able to return to their former employment. Elizabeth returned to office work at her previous firm in Skipton, Marie returned to her job as a shroud maker in Dewsbury and Kate transferred her hairdressing skills from her former job in Harrogate to a position in Settle where she married a local man.

Three recruits left the WLA due to the illness of parents and were required to assist with the care of younger siblings and/or the family home and business.

When asked to comment on their experience of the WLA, without exception respondents indicated how much they had enjoyed their years of service. Hazel Driver holds the view that there may be a tendency for former WLA members to 'look back on those few years with a nostalgia that distance lends to so many experiences long past'⁶³ and this is very relevant in considering the opinions expressed by former members.

Reasons given for valuing WLA life included the camaraderie of hostel accommodation, the social life, 'plenty of boyfriends' stationed in the forces nearby and disappointment when they were posted elsewhere. Many recruits also enjoyed the work for while it was physically demanding they took great pleasure from the

fresh air and countryside. Laura was the only former recruit to say she enjoyed meeting the farmers. She recalls them being very different from each other - 'some outgoing and some reserved and tight-fisted. Some farmers were very amenable but others didn't think women could do a job at all, but that was before they [women] ever tried.'

Although in the midst of war, the Craven area bore little evidence of fighting. Stray bombs were dropped and ammunition dumps appeared at some roadsides but there was little or no danger of sustaining injury due to battle, unlike in Kent where WLA members worked in an area known as 'bomb alley'. Peggy said, 'I loved the life even in the midst of war. I considered my time in the WLA some of my happiest years.' Maggie said that although there were times when she could have wept because of the physically demanding work, she enjoyed the rest of her experience because the farm where she was billeted treated her as part of their family. Jane also felt it was 'the best five years of her life' because she got on so well with her work-mates and 'didn't really feel there was a war going on.' Libby said

they were the best years of my life. My daughter-in-law can't understand it because they say 'there was a war on' but I mean the atmosphere and everything, the friendliness, it was so much different to what it is now. When you were travelling about on trains everybody used to talk to each other and had the cigarettes out and the sweets if they had any and it was a great atmosphere.

Some recruits felt that joining the WLA had changed the course of their lives. Millie felt it 'made' her life although Jean said it changed hers because of suffering a very bad tractor accident. However, she felt 'the actual Land Army was lovely. You can look back and say you did something but what you did you enjoyed doing. It was hard work but we were young enough to do it.' Linda said the experience opened up her life, particularly through living with almost 40 other girls where she had to learn to 'stick up for herself.' She had previously undertaken office and shop work and said her parents had difficulty in accepting the idea that she had coped with fieldwork. On one occasion when she returned home, she had to wash her face to prove to her mother that her sunburn was not faked.

Daphne felt that had she not joined the WLA she would have married someone from her own village and not moved around. Violet said she was brought up not to mix very much and she, therefore, felt that joining the WLA 'was good for us, as we were rather timid.' Edie felt her years in the WLA were enjoyable because they were so different from the life she had been used to. She said they were mostly city girls who 'really put [their] hearts and souls into the work and the life there, and rather strangely the girls that had been brought up on farms were anxious to join the forces.'

7. Summary and conclusion

This chapter has focused upon the issues concerned with disbanding the WLA. It is suggested that the failure of successive governments to satisfactorily resolve the question of the status of the WLA in relation to other wartime services caused controversy and discontent over many years. However, it is accepted that hindsight is a perspective of which the politicians of the day could not take advantage. Similarly if, as was suggested by some County Chairmen, Lady Denman wished to maintain the WLA as an organisation with some independence from the MAF, then she cannot have realised the implications this would have for the future of the service or her members.

The main point of contention was whether or not the WLA was perceived as a state service operating along similar lines to women's services such as the ATS, WAAFs or WRNS. If the view was held that it was a state service, then it followed that the WLA should be allowed the same gratuities as women's service organisations. However, if it was considered that the WLA was a 'civilian' service similar to munitions workers, then it was suggested that its members should not be entitled to receive awards similar to those made to the services.

As a result of pressure placed upon the government in the form of protests by MPs, recruits and Lady Denman's resignation, some changes were made to the awards initially offered. The protesters' desired outcome was not achieved in full but they were successful in persuading the government to modify and improve its offer to the WLA. The Prime Minister (Mr Churchill) was, however, somewhat intransigent in his dealings with the WLA being concerned that his honour remain intact and that

he should not be seen to change his mind too readily with the aim of trying to win popularity for election purposes.

The decision to finally disband the WLA met with the agreement of the government, the MAF and the WLA itself. All parties concluded that the organisation had reached the end of its natural life by late 1950. Chapter Eleven will consider the achievements of the WLA in relation to the selected policy areas examined in this study.

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- 27 *Hansard, op. cit.* Vol.414, Col.689. Oral answers, 15.10.1945.

- 28 *Ibid.* Vol.414, Col.1059. Oral answers, 16.10.1945.
- 29 *The Land Girl*, Vol.6, No.3, 1945, p.1.
- 30 Lancashire WLA Committee, minutes March 1945.
- 31 *MAF 59/20 op. cit.* WLA circular 187 of 18.5.1945.
- 32 Letter from West Riding County Secretary to Doris dated October 1945. (Copy given to researcher).
- 33 Tyrer, *op.cit.* pp.219/220.
- 34 *Ibid.* pp.222/223.
- 35 *PRO MAF 59/12 op. cit.* Letter from Fighting Fund Committee to potential supporters (date of issue unclear).
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 *Ibid.*
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- 39 BWLAS Magazine, March 1999.
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- 45 *PRO MAF 59/27 op. cit.* MAF Paper headed Future of the WLA c. 1945.
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- 47 *Ibid.* Letter from Minister of Agriculture to WLA members, January 1947.
- 48 *PRO MAF 59/27 op. cit.* Speech by Mr T Williams to special NUAW conference. Press Notice 7.10.1947.
- 49 *PRO MAF 59/12 op. cit.* Committee of Employment of Women in Agriculture. Report on Women's Supplementary Labour, December 1947.
- 50 *PRO MAF 59/27 op. cit.* Letter from Minister of Agriculture to WLA members, January 1947.
- 51 *The Land Girl*, Vol.6. No.4, 1945, p.2.
- 52 *PRO MAF 59/27 op. cit.* Draft memo by Minister of Agriculture (undated).
- 53 *Ibid.* Mr HJ Johns Report to Ministers 24.2.1947.
- 54 *PRO MAF 59/27 op. cit.* Speech by Mr T Williams to special NUAW conference. Press Notice 7.10.1947.
- 55 *PRO MAF 59/12 op. cit.* Letter from Mr WC Tame to Mr J Rhodes, 21.4.1948.
- 56 *PRO MAF 47/166 op. cit.* Notes for Minister of Agriculture for WLA conference 21.1.1948.
- 57 *MAF 59/12 op. cit.* Note by Mr AB Bartlett, 22.6.1949.
- 58 *MAF 59/27 op. cit.* Letter from Mrs Jenkins to County Chairmen, January 1948.
- 59 *MAF 59/12 op. cit.* Letter from Miss A Curtis to Mr AB Bartlett, 3.9.1948.
- 60 *Craven Herald*, 17.9.48, p.7
- 61 WRWAEC Labour Sub-Committee minutes, 20.5.1948.
- 62 *The Land Girl*, Vol.6, No.5, 1945, p.1.
- 63 Hazel Driver, 'Land Army Girls', *Dalesman*, Vol.37, No.6, 1975, p.451.

CHAPTER ELEVEN - AN EVALUATION OF THE WOMEN'S LAND ARMY, ITS POLICIES AND PRACTICES

To conclude this study of the Women's Land Army, an evaluation of its policies and practices will be made by returning to consider the stages and strategies of the policy process. Other relevant issues will be addressed such as the impact, if any, of the WLA on the position of women and agriculture, and opportunities for further research will also be suggested.

1. Policy formulation

The decision to introduce what was to become the first WLA was made by the Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, in 1917. Interestingly, the impetus came not from within the Board of Agriculture but from Mrs Wilkins, a former member of the voluntary agricultural service, who had been placed in charge of the government-run Women's National Land Service Corps. She persuaded the Prime Minister that women could provide appropriate agricultural labour but made it clear that increased government resources were required for a larger scale operation. The WLA was, therefore, eventually instigated at the behest of a former female volunteer who appeared to possess greater foresight than civil servants in sowing the seeds for innovative policy.

Decisions to introduce both Women's Land Armies were made to protect the nation's food supplies during periods of war. In 1939 Britain imported as much as 70% of its foodstuffs and there was a continuing threat of losing much of this due to enemy action at sea (35,600 tons were lost in 1939, rising to 65,600 in 1941).¹ The combination of food losses and the compulsory call-up of male workers resulted in agriculture being faced with a huge task if it were to successfully meet its production targets and feed the country. The government, therefore, decided to recruit the female population into the agricultural labour force at the beginning of the Second World War rather than wait for three years as it had done in World War I.

Lady Denman, a former WLA Assistant Director during the First World War, was appointed by the MAF as Honorary Director of the new organisation and in 1938

was charged with the task of setting up the WLA. She began by putting in place a structure through which the organisation could be administered. Her appointments of county chairmen from the gentry met with disapproval from some quarters. Farming and labour unions and agricultural labourers themselves suggested these women did not necessarily possess a thorough knowledge of agriculture and had been appointed due to their position of privilege. However, as the women were often involved with the WI and had experience of the countryside, it could be argued they were the most appropriate people for the task in hand. They were not paid for their time and effort and were known and respected figures in their localities. Furthermore, men who did possess agricultural experience did not aspire to WLA Committees but were involved with WAECs, putting their agricultural experience into practice.

Members of the MAF, Lady Denman and her deputy, Mrs Inez Jenkins, were involved in making national WLA policy decisions. However, political factors impinging upon policies such as recruitment and accommodation meant that contributions to policy formulation were made by a variety of government ministries. These included the Treasury, the MoLNS, the Ministry of Supply and the Ministry of Health and their requirements often took precedence over those of the MAF and the WLA.

In investigating policy formulation it has not always been possible to identify particular policy statements. Indeed, announcing precise aims and objectives may have been deliberately avoided by the government and by the WLA itself to avoid certain outcomes being judged as failures. Nevertheless, from various statements made by the MAF, the Minister of Agriculture in the House of Commons and the WLA hierarchy, it has been possible to identify the *raison d'être* of the WLA, 1939-1950. As indicated throughout this study 'a new mobile agricultural labour force of women specially recruited to assist in increasing the production of home-grown food' is an appropriate summation of its purpose.

Statements in relation to WLA policies varied in terms of their specificity. For example, publicity indicated that recruits would be allocated to one of three categories of accommodation - farm, billets or hostels - but no definitive policy statement appears to have been issued on the standards of such accommodation. This

is, of course, hardly surprising, given that many farms were not supplied with water or electricity at that time, but on occasions the living conditions of some WLA recruits were poor. In considering the information obtained from recruits working in Craven, together with details contained in MAF and WRWAEC records, hostel accommodation in the area appears to have generally been satisfactory and particularly good in Skipton.

An explicit policy statement was issued in relation to welfare supervision, indicating that county offices were 'responsible for supervision of moral and social welfare in Land Army training or employment in their counties.'² However, organising secretaries, voluntary workers and the WI were criticised by MAF and MoLNS officers for inadequate welfare arrangements, suggesting that the county staff did not 'understand the minds of urban girls drafted into the countryside.'³ The ministries appear to have absolved themselves of any responsibilities for this situation, yet they did not provide Lady Denman with sufficient finance to recruit qualified and experienced welfare workers. Sir Donald Fergusson, MAF Permanent Secretary, even went so far as to suggest that welfare policy could not be successful on private farms because they were too widespread, although he felt that a welfare policy should operate for recruits in hostels.⁴ It appears that not only did the government fail to accept responsibility for welfare supervision, it criticised those who were made to carry it out. In Craven, however, with the emphasis on hostel accommodation, welfare supervision was of a high standard.

Where policy statements were issued, they were not necessarily binding throughout the lifetime of the WLA, as reformulation was required to meet ever-changing needs. From an examination of MAF documentation it has been possible to identify three periods in recruitment policy when significant reformulation occurred. As indicated in Chapter Five, these were

- (i) 1917-1919 when a recruitment policy was established.
- (ii) 1939-1945 when recruitment policy was re-established along similar lines to that operating previously and then developed to meet the demands of higher recruitment targets during the Second World War and reformulated due to the stop-start nature of recruitment.

- (iii) 1945-1950 when recruitment policy was again reformulated by the MAF/WLA as they tried to balance the need to retain a WLA to deal with the post-war agricultural plan against the desire of the majority of its membership to return to peacetime homes and jobs.

Formulation of recruitment policy was, therefore, flexible to meet these contingencies yet decision makers were restricted due to the requirements of powerful ministries whose services took precedence over the WLA for women's labour.

There was generally little opportunity for policy implementers and those whose involvement was that of putting policy into practice (i.e. recruits working on the land) to influence the direction of policy. However, there were instances where apparently definitive decisions had been made which the government then changed due to the influence of the WLA hierarchy, recruits, public opinion, lobbying of MPs and parliamentary debate. This was particularly evident regarding policy formulation on the award of gratuities to WLA members. Lady Denman, whose name was synonymous with the organisation, sacrificed her position by resigning in protest at what she perceived as the lack of recognition by the government of the work undertaken by the WLA. Chapter Ten details her departure and discussions in the House of Commons on the status of the WLA compared with the women's auxiliary services, which was at the root of the disparity between the respective awards. The Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, and his cabinet could not be persuaded to change their views on the status of the WLA and it is difficult to know what further action protesters could have taken, particularly as strike action by recruits was considered inappropriate. However, due to public pressure, the government made some changes to their original proposals which benefited the WLA, although the magnitude of these changes did not bring the WLA into line with the women's auxiliary services.

The WLA labour force was still needed to assist the agricultural industry in the provision of food during the harsh post-war period, but the MAF finally decided to disband the organisation in November 1950. Many recruits had considered their work in the WLA as war service and did not wish to remain in agriculture once the war had ended. The MAF was unable to offer sufficiently attractive conditions of service to maintain the WLA at a viable level of membership and, with the gradual

reintroduction of male labour, the life of the WLA came to a natural end. It will be shown that agriculturists and others involved with the organisation expressed admiration for the WLA and mourned its passing.

2. Policy implementation

Chapters Two and Three have included discussion on the problematic nature of distinguishing between the stages of policy formulation and implementation and, indeed, whether such a demarcation is appropriate. However, it is suggested that within the WLA policy process it is somewhat easier to make this distinction due to the nature of the organisation. For example, the WLA was obviously hierarchical with MAF and WLA policy formulators passing instructions on decisions made at government level to WAECs and WLA county chairmen via a series of circular letters for policy to be implemented locally. The subject matter of the circulars was wide-ranging and varied from major policy decisions described in previous chapters to more mundane concerns such as petty cash, the surrender of coupons and petrol rationing. Policy-makers and implementers were also separated geographically in that the former were situated in London and Sussex and the latter were widespread throughout the English counties. However, despite this hierarchical and physical separation, there appears to have been only a little dissension between Lady Denman and her county chairmen over implementing policy, probably due to the majority of them having been hand-picked by her.

Chapter Four shows that Craven provided the location within which this study of the implementation and outcomes of WLA policy was made. The geography of the area predisposed it to livestock rather than arable farming. Therefore, when its agricultural community was compelled by the MAF to plough up pasture land it was met with reluctance and a great deal of protest. The area produced foodstuffs for animals rather than food for human consumption with the aim that farmers should be self-sufficient in feeding their livestock and producing milk for nearby towns and cities such as Leeds and Bradford. The negative attitude of farmers towards ploughing, coupled with perceptions that women were best suited to domestic work, meant that groups of young women with little agricultural training imported from towns and cities were not initially made to feel welcome. WRWLA and WRWAEC

personnel with responsibility for implementing agricultural policies had, therefore, to overcome a good deal of resistance in the Craven district in order to achieve the aims of policy makers. However, as agriculture was labour intensive and male labour was being called up to the forces there were opportunities for the WLA to prove its worth, particularly as the MAF had set the West Riding a target of an additional 50,000 acres of land to plough. By September 1943 some 231 WLA members were employed in Craven together with 310 male workers, 250 Italian POWs and 12 schoolboy harvest camps, and 75% of ploughing, seeding and cutting was undertaken by WRWAEC machinery.⁵

The implementation of policies in Craven was undertaken within a system of partnership. The principal policy implementers were the WRWAEC and the North, East and West Riding WLA Committees who worked closely together. However, there also existed a wider inter-organisational network comprising other important components such as the NFU, CTFA, WI and YWCA. There was little involvement from agricultural labour unions in Craven although the NUAW was slightly more active nationally. This absence appears to be due to a combination of factors such as the small number of union representatives available due to call-up and the fact that those who were active were not always made welcome by WLA foremen. Recruits themselves were also unsure what benefits would accrue from union membership.

The network of agencies interacted within the political context of Craven and developed over time to meet the changing requirements of agricultural labour. These developments were often accompanied by modifications to the committee structure within both the WLA and WRWAEC organisations. For example, WLA Welfare Committees were formed in the Ridings when paid and qualified welfare workers were employed in 1948 and the WRWAEC had numerous sub-committees which were formed and disbanded as and when required. The WRWAEC sub-committees which were of particular importance to the WLA were those for Labour and Machinery, which usually included a member of the WRWLA committee on their boards. The WRWLA and WRWAEC appear to have forged good relationships and occasional differences were rectified by discussion. For instance, when the WRWLA sacked some recruits without advising the WRWAEC, the two parties agreed that

they would liaise before any future disciplinary problems resulted in this course of action.

In general, the system was cohesive although organisations on the periphery, with perhaps less interest in its success, declined to participate even when faced with a government policy decision. For example, Leeds University lecturers indicated they were 'too busy' to provide training for WLA recruits during wartime and also discouraged women from undertaking agricultural courses after the war. The University did, however, assist the Craven community by holding talks in the area for farmers and the general public to advise on crop growing.

Whilst county committees discussed how policy should be implemented, the county organisers were responsible for arranging the actual implementation. Their duties ranged from tasks associated with enrolling recruits through to their departure from the service and, in some instances, the workload proved too heavy to be manageable, with the organisers using their own money to pay for secretarial assistance. In Craven, however, with the emphasis on hostel accommodation, it was easier for the local representatives to visit groups of recruits in one location to deal with work and welfare issues. In such cases the dual responsibility of the WRWLA and WRWAEC produced a standard of living and working conditions which were not always available to individual recruits on private farms.

From time to time, problems arose in implementing policy due to lack of materials but counties could do little to rectify matters, being restricted by the national situation. For example, there were often difficulties in acquiring appropriate sizes of uniform, resulting in recruits having to 'make do' rather than being comfortable in their working kit. In addition, the quality of some items such as boots and mackintoshes often left something to be desired when working in very wet weather. County organisers also experienced difficulties in obtaining the required number of coupons from recruits in exchange for uniform and the bureaucracy of this type of work, together with such matters as ensuring that petrol rations were not exceeded, added to the workload of the county system. This resulted in some policies not always being rigorously implemented. For example, medical examinations and references appear not to have been taken up on occasions or questionable information may have been supplied but not followed up. This resulted in the enrolment of

women who may not have been physically fit enough to undertake strenuous work on the land.

Policies in relation to conditions of service appear to have been implemented appropriately in Craven. This is most likely to be due to the fact that recruits were employed by the WRWAEC and not by individual farmers. Wages were paid directly to recruits by the WRWAEC who ensured that they received the correct amount. In some areas recruits experienced problems in receiving wages from individual farmers who appear to have been less accountable than the official bodies of the WAECs and WLA. However, Craven recruits did yield to local arrangements when, for example, working hours exceeded the stipulated 48 per week at harvest time or when ploughing had fallen behind schedule due to poor weather. Recruits tended to accept these situations in view of the war emergency although completing a 70-hour week of demanding work must have required all the physical resources they possessed.

Successful implementation of policies is said by Lewis to be 'cost effective use of appropriate mechanisms and procedures to fulfil expectations aroused by policy and retain general public assent.'⁶ It is argued that WLA policies were implemented satisfactorily in the Craven area with expectations being fulfilled despite any local difficulties which may have existed. This is indicated by the influx of recruits to the area, the continuation of the hostel system for several years, the acreage of land ploughed for crops and the eventual acceptance of farmers of this type of female labour following their earlier stubbornness.

3. Policy outcomes

Outcomes of WLA policy have been gauged by obtaining information from a sample of recruits who were employed in Craven together with a limited number who worked in other areas. Details of the sample appear in Chapter Three and their experiences of policy outcomes are outlined in Chapters Six to Ten.

Only very occasionally did recruits appear to influence the policy process. The government policy on gratuities is perhaps the most obvious example of a national group protest which resulted in a change in policy formulation. It is, however, unlikely that recruits themselves would have possessed sufficient credibility to have

forced the government's change of heart and the case of WLA members and the award of gratuities was also taken up by others more powerful than the WLA rank and file.

However, local recruits did manage to persuade their regional leaders to make some changes. For example, members who were transferred from Skipton to Settle hostel drew up a petition protesting that at the time they felt conditions at Settle were substandard. As a result, the Machinery Officer of the WRWAEC, based in Craven, decided they could return to Skipton. Recruits did not adopt a passive role outside the work place, contributing to the local community in terms of social activities. They also became actively involved when policy implementers met with difficulties in achieving policy aims such as raising money for the WLA Benevolent Fund, formed in 1942, to help recruits where illness or accident caused financial hardship. In addition, when uniform was difficult to replace, evenings were often spent patching and mending garments after an arduous day of land work. Recruits placed singly tended to be less fortunate, however, with one recruit being able to do little about having to share her bed with the grandmother of the family with which she was placed. It was not until her brother intervened and complained to the WLA that her circumstances were changed. In other instances, individuals fared well in their farm placements by being treated as part of the family or being given very good meals when billeted.

The majority of recruits seem to have accepted the level of pay received, being unaware of any 'struggle' by policy makers to achieve a standard minimum wage. Although not well paid, some recruits were able to send money home to families in addition to paying for board and lodgings from their wages. A small number of recruits, particularly former shop workers, earned wages in the WLA in excess of those earned in previous employment.

The above examples show that with one or two exceptions, recruits generally accepted the outcomes of policy formulation and implementation between 1939 and 1950. This was not necessarily due to apathy on their part but due also to a combination of factors such as the cultural and industrial conditions prevailing during the period. A number of respondents suggested that 'in those days' people did not

make claims and demands to the same extent as in present day economic and social climates and, in any event, appropriate mechanisms were not in place to enable such action to be taken by individuals. Some recruits did, however, qualify for awards from the WRWAEC but only on sustaining injury due to accidents using the Committee's equipment or through muscular injury which caused them to be medically unfit for further WLA work. In fact, several former members felt that they had continued to suffer from illness in later life because of work carried out in the WLA. They cited stomach problems due to the inhalation of cyanide gas when working on pest destruction, asthma as a result of threshing operations, rheumatism and arthritis but this was obviously difficult to prove and the ethic that 'one didn't complain' was still in evidence.

Despite uncomfortable working conditions and occasional lack of training, recruits became proficient in a variety of tractor driving related tasks involving both single and dual person operations. These included ploughing, threshing, discing, spreading fertiliser, seed drilling, chain harrowing, binding and cutting corn, machine maintenance and pest control. All respondents appeared to take pride in their work and participated in ploughing competitions, winning prizes and appearing in local and national newspapers. This was not purely for 'personal glory' since there was little, if any, opportunity for promotion but it did bring the work of the WLA to public attention. Recruits felt they were making a contribution to the war effort which was no less important than that of most other services. They felt they played their part in fulfilling the aims and objectives of the WLA in assisting in increasing the volume of arable crops produced. Notwithstanding the hardships endured, all respondents enjoyed their years of service in the WLA, citing the camaraderie, social life, fresh air and countryside as factors contributing to what was, for many, amongst the happiest years of their lives.

4. Policy evaluation

As indicated in Chapters Two and Three, the evaluation of policies is in itself problematic, as the most appropriate method(s) of measuring success or failure have not necessarily been established. Burch and Wood consider that 'unless we know what was intended [by a policy] we cannot judge whether or not policy has

succeeded.⁷ As policy statements were not always issued within the WLA, problems are obviously encountered in assessing whether or not policies were successful. The task of policy evaluation is made even more difficult when, as Burch and Wood suggest, 'objectives are commonly unstated, ambiguous or even in conflict with one another.'⁸

How, then, do we measure whether the WLA achieved its aims and objectives? Firstly, quantitative assessments can be made from numerical data, although success and failure cannot be measured solely in these terms as political factors impinge on the process. Secondly, therefore, in addition to a consideration of quantitative data, an appraisal can be made of the comments made by various parties on the performance of the WLA for as Burch and Wood also suggest, assessment of policy has traditionally been impressionistic and anecdotal.⁹ By presenting both quantitative and qualitative assessments of selected policy areas, it is intended to provide a balanced evaluation of the achievements of the WLA and its functioning.

Table 6 shows the acreage of crop cultivation in 1939 and 1944 both nationally and in the West Riding. This indicates an increase of between 33% and 50% or above in most crop acreage in the West Riding and even higher yields nationally.

Table 6: Area of crops cultivated (1939/1944)

Crop	UK^a 1939	UK 1944	WR^b 1939	WR 1944
Arable land	11,870,000	17,936,000	293,285	509,107
Tillage (total)	8,342,000	13,708,000	232,872	411,767
Wheat	1,763,000	3,215,000	67,725	109,926
Barley	1,010,000	1,957,000	15,149	39,233
Oats	2,135,000	3,215,000	60,199	99,602
Mixed corn	85,000	415,000	2,834	21,326
Potatoes	589,000	1,219,000	26,041	50,316
Bare fallow	374,000	231,000	11,824	4,959

^a Source: *Statistical Digest of the War*, HMSO 1951, p.57 Extract from Table 55.

^b Source: *Craven Herald* 11.5.1945, p.6).

However, these spectacular successes cannot be attributed solely to the WLA as PoWs, the armed forces, agricultural camps, holiday workers and casual workers also contributed their labour to these achievements. Nevertheless, the above figures show

that the WLA fulfilled its primary aims and objectives of assisting in increasing the production of home-grown food.

Furthermore, in order to achieve these targets, WLA recruits were involved in the mechanisation of the agricultural industry. Table 7 gives an indication of the national picture showing that between 1942 and 1946 the number of tractors in use grew from 116,830 to 203,420 with the number of harrows and cultivators rising from 195,530 to 1,477,160 during the same period.

Table 7: Increased usage of mechanised implements

Implement	Numbers in operation (UK)	
	May 1942	June 1946
Tractors	116,830	203,420
Ploughs	464,450	466,860
Harrows, Cultivators	195,530	1,477,160
Binders	131,600	149,640
Potato spinners/diggers	37,980	64,620
Milking machines	29,510	48,280

(Source: Murray, *op. cit.* Extract from Table 26, p.276).

While the impact of this is considered later in this chapter, it is appropriate to indicate the magnitude of the increase in the use of mechanised implements in which the WLA played its part.

Data presented in Chapters Six to Ten suggest that the MAF and WLA were successful in the formulation and implementation of selected policies, the outcomes of which are not so easily quantifiable. However, it has been shown in Chapter Nine that, in conjunction with the Agricultural Wages Board, the MAF and the WLA achieved a standardised wage structure throughout most counties. Unfortunately, from the point of view of agricultural labour generally, the MAF concerned itself solely with conditions of service within the industry rather than with the disparity in wages between agriculture and manufacturing. The WLA had insufficient clout to fight the battles of the entire agricultural labour force and the conditions of its own members remained its prime responsibility.

The WLA also obtained improved conditions of service such as the right to one week's paid annual leave, and strove to unify the weekly hours worked by its members across the counties. This was achieved within a band of 46 to 48 hours although this number increased substantially at harvest time. The 48-hour ruling did, however, afford some protection to recruits employed on private farms where occasionally the vulnerability of individual recruits was exploited.

A uniform was provided by the WLA for its members, as the work force was new to agricultural labour. Overall, this was a successful policy with recruits finding the uniform practical for use in land work. Some recruits did, however, experience difficulties with occasional poor quality and shortage of uniform resulting in the need to improvise by wearing their own clothes. Although this was an infrequent occurrence in Craven, it drew criticism nationally as it gave the WLA the appearance of a somewhat motley band, which did not enhance the image of the organisation.

If the WLA failed in any aspect of its policy implementation it was in relation to the different qualities of life and welfare support experienced by recruits dependent upon where they were billeted. As previously suggested, however, the reasons for this cannot be laid entirely at the door of the WLA itself, as it was not supplied with sufficient funding to provide a comprehensive welfare service. In fact, the WLA, WRWAEC and YWCA in Craven appear to have provided well-structured and comfortable living conditions in hostels as far as was possible in wartime.

The WLA itself felt it had been failed by government policy makers, particularly in relation to the issue of gratuities. Arguments concerning the status of the WLA were used in discussions on the desirability of awarding gratuities to the WLA on the same basis as those given to the women's auxiliary services. This argument was succinctly reviewed by Mr H Stewart, MP, in the House of Commons on 14 February 1945 as indicated in Chapter Ten. The government was concerned not to incur expenditure by making awards to the WLA which it would then feel duty bound to offer munitions workers whom it considered to be of similar status. In the circumstances, great pressure was brought to bear on the government by WLA supporters resulting in an improved offer being made, but one which still fell short of that given to the auxiliary services. By this action, the government served its own

purpose in minimising expenditure but was also seen to have bowed to public opinion.

However, the protests did not die with the disbanding of the organisation and continued until recently with the Blair government setting up a review group to consider financial awards to former WLA members. It is hardly surprising that the group did not advocate the award of a financial gratuity as it pointed out the difficulties which would be encountered in tracing former members. Instead, it recommended that a plaque be placed in Coventry Cathedral in recognition of the work undertaken not only by the WLA but by all civilian personnel.¹⁰ Whether this adequately reflects the achievements of the WLA or, indeed, other civilian services remains open to debate.

An additional acknowledgement of the WLA's achievements was reported in *The Times* in October 1999. It stated that the Royal British Legion intended to increase the numbers marching to the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday in the following year to include civilians 'in belated recognition of the vital but forgotten armies that helped in the war effort between 1939 and 1950.'¹¹ The report continued that the Legion considered the WLA 'was heading the queue of organisations being considered for the expanded march. Others included representatives of ambulance services, munitions workers and civilian medical services.'¹²

Further evaluation of the WLA and its policies can be made by examining some of the comments made on its performance at the time. Although the official journal of the WLA, *The Land Girl*, may be biased towards its readership, it pointed out in late 1942 that it was aware of the 'general recognition of the value of the WLA which is now 50,000 strong.'¹³ Acknowledgement of the role of the WLA followed from the Queen who, in addressing the organisation's Christmas Party in 1945, thanked its membership for what it had done, saying 'how deeply I share in the admiration which the whole country feels for your achievements ... even during the darkest war years its [the WLA's] task has been mainly one of creation and not of destruction.'¹⁴

Farmers in Craven had initially resented the intrusion of the WLA as they did not understand how young women could undertake the type of agricultural work

required of them. In addition, the farming community was so concerned at the prospect of ploughing the land that some individuals tried their hand at sabotage. One farmer filled the petrol tank of a WRWAEC tractor with sand to prevent its operation and another was said to have caused an accident. A third complained to the WRAEC that recruits were time-wasting when, in fact, they were waiting for the heavy dew to dry before cutting the grass, illustrating the farmers' own lack of understanding of ploughing operations. However, over a period of time agriculturists changed their view of WLA recruits who proved they could carry out a satisfactory standard of work. The women appeared more adaptable than their male counterparts and were considered the equal of men with the exception of physical strength. Recruits felt that their male colleagues began to admire them for their willingness to learn and their efforts to do a good job.

These views were reinforced through tributes paid to the WLA in the *Craven Herald* which reported that

Craven would be among the first areas of the country to pay tribute to the fine work of the WLA during the strenuous years of the war. It must be admitted that our farmers were more than a little sceptical about the wisdom of "employing lasses" at first. Problems of accommodation, of domestic arrangements ... troubled many minds. It was felt, too that the sort of work that the WLA would have to tackle in this part of the country would be very unsuitable for womenfolk. Our hills and fells called for many qualities not needed on the flat, arable lands elsewhere. It was doubted whether the WLA would be able to "take it."

... It soon became evident that the "lasses" were settling down to their jobs with real spirit. Girls who had previously done nothing rougher than hairdressing or office work were turning to turnip singling, milking, hay-timing and the handling of tractors and other machines as if they had known nothing else. They carried off the trophies at ploughing competitions and tractor management tests, and proved their worth in the arduous daily routine of our Pennine farms. Doubting farmers began to express real admiration for their work.

The WLA fitted in, too, with the domestic and social life of the farming community. Their workmanlike uniform became an accepted part of market town and village life...¹⁵

The article continued that although the war had ended, there remained a need for the WLA and there was to be a national drive to recruit 30,000 women due to a labour shortage and the need for increased food production. There was, therefore,

scope in Craven for the work of many capable girls and the need will grow with the year. We cannot afford to dispense with this fine army of workers yet... The WLA has done a grand job during the war. It is called upon to do another big job in peace. Nothing should be allowed to stand in the way of that.¹⁶

In early 1948, the same newspaper stated that a serious labour shortage existed on Craven farms with the loss of the WLA and Italian and German PoWs.

It called for the WLA to be

maintained at the highest possible strength, for it is an essential part of the country's agricultural resources. There is indeed a permanent place for the WLA if only as an organisation for the many town girls who want to work on the land in preference to factory or shop. The WLA has proved its value.¹⁷

Similar sentiments were expressed in other parts of the country with Mr John Wheeler, a Somerset farmer, stating that women were

probably more enthusiastic than the men ... they did do a really marvellous job and when you think they came from a closed environment and we were out in all weathers ... it was a really hard life which even the ordinary country man through all his experience would have a job to survive ... that was the war effort really.¹⁸

On the disbanding of the WLA in 1950, the Queen, who had been its patron for nine years, stated that at the

culmination of a long and honourable history, our feelings are chiefly of pride and gratitude. The story of the Land Army has been one of a great response by the women of our country to the call of duty in the nation's hour of danger and need. They could not have done more for their country than they did. By their efforts they helped to ensure that our country contributed its utmost towards its food supplies and for this the nation owes them an everlasting debt.¹⁹

Whilst this may be a sentimental expression, it also sums up the feeling of the period. There was both national and local recognition that the WLA had achieved its principal aims and objectives.

5. An overview of the policy studies approach to the WLA

The utilisation of the policy studies approach imposes a somewhat artificial structure upon the data presented but provides a framework to enable the WLA organisation to be examined in its entirety. It is not feasible to debate here all aspects of policy studies theory in relation to the WLA, although brief consideration of some issues is appropriate. The policy process best suited to an analysis of the WLA was found to be the 'top-bottom' approach as policy formulation and implementation were first and foremost carried out hierarchically. This was particularly apparent in organisations operating during the war, which were state-influenced to a greater degree than in peacetime. Furthermore, the administrative infrastructure of a nation at war was unlikely to accommodate challenges to the *status quo*.

The stages within the policy process and the policies themselves could, however, be fluid and adaptable. This was particularly evident between 1939 and 1950 when WLA policies changed to meet different national demands as the country moved from a period of war to one of reconstruction. Due to the need for policies to evolve and develop, the evolutionary approach to policy implementation can usefully be extended to cover the entire policy process thereby enhancing our understanding of the manner in which WLA policies progressed.

This study of the WLA also shows how essential it is for consideration to be made of political behaviour in the policy making process. The complexity of issues such as the award of gratuities, the need to plough pasture land and the ability of women to carry out demanding physical work should not be overlooked. Account is taken of pressure groups and the amount of influence they were able to exert on policy makers. At national level, several government departments as well as the MAF contributed to policy formulation for the WLA. There is no doubt that they were required to consider the labour situation in other industries and, therefore, their involvement in the policy making process did not necessarily serve the interests of the

WLA. Locally, the county structure consisted of a wide interorganisational network and policy implementation and the complexity of bureaucratic relationships cannot be underestimated. The rationalist model of policy making is, therefore, too simplistic an approach to adopt in considering the WLA, as it fails to acknowledge the political behaviour involved in policy formulation, implementation and outcomes.

In relation to policy evaluation, Lewis poses an interesting question in asking whether, when policies are modified for reasons such as environmental influences, this indicates a successful policy or one which has failed.²⁰ It is suggested that in the case of the WLA, the former would be an appropriate answer. This view is taken because it has been shown that within the WLA, policy formulation and implementation were continually revised to meet the changing conditions with which it was faced. Had the organisation not been able to make these adaptations then it would have failed to fulfil its aims and objectives and been disbanded within a much shorter period than its 11 years of operations.

6. The impact of the WLA on the roles of women

A number of issues concerning the status and work of women in the WLA arise from this study and are worthy of comment. For example, Woollacott's (1994) 'heterogeneity of women workers thesis' applied to World War I female workers in munitions (described in Chapter Two), is also relevant to the WLA in World War II. As previously indicated, Sackville-West (1944) mentions that the WLA was united by gender but divided by class and age and this division was apparent in several aspects of the organisation's operations. Women involved in policy formulation and in policy outcomes were generally separated in terms of class and age, being from different generations and backgrounds, and were also separated in their working environments. This cultural and physical gap was not reduced during the years of WLA operations nor did it lessen as a result of any changes which endured after the war, as the parties were still influenced by existing social pressures and expectations.

The experiences of WLA members also accorded with those described by Ouditt (1994) in her study of the WLA and Voluntary Aid Detachments in World War I. She suggested that women undertook a round trip, starting out from home,

entering the public domain for the duration of the war and returning to domesticity.²¹ This is reflected in the experiences of respondents who worked in Craven, the majority of whom left home to enrol in the WLA but after their service either recommenced the jobs they had previously undertaken or married, thus returning to domesticity.

It is evident that WLA recruits performed tasks in agriculture which were consistent with traditional views on what was appropriate work for women, for example horticulture and the care of animals. However, women also challenged these ideas to some extent. The Advisory Committee on Employment of Women in Agriculture suggested in 1947 that

during the war women showed the ability to undertake work in agriculture formerly considered beyond their physical capacity and undertook for the first time to any appreciable extent, general all round farm work, hitherto performed almost entirely by men.²²

Published figures relating to the differentials in male and female output may, however, have been detrimental to the female cause. These showed that on the basis of male output of 100, women scored 100 for picking small fruit and 101 for tending poultry, but achieved scores of 73 for driving tractors excluding repairs and 49 for driving and repair work, 63 for stooking, 61 for loading sheaves and 61 for sacking potatoes.²³ However, the WLA showed that for the duration of the war the sex-typing of work roles was, to some extent, contradicted. This was also reflected in other areas of work and the *Craven Herald* informed its readership that women had been appointed as district managers in charge of several NAAFI canteens. It suggested this was ‘the first time women have been entrusted with this work - a splendid chance for them to show their capabilities.’²⁴ Where women drivers had replaced men it reported that ‘the girls ... have impressed the critics by their efficiency and knowledge of motor mechanics.’²⁵ Other acknowledgements of women’s wartime work also included an account of a WAAF Corporal being in charge of a barrage balloon site.²⁶ However, in general, these changes were temporary as many of the opportunities to undertake such work were no longer available when the war ended and the majority of women returned to their home environments.

It appears that while women were prepared to participate in the WLA because it was an emergency service, they did not want to carry out agricultural work on a permanent basis. Chapter Ten shows the destination of respondents to this study on leaving the WLA, the majority of whom married. Several remained in the area marrying local men, some of whom were farmers. Women found their experience of agriculture beneficial in their roles as farmers' wives although of less use than might be expected due to the change in farming methods as the community reverted from arable to livestock work. Ruth Gasson²⁷ found that in general, the number of women agricultural workers increased from the end of World War II and in 1950 one farm worker in seven was female. By 1978 this had increased to one in four. In the corresponding period the number of male farm workers had dropped by 65% whereas the number of females had declined by only 22%. This difference can be partially explained by a change in agricultural census categories with the inclusion of farm secretaries and an increase in part-time and seasonal employment of women. The number of women holding more responsible positions such as farmers in their own right, managers or market gardeners was, however, said to be only 24,910 or 10.7% of the total.²⁸ The study has shown that between 1950 and 1978 the numbers of men employed on the land fell sharply from 630,000 to 221,000 with an accompanying reduction in women workers from 107,000 to 83,000.²⁹ This was due to the increasing use of mechanisation but in more recent years can be traced to the decline in the farming industry in general.

However, one aspect of the roles allotted to women which WLA recruits appear to have avoided was that of the 'double burden'³⁰ i.e. undertaking their traditional domestic roles of child care and shopping together with a wartime occupation. Although the WLA recruited women in the age range 17 - 40, the requirement for them to be mobile in order to work anywhere in the country meant that women with family responsibilities did not enrol. Although some Craven farmers had attempted to perpetuate the double burden issue during World War I by suggesting that once WLA recruits had completed their work in the fields they should return to the farm to assist with domestic chores, they were told in no uncertain terms by the WLA that this was not an option.³¹

Women not only undertook manual labour in the WLA but also participated in policy formulation and implementation. In an examination of dilution during World War II, Braybon and Summerfield suggest that ‘women were not encouraged to participate in building the framework within which they were employed during the war ...’³² However, women, albeit of a particular class, were responsible for setting up the administration and structure of the WLA. Whilst acknowledging that the WLA hierarchy came under the auspices of the MAF, and policy was formulated with other male-dominated government departments, women at least contributed to the sphere of policy making and were not confined solely to experiencing policy outcomes on the land. This situation was replicated in other women’s war work but was more apparent in areas traditionally associated with women such as nursing, rather than in manufacturing or engineering.

Although well-respected within the MAF, Lady Denman’s own path within the policy making process did not always run smoothly. Two instances of her dealings with the government which, unsurprisingly, do not appear in the MAF records provide examples of this. Twinch states that in November 1939 members of the Ministry of Agriculture suggested that since the WLA Honorary Director was a woman, the Minister might consider sending her a Valentine’s Day Card in 1940. The card was duly sent, bearing the sentiment ‘Tape is Red, Pencils Blue, Sugar is Beet and So are You,’ something which Twinch suggests ‘convince[d] the unsentimental Lady Denman that bureaucracy had indeed gone mad!’³³ Tyrer also provides an anecdote from Lady Denman’s granddaughter who said ‘The WLA was the victim of male chauvinism. It lacked friends in high places. Bevin was particularly chauvinistic. He refused to recognise anything my grandmother did. She was always cursing him.’³⁴ However, Twinch considers that women had reason to be grateful to Lady Denman for her ‘inestimable influence’ and ‘championing the cause of both farm and country women.’³⁵ Her biographer also states that

without her driving power, without her determination to get attention paid to the Land Army’s needs ... the Land Army’s immense success would never have been achieved... Even though she had lost the final battle to obtain ... the rewards which she so deeply felt were their due, it may have been some consolation for her to know that her feelings were so widely shared. Notwithstanding her resignation she was given in 1951 the exceptionally high award of the Grand Cross of the British Empire. When the King invested her,

he said, 'We always thought that the land girls were not well treated.'³⁶

This study of the WLA suggests that the organisation did not have a major impact on the future occupations of women in general, although those involved appear to have gained a great deal of personal satisfaction from their service years. This is reflected in the continuation of annual reunions as witnessed in Craven and the national BWLAS. These findings are consistent with those of Braybon and Summerfield who state that

women in both wars got a great deal out of their participation personally, in terms of new and lasting friendships and the satisfaction of difficult work well done ... women were drawn into industrial and military positions which they did not usually occupy - women discovered their hidden depths, earned their own money and enjoyed the company in war work. Some left home for the first time, and felt the satisfaction of being independent of their families.³⁷

7. The impact of the WLA on agriculture

Obviously the WLA was not the sole participant in the great changes which took place in agriculture between 1939 and 1945. There is no doubt, however, that the WLA is an important part of agricultural history and should not be overlooked. As indicated in Table 7, its members were very much involved in the mechanisation of agriculture. In Craven only three or four tractors operated in 1939, but by 1943 the number had risen to 400 with an additional 269 binders and approximately 30 threshers.³⁸ As the *Craven Herald* suggested

the mechanical horse is one of the certain legacies of the war to our agriculture ... With the tractor has come a machine mentality on the farm and more and more mechanical devices have come in to their own. Milking machine, grass dryer, mechanical planting machine ...³⁹

The article also suggests that the adoption of such different farming methods resulted in a great deal of reorganisation in agriculture but made Great Britain the leading mechanised agricultural nation in Europe.

According to Sir John Russell, the impetus of war also brought about a change in the 'social basis' of agriculture because women returned to farm work. However, he considered that they were not 'unskilled ill paid labourers' but 'skilled tractor drivers ... no longer is muscular strength the main consideration, deftness and intelligence have become more important.'⁴⁰ Although this comment might underestimate the struggles which existed for women wishing to undertake a career in agriculture, Russell at least recognised that women played a not inconsiderable role in the mechanisation of agriculture.

The WLA in Craven was also involved in the relative success achieved in the conversion of pasture land to accommodate arable farming in an area supposedly unsuited to the growth of crops. Recruits participated in harnessing the elements to grow corn in the area, although farmers suggested too much was being attempted, resulting in wastage of implements and 'manpower'. On several occasions there had been a promising summer crop only for the late harvest to fail.⁴¹ When the weather was ideal for harvesting, farmers accused the WRWAEC of having insufficient labour power at its disposal as it obviously could not work on all local farms simultaneously.⁴² However, the Ministry of Agriculture rejected the view of Craven farmers stating that the 'actual loss of crops was a surprisingly small percentage of the crops grown ... and ... such losses were part of the risks of war.'⁴³

The WLA, therefore, played its part bringing about changes in farming methods. Although it is acknowledged that some change was temporary for the duration of the war, mechanisation had far-reaching implications for the future of agriculture and its labour force.

8. Opportunities for future research

This investigation of the Women's Land Army has opened up themes which went beyond the scope of this study but which may be considered worthy of further research. Comparisons might usefully be made between the WLA and other war work carried out by women such as nursing. This would facilitate a more detailed examination of the perceived sexual division of labour and stereotyping. In addition, there appears to have been a hierarchy of work within the women's auxiliary services

with the WRNS and WRAF at the top and the ATS, WLA and munitions workers some way down the pecking order. It would be interesting to research the roles carried out by women in the respective services in an attempt to ascertain the volume, type and usefulness of work they carried out to ascertain whether this hierarchy was accurately reflected in fact.

The WAEC played a particularly important role in the functioning of the WLA in the West Riding and it is likely that Agricultural Executive Committees in other areas held similar responsibilities. However, the WAECs had a much wider brief than the oversight of labour and a study of the role of the WRWAEC and other committees would contribute to the history of agriculture.

In order to provide a greater understanding of the WLA, it would be appropriate to replicate this study in counties and districts other than the West Riding of Yorkshire and Craven. This would, of course, be dependent upon the availability of written records for the areas concerned and information from women who worked in the WLA. As time passes, fewer women are able to provide oral history interviews and it is important that their experiences are recorded soon.

9. Afterword

Following the disbanding of the WLA in 1950, relatively little attention has been paid to the organisation in either academic study, in comparison to women in munitions or manufacturing, or in the popular media. However, with celebrations to mark Jubilee events, the WLA has made a reappearance in the annals of the latter, both nationally and locally. This has included accounts of former recruits meeting up 50 years after they first met in the WLA⁴⁴ or one in a series of photographs depicting the 1940s showing the WLA at work on the land.⁴⁵

The local focus on the WLA has taken the form of interviews with individuals on their wartime experiences in a similar way to the reminiscence literature described in Chapter Two. This has included an article on a WLA member who worked in Keighley, West Yorkshire⁴⁶ and pieces entitled 'Digging for Victory' and 'The Unsung Heroines of the Home Front.'⁴⁷ An extensive booklet entitled 'Women at

War' which includes short articles on individuals serving in the auxiliary services including the WLA was published in early 2001.⁴⁸

In addition a film entitled 'The Land Girls' was released in 1998 based on a book of the same name.⁴⁹ The film received mixed reviews as, despite its title, it paid little heed to the accurate portrayal of the WLA and its work, preferring to concentrate on the romantic activities of three recruits. One review suggests that the film's director 'catches the period perfectly on the surface, but he's less sure on the detail.'⁵⁰ The BWLAS Chairman was far less complimentary, however, suggesting that 'just as we are getting some prestige at long last, along comes the book and now the film which destroys our image again ... they are trying to pass it off as a tribute to the WLA, which of course it isn't.'⁵¹ On the other hand, one reviewer considers that the film is a 'moving tribute to a sometimes forgotten band of heroines who, quite literally, kept the home fires burning with their hard slog and toil.'⁵² It would seem, therefore, that the debate on the status of the WLA continues through the manner in which it has been depicted in recent years. However, it should not be forgotten that without the decision to introduce the specially recruited mobile labour force of women new to agricultural work, and their toil over a period of 11 years, the production of the nation's food supplies in a period of great hardship would have been greatly reduced, possibly with disastrous results.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1**LETTER OF INTRODUCTION AND INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

Date as postmark
(November/December 1995)

Dear Friend

Women's Land Army

Mrs has kindly agreed to send out these papers on my behalf as I am undertaking some preliminary research into the Women's Land Army. Eventually I hope to register for a PhD to do a study of the WLA probably between 1939 and 1950. At this stage I am writing to ask if you might be able to give me some information about the time you spent in the Land Army by answering some or all of the questions on the attached sheets and returning them to me in the enclosed s.a.e.

I believe that many official Land Army records were lost or destroyed so I hope to obtain some information from people who actually served in the WLA, from the Craven Herald which is held on microfilm at Skipton Library and from the Imperial War Museum which holds a number of books, posters, memoirs, etc. There are also several other possible sources from which I need to find out more.

I do understand if you feel you haven't the time to spend on this but hope to hear from you at your convenience. Thank you for reading the papers.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Bullock

7. Did you have 'a social life' whilst in the WLA or did you feel isolated in the countryside?

8. Please could you tell me about leaving the WLA.

e.g. What year did you leave? Why did you leave? Did you enjoy the WLA? What kind of work did you do on leaving? Did you want to stay in the area?

9. If possible, would you be prepared to talk to me for an hour or so about your life in the Land Army? As I am in the early stages of my research this may not be for a while.

Yes*/No*

*Please delete as appropriate.

10. I would be very grateful if you could give your name and address or phone number, especially if the answer to no. 9 is yes! However, I would still appreciate receiving a completed form even if you do not want to give this information.

Name

Address

Phone

Thank you very much for your time.

APPENDIX IIBIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS OF INFORMANTS

- Name:* Peggy
Date of interview: 15.8.1996
Place of origin: Hebden Bridge
Previous employment: Made uniforms in a clothing factory
Destination: Wellingore hostel, Lincolnshire; private farm
Year of joining WLA: 1942
Length of WLA service: Three years
Reason for leaving: End of war and married
- Name:* Maggie
Date of interview: 28.5.1996
Place of origin: Scunthorpe
Previous employment: Companion-help
Destination: Private farm, Market Rasen; transferred to private farms, St Bees and Eskdale, Cumberland
Year of joining WLA: 1940
Length of WLA service: Four years and six months
Reason for leaving: End of war and took job van driving for the post office
- Name:* Rosie
Date of interview: 15.9.1996
Place of origin: Huddersfield
Previous employment: Waitress
Destination: Luckington hostel, Chippenham, Wiltshire.
Year of joining WLA: 1944
Length of WLA service: Three years
Reason for leaving: Only WLA member left in village and married
- Name:* Madge
Date of interview: 27.6.1996
Place of origin: Pickering
Previous employment: Assistant in florists' shop
Destination: Private farm, Scotch Corner; school for evacuated children, Pateley Bridge; private farms, Northallerton and Carlisle; hostel, Weatherall, Carlisle
Year of joining WLA: 1941
Length of WLA service: Four years and six months
Reason for leaving: Married

Name: Irene
Date of interview: 1.6.1996
Place of origin: Holmfirth
Previous employment: Not known
Destination: Skipton hostel
Year of joining WLA: 1943
Length of WLA service: Three years
Reason for leaving: Married

Name: Mavis
Date of interview: Completion of written interview schedule only
Place of origin: Skipton
Previous employment: Office work
Destination: Lived at home in Skipton, Skipton hostel.
Year of joining WLA: 1942
Length of WLA service: Three years
Reason for leaving: Males required agricultural jobs. Took a post with the Inland Revenue

Name: Dorothy
Date of interview: 3.7.1996
Place of origin: Wakefield
Previous employment: Grocery shop work
Destination: Howden Hall hostel, Silsden; Skipton hostel
Year of joining WLA: 1942
Length of WLA service: Four years
Reason for leaving: Cared for sick mother and married

Name: Pat
Date of interview: Completion of written interview schedule only
Place of origin: Wakefield
Previous employment: Tailoress
Destination: Howden Hall hostel, Silsden; Corner House hostel, Gisburn
Year of joining WLA: 1946
Length of WLA service: Four years
Reason for leaving: Fiance home and married

Name: Florence
Date of interview: 15.8.1995
Place of origin: Lockwood, Huddersfield
Previous employment: Confectionery shop work
Destination: Cappleside hostel, Rathmell; Settle hostel; Aylesbury and Stoke Mandeville hostels, Buckinghamshire
Year of joining WLA: 1944
Length of WLA service: Four years
Reason for leaving: Married

Name: Edie
Date of interview: 19.11.1995
Place of origin: Leeds
Previous employment: Jewellery and silversmith shop work
Destination: Skipton hostel; Settle hostel
Year of joining WLA: 1942
Length of WLA service: Three years
Reason for leaving: Contracted bronchitis from furnace fumes

Name: Marianne
Date of interview: Completion of written interview schedule only
Place of origin: Wakefield
Previous employment: Textile mill
Destination: Howden Hall Hall hostel, Silsden; Settle hostel
Year of joining WLA: 1942
Length of WLA service: Five years
Reason for leaving: Married

Name: Renee
Date of interview: Completion of written interview schedule only
Place of origin: Meltham, Huddersfield
Previous employment: Private service
Destination: Skipton hostel
Year of joining WLA: 1945
Length of WLA service: Two years
Reason for leaving: Married and undertook shop and factory work

Name: Hazel
Date of interview: Completion of written interview schedule only
 and referred researcher to articles in *Dalesman*
Place of origin: Halifax
Previous employment: Building Society
Destination: Private farm Saxton, East Riding; Skipton hostel;
 Howden Hall hostel, Silsden
Year of joining WLA: 1941
Length of WLA service: Three years
Reason for leaving: Married

Name: Meriel
Date of interview: 9.3.1998
Place of origin: Addingham, near Ilkley
Previous employment: Munitions. Left due to ill health
Destination: Skipton hostel; Settle hostel; Howden Hall hostel,
 Silsden
Year of joining WLA: 1942
Length of WLA service: Three years and six months
Reason for leaving: To be with parents following family bereavement

Name: Laura
Date of interview: 16.8.1996
Place of origin: Keighley
Previous employment: Shorthand typist
Destination: Skipton hostel; Corner House hostel, Gisburn
Year of joining WLA: 1941
Length of WLA service: Three years
Reason for leaving: Married and cared for sick mother

Name: Jane
Date of interview: 1.6.1996
Place of origin: Langbar, near Ilkley
Previous employment: Dressmaker
Destination: Skipton hostel; Settle hostel
Year of joining WLA: 1942
Length of WLA service: Four years and eight months
Reason for leaving: Only six recruits were left in the area and the war had been over for two years

Name: Joy
Date of interview: 24.7.1996
Place of origin: Eccleshill, Bradford
Previous employment: Office work
Destination: Wetherby hostel; Skipton hostel
Year of joining WLA: 1942
Length of WLA service: Two years and six months
Reason for leaving: Asthma due to threshing work

Name: Kate
Date of interview: 13.1.1996
Place of origin: Harrogate
Previous employment: Hairdresser
Destination: Cattleside hostel, Rathmell; Settle hostel; Skipton hostel
Year of joining WLA: 1943
Length of WLA service: Three years
Reason for leaving: Married and worked as hairdresser

Name: Ginny
Date of interview: 14.11.1996
Place of origin: Leeds
Previous employment: Tailoress
Destination: Skipton hostel
Year of joining WLA: 1942
Length of WLA service: Six years
Reason for leaving: Married

Name: Ann
Date of interview: 4.6.1996
Place of origin: Haworth, near Keighley
Previous employment: Burler and mender
Destination: Skipton hostel
Year of joining WLA: 1942
Length of WLA service: Three years
Reason for leaving: Married

Name: Marie
Date of interview: Completion of written interview schedule only
Place of origin: Batley
Previous employment: Shroud maker
Destination: Skipton hostel
Year of joining WLA: 1942
Length of WLA service: Three years
Reason for leaving: Wanted to return home

Name: Maisie
Date of interview: 8.9.1996
Place of origin: Thornbury, Bradford
Previous employment: Grocer's shop
Destination: Howden Hall hostel, Silsden; Skipton hostel
Year of joining WLA: 1941
Length of WLA service: Three years
Reason for leaving: Cared for sick father

Name: Linda
Date of interview: 4.5.1996
Place of origin: Leeds
Previous employment: Office work at Ministry of Supply
Destination: Skipton hostel; Settle hostel; private farm in Settle
Year of joining WLA: 1942
Length of WLA service: Two years
Reason for leaving: Married

Name: Gloria
Date of interview: 18.5.1996
Place of origin: Ackworth, Pontefract
Previous employment: Packer in glass factory
Destination: Cattleside hostel, Rathmell; Skipton hostel
Year of joining WLA: 1944
Length of WLA service: Four years and six months
Reason for leaving: Married

Name: Millie
Date of interview: 20.8.1996
Place of origin: Skipton
Previous employment: Not known
Destination: Lived at home in Skipton
Year of joining WLA: 1941
Length of WLA service: Three years
Reason for leaving: Married

Name: Jean
Date of interview: 20.8.1996
Place of origin: Skipton
Previous employment: Bus conductress
Destination: Lived at home in Skipton
Year of joining WLA: 1941
Length of WLA service: Four years
Reason for leaving: Tractor accident

Name: Mary
Date of interview: Completion of written interview schedule only
Place of origin: Barnsley
Previous employment: Not known
Destination: Skipton hostel
Year of joining WLA: 1941
Length of WLA service: Not known
Reason for leaving: Married

Name: Constance
Date of interview: 3.5.1997
Place of origin: Linton, near Skipton
Previous employment: Book-keeper
Destination: Lodged with friend in Skipton
Year of joining WLA: 1943
Length of WLA service: Two years
Reason for leaving: Accident

Name: Zoe
Date of interview: 28.7.1996
Place of origin: Ilkley
Previous employment: Wool Control office
Destination: Settle hostel; Skipton hostel; Holden Clough hostel, Bolton by Bowland
Year of joining WLA: 1941
Length of WLA service: Five years
Reason for leaving: Married

- Name:* Jessie
Date of interview: 9.9.1996
Place of origin: Doncaster
Previous employment: Railway office
Destination: Settle hostel; Lakenheath hostel, Suffolk
Year of joining WLA: 1946
Length of WLA service: Two years
Reason for leaving: WLA disbanding in the area
- Name:* Elizabeth
Date of interview: 12.8.1996
Place of origin: Skipton
Previous employment: Office work
Destination: Settle hostel; lived at home in Skipton
Year of joining WLA: 1941
Length of WLA service: Five years
Reason for leaving: WLA disbanding in the area; returned to previous job
- Name:* Libby
Date of interview: 15.6.1997
Place of origin: Sheffield
Previous employment: Book-keeper
Destination: Women's Timber Corps, Wetherby and Harrogate; WLA near Clitheroe, Lancashire
Year of joining WTC/WLA: 1942
Length of WTC/WLA service: Four years
Reason for leaving: WLA disbanding in the area; getting married
- Name:* Sylvia
Date of interview: 23.5.1996
Place of origin: Skipton
Previous employment: Shop work
Destination: Estate cottage, Parceval Hall; WRWAEC employment and lived at home in Skipton
Year of joining WLA: 1942
Length of WLA service: Two years:
Reason for leaving: Muscular injury
- Name:* Doris
Date of interview: 15.7.1996
Place of origin: Bradford
Previous employment: Book-keeper
Destination: Skipton hostel
Year of joining WLA: 1942
Length of WLA service: Three years and six months
Reason for leaving: Sciatica due to ploughing; returned to previous job

Name: Daphne
Date of interview: 15.8.1996
Place of origin: Clayton West, near Huddersfield
Previous employment: Apprentice dressmaker
Destination: Skipton hostel
Year of joining WLA: 1942
Length of WLA service: Three years
Reason for leaving: Married

Name: Violet
Date of interview: 14.8.1996
Place of origin: Clayton West, near Huddersfield
Previous employment: Grocery shop assistant
Destination: Skipton hostel
Year of joining WLA: 1946
Length of WLA service: Three years and six months
Reason for leaving: To be near boyfriend; returned to shop work

Name: Noreen
Date of interview: 29.5.1996
Place of origin: Oxenhope, near Keighley
Previous employment: Mender, textiles
Destination: Skipton hostel
Year of joining WLA: 1941
Length of WLA service: Two years
Reason for leaving: Married

Name: Nancy
Date of interview: 29.7.1996
Place of origin: Thackley, near Bradford
Previous employment: Shop assistant
Destination: Skipton hostel; transferred to Bradford and lived at home
Year of joining WLA: 1942
Length of WLA service: Two years
Reason for leaving: Fibrositis due to ploughing

Name: Foreman Bert
Date of interview: 1.6.97

Name: Foreman Ron
Date of interview: 26.10.1996

(Information was obtained from 38 WLA members (32 of whom were interviewed) and two WLA foremen, both of whom were interviewed).

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