

World War One and the Women's Land Army.  
([CR0815/119](#))

How did it begin?

Whilst more commonly associated with World War Two, the Women's Land Army (or Land Girls as they were often called) was actually formed in February 1917 by the Women's branch of the British Board of Agriculture.

At the start of World War One, Great Britain produced less than 40% of the food that was consumed and relied heavily on imports. The German submarine blockades, coupled with many of the men that would usually work on farms being conscripted to fight, meant that food shortages became a serious concern.

A national campaign was launched that had two main aims: the first was to encourage women to join the Women's Land Army and work on the farms; the second was to persuade farmers that women workers could be just as effective at meeting their labour needs as the men they replaced. The message emphasised was that the Women's Land Army was essential if the Allies were to succeed. One spokesman going so far as to say

*"...the farmer who held back for any reason in accepting that help...would be helping the Kaiser rather than the King."*

*Mr F.D. Acland, Leamington Spa Courier and Warwick Standard, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1916.*

Despite the name, it was actually a civilian organisation and the girls were recruited directly by the farmers themselves based on the labour needs of the individual farm. It was very successful, with estimates of 250,000 women working on farms, of which roughly 23,000 were Land Girls.

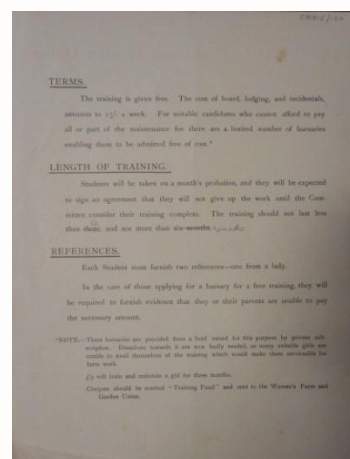
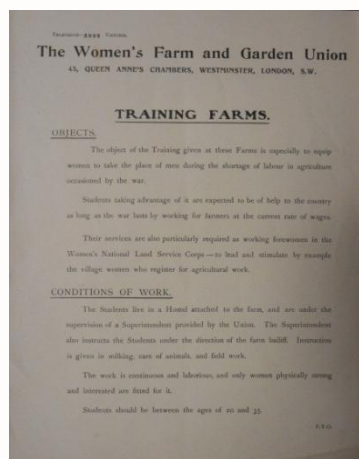
## What was the application process?

In order to become a member of the Women's Land Army, a women between the age of 20 and 35 would be assessed on her ability to complete physical work and her medical fitness. If she had no previous experience of agriculture, she was sent to a training farm where she would be equipped with the skills to

*'...take the place of men during the shortage of labour in agriculture occasioned by the war.'*

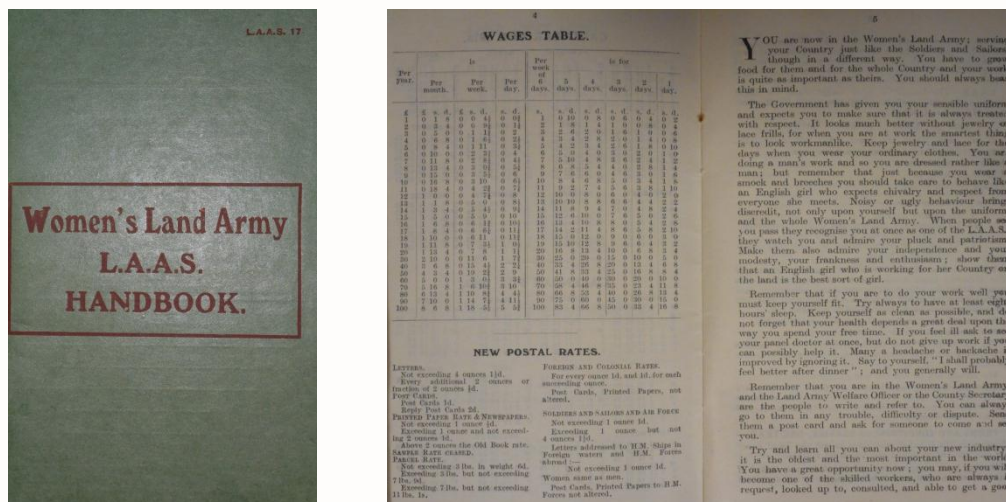
Rather than be a short term commitment, the expectation was that

*'Students taking advantage of it are expected to be of help to the country as long as the war lasts by working for farmers at the current rate of wages.'*



Leaflet about 'Training Farms'  
Warwickshire County Record Office. Reference: [CR0815/120](#)

## What guidance was a member given?



**Women's Land Army Handbook**  
Warwickshire County Record Office. Reference: [CR0815/119](#)

Each member of the Women's Land Army was issued with a handbook. As well as the essential information such as Wages Table (seen on Page 4 of the open booklet) or Terms and Conditions of Service, it was very keen to specify the sort of moral behaviour that was expected.

*'You are doing a man's work and so you are dressed rather like a man; but remember that just because you wear a smock and breeches you should also take care to behave like an English girl who expects chivalry and respect from every one she meets. Noisy or ugly behaviour brings discredit, not only upon yourself but upon the uniform, and the whole of the Women's Land Army...show them that an English girl who is working for her country is the best sort of girl.'*

*(Page 5 of the open booklet)*

The booklet also stated that the acronym L.A.A.S on the badges worn by the women stood for both the name 'Land Army Agricultural Section' and the values that they believed the girls should demonstrate:

- L**oyalty to the Land Army and your employer.
- A**bility in your work.
- A**rdour in doing it.
- S**ervice to your country.



*Photograph of the Women's Land Army on Parade in Birmingham  
Warwickshire County Record Office. Reference: PH1035/A2996*

### What happened after the war?

Whilst the Women's Land Army was officially disbanded on the 30<sup>th</sup> November 1919, it had an impact far greater than the duration of the war. It is believed to have contributed to 'The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act, 1919' which made it illegal to exclude based on gender. It was a significant step towards equal rights for women in the workplace.

It had also not had its day. It was reinstated in June 1939, in preparation for maintaining food supplies in what was to become World War Two. Again it was seen as having a vital role in helping the war effort.

The contribution of the Women's Land Army to the war effort was officially recognised by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in 2007 with the creation of a specially commissioned badge. A national ceremony was also held in 2008, in which around 50 original 'Land Girls' received their badges at Downing Street.

## References:

[www.womenslandarmy.co.uk/world-war-one](http://www.womenslandarmy.co.uk/world-war-one)

[www.historylearningsite.co.uk/womens\\_land\\_army.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/womens_land_army.htm)

<http://www.murtonpark.co.uk/womens-land-army/>

The Yorkshire Museum of Farming has a dedicated gallery space to the Women's Land Army and extensive archives relating to the organisation.

<http://www.nfuonline.com/the-few-that-fed-the-many-ww1-report/>