

VE Day 75th Anniversary

As a group of passionate gardeners, I wonder how much many of us know about the British Women's Land Army. With the 75th Anniversary of VE Day, it seems a fitting tribute to acknowledge their efforts to fuel the nation.

First formed in January 1917 during World War One, it was re-formed in June 1939, in preparation for World War Two. Over 200,000 Land Girls worked in the WLA from June 1939 until November 1950 replacing the Farm Hands who had joined the forces.

In 1938, Lady Denman is approached by the Ministry of Agriculture to re-form the Women's Land Army. In January 1939, the Woman's Land Army is listed as one of the civilian organisations which women could volunteer to join in the event of war. On 3rd September 1939 war is declared on Germany by Britain, by January 1940, food rationing begins. In May that year all British women ages 19 – 40 have to register at labour exchanges for war work. My mother worked as a bomb spotter during air raids, my mother-in-law was working in an ammunition factory. In July, HM Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother raises the profile of the WLA by becoming their Patron.

Many of the women have no experience of life in the country, having lived their whole lives in cities. The work is strenuous, nothing like many had done before, the work was tiring and incredibly demanding. With a typical day starting between 5:00am – 7:30, with cows to milk, ploughing, threshing and other related work according to the season Some girls reported putting on a stone in weight due to the muscle they built! No Fitbit required back then!

The Women's Timber Corps is formed in April 1942, over 4,000 Lumber Jills are employed in forestry throughout the war. One Nellie Wright from the West Midlands was posted to a Lumber yard at Shab Hill, Birdlip. Nellie was lodged in Fairview Road, Cheltenham. I wonder if she had to walk to work each day?

Dig For Victory

This campaign became every households duty during and after the war. It helped keep the country fed. The additional food the campaign produced helped feed the country whilst Britain was blockaded by U Boats. Up until the war, the nation had been used to relatively cheap food being imported from the British Empire, they had to adapt to a limited diet, supplemented by any produce they could grow. Rationing continued long after the war and only finally ended in 1954.

I hope you've enjoyed this brief overview of how previous generations have dug in and won through!

Jan Evans

Acknowledgments:-

<https://www.womenslandarmy.co.uk>

<https://dig-for-victory.org.uk/>