

JOYCE JOHNSON

Land army duties

Just after war broke out I enlisted in the women's land army, I was billeted to a small farm where I was the only girl and stayed in an old vicarage with Nancy, another land army girl who was working on the next farm along from me. I remember the place wasn't very nice and the food was awful, we had cheese sandwiches every day and we used to pick it off the bread and throw it away. My working day started at 6.00am and sometimes didn't finish until late in the evening. I had to go round the sheep and make sure that they didn't have any ticks, I would put tar on their feet to make sure that they didn't get foot rot, I also had to help the farmer to collect the hens that were going to market in town (and I never did like feathers!). We would get them all together in big boxes and take them the 9 nine journey on the back of a horse and cart. It was a bit intimidating being surrounded by all the old farmers.

One time one of the hens I had been taking had managed to get itself smothered when they were all huddled together and one of the old farmers came over and said that I had better get it moved before the inspector came, well, I couldn't bare to touch any feathers so he had to take it out for me.

But harvest time was marvellous, of course, you had to cut the hay and then with the old fashioned binder it was bundled together. In the fields I worked along side the Italian prisoners of war and they were lovely, so kind, and I had long hair and it was very blonde, they would always compliment me on my lovely hair.

When the corn had been cut it was stacked together in sheaths until it was dry then it had to be picked up. But the barley was the worst, it was so rough that it cut into you. One of the old farmers would bring the sleeves of old shirts to wear on top of his own shirt sleeves to help stop the cuts.

We also had to help with shearing the sheep, which I hated! One of the Tups had given me quite a fright and I had to stab it with a pitch fork to keep him away and I was always worried around the sheep. It was jolly hard work, jolly hard.

Getting married

On Sunday the 12th September 1943 I was married to John, even though it was unusual to get married on a Sunday, it was the only day I could get leave with it being harvest time. My husband was home on leave from India. We had very little money and no coupons so we just made the best of what we had. John wore his uniform and I wore my best clothes, our wedding cake was a plain sponge and some of the Italian prisoners came. My friend Nancy the land army I had been billeted with, stood as my bridesmaid and John's friend from his battalion in India was the best man. We spent our wedding night together at the old vicarage that I had been billeted to and the next morning I went back to work and John went back to camp, we didn't see each other for a couple of months. Life was sometimes hard.