

The Women's Land Army and Timber Corps (WLA & TC)



Land Army cap badge



Timber Corps cap badge



Commemorative badge issued in 2008

With their uniform of green ties and jumpers and brown felt slouch hats, the WLA and TC worked from dawn to dusk each day, milking cows, digging ditches, sowing seeds, harvesting crops and cutting timber. The veterans campaigned for years for recognition and were given considerable help in this by the actress and MP, Glenda Jackson. Her website contains advice on how to apply for the badge.

The words that follow are by Ruth Johnson as published in *Deddington News*. 'For a healthy, happy job, join the Women's Land Army' (1940s slogan). The heroic achievements of British agriculture during the Second World War must not be forgotten. The objective of a plan drafted in 1936-37 was the production at home of as much of the food most needed in war time as possible. Yet, during the war some 98,000 men had left the land to enrol into the Armed Forces. Somebody had to step into the breach and none were better organised than the Women's Land Army colloquially known as the Land Girls. Imagine my pleasure when over a welcome cup of tea, a dear, only too modest, Deddington friend chatted to me about her two years service in the WLA and showed me a letter of thanks signed by the Prime Minister, and her brand new shiny commemorative badge.

This is a long overdue official thank you for war work, to the surviving members of over 80,000 young women volunteer labourers on the land. My friend, together with another Land Girl, shared work on a big estate, tending a large market garden, looking after six Jersey cows, poultry and generally supporting two elderly estate workers, the only regular staff left who had not been called up. The girls were quartered above a stable/barn, did their own cooking on a single electric ring and even had water laid on into their quarters! (the men had to make do with an outside tap). Once a fortnight the girls took turns with weekend leave to visit their parents, but each felt duty bound to return on the earliest milk train on Monday morning to lighten again the on-duty girl's heavy burden. Luckily healthy food was always in good supply which eked out their 7s. 6d a week pay. My friend showed me her original WLA badge worn on her issue uniform of green jumper, beige shirt, tie, hard-wearing trousers, Wellington boots and a warm coat. Sadly, I could not persuade her to dig out some old photos from the attic. She said: I was only one of thousands doing my bit for my country. Yes it was hard work, but we learned a lot and also had some fun. We two Land Girls got on famously and are still in contact with each other to this day. The WLA Badge has been specially designed by the Garter King of Arms and bears the Royal Crown. The commemorative badge shows a gold wheat sheaf on a white background surrounded by a circle of pine branches and pine cones to indicate the work of both the Women's Land Army (WLA) and the Women's Timber Corps (WTC), known as Timber Jills (Lumber Jills was another common sobriquet). The WLA was disbanded in 1950. Land Girls and Timber Jills we salute you.'

A few of those who joined the WLA or WTC were:

Jean CLARKE née Woolley.

Jean lodged with Arthur and Clara Clarke and worked for Mrs Hoare (the Old Farmhouse on the west side of lower New Street) who kept dairy cows in fields on the Oxford road. She married Leonard Clarke, brother to Arthur, after he was invalided out of the Army.

Violet June FRENCH (1928-2003) née Cooper.

She was an Oxford girl who married Gerald French from Clifton.

Dorcas LOVE.

She lived in digs in the village.

Irene (René) O'ROURKE née Sheppard.

She lived at the Paper Mill cottages. Her home town was Bristol.

Enid TURNEY.

She also lived in the Paper Mill cottages. She came from Norfolk.

Diana UNDERWOOD (b 1923) née Fortescue.

She recounts her experiences as a 'Timber Jill' (WTC) on page 186.

Jean GREEN (b 1924) née Walsh.

Jean was born in Wakefield, Yorkshire but was sent as a Land Army girl to the Welford's farm in Clifton in about 1941-42. She would have been about 17. There were two other Land Army girls on the farm. Jean now lives in Brisbane, Australia, with her daughter Merle Langley who provided this information after reading the appeal for information in the *Deddington News*.