

‘We cows are in a very serious predicament’: Constructions of Land Girls and Cattle in Britain in the Second World War

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In 1946 Pathé News released a one-minute film in cinemas entitled ‘Straight from the cow’s mouth’. It was part of a post-war recruitment drive for the Women’s Land Army (WLA), the official wartime organisation devoted to supplying an all-female agricultural labour force to farming, forestry and market gardening. The WLA was not disbanded until 1950, and, in 1946 and 1947, the government was actively seeking to retain wartime members and enrol new ones, due to the ongoing food shortage in Britain. The film features two cows ‘talking’ to each other, in male voices, about their desperate need to be milked: ‘Ladies and gentlemen, we cows are in a very serious predicament. There are not enough people to milk us and the Land Army needs 30,000 volunteers this year’. The film cuts to ‘Land Girls’, as members of the WLA were known, milking, driving tractors, feeding calves, sorting potatoes and eating a substantial meal. One of the cows comments, ‘The girls don’t have to look after us all the time. There are plenty of other interesting jobs to do’. It concludes with the cows discussing their need for the ‘gentle female touch’ while a Land Girl herds them into a byre wielding a stick. The words ‘Choose an outdoor life. Join the Women’s Land Army’ appear on the screen.<sup>1</sup>

This short film encapsulates the issues that we address here. Made by the Ministry of Information, it belongs within the history of state intervention in farming during the Second World War and its immediate aftermath. It focuses on the vital role of a novel agricultural

labour supply, regulated by the state and dressed in distinctive uniforms, that was drafted onto farms during the war to maintain production. This initiative temporarily reversed the pre-war trend of young women's migration from agricultural employment in rural districts.<sup>2</sup> Like other wartime policies that threatened to disturb conventional social arrangements and gender hierarchies, the Land Army was subject to a combination of derision, praise and fantasy in official documents and press coverage, as well as nostalgia and a sense of exceptionalism in personal narratives. The film contributes to the public discourse by anthropomorphising animals, placing into the mouths of cows both the needs of farmers for dairy workers and cultural constructions of the alleged special suitability of women for this job. The dialogue is voiced by men with West Country accents, underlining the impression that the cows are channelling the views of farmers, as well as serving a larger wartime purpose. Regional accents were used in propaganda films to communicate messages of citizenship and duty to the 'ordinary' man and woman.<sup>3</sup> The West Country accent became a stereotype that stood for the entire population of rural Britain including, in this case, its farm animals.

Interactions between the state, farmers, dairy herds and the wartime female labour force, over one quarter of whom worked with cattle, are at the heart of our concerns in this article. We argue that the cultural construction of both the cow and the Land Girl worked to maintain and reinforce agricultural power hierarchies at the same time as being fraught with contradictions. We engage with four fields of scholarship. One is work on women in agriculture before and during the Second World War that seeks to refocus the attention of historians preoccupied with urban society on the gender dynamics of rural lives.<sup>4</sup> Another concerns the debate on gender and war that explores the destabilisation of gender boundaries in wartime, and interrogates the social, cultural and political processes at work in change and resistance to

change.<sup>5</sup> A third area is the body of literature considering the role of animals within the war effort and its impact on animal-human relations.<sup>6</sup> Fourthly, we undertake our enquiry in the context of work that questions and nuances celebratory post-war accounts of farmers ploughing uncultivated land, adopting new practices, and seeking to ‘modernise’ agriculture in order to feed the nation in wartime.<sup>7</sup> In all these fields historians have sought to tap previously unheard voices and experiences. Building on this historiography we examine the meanings attributed to the mobilisation of humans, divided by gender, and the enlistment of dairy cattle, for the agricultural war effort. Our contribution underlines the importance of the simultaneous enrolment of animals and humans for the construction and negotiation of wartime gendered discourses and identities.

The paper draws on a range of sources. Among them are official documents, including publicity material aimed at recruiting the new female labour force to work with dairy herds; training guides and manuals on how these workers should treat cattle; newspaper, magazine and journal reports about changes on the wartime farm; and Land Girls’ personal testimonies (oral and written, contemporary and retrospective) reflecting on the lived experience of human and animal interactions on the farms to which they were sent. We make extensive use of one source in particular, which represents a cross-over between official documents, publicity material and personal memoir. *The Women’s Land Army*, published in 1944, was written by Vita Sackville-West, novelist, diarist, poet, gardener and intimate friend of Virginia Woolf. Sackville-West, who had notorious same-sex relationships throughout her marriage to the diplomat, Harold Nicolson (as did he), lived at their home, Sissinghurst Castle in Kent, during the war. She was a member of the Kent WLA committee and she employed Land Girls on the farm in the castle grounds.<sup>8</sup> Her extraordinary book was ‘published under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries’.<sup>9</sup> While not an

official history, it has a semi-official status evident in its lengthy explanation of the administrative structure of the Land Army as well as its ten appendices detailing, for example, the numbers of Land Girls employed by county in England and Wales, with a separate appendix for Scotland, the relative work outputs of women compared with men, and ‘suggested post-war careers’ for Land Girls. Yet it also contains very different types of writing. Sackville-West used the first person throughout and did not attempt to conceal her personal views, for example on the ‘dire results’ of Land Girls’ attempts to look fashionable in uniform.<sup>10</sup> The book was evidently designed to help boost recruitment without concealing the difficult and often harsh aspects of a Land Girl’s working life. Sackville-West lavished praise on Land Girls’ achievements while, at the same time, patronising them from her perspective as a white British aristocrat in her fifties.

Our written and oral sources, including Sackville-West’s book, were, of course, constructed from the standpoints of the people involved in the relationships at stake: journalists, officials, farmers, cowmen, Land Girls. Getting at the perspectives of the cows and bulls involved is seemingly impossible. However, many of the records we use were produced by historical actors who had material relationships with the animals they conceptualised and harnessed, and the sources contain, in Etienne Benson’s formulation, ‘traces’ of these interactions.<sup>11</sup> Gender played a crucial part in their production. Wartime discourses and gendered identities were not just constructed and negotiated in writing, photographs, and spoken testimonies about the farm, its animals, and those who lived and worked there. They were also embedded in the physical interactions and lived experiences of the working relations between animals and people, which were multi-sensual. By tapping into sources that give access to these multiple relationships, with a focus on the wartime dairy cow, we seek to contribute to debate

in social and cultural history concerning the gendered dynamics of the simultaneous enrolment of men, women and animals in the war effort.

The first section of what follows explores the image of the Land Girl as an urban interloper imposed by the state in response to wartime exigencies. The second addresses the triangular relationship between the farmer, cattle and the Land Girl, focusing on its sensory dimensions. The third interrogates the trajectory from fear to fulfilment in narratives of the Land Girl's experience of dairy farming. The Land Girl became a well-known feature of the wartime farm, whose presence was supposed to be beneficial to the nation, the farmer, the cow and herself. Yet she was suspected of potentially disrupting rural society, and her place in the countryside was contested.

### Milk, the State, and the Land Girl

Milk was a politically sensitive topic in Britain during the Second World War. Expectant and nursing mothers and children were at the centre of wartime concerns about adequate nutrition, and milk was seen as an answer. From 1940, the National Milk Scheme provided pregnant women and mothers of babies with seven extra pints of subsidised or free milk per week, on top of their rationed allowance.<sup>12</sup> The number of school children who consumed milk daily also rose steeply.<sup>13</sup> The stigma associated with free school milk in the inter-war years was challenged by the circumstances of war, and new norms and rights to milk were established.<sup>14</sup> The production of milk became, in the words of the Ministry of Food, 'an essential part of our war food policy'.<sup>15</sup> It involved price incentives for milk production, prioritising the supply of feedstuffs to the dairy industry, and attempts to improve breeding practices.<sup>16</sup> In order to meet the escalating demand, the state also had to concern itself with

labour supply. The long-term trend of rural depopulation was hastened by the conscription of men for the war effort from September 1939. To ensure that they were replaced, and that food supply was maintained given the wartime disruption to the imports on which Britain depended, the Women's Land Army, first formed in 1917 to address the same issues, was reconstituted, in July 1939. Young women were recruited, variably trained, and sent to farms. They were employed as agricultural workers by farmers who were required to pay a minimum wage, set by the state, and to observe regulations concerning their hours and job specifications.<sup>17</sup> According to Sackville-West, out of a total WLA membership of 83,860 in England, Wales and Scotland in December 1943, over 20,000, or 25 per cent, of Land Girls were primarily engaged in milking.<sup>18</sup>

The advent of the Land Girl during and after the Second World War was represented as novel and exceptional, just as it had been in the First World War.<sup>19</sup> But women had, of course, worked on farms before both wars, even though their presence has been largely overlooked in both historical literature and official statistics. Nicola Verdon argues that national census data under-recorded women agricultural workers, for three main reasons: their work was often casual and seasonal; their jobs did not correspond with the occupational definitions used in the census, which, for example, ignored the crossover between domestic and farm service; and women farm workers were frequently members of the farmer's family.<sup>20</sup> They were also regionally concentrated and their work was gender stereotyped. Verdon suggests that, in south-west Wales and northern and south-west England, 'Work in the dairy and in the farmyard ... was customarily perceived as part of the women's province of the farm' whereas practices were variable elsewhere.<sup>21</sup> She quotes a young woman working on a Cumberland farm just after the First World War who was required to milk up to thirteen cows twice a day, separate the milk, feed the calves, clean the pigs out, clean the farmhouse, assist with food

preparation and take refreshments out to men in the fields. Unsurprisingly, such employment was, in Selina Todd's words, 'increasingly unattractive to young women' who migrated in growing numbers to urban areas for work under better conditions, as domestic servants, shop assistants, waitresses and factory workers.<sup>22</sup> In any case, Todd argues, during the agricultural depression of the interwar years, which saw an intensification of rural depopulation, farmers tended to employ their female relatives rather than hire and pay non-family members.

The implication of this history is that there was a tradition, in many parts of Britain, of women working with dairy herds before 1939, even if the precise number is not available. Some of these women joined the WLA, with its guaranteed wage, restricted duties and uniform of brown breeches, green jersey, and strong shoes, which was both practical and symbolic of involvement in the war effort.<sup>23</sup> The emphasis in publicity, however, was on the Land Girl recruited from the city. Vita Sackville-West calculated that 'about one-third of the recruits come from London and Middlesex, or from industrial towns in Lancashire and Yorkshire'.<sup>24</sup> The measure was imprecise, but the implication was that the other two-thirds were, in fact, from small towns and country districts. Sackville-West acknowledged that many Land Girls were, indeed, familiar with work on the land through, for example, 'seasonal work on farms during their holidays', even if they were not from farming families.<sup>25</sup> Some such women have left traces of their experiences. Winifred Evans was working on a farm in the Black Mountains when she volunteered for the WLA, telling a journalist who asked why she did so, 'I really fancied being in uniform!'. She slotted into a traditional pattern of women's work on her new farm in Pembrokeshire. The day after she arrived 'she was hand-milking a herd of 28 dairy cows with the farmer's wife.'<sup>26</sup> Even some recruits who were not farm workers themselves had connections with agriculture. Anne Hall was doing office work in Bournemouth at the beginning of the war. She recorded in her

memoir that her father had grown up on a Lancashire farm and moved south as an adult. When Anne and her sister proposed to volunteer for the WLA in 1940, he warned them that ‘our work would be heavy, dirty and arduous in all weathers’.<sup>27</sup> The sisters nevertheless became Land Girls and Anne’s memoir documents ‘years of rewarding toil’ that she entered with her eyes open.

The construction of the Land Girl as a young woman from an urban environment who had previously had little contact with rural life was, however, so pervasive and enduring that it became embedded at the core of the identity of the Women’s Land Army. The attention of publicists and trainers focused on the urban minority whose previous occupations had been remote from farmers, fields and animals. Even though Sackville-West recorded the proportions quoted above, at the start of her book about the WLA she portrayed the typical new recruit as ‘a shop-assistant, a manicurist, a hair-dresser, a shorthand-typist, a ballet-dancer, a milliner, a mannequin, a saleswoman, an insurance-clerk’ who was used to wearing ‘silk stockings and high-heeled shoes, pretty frocks and jaunty hats’.<sup>28</sup> Later in the book she reasserted the misleading idea that ‘in the majority of cases she isn’t a country-bred girl at all, but a relatively spoilt and gently-nurtured girl from the town and even the city’.<sup>29</sup> The successes and failures, the sorrows and steadfastness, and the ultimate transformation of this figure was of far greater interest than the experiences of those who already knew about country ways.

In spite of the image of Land Girls as ignorant of farming practices, formal training at agricultural colleges and dairy schools was offered to only a minority of WLA recruits. This is perhaps indicative of the high proportion who were assumed by officials to have some experience, although it was also reflective of a longer-term lack of training for the



agricultural workforce.<sup>30</sup> In so far as Land Girls received such training, its orientation was both to correct the shortcomings of women assumed to be unaccustomed to the land, and to instil the scientific aspects of dairy farming. The latter was part of the commitment of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF) to the introduction of scientific procedures to increase productivity on the pre-war and, especially, the wartime farm.

The Ministry may have been keen to associate farming and modernity, but machine milking had made only limited advances in Britain before the Second World War due to the complexity and expense of this relatively new technology.<sup>31</sup> Labour-intensive hand-milking still predominated, and for this reason Land Girls who worked with dairy cows had to learn how to do it. Training, however, was far from hands-on, as an official photograph of Land Girls being taught to milk suggests (see Figure 1). [Figure 1 here.]

Figure 1. 'A group of Land Army students sit at one end of the cow shed to watch instructors demonstrate the art of milking as part of their training at Northampton Institute of Agriculture.' Ministry of Information Photographic Division, 'Battle of the Land: The Work of the Women's Land Army on the British Home Front, 1942', Ministry of Information Second World War Collection, © IWM D 8799, Imperial War Museum.

Mavis Young, a former Land Girl, recalls, 'before we were even allowed near a cow we had to learn the skills of hand milking from charts and diagrams, and even a model cow. We had to learn how to calculate the milk yield and enter it on the Government forms'.<sup>32</sup> The model cows were the subject of many jokes, especially concerning their artificial rubber udders. They were meant to provide a clean and scientific opportunity to learn to milk, without placing stress on either the cow or the milker (see Figure 2). The training was also intended to

address farmers' belief that the new workers would mishandle their cows, but from the point of view of the Land Girl it went only so far, since animal behaviour was not simulated. As Shirley Joseph commented in a memoir, 'the snag is that at least half the art of the expert milker consists in knowing instinctively when a cow is going to kick'.<sup>33</sup> [Figure 2 here]

Figure 2. 'Milking Practice with Artificial Udders' by Evelyn Mary Dunbar, 1940. © IWM Art. IWM ART LD766.

Demonstrations and rubber udders may have kept Land Girls at one remove from active cows, but wartime training guides sought to prepare them with knowledge of the 'right' and 'wrong' ways to handle cattle to ensure productivity. One of the texts used was *A Book of Farmcraft*, written by Michael Greenhill, an Instructor in Agriculture at Sparsholt Farm Institute in Hampshire. It was illustrated by Evelyn Dunbar, one of a small number of women artists commissioned by the War Artists Advisory Committee, who spent time at Sparsholt watching Land Girls being trained, and painted 'Milking Practice with Artificial Udders' (Figure 2).<sup>34</sup> The book was created in response to concerns about 'Land Girls always doing things the wrong way, often endangering themselves and others'.<sup>35</sup> Echoing contemporaneous discussion of the acceptable and unacceptable behaviours of 'outsiders' in the wider countryside, *A Book of Farmcraft* constructed moral geographies of right and wrong farming behaviour aimed at the Land Girl, conceptualised as another type of urban outsider.<sup>36</sup>

*A Book of Farmcraft* put forward a vision of farming citizenship based on a set of practices presented as prescriptions for encountering cattle in an appropriate manner. The guide focused on the importance for the cow of a conducive sensory environment. Land Girls were instructed: 'at milking-time be as quiet as you can; a nervous cow may be upset by rough

treatment and noise, and so may make milking difficult for you'.<sup>37</sup> Similarly it stated, 'never strike a cow in the stall as this will only increase her nervousness – often the reason for kicking'.<sup>38</sup> The authors told the Land Girl to give warning to the cow of her intention to milk by speaking to, or touching, the animal gently, and suggested physical strategies to avoid kicks: 'an attempted kick can be foiled if the milker is sitting correctly, the knee and left arm preventing the cow from bringing her leg forward'.<sup>39</sup> Although such instructions may have been ignored or incorrectly implemented (and may have been quite different from the practices traditionally used on many farms) they highlight the visual, tactile and auditory standards that officials considered necessary to build a successful partnership between human and cow.

In keeping with the 'scientific' approach of the MAF, and in the context of a longstanding concern, heightened in wartime, about the spread of tuberculosis, the *Book of Farmcraft* also instructed Land Girls in ways of handling both cows and milk hygienically.<sup>40</sup> It stated that 'the milk drawn from a cow must be kept absolutely free from dirt, otherwise bacteria (germs) will quickly breed and the milk will become unpleasant or even dangerous to the consumer'.<sup>41</sup> Further, the Land Girl should 'avoid getting any milk on the fingers or any part of the hand – wet milking is bad, leading to contaminated milk and sore teats [...] Carry a clean cloth in the pocket of your milking overall for wiping from the udder or pail any dirt'.<sup>42</sup> Anxieties that inexperienced Land Girls would 'endanger themselves and others', including the cow, were closely linked to fears that their lack of skill would put the milk-consuming citizen at risk.

The MAF encouraged the association between WLA training, modernity and science, and framed the move towards modernisation as a way to provide a place for women on the farm in the future, as it had before the war.<sup>43</sup> Concern about the potential post-war shortage of

agricultural labour sharpened this discourse in wartime. In 1944 Sir E. John Russell, recently retired director of Rothamsted Experimental Station, an agricultural research institution founded in 1889 to develop modern scientific agricultural methods, contributed an article to *The Land Girl*, the monthly magazine for members of the WLA. In it he encouraged Land Girls to consider remaining in farming after the war by suggesting that technological advances were making physical strength less central to agriculture. He argued that the drudgery of dairy and poultry work would soon be overcome, and that the modernisation of agriculture meant that 'intelligence and deftness' were increasingly important, qualities at which, he suggested, women excelled.<sup>44</sup> Such visions were accompanied by new wartime openings for Land Girls within the dairy sector. A relatively small group of skilled milkers in the WLA were designated 'relief milkers'. They were sent to farms to relieve the regular dairy workers, whether cowmen or Land Girls, where time off was otherwise impossible to organise.<sup>45</sup> The milk-recording scheme, overseen by the Milk Marketing Board as a vital part of the productivity drive, was also staffed largely by Land Girls in wartime. They had to make unannounced visits to farms to inspect the hygiene standards and take samples of milk, 'responsible work' wrote Sackville-West, for which 'special training is necessary'.<sup>46</sup> As inspectors of the work of male farmers, women milk recorders occupied positions of authority, as well as relatively well paid jobs, that challenged the gender hierarchy on the land. Long-term change was, however, resisted. Early in 1945 disabled servicemen with dairying experience insisted that they had a superior claim to such jobs and persuaded the Milk Marketing Board to give them employment priority.<sup>47</sup>

Farmers, Land Girls and Touch

Mark Smith stresses the importance of historicising the senses and recognising them as socially and culturally constructed. He argues that study of the senses can help texture the past and illuminate aspects which cannot be fully understood in purely visual terms.<sup>48</sup> The tactile and felt encounters between humans and animals, seen in a sensory way, are redolent with the meanings of interspecies relationships in the context of particular times and spaces.<sup>49</sup> As far as dairy herds are concerned, the idea that touch produced an emotional response in both animal and human went back a long way.

Erica Fudge, writing about interactions between humans and cows in the seventeenth century, finds that farmers believed that their cattle responded most effectively to them alone and accordingly tried to ensure that other people did not attempt to milk their cows. Fudge argues that, 'an individual, named dairy cow might have been milked by the same person, or the same small number of people, at the same times of day, day-in day-out, for a period of over a decade. In this context a stranger entering that cow's world would have been massively disruptive'.<sup>50</sup> Although, as Fudge demonstrates, farms and cattle changed greatly between the early modern period and the twentieth century, the idea that the wellbeing of dairy herds depended on familiarity and experienced handling was still strong in the 1940s.

Farmers' conviction that the optimum relationship between humans and animals on the farm was one that had built up over years of contact, possibly from birth, framed attitudes toward Land Girls. Scepticism about their abilities was linked to notions of the negative effects of a stranger's unfamiliarity and lack of skill on a cow's productivity. In a report on the deployment of Land Girls as relief milkers a *Picture Post* journalist commented, 'The concern of a good cowman for his herd is as great as his employer's, and cowmen and farmers were both cautious at first about the scheme, for every farm has its own routine, and there is a firm belief that a cow will not give her milk properly to a stranger.'<sup>51</sup> When the WLA organised milking

competitions in which Land Girls milked ‘unfamiliar herds’ during the war, farmers pessimistically asserted their expectations that the ‘cows or the milk yield should suffer’.<sup>52</sup> Such examples echo Fudge’s observation that cattle wellbeing and human economics are inextricably linked, and rest on intimate and often gendered human-animal relations.<sup>53</sup>

Letters from farmers published in wartime agricultural journals and magazines confirm the idea of cows as active participants, who, when mishandled or touched by a stranger, would withhold milk. They often invoked anthropomorphic constructions of the emotions and reasoning of individual animals. One farmer noted, ‘I like a small herd, where I can know every cow individually. A cow will only do its best for someone it’s friendly with’.<sup>54</sup> These attitudes were not limited to cattle, but were, as Abigail Woods has identified in relation to pig production, integral to farming practices in twentieth-century Britain. Indeed, farm animals were widely perceived as responsive and sensitive individuals, who needed to be worked with rather than on, even if this was for ultimately commercial ends.<sup>55</sup>

Farmers’ ideas about the importance of the human-animal relationship were particularly marked in the case of bulls, who played an essential role in the dairy herd. In an exchange in the magazine *Dairy Farmer* on the ‘Care and Management of the Bull’ a farmer stressed that bulls not only recognised humans and had good memories, but that they could actively seek revenge:

Give him plenty of handling; he gets to know you and it’s worth it. Ring your bull at about six months, but do not handle him by his ring too soon, or he will get too hard in the nose. Don’t condemn your bull to solitary confinement in some old corner shed, with no fresh air and exercise. And don’t go barging into him brandishing a stick or some likely tool. Your bull always remembers.<sup>56</sup>

The physicality of the animal, combined with a masculine identification, contributed to a gender divide in which handling bulls was considered ‘men’s work’ before 1939, even in areas where women traditionally worked with dairy animals. There was particular scepticism about whether ‘urban’ Land Girls could control and master such large, powerful animals. However, the *Book of Farmcraft* explained to the trainee Land Girl how to manage a bull:

Bulls are notoriously liable to a change of temper [...] When a bull is led out from his stall for a drink or exercise, a leading pole is used [...] The pole is held firmly in both hands and the bull can be led about safely, at arm’s length. Don’t get too familiar with a bull, but be on your guard in your dealings with him.<sup>57</sup>

An official photograph, taken in 1942, in the Ministry of Information wartime photograph series ‘Battle of the Land’, portrays a slight young Land Girl using a leading pole to control a large bull in precisely this manner. (See Figure 3.) She is biting her lip, suggesting both concentration and caution. Nevertheless, the image challenges the well-established boundary between men’s and women’s work with cattle, implying that this line could be crossed, albeit exceptionally, and, hence, that the gendered dualism in farm work was unstable. [Figure 3 here.]

Figure 3. ‘Land Girl Iris Joyce leads a bull’.

Ministry of Information Photographic Division, ‘Battle of the Land: The Work of the Women’s Land Army on the British Home Front, 1942’, Ministry of Information Second World War Collection, © IWM D 8839, Imperial War Museum.

The boundary was reinforced, however, in numerous subtle and unsubtle ways. During the war, some farmers and experts spoke of dairying as ‘naturally’ suited to women, presenting milking and calf-rearing as ‘maternal’ roles, and taking the view that ‘It is a natural instinct with some girls to look after animals, just as it is to take care of children’.<sup>58</sup> It was as if, when Land Girls

proved themselves competent workers on dairy farms, an essentialist explanation was needed. Even though most Land Girls were not mothers, commentators attributed their success with cows and calves not to their hard-won skills but to their biological capacity for child-bearing and lactation. The construction of femininity as the dominant factor in women's lives was used in a wide variety of other wartime work contexts, too, from industrial welfare officer (caring for her factory 'family') to power saw operator (whose strength concealed her 'maternal instincts').<sup>59</sup> Its purpose was to neutralise the threat to the gender order of new roles for women.

Members of the WLA were also reminded of their subordinate place in more offensive ways. Anne Dupuy wrote in the *Land Girl*, in 1944, about her experience of taking cattle to auction, stating: 'I found myself in the ring gazing at a sea of faces while I walked Annie round to the accompaniment of a wisecrack from the Auctioneer, 'Now, remember it's the heifer you're bidding for'.<sup>60</sup> The joke turned Dupuy into a sexualised spectacle for the onlookers, underlining the male view that, like the female minority of farmers, she was out of place in the auction ring. As Nicola Verdon puts it with reference to the interwar period, 'women presented an unusual spectacle at market' and received 'inequitable treatment as a result'.<sup>61</sup> In a similar vein, spaces of male authority on the farm were defended against the encroachment of Land Girls: they did not manage male farmers and labourers. Even when they were employed as skilled workers in roles such as a relief-milker their importance was diminished by the notion that they were substituting for the 'real' work of the cowman when he required a day off.<sup>62</sup>

Work with dairy cattle placed a spotlight on the physical capabilities of Land Girls. Trainers assumed that, since they came from urban backgrounds, they needed to be made more robust before they could undertake the work effectively. Echoing long-standing medical concerns about, and attempts to shape, women's diets, one authority, Dr W. A. Stewart, devised a



training schedule to fatten them up, almost as if they were themselves cattle.<sup>63</sup> According to Stewart, following four weeks of training that included substantial meals, a group of trainees from Birmingham and Coventry who had previously been typists and hairdressers gained an average of four pounds each: one Land Girl gained a stone.<sup>64</sup> The importance attributed to Land Girls' weight gain was proclaimed in the official photograph series 'Battle of the Land', in 1942. One of the images depicts a Land Army recruit standing on a set of scales in a barn. She is peering with concern at the dial beside an instructor who is weighing her, 'two weeks after she left her job as a typist'. (See Figure 4.) The caption states that she is Iris Joyce – who is the young woman leading the bull in the photograph in Figure 3. By implication this second photograph raises the question, 'Is she big enough?'. Building up strength was obviously important, and many Land Girl memoirs comment on gaining muscularity through doing agricultural work. But strength and size are not the same thing. Mavis Young, for example, recorded that whatever she ate when she was a Land Girl, there was 'no need to worry about putting on weight', adding, 'the spartan life, hard work and exercise had made me strong, healthy and supple. I could and was doing a man's job.'<sup>65</sup> [Figure 4 here.]

Figure 4 'Iris Joyce, new recruit to WLA, is weighed at the Northampton Institute of Agriculture two weeks after she left her job as a typist.'

Ministry of Information Photographic Division, 'Battle of the Land: The Work of the Women's Land Army on the British Home Front, 1942', Ministry of Information Second World War Collection, © IWM D 8791, Imperial War Museum.

At the same time that Land Girls were regarded as naturally suited to work with animals, and yet were urged to increase their size, they were also represented as handling cattle too roughly. Michael Greenhill, author of *The Book of Farmcraft*, was preoccupied with the ways in which

Land Girls should touch cattle, reflecting anxieties that ‘rough’ treatment would hinder productivity and threaten the wellbeing of dairy herds. Accompanying Greenhill’s text, warning against rough handling, Evelyn Dunbar’s detailed illustrations show how a Land Girl should, for example, hold the cow’s teats close to the udder, firmly but gently, when milking.<sup>66</sup>

Stereotypes of rough and clumsy Land Girls circulated in popular media. In his satirical column in the *Sunday Express*, Nathaniel Gubbins invented a conversation between a cow and a Land Girl. When discussing the use of a milking machine and the ways in which it helped speed up milking, the cow states, ‘Saves me too. Yer knows what to expect with that. Not like some of these ‘ere novices, one day gentle, the other day rough.’ Alluding to stereotypes of the alleged sexual promiscuity of young working-class urban women in wartime, the cow continues, ‘All depends on whether ‘e turned up the night before I expect’.<sup>67</sup> The idea that the Land Girl was inconsistent and incompetent in her treatment of animals is underlined at the end of the conversation when the cow states, ‘Cor chase me round the stack yard! You Land Girls don’t ‘arf treat a girl rough!’<sup>68</sup> Such depictions, channelling male scepticism about Land Girls’ morals and competence, were not limited to satirical newspaper columns and they persisted after the war. In the 1946 WLA recruitment film with which we opened, one of the cows, presumably with intentional irony, praises the ‘gentle female touch’ at the same moment that a Land Girl hits her with a stick.<sup>69</sup> Such portrayals of Land Girls highlight their paradoxical position during and after the war. These new workers were desperately needed by farmers and the state to fill labour shortages, but at the same time their strangeness, inexperience, and inappropriate behaviour were seen as potentially threatening not only to animal wellbeing and productivity, but also to conventional rural relationships. Cattle were frequently depicted as resisting their incursion.

## Fear and Transformation

It was not only Land Girls' physical size and strength that farmers and officials believed required improvement. Their mental suitability was also under scrutiny. Farmers suspected that Land Girls would respond to cattle nervously, and fearful encounters, it was believed, were not good for either the cattle or their productivity. In 1940 *Picture Post* reported that this was a common conception among farmers and that it was one of the reasons for their initial reluctance to employ members of the WLA on their farms.<sup>70</sup> The training offered by the state was designed to remove the fear of cattle that the new agricultural workforce was expected to harbour, as the caption of an official photograph of a Land Girl herding cows indicates. (See Figure 5.) WLA recruitment publicity went one step further. Its depictions of docile animals tended by pretty young Land Girls in clean conditions, helped by kindly farmers, sought to show there was nothing to fear.<sup>71</sup> However, the idea that Land Girls were, at least initially, afraid was as integral to constructions of their identity as the notion that they came from urban environments. It was a central feature of Vita Sackville-West's account of the Land Army, and personal testimonies at the time and later channelled the same idea. Land Girls' recollections in memoirs and oral histories are almost generically structured by the recall of fear and the challenge of overcoming it. [Figure 5 here]

Figure 5 ' "All fear of cattle disappears quickly under training." A member of the Women's Land Army drives a small herd of cows down a narrow country lane, ready for milking, as part of her training at the Northampton Institute of Agriculture.' Ministry of Information Photographic Division, 'Battle of the Land: The Work of the Women's Land Army on the British Home Front, 1942', Ministry of Information Second World War Collection, © IWM D 8831, Imperial War Museum.

Sackville-West assumed that Land Girls would be apprehensive in the countryside. With specific reference to dairy work, she wrote, ‘It means getting up at half-past five or even five in the morning, in the dark for half of the year, in the wet and the cold and the slush’ and she painted a portrait of a ‘young, tender’ Land Girl leaving her warm bed and making her way, alone and fearfully, from her billet to the farm. ‘A twig cracks, and she nearly screams.’<sup>72</sup> Arriving at the cowshed she encounters the cow, who is ‘very large and bony’, and she learns that ‘a lash in the eye from the tip of a matted tail can be very painful’, but while nursing her pain she is likely to be scolded by the farmer for letting the cow kick over the hard-won bucket of milk.<sup>73</sup> ‘I wonder how many hot tears have been secretly shed as the little trainee learned her task?’<sup>74</sup> Fear, in Sackville-West’s account, drove some new recruits away. ‘One girl went on strike saying that she was allergic to cows, and would rather go through another blitz than ever sit on a milking-stool again.’ But others, such as ‘a little Jewess from the East End who remarked that she scarcely knew what a cow looked like and had certainly never been so near one in her life ... have seen it through’.<sup>75</sup> Sackville-West’s identification of this East London Land Girl as Jewish underlines her construction of members of the WLA as urban in origin: in modern British literature and popular culture Jews were city-dwellers who, by implication, had no place in the countryside.<sup>76</sup> Even such unlikely recruits, writes Sackville-West, could become ‘plucky and sturdy little toilers’.<sup>77</sup>

Class, age and ethnicity coloured Sackville-West’s epic narrative, which was at the same time deeply condescending and warmly affectionate. She described Land Girls confronting the seemingly impossible obstacle of their own fear and overcoming it, for personal and patriotic reasons (‘the people in England ... must have their milk’). She did not invent this image, although her publication placed it firmly in the public domain. Similar constructions were

present in numerous personal narratives, pre-dating Sackville-West's account as well as following it, although they avoid her belittling language. In a letter to the *Dairy Farmer* about her experiences in 1943, for example, Land Girl Mary Robertson wrote:

My first attempt at milking was rather an ordeal. I entered the byre – it was the first time I had seen a cow at such close quarters – and found myself confronted with four large and, as I felt, menacing beasts. The cow nearest me was tied by a rope round her legs; she had not long calved and was rather wild. She danced in her stall and finally, to my horror, fell. I lost all my courage and turned and opened the byre door, intending to run for my life. Imagine my consternation to find a large black bull standing in the “square” facing me. I didn't know whether to run past him or stay in the byre, but decided to stay in since the beasts inside were tied. It was a few days before I really sat under a cow and tried to milk, not very successfully I am afraid; my knees were shaking so violently that I could hardly steady the pail.<sup>78</sup>

Pat Peters, who wrote of joining the WLA with romantic preconceptions of milking docile cows, described in her memoir the first time the farmer asked her to milk: ‘my stomach performed a somersault and inwardly I panicked’ before begging the farmer to give her a quiet cow.<sup>79</sup> Joan Collinson recalled in an oral history interview how she had actively avoided cows when visiting the countryside before the war and was horrified to be expected to work with them.<sup>80</sup> Jenny Williams, a factory worker from Swansea who was sent to a Pembrokeshire dairy farm, told a journalist, ‘the first cow I milked was a Welsh Black with great big horns ... The bucket was shaking that much because I was terrified.’<sup>81</sup> If former Land Girls did not report their own fears they remembered those of other women. Frances Walls posted on the BBC People's War website a memory of travelling with other new recruits from London to Cambridge. ‘When we were on the train, going past fields, we passed cows and I said, “We'll

soon be milking them.” Some of the girls who were from London said, “Are they cows? They’re big!” When we got to Cambridge, they gave in their notice.’<sup>82</sup>

The recollections of Land Girls who, in contrast to Walls’ companions, overcame their fear and ‘saw it through’ are commonly accompanied by sequels concerning the personal transformation they experienced as a result of wartime farm work. These accounts are similar to some of those that Penny Summerfield discusses in *Reconstructing Women’s Wartime Lives*. Women who composed ‘heroic’ accounts of their wartime work, that is narratives that involved overcoming internal and external obstacles to contribute to the war effort, emphasised the positive effects of even negative experiences on themselves as people. ‘They became better and more complete people ... understanding their common social and physical, spiritual and corporeal humanity with others, gaining a sense of identification with the nation and acquiring a new gender identity.’<sup>83</sup>

‘Heroic’ Land Girl testimonies extend these changes into the register of human-animal relationships. Following their stories of initial fear and ineptitude, Mary Robertson and Pat Peters both drew on a notion of embodied renewal and rejuvenation associated with their close physical interaction with animals in wartime. Success in establishing relationships with cattle gave them a new sense of self, legitimised their place on the farm, and established them as authentic farm workers contributing to the war effort.<sup>84</sup> Robertson wrote, ‘gone is the pale slim girl with the white velvety hands who climbed the hill path that day so long ago. In her place is a tanned, rotund person with rough, reddened hands who has proved her ability to do a *real day’s work*.’<sup>85</sup> In a similar vein Peters recalled, ‘very slowly... the milk fell in odd drops and squirts. My vision had come true! Now I felt like a *real* land girl, now I could boast!’<sup>86</sup> These ‘real’ Land Girls found it possible to stand up to bullying farmers. Bulls, with their overt

masculinity, as well as the popular etymological link with the concept of bullying, were a trigger point.<sup>87</sup> Land Girls told stories of farmers testing their competence by making them handle the most difficult animals, and of turning the tables on these men. In such narratives the Land Girl either managed the bull with no problems, or wisely refused to work with him, recording a sense of satisfaction when the bull then chucked the man, who had declared that he was ‘not afraid of him’, into the muck.<sup>88</sup>

Feelings of intimacy with cattle were often part of accounts of transformation that included sensory dimensions. D. E. Runacles, in a letter to *Dairy Farmer*, described her transition from a Londoner who had a ‘great fear of cows’ to a ‘fully-fledged milker’ and went on to describe how, in winter, the Land Girls would ‘scuttle into the sheds and slap our cold hands on a lovely, warm old cow, with the place smelling of animals’ sweet breath when they have been eating hay’.<sup>89</sup> Mavis Drake recalled milking a cow and ‘feeling the warmth as I pushed my head into her hairy side, the sound of the soft crunch of her munching hay plus the occasional low or belch. I also recall the sweet smell of the warm milk as it was squirted into the bucket. When I finished the cow looked round at me as if to say “not bad”’.<sup>90</sup> There may have been Land Girls for whom the odour of the byre was an unwelcome shock but, for Runacles and Drake, recollections of the smell and warmth of the beasts they cared for were markers of the achievement of a partnership between Land Girl and cow that contributed to their mental and physical well being.<sup>91</sup>

If the development of the inter-species relationship provided reassurance, it also prompted reflections on bovine subjectivities. Anne McEntegart reflected in her wartime diary on the distinctiveness of each cow she worked with: ‘I think what has set me wondering most of all during this past year is the personality of the animals and how individual each one is.’ They

were not ‘dull and very similar creatures’, but sentient beings with their own characteristics which became especially evident during milking.<sup>92</sup> McEntegart found dairy work physically exhausting but felt spiritually transformed by the experience. It ‘made me realise the essential “me” in myself... It seemed to prove to me the immortality of the soul more than anything else.’<sup>93</sup>

A sense of intimacy and personal involvement with cattle made the relationship an emotional one. Anne Hall remembered that she and the cowman with whom she worked shared a ‘love of the cows and appreciated their distinct personalities’.<sup>94</sup> Memories of losses provoked feelings of grief. Hall continued:

We shared the sorrow of losing any one of them, or their adorable new calves who often went for slaughter when very young, so that humans could benefit from their mothers’ milk. The suffering of the bereaved cows was an added torture, but I hoped there was another life for calf martyrs.<sup>95</sup>

Land Girls recalled particular distress when cattle were slaughtered to contain outbreaks of disease or were casualties of fires or other accidents.<sup>96</sup> Beatrice Smith documented her trauma at the culling of an entire herd which had contracted Foot-and-Mouth disease. She described how fourteen butchers descended on the herd following the announcement of the outbreak of the disease, while her job was to soak the hides and meticulously clean the cowsheds. On completion, she wrote, ‘as I stood in the spotless, empty cowshed I seemed to see the ghosts of all the cows still waiting to be milked, and I felt a pang of sorrow for the innocent creatures I loved so much.’<sup>97</sup> A letter from Barbara Anwell in *Dairy Farmer* recorded her feelings about an outbreak on a nearby farm in language that echoed the maternalist construction of the Land Girl: ‘I suffered agonies of mind in case I should lose my family of cows’. She added a sentence



about what she felt to be the long-term legacy of her time as a Land Girl: ‘My experiences have not been sensational, but they have taught me the true values of life.’<sup>98</sup>

We would not wish to suggest that women who habitually worked with cattle, and who already lived on the land at the start of World War Two, did not share such feelings of intimacy with the cattle they cared for, as well as grief over losses. It is certainly the case, however, that the testimony of women who joined the Land Army as urban outsiders, with no experience and great apprehension, and who felt transformed by enduring the rigours of rural life, was more newsworthy than that of those for whom work on a dairy farm was already familiar.

## Conclusion

Susan Grayzel argues that, in the First World War, the power of cultural representations of the Land Girl as an urban woman saving the land, and of the redemptive capacity of the countryside which created a ‘“new” robust yet gentle femininity’, served to uphold ‘long-standing assumptions about gender and the land’.<sup>99</sup> We are making a similar argument about the experience of the WLA between 1939 and 1950, while further illuminating that history from the perspective of human-animal relations. The contradictions in the stereotypes of the World War Two Land Girl, who was at the same time too weak and too rough, too fearful and too bold, who was lacking in skill yet threatened jobs designated as male, highlight persistent ambiguities surrounding the perceived competence and legitimacy of a female agricultural workforce and its place on the wartime farm. They also echo constructions of women workers in the Second World War more widely as patriotically engaging in ‘masculine’ essential work ‘for the duration’ while preserving their femininity. Even the most sympathetic account of Land Girls’ work with cattle emphasised the temporary status of the WLA and the subordinate position of women on dairy farms. The unrepresentative narrative

of their urban origins, non-manual jobs, and love of fashion, played into the larger story of the maintenance of gendered power hierarchies in rural areas, even as it acclaimed their transformation.

If the Land Girls were discursively constructed, so too were the cattle, with whose wartime and post-war 'predicament' we opened. They were assumed by trainers and farmers to have preferences, to respond to differences in touch, to be moody, and to have affections that had to be won. These human interpretations of animal behaviour were projected on to cattle for, to transpose a point made by the sixteenth-century French philosopher Michel de Montaigne about his cat, who could know what a bull saw when he looked at you, or what a cow felt when you milked her? Such wartime conceptualisations of cattle had implications for Land Girls: the discourse was either derogatory or, when complimentary, attributed success to her innate feminine characteristics.

The history of the WLA during and after the Second World War constitutes a special case within the historiography both of the effects of the war on agriculture and of the war's impact on the lives and opportunities of women within Britain. It is not that there was no change. Agricultural historians have seen the Second World War as a time 'of greater significance to the development of British agriculture than any comparable period since the Norman Conquest' and in this context milk production rose.<sup>100</sup> Farmers acknowledged that Land Girls had been, overall, useful workers who had made an important contribution. Some of the women remained on the land, albeit, seemingly, usually as the wives of farmers they had met during the war rather than as farmers in their own right. However, as in the case of the mobilisation of women for industry and the armed forces, the movement of women into 'male' roles in dairy farming was seen as meeting the needs of the emergency, with the

expectation that they would leave when it was over. The ‘Cream of the Land Army’,<sup>101</sup> who ensured that milk flowed to urban centres to nourish industrial war workers as well as the next generation, were characterised by heroic exceptionality, while regular women agricultural workers were all but forgotten. The boundary between ‘light’ and heavier farm work, skilled (male) and unskilled (female) jobs, may have been stretched by technology and breached in practice. But that boundary was remarkably elastic and the 1950s saw it spring back into place. Even the image of diminutive Iris Joyce leading a bull did not permanently shift the assumption that women were not strong enough to take on the demands of livestock husbandry.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Straight from the cow’s mouth’ 1946. Pathé News, Ministry of Information public information trailer – Women’s Land Army recruitment. Originally part of Gazette issue 46/57.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6R3OdOcLnfk>

<sup>2</sup> Selina Todd, ‘Young women, work and family in inter-war rural England’, *Agricultural History Review*, 52.1 (2004), 83-98.

<sup>3</sup> Jo Fox, ‘Millions Like Us? Accented Language and the “Ordinary” in British Films of the Second World War’, *Journal of British Studies*, 45 (2006), pp. 819-845.

<sup>4</sup> For critiques of that preoccupation see Lena Sommestad, ‘Rethinking Gender and Work: Rural Women in the Western World’, *Gender & History*, 7 (1995), pp. 100-105, and Alun Howkins, ‘Cinderellas of the Soil’,

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*History Workshop Journal*, 70 (2010), pp. 280-282. Attempts to correct it include Susan Grayzel, 'Nostalgia, Gender and the Countryside: Placing the 'Land Girl' in First World War Britain', *Rural History* 10:2 (1999), pp. 155-170; Todd, 'Young women, work and family in inter-war rural England'; Nicola Verdon, 'Agricultural Labour and the Contested Nature of Women's Work in Interwar England and Wales', *The Historical Journal*, 52:1 (2009), pp. 109-130; Nicola Verdon, '“The Modern Countrywoman”: Farm Women, Domesticity and Social Change in Interwar Britain', *History Workshop Journal* 70 (2010), pp. 86-107; Nicola Verdon, 'Business and Pleasure: Middle-Class Women's Work and the Professionalization of Farming in England, 1890–1939' *Journal of British Studies* 51 (2012), pp. 393-415; Karen Sayer, '“His footmarks on her shoulders”: the place of women within poultry keeping in the British countryside, c. 1880 to c. 1980', *Agricultural History Review* 61:2 (2013), pp. 301-329; Carol Twinch, *Women On the Land: Their Story During Two World Wars* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1990); Gill Clarke, *The Women's Land Army: A Portrait* (Bristol: Sansom and Co, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict* (London: Croom Helm, 1984); Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender and National Identity 1939-1991* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1998); Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Sonya Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Jilly Cooper, *Animals in War* (London: William Heinemann, 1983); Clare Campbell, *Bonzo's War: Animals under Fire 1939-1945* (London: Corsair, 2013); Clare Campbell, *Dogs of Courage: When Britain's Pets Went to War 1939-45* (London: Corsair, 2015); Hilda Kean, 'Britain at War: Remembering and Forgetting the Animal Dead of the Second World War', in Margo DeMello (ed.), *Mourning Animals: Rituals and Practices Surrounding Animal Death* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2016), pp. 115-122; Hilda Kean, 'Traces and Representations: Animal Pasts in London's Present', *The London Journal*, 36.1 (2011), pp. 54-71; J. T. Baumel-Schwartz, 'Beloved Beasts: Reflections on the History and Impact of the British 'Animals in War' Memorial', *History & Memory*, 29.1 (2017), pp. 104-133; Thomas Webb, Chris Pearson, Penny Summerfield and Mark Riley, 'More-Than-Human Emotional Communities: British Soldiers and Mules in Second World War Burma', *Cultural and Social History* 17:2 (2020), pp. 245-262.

<sup>7</sup> The official version is Keith A.H. Murray, *Agriculture: History of the Second World War* (London: HMSO, 1955). More critical work includes B. Short, C. Watkins and J. Martin (eds), *The Front Line of Freedom: British Farming in the Second World War*, (Exeter: British Agricultural History Society, 2007); B. Short *The Battle of*

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*the Fields: Rural Community and Authority in Britain during the Second World War* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014); D. Harvey and M. Riley, ‘“Fighting from the fields”: developing the British ‘National Farm’ in the Second World War,’ *Journal of Historical Geography* 35:3 (2009), pp. 495-516.

<sup>8</sup> B. Short, *Battle of the Fields*, p. 78; Vita Sackville-West, *The Women’s Land Army* (London: Michael Joseph, 1944), pp. 28-29.

<sup>9</sup> Sackville-West, *Women’s Land Army*, flyleaf. The National Archives (TNA) website states that ‘the original service records of the Women’s Land Army have not survived’ a problem that has limited research and publication and increased dependence on Sackville-West while also encouraging the use of oral history.

<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/help-with-your-research/research-guides/womens-land-army/> (accessed 11 July 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Sackville-West, *Women’s Land Army*, p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> Etienne Benson, ‘Animal Writes: Historiography, Disciplinary, and the Animal Trace’, in Linda Kaloff and Georgina M. Montgomery (eds), *Making Animal Meaning: The Animal Turn* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2011), pp. 3-16. See also Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: the English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p.4.

<sup>12</sup> Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls and Consumption, 1939-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 134-5.

<sup>13</sup> P. Atkins, ‘Fattening Children or Fattening Farmers? School Milk in Britain, 1921-1941’, *Economic History Review*, 58.1 (2005), pp. 57-78; P. Atkins, ‘The Milk in Schools Scheme, 1934-45: “Nationalization” and Resistance’, *History of Education*, 34.1 (2005), pp. 1-21; J. Welshman, ‘School Meals and Milk in England and Wales, 1906-45’, *Medical History*, 41.1 (1997), pp. 6-29.

<sup>14</sup> Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War Two and the Battle for Food* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), pp. 395-7.

<sup>15</sup> The National Archives (TNA) ED 50/229, Report to the Ministry of Food, 26 May 1941.

<sup>16</sup> J. Martin, *The development of modern agriculture: British farming since 1931* (London: Springer, 2000); Sarah Wilmot, ‘From “public service” to artificial insemination: animal breeding science and reproductive research in early twentieth-century Britain’, *ScienceDirect*, 38 (2007), pp. 411-441.

<sup>17</sup> The minimum wage was set by the Agricultural Wages Board for the county where the worker was employed, subject to a guaranteed cash wage of 22s 6d, after deduction for board and lodging, for a working week of up to forty-eight hours in summer and fifty hours in winter, for those aged eighteen or over. Sackville-West, *Women’s*

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*Land Army*, p. 105. At least one Land Girl asserted to her hosts that domestic work in her billet was not part of a Land Girl's duties. Anne Hall, *Land Girl: her story of six years in the Women's Land Army, 1940-46* (Ex-Libris Press: Bradford on Avon, 1993), p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Sackville-West, *Women's Land Army*, pp. 95 and 98. Since milking was usually done twice a day, most Land Girls on dairy farms were required also to do general farm work.

<sup>19</sup> Grayzel, 'Nostalgia, Gender and the Countryside'; Twinch, *Women on the Land*.

<sup>20</sup> Verdon, 'Agricultural Labour and the Contested Nature of Women's Work'.

<sup>21</sup> Verdon, 'Agricultural Labour and the Contested Nature of Women's Work', p. 116.

<sup>22</sup> Todd, 'Young women, work and family', p. 91.

<sup>23</sup> Sackville-West, *Women's Land Army*, p. 105, lists all items of the uniform, which included a badge. Ration coupons had to be surrendered but otherwise it was free of charge.

<sup>24</sup> Sackville-West, *Women's Land Army*, p. 15, also p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Sackville-West, *Women's Land Army*, p. 22.

<sup>26</sup> 'Land Girls Look Back to Life on the Home Front', *Farmers Weekly*, 148:9, 29 February 2008.

<sup>27</sup> Hall, *Land Girl*, p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Sackville-West, *Women's Land Army*, p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> Sackville-West, *Women's Land Army*, p. 26.

<sup>30</sup> P. Brassley, 'The Professionalisation of English Agriculture?', *Rural History*, 16:2 (2005), pp. 235-251, here pp. 244-5. Little scholarly attention has been paid to WLA training, but see Clarke, *Women's Land Army*, pp. 80-85, for an overview. Celia Gowdy-Wygant argues that training was represented as a 'vehicle to transition [urban] women from bad to good through labour on the land'. C. Gowdy-Wygant, *Cultivating Victory: The Women's Land Army and the Victory Garden Movement* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), p. 114.

<sup>31</sup> Richie Nimmo, 'The Mechanical Calf: on the making of a multispecies machine' in Mathilde Cohen and Yoriko Otomo (eds) *Making Milk: the Past, Present and Future of Our Primary Food* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 81-98.

<sup>32</sup> Mavis Young, 'Life in the Women's Land Army Chapter 2', BBC, WW2 People's War, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/42/a4112542.shtml> (accessed 13 July 2020).

<sup>33</sup> S. Joseph, *If Their Mothers Only Knew: An Unofficial Account of Life in the Women's Land Army* (London: Faber and Faber, 1946), p.140.

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<sup>34</sup> Michael Greenhill and Evelyn Dunbar, *A Book of Farmcraft* (London: Longmans, 1942).

<sup>35</sup> Clarke, *Women's Land Army*, p. 81. The phrase was evidently used, possibly by Evelyn Dunbar, in relation to the need for the *Book of Fieldcraft*. See Gill Clarke, *Evelyn Dunbar: War and Country* (Bristol: Sansom and Co, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> Ben Anderson, 'A Liberal Countryside? The Manchester Ramblers' Federation and the "Social Readjustment" of Urban Citizens, 1929-1936,' *Urban History* 38:1 (2011), pp. 84-102; Catherine Brace, 'A Pleasure Ground for the Noisy Herds? Incompatible Encounters with the Cotswolds and England, 1900-1950', *Rural History* 11:1 (2000), pp. 75-94; P. Merriman, '“Respect the life of the countryside”: the Country Code, government and the conduct of visitors to the countryside in post-war England and Wales', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 30.3 (2005), pp. 336-350.

<sup>37</sup> Greenhill and Dunbar, *Book of Farmcraft*, p.22.

<sup>38</sup> Greenhill and Dunbar, *Book of Farmcraft*, p.21.

<sup>39</sup> Greenhill and Dunbar, *Book of Farmcraft*, pp.20-21.

<sup>40</sup> P. Atkins, 'Milk consumption and tuberculosis in Britain, 1850-1950', in Alexander Fenton (ed.), *Order and Disorder: The Health Implications of Eating and Drinking in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 2000), pp. 83-95; 'Tuberculosis in War-time', *Public Health: The Journal of the Society of Medical Officers of Health* 56 (1942), pp. 15-16.

<sup>41</sup> Greenhill and Dunbar, *Book of Farmcraft*, p.18.

<sup>42</sup> Greenhill and Dunbar, *Book of Farmcraft*, p.21.

<sup>43</sup> Verdon, 'Agricultural Labour and the Contested Nature of Women's Work', p. 117. Verdon argues that new training and qualifications offered to women in the interwar years were class divided: degrees were for middle-class women who might set up their own farms; diplomas and certificates were for 'young women who planned to go into paid dairy work'. Verdon, 'Business and Pleasure', p. 405. During the war MAF acquired two training farms for WLA members and fitted them up with the latest 'modern contrivances'. *Land Girl*, September 1944, pp.6-8; *Farmer and Stockbreeder*, September 1942, p.1359.

<sup>44</sup> *Land Girl*, June 1944, pp. 2-4.

<sup>45</sup> Sackville-West, *Women's Land Army*, p. 30; *Picture Post*, 16 March 1946. A recruitment film closely following the *Picture Post* article was made by the Central Office of Information: 'Early One Morning', 3 June 1946, British Pathé Film Archive <https://www.britishpathe.com/video/early-one-morning/query/early+one+morning> [accessed 11 June 2020].

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<sup>46</sup> Sackville-West, *Women's Land Army*, p.31.

<sup>47</sup> TNA, JV 7/78, 'Employment of Women's Land Army members as milk recorders 1942-1946': correspondence between J.L. Davies (Assistant General Manager of Milk Marketing Board) and F. Wynne Owen (Regional Marketing Officer for MMB in Worcester), January and February 1945.

<sup>48</sup> M. M. Smith, 'Producing Sense, Consuming Sense, Making Sense: Perils and Prospects for Sensory History', *Journal of Social History*, 40.4 (2007), pp. 841-58.

<sup>49</sup> Erica Fudge, *Quick Cattle and Dying Wishes: People and their Animals in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018); N. Rothfel, 'Touching Animals: The Search for a Deeper Understanding of Animals', in D. Brantz (ed.), *Beastly Natures: Animals, Humans, and the Study of History* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2010), pp. 38-58; Jonathan Saha, 'Among the Beasts of Burma: Animals and the Politics of Colonial Sensibilities, c. 1840-1940', *Journal of Social History*, 48.4 (2015), pp. 910-32.

<sup>50</sup> Erica Fudge, 'Milking Other Men's Beasts', *History and Theory*, 52 (2013), pp. 13-28, here p. 26.

<sup>51</sup> *Picture Post*, 16 March 1946, pp. 21-2.

<sup>52</sup> *Land Girl*, December 1943, p.11.

<sup>53</sup> Fudge, *Quick Cattle and Dying Wishes*.

<sup>54</sup> *Dairy Farmer*, October 1944, p.8.

<sup>55</sup> Abigail Woods, 'Rethinking the History of Modern Agriculture: British Pig Production, c. 1910-65', *Twentieth Century British History*, 23.2 (2012), pp. 165-191.

<sup>56</sup> *Dairy Farmer*, August 1944, p.14.

<sup>57</sup> Greenhill and Dunbar, *Book of Farmcraft*, p.25.

<sup>58</sup> Peggy Scott, *British Women in War* (London: Hutchinson, 1940), p. 106; Short, *Battle of the Fields*, p.15; Joseph, *If Their Mothers Only Knew*, p.139; 'Cattle at the Cross Roads', *Agriculture – The Journal of the Ministry of Agriculture* (December 1943), p. 388.

<sup>59</sup> Peggy Scott, *They Made Invasion Possible* (London: Hutchinson, 1944), p. 110; J. B. Priestley, *British Women Go To War* (London: Collins, 1943), p. 35.

<sup>60</sup> *Land Girl*, March 1944, p. 7.

<sup>61</sup> Verdon, 'Business and Pleasure', p. 410.

<sup>62</sup> 'The Farmer's Boy's Day Off' *Picture Post*, 16 March 1946, pp. 20-22.

<sup>63</sup> Roberta Bivins and Hilary Marland, 'Weighting for Health: Management, Measurement and Self-surveillance in the Modern Household,' *Social History of Medicine* 29:4 (2016), pp. 757-780



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<sup>64</sup> *Land Girl*, April 1940, pp. 3-4.

<sup>65</sup> Mavis Young, 'Life in the Women's Land Army Chapter 2, BBC, WW2 People's War, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/33/a4112533.shtml> [accessed 14 July 2020].

<sup>66</sup> Greenhill and Dunbar, *Book of Farmcraft*, p. 22.

<sup>67</sup> Reprinted in *Land Girl*, January 1943, p.3. On wartime women's alleged sexual promiscuity see S. Rose, 'Sex, Citizenship and the Nation in World War II Britain', *American Historical Review*, 103 (1998), pp. 1147-76.

<sup>68</sup> *Land Girl*, January 1943, p.3

<sup>69</sup> See note 1.

<sup>70</sup> *Picture Post*, 13 January 1940, pp. 33-7.

<sup>71</sup> Clarke, *Women's Land Army*, pp. 67, 70.

<sup>72</sup> Sackville-West, *Women's Land Army*, p.27.

<sup>73</sup> Sackville-West, *Women's Land Army*, p.28.

<sup>74</sup> Sackville-West, *Women's Land Army*, p.28.

<sup>75</sup> Sackville-West, *Women's Land Army*, p. 28

<sup>76</sup> Phyllis Lassner, '“The Milk of Our Mothers' Kindness Has Ceased to Flow”': Virginia Woolf, Stevie Smith, and the Representation of the Jew' (1996) reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, vol. 118, 2002.

<sup>77</sup> Sackville-West, *Women's Land Army*, p. 29.

<sup>78</sup> *Dairy Farmer*, January 1943, p.12.

<sup>79</sup> Pat Peters, *Land Girls Gang Up* (Ipswich: Old Pond Publishing, 2009), pp.179-81.

<sup>80</sup> Joan Collinson, Interview, 31 January 2001, IWM 21008.

<sup>81</sup> 'Land Girls Look Back to Life on the Home Front' *Farmers Weekly*, 148:9, 29 February 2008.

<sup>82</sup> F. Wall, 'Keeping the Cows Milked in Cambridge', BBC, WW2 People's War, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/00/a4139200.shtml> [accessed 14 July 2020]

<sup>83</sup> Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, p. 268.

<sup>84</sup> Recent work in human geography suggests that interaction with farm animals has positive impacts on mental health, general wellbeing and a sense of place. R. Gorman, 'Therapeutic landscapes and non-human animals: the roles and contested positions of animals within care farming assemblages', *Social and Cultural Geography* (2016), pp. 1-22.

<sup>85</sup> *Dairy Farmer*, January 1943, p.12 (emphasis in original).

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<sup>86</sup> Peters, *Land Girls Gang Up*, pp.179-81 (e.i.o.).

<sup>87</sup> Oxford English Dictionary on-line: 'Bully. In the popular etymological consciousness the word is perhaps now associated with bull.'

<sup>88</sup> Margaret Mary Rumbold, Interview, 31 May 1985, IWM 8856; Iris Hobby, Interview, 29 January 1999, IWM 18274; Neta Joan Hutchinson, Interview, 4 October 1999, IWM 19776.

<sup>89</sup> *Dairy Farmer*, December 1942, p. 12.

<sup>90</sup> Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It: British Women in World War II* (Chippenham: Picton Publishing, 1994), p. 80.

<sup>91</sup> On the relationship of smell to place, memory and emotion see Kara C. Hoover, 'The Geography of Smell', *Cartographica*, 44:4 (2009), pp. 237-239.

<sup>92</sup> A. McEntegart, *The Milk Lady at New Park Farm: The Wartime Diary of Anne McEntegart* (Sheffield: RMC Books, 2011), pp. 96-7. McEntegart volunteered to work on a dairy farm during the war without joining the WLA.

<sup>93</sup> McEntegart, *The Milk Lady*, pp. 18, 96-7.

<sup>94</sup> Anne Hall, *Land Girl*, p. 32.

<sup>95</sup> Anne Hall, *Land Girl*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>96</sup> For a study of farmers' responses to the loss of animals outside the normal routines of production, see, M. Riley, '“Letting them go” – Agricultural Retirement and Human-Livestock Relations', *Geoforum* 42 (2011), pp. 16-27.

<sup>97</sup> *Dairy Farmer*, June 1943, p.12.

<sup>98</sup> *Dairy Farmer*, June 1943, p.12.

<sup>99</sup> Grayzel, 'Nostalgia, gender and the countryside', p. 168.

<sup>100</sup> B. Short, C. Watkins, W. Foot, P. Kinsman, *The National Farm Survey, 1941-1943: State Surveillance and the Countryside in England and Wales in the Second World War* (London: Cab International, 2000), p. 229.

<sup>101</sup> *Land Girl*, December 1943, p.1.