

**JOYCE EDITH INGLE nee IRVING.** d.o.b. 04 February 1922

**INTERVIEW #7**

Interviewer: Stuart Antrobus 20 February 2003 (Recording approx. 60 minutes)

**Bedfordshire Women's Land Army**  
**20 July 1942 – 21 September 1946\***

**Served at Bolnhurst Hostel**  
**WLA No. 90468**

**SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW**

Born and lived in Bedford all her life. Called up and chose Land Army instead of Munitions. Mother had a newsagents business. Took form to Land Army offices in Harpur Street, Bedford (where Eagle Court is now). Had an interview with 2 people – one of them Mrs. Eugster. (She had previously known Mrs. Sharman, in charge of uniforms)

She liked animals. Her uncle had a farm. A new hostel was due to open in October 1942 [**19 October 1942**] in Bolnhurst. Uniform was collected a few days before beginning there. Advised to put neats-foot oil on shoes and boots to soften them.

Aged 20. Started on the Monday. Took her bicycle to Harpur Street. Met up with 2 other girls she knew, one from school. Taken to hostel. Tea then talk. Mrs. Eugster and a Bedfordshire War Agricultural Committee. person (lady). Never been to Bolnhurst. YWCA hostel. Warden – Miss. E. McGinn. Very nice lady. Were told where they would work next day. 40 at hostel.

8 girls, including Zeita Trott, followed War Ag. lady (in car) on bicycles 3 miles to Walker's farm, Keysoe. Pulling mangel wurzels. No training. Using knives to cut them. After first hour – ready to go home!

Given tins containing their sandwiches for lunch. Flask with hot drink. Very good cook. Her daughter was the kitchen maid. They lived at Kimbolton and cycled home every weekend.

Very fortunate with Bolnhurst hostel – she could go home to Mum every Saturday afternoon and come back Sunday night, but missed out on what the girls who stayed at the hostel had done over the weekend. Most girls from Luton and London first; girls from North came later.

Had accident in December. On load of slippery barley straw. Cart went into rut and she fell off. A clever surgeon saved her arm. Did not realise at time how serious it was. She was off work 3 months. Hospital then home. Sister was home, fortunately.

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Returned but had to be careful. Did 'dirty end' of threshing. Keeping it clear behind drum.

Went to different farms, each week – Stotfold, Great Barford - east of Bedford. Girls drove lorries, others cut. Liked working in a small group – 3 or 4. Some did more work than others. All more or less friendly with each other.

Yorkshire girls came down in 1943 - 44. Still keeps in touch with those girls – in Yorkshire, Lancashire, Australia, New Zealand, America.

At weekends or off duty, did not have to wear uniform. Did washing at home.

Uniform – superb. Top quality poplin dress shirts. Aertex shirts for working. Pullovers were good. Overcoats – beautiful, really good. Only allowed to keep dungarees at the end.

Used to wear hats.

No formal training before starting. Were offered courses on thatching, etc. Chances to do tests for Proficiency Certificates.

Most hated job – potato picking. Did not mind picking them.

Favourite job – threshing – feeding drum or on straw stack.

Some girls were asked to carry heavy bales and sacks of corn. It was cruel. She wasn't.

In spring – hoeing was nice. 2 or 3 girls. Not keen on singling, crawling on hands and knees.

No memory of District WLA Reps coming out but could always go in or ring them.

Second pair of breeches were nice.

Heard various talks on subjects at the hostel.

#### Routine at Bolnhurst.

Bunk beds. Thin palliasses on wooden bunk. Basic. Only had bedspreads post-war, in 1945 – a gift from Canadian WVS – patchwork quilts.

20 cubicles. Dressing table to edge of aisle. A wardrobe. Large wooden box – "coffin" under bed for odds and ends. Concrete floor. Thin mat.

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6 – 6.30 am: Cook clanged a bell each morning to wake us up. Then walked down the dormitory and spoke to each girl individually calling them by name, saying “Time to get up.” She was mothering - in mid- 40s.

Remembers the first time she tasted oat flapjacks - “hostel crunch” in lunch box. Had to get washed, make sandwiches and have breakfast.

Dining room (which acted as a space for concert or a dance).

2 girls keen on jiving. Glen Miller’s music was popular. First thing on returning from work in the fields – you took your boots off outside. They switched on the radio and started jiving, after a hard day’s work. 5.30 – 6 p.m. broadcast. Very keen. Very funny.

Did not appreciate there was a war on. They lived in their own world. Cockney humour. North-country humour.

Accumulator wireless in the dining room but did not listen much. Paraffin lamps. Hot and cold running water. Ted Hughes was the caretaker who kept the boiler going. He lived in the cottage down the lane, near the main road.

Near Thurleigh Airfield. At one time working at Waterfall Farm, less than mile from airfield.

### **(Short break)**

Airmen used to cycle down to hostel. “The Plough” pub (not the new “Plough” there now).

There was a little farm, Tommy Fenton’s, behind pub.

Most girls smoked cigarettes and had a shandy. Social hour or two. Also “Wheatsheaf” pub in Colmworth

Airmen used to come and collect the girls.

Mother asked if any American friends (of her daughter) would like to come at Christmas – her son was away in the forces and she would like to think that someone was doing the same for her son. 2 Americans at Walker’s farm, looking at farm machinery (one of them was a farmer). They came to her home for Christmas. Mother liked entertaining – brother in law, sister, 2 Americans, granddad, her friend. One American went out with her friend and eventually married her. They did that for two Christmases. The Americans brought tins of peaches.

Chicken for Christmas from a friend. It was a luxury. Turkey unheard of.

Farms visited – Bolnhurst farms, Keysoe, Pertenhall, Staughton, Great Barford, Willington, Sandy, Potton. Market gardens.

Shuttleworth glasshouses – picking tomatoes. Lady of big house complained to War Ag. that they had been given beetroot sandwiches – not enough to work on.

Occasional treats – one friend got a jar of salad cream – luxury. Another treat – a bar of lovely soap. You supported each other. Even she was homesick and she saw her Mum every weekend. Those from the North suffered more – Yorkshire, North-East.

Wardens, after Miss McGinn: Mrs. Bagent, then Mrs. Lancaster – a grandma of a lady.

Went to “Cook” if they wanted anything. Her daughter also worked there.

Hostel – single-storey huts, long dormitory, sickbay, quiet room, cook’s quarters.

Supposed to do fire watch duty. Wooden shutters to windows. Paraffin lamps.

When it was very cold, bricks were heated in the boiler room and wrapped up to keep warm. Stoves. A lot of letter writing.

Public phone in the village. A phone for emergencies only in the hostels. Letters from boyfriends abroad. No newspapers in hostel.

Better in hostel rather than on private farms. Hostel girls were cliquey – “I’m a Bolnhurst girl”. Trained to march at Sharnbrook Hostel, ready for 14 February 1946 Parade in Bedford past Princess Elizabeth.

They were right at the back of the parade.

Went into lunchtime Corn Exchange concerts in Corn Exchange.

She was in the Club Choir. Lesley Woodgate, of the BBC, trained the Cople hostel choir.

Remembers Sir Adrian Boult, Charles Groves, etc. in town (while the BBC Music Department was there).

Forces dances in Corn Exchange. Remembers Canadians being in town.

Hostel girls were picked up in American trucks to be taken to dances at Thurleigh aerodrome and returned by a certain time.

Some Land Girls had boyfriends who were prisoners of war.

Sister, aged 28, married in May 1942. Her husband was killed in the Dambuster's raid eleven months later. She worked at W. H. Allens, Bedford.

Her mother continued running the newsagent business during the war. Wartime rationing – dealing with coupons. Under-the-counter cigarettes for regular customers. 5.30 a.m. until 7 o'clock at night and fire-watching. Father had died in 1934. Brother took over the shop after the war, in Russell Street (now part of Roffe Avenue).

Concert after February 1946 Parade. She took part with a group of land girls "blackened-up" (like the later Black & White Minstrels) singing the Al Johnson song, "I know why you're blue." Concert lasted until 11 p.m.

ENSA concerts at Bolnhurst hostel. Variety and light classical music.

Left in September 1946 - harvest time. Worked for Ben's (husband's) father. In the Bolnhurst area. Brother came home. She applied for a release. She did not feel she had done anything special but she'd done her best.

Annoyed now that agriculture has declined in Britain.

**END OF INTERVIEW.**

**Facts checked and updated with subsequently-documented corrections and amendments to content information (if any) in bold in square brackets. \*Actual service may have commenced some time after the enrolment date.**

**For photographs and further information on Joyce Ingle nee Irving:**  
Stuart Antrobus *We wouldn't have missed it for the world: The Women's Land Army in Bedfordshire 1939-1950* (Book Castle Publishing, 2008)  
pp 127-128, 207

Bedfordshire Women's Land Army website: <http://tinyurl.com/2nq2up>  
See *Roll Call* under 'I' for Irving, Joyce Edith  
See also: *Land Girl Memoirs* webpage