

*The Wartime
Efforts
of*

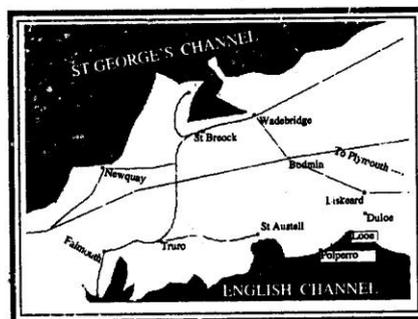
Dorothy Wildgoose

*An experience of the
Navy, Army & Air Force Institute*

and the

Women's Land Army

1943 - 1946



Chapter One
The Postman Knocks

One morning late in 1944 in the living room of 72 Rosebery Street, Moss Side, Manchester, there was great excitement and much mickey-taking because there had just been a delivery to the front door of a well-stuffed kit bag. When I use the word excitement I expect that I was the only one feeling excited. I should think my mother and father's feelings were more akin to dread for their darling daughter had joined the Women's Land Army and would soon be leaving home yet again, this time to work in Cornwall which in those days seemed like the other side of the world. I don't know how my two brothers felt. They never told me and I never asked.

The kit bag was unpacked and I was soon inspecting my uniform. It was a very nice uniform; especially if you made sure you got the best of everything! By this I mean there were two types of shirt. One was ugly and shapeless, anything but smart, and made from Airtex which was a floppy, stretchy fabric woven with air holes all over, hence its name, and it had short sleeves. The other was smartly cut, made like a good quality man's shirt with long sleeves and was made from an excellent quality fine poplin. They were both the same colour, which was cream.

There were also two types of breeches, one made from heavy corduroy and the other from cavalry twill. The one looked like those worn by the dustbin men and the other looked like cavalry officer's issue. Which would you choose? They were both in a soft shade of khaki. There were several pairs of woolen knee length khaki socks which were all right, and one pair of good quality brown leather shoes for dress wear, one pair of black leather ankle boots for work in the fields and one pair of gumboots, also for the fields. There were two high quality wool long sleeved pullovers in a fairly dark rich green, two pairs of khaki dungarees for work in the fields (one pair of which I still wear when I decorate, and this is 1994. How's that for quality!). One double breasted greatcoat cut on the lines of the army officer's greatcoat except that the skirt was cut with a slight flare. The fabric was woven as dense and as wind-proof and warm as the soldiers' greatcoats. The colour of this I would describe as a pinkish khaki. Many years later the fashion world called it mink. There was also a lightweight coat meant to be worn for work with the dungarees. It was similar to a doctor's white hospital coat, only in khaki. This I never used. Instead, I acquired for myself an army battle dress jacket. There was one green tie which I never wore; I always wore my shirt neck open. One felt hat which came in the raw state, looking as if it had been stolen from a scarecrow and this had to be moulded to shape by steaming it.

Consequently, there were many shapes of Land Army hat according to individual taste. I made mine like a cowboy's hat and never saw another one like it. The majority of them looked like a pork pie with a brim. Mine, however, did cause a lot of childish comments from the opposite sex.

There was a set of oilskins and a sou-wester for work in the fields and another raincoat for dress wear. This was khaki coloured, and once again, cut on the lines of an army officer's issue, which means that it was exceptionally smart for any girl or woman who had the right sort of build to wear it, i.e. tall and slender. Then there were badges and other insignia to fix on hat and greatcoat, and last of all there was an insignia arm band to be worn over the sleeve of shirt or pullover when the greatcoat was not being worn. And that, I think, is the lot - and it was spread all over the living room!

But not for long, for I had to move fast. All those ugly shirts had to be sent back to be changed for poplin ones, also one pair of corduroy breeches which had to be changed for whipcord to use as dress uniform. I didn't mind using corduroy for work; they would be covered by dungarees anyway. Sure enough, they delivered what I wanted in record time and I was very proud to wear my uniform.

I had tried hard to get into the Women's Land Army and it was the only service my father was willing to sign his permission to let me join, since I was under age. Correction: I would have been under age if I had been accepted when I first applied. I remember that day well. I arrived at the recruiting office looking more like a fashion model than a farm worker with appropriate measurements to complete the picture, bust 34 - waist 21 - hips 34.

"I'm sorry, my dear, but I don't really think that you would be suitable, the work is very hard on the land, and we are looking for girls of a heavier build than you".

"But I'm not afraid of hard work. I am strong and have never ailed a day in my life." (All seventeen years of it!)

"No. I'm sorry, but I cannot accept you; your bone structure is much too fine. Look at the size of your wrists and your ankles and legs! I'm sorry, but there's nothing more to be said."

I was furious! But that was that and there was nothing I could do about it. I would be eighteen years old soon and, as people of my age will remember, after that magic birthday we suddenly became the property of the State. Together with many others I would be drafted into either the Armed Forces or into war work,

which probably meant I would be shoved into a factory and that was not high on the list of the things I wanted to do with my life! So, not letting the grass grow under my feet, I started to collect propaganda leaflets telling me how much I would enjoy being in the Women's Army, Navy and Air Force, but of course it was the Women's Land Army where I really wanted to be. I brought these home to read, being very careful not to let my father see them.

I decided after a while that I would apply for the Air Force, because I liked the uniform better than that of the Army, although the Wrens appealed to me more than either of them. The uniform again, I suspect, but I considered myself not educated enough for the Wrens and I knew, therefore, that I would not fit in.

Having made my decision I took my mother into my confidence and told her I would ask Dad that evening. I filled in the application form and had it all ready for his signature. As my father walked in the back door (we always used the back entrance) my pulse started thumping. I had an idea what the outcome would be.

"Don't give those forms to your father before he's eaten his dinner. You'll stand a better chance after he's fed." Probably the voice of experience!

The rest of the family had already eaten so I had to sit and watch his every mouthful and I was on pins. Finally, he laid down his knife and fork and the newspaper he had been reading at the table in spite of mother always telling him about it. Now my moment had arrived I laid the forms in front of him and asked him to sign them. He took a moment or two to read them then picked them up and tore them into pieces saying, "No daughter of mine is going into the Forces!"

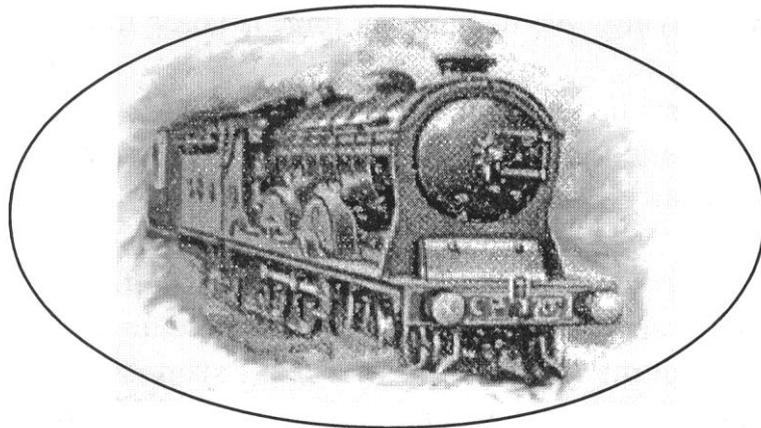
There was a hushed moment while the rest of us took it in then all Hell was let loose as my emotions erupted (which they were inclined to do quite often, and still do from time to time.)

"Don't think I'm going to work in an ammunition factory, because I'm not. I'll go to jail first, and when I'm eighteen they'll come and fetch me then you'll be sorry when they put me in jail." And with that I stamped out of the house slamming the door behind me. With hindsight, as it is fashionable to say these days, I don't know what the fuss was about. Presumably after my eighteenth birthday I would be able to sign my own papers and I think I would have been given a few days grace in which to decide what choice to make. But nobody told this seventeen year old and I thought the matter was getting urgent.

After the storm came the quiet. Time to think again. If they won't take me for the Women's Land Army and I'm not allowed to go into the Forces, what is left? The Navy, Army and Air Force Institute, otherwise known as the NAAFI.

Off I went for more propaganda leaflets telling me how wonderful life in the NAAFI would be. Oh, boy!!!

The same procedure led up to the signing of the papers, but this time with success. I suspect mother pointed a few things out to my dad, such as "She'll soon be eighteen and then she can do what she likes anyhow."



Chapter Two

In the NAAFI

I'm sure it was the thought of his little girl being at the mercy of all those servicemen which was bothering my father and, after all, who could blame him. But the situation was just as bad for NAAFI girls, or just as good whichever way you look at it, and there were those who made good use of the situation. I think it could be even more dangerous in the Land Army though, because if a girl was billeted with a dicey farmer it would be more difficult to get away, sleeping under the same roof. Anyhow, I was now in the NAAFI, stationed at RAF Station Lindley near Nuneaton, Warwickshire, and I arrived a few months before my eighteenth birthday. Poor Mum and Dad. They couldn't win. I know how they must have worried, and living on an RAF station was not exactly the safest place to be during war time. We were never bombed whilst I was there, but we easily might have been. From what I can now remember the uniform was very similar to that of A.T.S. (The Women's Royal Army) uniform. It was khaki, and a Glengarry was worn on the head. It looked very smart when worn with pride, but I was not inclined to wear it much. Off duty I wore my civvies. The glamorous life of the NAAFI girl depicted by the propaganda leaflets turned out to be the life of a skivvy in uniform. Talk about the television drama 'Upstairs, Downstairs'. It had nothing on the NAAFI!

Scrubbing and cleaning. Fetching and carrying. Tending to fires and cooking stoves which were heated by living fires. Up at 5 o'clock in the morning - till then I didn't know that there was a 5 o'clock in the morning - to clean out and re-light fire places and cooking stoves which had to be hot enough for the cook to start work at 7 o'clock cooking breakfast. I didn't do this every morning. We took it in turns two at a time, but it came round mighty quickly. We went out with the canteen van to the far end of the aerodrome, this was called Dispersal Point, to serve the men with a mid-morning drink - and mighty cold that was too, in the winter.

We served at the counter, collected dishes from the other side of the counter, washed them and started all over again. There were tables to be washed and floors to be swept and washed. I cannot quite remember the canteen opening hours, but we were off duty in the afternoon and opened again in the evening. However, it did have its lighter side. The RAF station was a small one for the training of air crew which in turn meant that the canteen was small also. This made for more intimacy. It was as though everybody knew everybody and most of them were friendly. We girls each had our own special boy friends who shared our sitting room after we had closed and these boys, most of them were about nineteen or twenty, used to help us clean up at night.

There are a few things I have never forgotten from those days. Firstly, the constant drone of the wartime aeroplanes, together with the leisurely feeling of lying on the grass on a sunny summer's afternoon looking up into a blue sky, listening to the constant drone as the trainees put in flying hours in readiness for the serious business of fighting the enemy. Whenever I hear a piston engined plane, even to this day, it takes me right back to Lindley Aerodrome 1943. Secondly, the day I innocently cycled past an aeroplane when its engines were at full throttle and the force of the wind almost blew me off my bike. The men enjoyed that. They cheered me on as I became more and more determined not to be blown off. I couldn't let that happen, could I? I would have felt such a fool. I remember feeling a bit of a fool anyway and it was some time before I was allowed to forget it. I must add that the plane was not on the runway ready for take-off, but at dispersal point which was where the engineers carried out repairs. Thirdly, Fry's Chocolate Peppermint Bars! There was always plenty of those. The men would give their ration coupons to us and of course I had my own chocolate ration. In those days the creme was of strong mint flavour, now it's just nothing but sweetness.

Before I came to Lindley I worked at C&A in Manchester and became friendly with a girl called Jean. She joined the NAAFI before me and came to Lindley aerodrome. I put in a request to join her, that's how I came to be there. Before she joined up Jean was very frumpy. She had a matronly figure, wore matronly clothes and had a matronly hair style. This was because she was not allowed to do otherwise. Her parents belonged to some peculiar religious sect which didn't allow such frivolities. No going to the pictures, no dancing and only certain types of music making. More than once she came into work covered in bruises because her father discovered she had indulged in one or other of these forbidden fruits. It was obviously OK to bash his women folk, though!

The day I arrived at Lindley Jean was waiting to meet me. I didn't recognise her she looked so lovely. Her hair was short and curly instead of being drawn back in a tight bun, she was wearing a liberal amount of make-up and a dress I'd never seen her wear before and she looked very sexy. What's more, she had a boy friend! I've often wondered what happened to her. I shouldn't think she would go back home after having tasted sweet freedom.

Although there were plenty of boyfriends allowed into the sitting room area of the private quarters I was never aware of any serious courtship going on, although it could have gone unnoticed by me because I was very young, immature and naive. As soon as one boy finished his training and moved away another filled his place. Perhaps there was an unofficial waiting list. Who knows! When you think of it, behind the scenes at the canteen must have provided a touch of homeliness for the lucky few. A comfortable lounge/sitting room with open fireplace always well stacked with coal, dim lighting, music (a gramophone) and a girl to sit with his arm

around. There was, of course, never any hanky-panky not that I was aware of, and certainly not with me!

This was the situation as I found it on my arrival and almost immediately I arrived I found myself 'claimed' by a pilot. One without the trainee's white flash in his cap and sporting 'wings' on his chest and I haven't a clue now as to his name. However I was pleased enough about this at the time. He seemed very nice indeed and was most definitely the most handsome of them all. (Or was it just the wings that did it?) Nobody warned me off.

Within about two weeks time he was promoted to whatever rank a pilot had to have to be in charge of a plane crew, was posted to an action station and sent up to fight the enemy. I'm not going to say I was in love, because I didn't know what that meant, but I remember I missed him very much and I was afraid for him. It brought it all home to me what these boys with white flashes in their hats were really doing there and that very soon they too would be posted to action stations. The day he went away I was lying on my bed during an off duty period feeling very unhappy and doing a little weeping when suddenly I was surrounded by nearly all the girls, some of whom had a smirk on their faces. One of them spoke up. "Serves you right! Now you know what it's like. He was Jean's boy friend. How do you think she felt when you took him from her?" And that was the first I knew about it. Jean would come up in conversation between him and me, but not in a way which rang any warning bells. But wouldn't you think I would have noticed a tension in the air? I suppose you can put that down to the callowness of youth. Why didn't Jean tell me, I wonder?

I suppose from then on I was not very popular, not that I remember it bothering me very much. Perhaps it all soon blew over in the constant moving on of boyfriends. Certainly both she and I soon had another boyfriend. I remember nothing at all about Jean's, but mine was just the opposite to the last one this who was dark and very handsome. Denis Meakin was this one's name. He was much taller, blue eyed and very blond. Probably the only reason I remember him so clearly is because I have letters and a photograph from him.

I stayed at RAF Lindley for quite some time, but exactly how long I don't know. I remember going about the aerodrome clad only in a summer dress and lying on the grass in the sunshine. I also remember how very, very cold it was out on the dispersal point when I went out with the mobile canteen, so this suggests at least six months. I do know I was transferred to an army barracks - Budbrooke Barracks, Warwick - and I was well settled in by 8th July 1944 because I have a letter with that date, written by a Private John Ankcorn telling me how much he was missing me, that was delivered to my home whilst on leave. So I had been in the NAAFI long enough to be eligible for leave, but how long that had to be I don't remember. I do remember spending some of my off duty time with John. Quite often, I think. We walked in parks quite often and also the grounds of Warwick Castle and I remember he tried to

impress me by leading me to believe that he was a member of the family at the castle. He said, "I'll take you in there one day. My uncle is the" I cannot honestly say I remember him using the word "Duke", but whatever word he did use led me to believe he was claiming to be one of the family. All he really achieved was to plant the idea in my mind that he was a bit of a liar and, of course, he lost my respect. I have never been easy to impress. I am more inclined to back off. Of course I may have done him an injustice all these years. It could have been true. After all, I should think all great families have their lesser known members and some must have decided to join the ranks.

I was only a few miles away from Stratford-on-Avon so, of course, I used to go there with my friend Sylvia who was also a NAAFI girl. She was a cook. We had lots of laughs her and me. There was one occasion which sticks out in my mind above all others. It was a beautiful sunny day and we took a rowing boat onto the River Avon. There were a lot of other people doing the same thing, most of whom seemed to be young men, and Sylvia and I flirted shamelessly with all who came our way. We were doing more laughing and flirting than rowing when we suddenly realised we were caught in the current and were being taken towards the weir. We tried very hard to rectify this, but the harder we tried the more we laughed and the more we laughed the weaker we became and there we were screaming and giggling and slowly getting closer to the weir. Suddenly the boat stopped moving forward and gradually started to move the other way. We turned to look for the reason for this miracle and saw another boat lined up behind us with two Americans on board, one holding on to the end of our boat and the other rowing like fury to get both boats out of this mess. Well, that did it. We set off into more fits of laughter, the tears rolling down our cheeks as we sat there holding our aching stomach muscles. We were probably hysterical by this time. They towed us to the safety of the bank and we all got out. Sylvia and I had no strength left for rowing, anyhow. Its amazing how weak hysterical laughter can leave you. We spent the rest of the day with these two American servicemen and, to my surprise, I found I liked them both very much. I was very prejudiced against Americans and usually gave them a wide berth.

We had a lovely day just wandering around in the sunshine exploring Stratford-on-Avon. They bought us a meal somewhere. Sylvia and I brought sandwiches with us, but we were all young and healthy so were quite able to eat those as well. We had cycled from Warwick to Stratford so what we did with our bikes while this was going on I don't know. I do know that we set off back later than we should have done and that consequently we were very late back in billets and Bosslady wasn't very pleased. I don't think we cared very much. Probably we came away giggling and giggled half way through the night. Happy day!

My young man's name was Roger Maltby and he wrote me a letter dated 6th August 1944, US Army Post Office Stamp 9th August 1944, asking if I would meet him again in Stratford on my next day off. I never received it. Within the few days

between that 'happy day' and the day the letter arrived at the NAAFI canteen I had been sent home with a very badly infected finger. Why on earth it wasn't simply redirected to my home address I've no idea. I never went back to the NAAFI and that letter caught up with me several years later, long after the war was over - I think it was 1949. My home address had been written in two places, on the front and the back of the envelope, and both in different handwriting. The envelope was so old and dirty it looked as if somebody had carried it around in their pocket all those years. The folds of the envelope were so worn that three of them had split open and it was tied together with tape to keep the letter inside. Where on earth had it been all those years?

In the letter Roger said he hoped we didn't get into too much trouble for being late back to camp. He, however, did get into trouble. When the convoy got back they were met at the gate by the camp Commander and all the company Commanders. The names were taken of all those who did not have a pass and those not wearing correct uniform. Roger and Leslie's names were taken on both charges so they had a price to pay for that 'happy' day. He went on to say "I think it was worth it, though, considering all the fun I had." But he would think I didn't care because I didn't even reply to his letter, and after they saved us both from a ducking too; or maybe saved our lives. I felt awful about that and I still do. I did try, though. I wrote to the address he gave in the letter, knowing full well I was wasting my time.

I wonder if they survived the war. Indeed I wonder how many of 'my ships that passed in the night'* survived the war. I was home a few weeks with that septic finger. It had to be lanced. It was in the first joint on the middle finger of my right hand and it took a long time to clear up. I still have the scar. But I made good use of the time.

I remember a lot about Lindley aerodrome, but I remember very little about Budbrooke Army Barracks. But there is one incident I do remember and it still tickles me to this day whenever I think about it.

One sunny, summer afternoon Sylvia and I, in pretty summer dresses, wandered through the camp towards the main gate chatting and laughing like girls do. We hadn't planned on walking far because we didn't have time. We would be back on duty very soon, so when we reached the guard house and the barrier across the entrance to the camp we stopped. We stood there for a short time leaning on the barrier in complete innocence and ignorant of what not to do at the entrance to an army barracks in wartime. All of a sudden all hell was let loose. The Sergeant Major came storming out of the guard house like a raging bull using his voice at full throttle. I wondered what the hell was the matter with him, then I realised that it was Sylvia and I who were upsetting him. He looked exactly like a sergeant major as portrayed by a comedian. All mouth and voice. He made his way halfway across the space

between us still bellowing "Get away from that barrier. What the hell do you think you're doing?"

By this time my hackles were up. How dare he speak to me that way. "Don't you dare speak to me that way. Who do you think you are? I'm not one of your recruits and I won't stand for it."

Can't you just picture this? I took the wind out of his sails and he stopped dead in his tracks. This must have been the first time in his life as a sergeant major that anybody had ever dared to answer him back. In that split second an officer came out of the guard room and called "Sergeant Major!". Talk about saved by the bell! They both went into the guard room and shut the door. No doubt the officer said something like "Leave them. They will go away in a few minutes", which was what we did because Sylvia wanted to. She was upset by it. Also, she had a different temperament to me and was wiser. I was more defiant and ready to stay longer - just to be defiant. I wonder what the outcome would have been if the officer had not intervened, because I wouldn't easily back down, not without an apology, and neither would he. By the time we got back to the canteen we were falling about with laughter, partly due to hysteria and partly due to relief. A few days later the NAAFI Bosslady told all 'her girls' not to hang around the entrance to the camp, and of course we never did again.

I remember when I told my father about this some time later I thought he would never stop laughing. Like all soldiers old or otherwise my father didn't have much time for the Sergeant Major breed, even though they are the men who hold the army together.

When the pain in my hand subsided it began to look as though I would be going back to the NAAFI and this did nothing to cheer me. I'd had enough of the life of a skivvy and it wasn't my idea of how to spend my young life. I still wanted to go into the Land Army, I was always very much the outdoor type, and now my mind began to work on ways of having another go to get in.

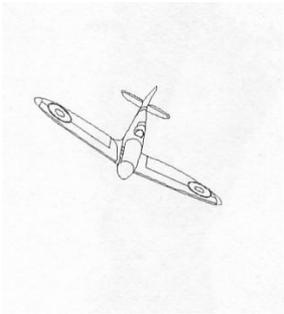
"I don't suppose anybody there is likely to recognise me, especially after all this time, and it is over a year since I last applied", is what I was thinking. I was also thinking of a way in which I could disguise myself, pull the wool over their eyes so to speak. So, just as I had dressed up for my first interview with the recruiting officer I also dressed up for my second. I had a double breasted tweed coat with big padded shoulders. I borrowed, from my mother, a pair of leather gloves with big gauntlets to cover up my "tiny wrists" and I wore wellingtons to cover my "thin legs and tiny ankles".

I was welcomed almost with open arms. I was obviously just what they were looking for! The Land Army did not have its own doctors and we had to have a

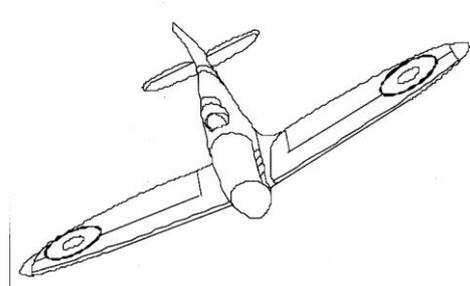
medical examination from our own GP so nobody from the Land Army ever saw me 'in the raw', so to speak.

I came home that afternoon and announced to the family, "I'm no longer in the NAAFI. I am in the Land Army."

AT LAST!



✓ Denis Meakin





Chapter Three
A Farm near St. Austell

The month is late October, the year 1944 and I am now nineteen years old. The first farm to which I was assigned was near St. Austell, Cornwall. I well remember the name of the owner although I now choose to call her "Mrs. X", but I cannot remember the name of the farm.

I was billeted on these people together with Winifred, a girl from Liverpool, and we left our homes eight weeks before Christmas. We were intruders in this house, Winifred and I, and what a terribly unhappy house it was. Very well furnished with many nice knickknacks gathered along life's way, clean and warm with enough to eat, but so unhappy, and we only made things worse.

Mrs. X's husband had died some time before we arrived. I never knew how long Mrs. X had been mourning, but whatever the time span two young lassies, full of the joy of living and straight out of the big city, should not have been sent to this house of silence and be expected to join in the mourning. We were expected to speak in whispers and when we laughed we were frowned at. After a few days of this I, like *Oliver Twist*, asked if we could have the radio on. Oh dear. Oh dear! "No! This house is in mourning and being without music is part of it. We only listen to the news."

Bearing in mind that this was November; short days and long, dark nights, very dark since it was the depths of the country. We couldn't go out, we didn't know anybody, we didn't know the surrounding countryside. If it had been summertime we would have been able to get away by going for a walk to get to know our surroundings. However, there was one bright star in our sky. Her name was Mrs. Tucker and she was the lady who went to do Mrs. X's cleaning and she understood the problem very well. Bless her! She started to ask Winifred and I around a couple of nights a week which eased the problem, but didn't cure it. With the selfishness of youth I kept going on at Mrs. X about having the radio on, which usually ended with us having words over it. Eventually one day she said "You can switch on the radio if you wish" and I suspect Mrs. Tucker had something to do with this. The atmosphere in the house became a little better after that, but it was never completely cleared because by this time Mrs. X and I didn't like each other. Winifred was a bit of a mouse and would not have had anything to say if I hadn't. Come to think about it, I don't remember her having anything to say at all during those tiffs between myself and Mrs. X. That was only inside of the house. Outside there were problems too!

The farm was run by her son, a young man of about thirty, and two farm labourers. The labourers, whose names I don't think I even knew, were never unpleasant to us, but the son, whose name I have forgotten, was very unpleasant. He was forever making snide remarks and using language fit for the ears of nobody but people like himself. I had been there only a few days when he gave me two very heavy metal buckets full of pigswill. "Feed the pigs in that pen." says he then stood back to watch the fun. There were two big pigs in this pen and the feeding trough was at the far end of the pen instead of the common sense place near the door. I wonder now if they had been moved especially for the occasion? The pen was ankle deep in slurry and he told me I had to tip the feed in the trough. I have never been a shirker and I am not easily daunted so, having passed through the gate, I put my best foot forward feeling immediately the difficulty of the ankle-deep slurry and the very heavy pails. Three times was about the limit I was able to put my best foot forward when, from the sheltered part of the pen the pigs, suddenly realising what was happening, made a bee line straight for me. They lumbered into me in their eagerness to get at the food and down I went into the slurry. So did the food because I dropped the buckets. Oh, what fun! Laughter all round.

What a brainless idiot he must have been to do that to a nineteen year old girl of such slender build. I wonder how loud he would have laughed if those pigs had broken my back. Anyhow it backfired on him, for the next time he asked me to feed the pigs I said "Feed them yourself." Not only did I refuse to feed those two pigs but I refused to feed any of them ever again and he was furious. His mother and Mrs. Tucker had my clothes to wash and that, and the stink I wafted through the house on my way upstairs to wash and change, did not leave Mrs. X very pleased at all.

We weren't ever allowed to come into the house to use the toilet. We were made to use the outside one. That's all right, I could accept that, except that the outside one was a very old-fashioned wooden bench job all open underneath and set over a running stream. Again, I could accept that in the summer, but in the winter? A REAL WINTER? All my young life I had to be careful to keep my bottom end warm because of scarlet fever at the age of seven. I was left with a weakness in my bladder and if I caught cold I would be forever on the loo! This was all explained to Mrs. X as soon as I realised the danger, but to no avail. I still had to use the outside toilet the same as all the others. OK then, but I was afraid that it may be only a matter of time, the snow was inches thick on the ground, it was icy and it was windy. Then, of course, it happened. I caught a chill in my bladder and the more I went to the loo the worse the chill - the worse the chill the more I went to the loo. A vicious circle.

Then came the climax. One night I wet the bed, but I knew nothing about it until the following morning. I, of course, was very embarrassed and hated to have to tell her. She was very angry, but I reminded her that I had done my best to avoid the

situation by taking her into my confidence so the results were no fault of mine. After that there was no problem. I was then allowed to use the indoor loo, "Take your boots off at the door". She need not have worried for it was against my nature to spoil her nice home by trampling muck all over it.

It would soon be Christmas. Cards had arrived for Winifred and myself. I can't remember what present I had received from home, but there would most definitely be something. What I can remember though, was the lovely Christmas cake Mother sent me, also some mince pies. Those obviously gave me a bigger thrill than the Christmas present for I have remembered them and the present I have forgotten. And why not for my mother's cakes were quite something. Remember also, being wartime, cakes like this were scarcely seen. Your rations had to be saved to collect enough ingredients to make a cake like this. The whole family had been going short for some time. So you see, it was far more than just a cake. I took it up to my bedroom where Winifred and I drooled over it for a while, but it was not to be eaten until Christmas so it was parcelled up again and put away in the dressing table drawer to await the great moment.

I can't remember what Christmas Day was like, so I suspect that it was very much like any other day. I do hope we all managed not to make any unpleasantness for each other. The only part I do remember was Winifred and I going up to the bedroom (in my case with wild anticipation) to scoff Christmas cake. Now was the time to cut the cake. We borrowed a knife from the kitchen, I lifted the cake from the drawer and unwrapped it only to find to my horror that the mice had eaten nearly half of it. Oh, no! No! No! I can still feel the disappointment, the emotion, the tearfulness of the moment - except that it lasted far longer than a moment!

I have thought of that moment many times since 1944 up to the present day (April 1994) and never failed to recapture it as if it were yesterday. Why should I have even thought about mice eating it? I had no experience of mice; there were none in my home. Perhaps because we always had a cat? But to have them upstairs surely must mean they were over-run with mice. Perhaps they scuttled all over us whilst we slept? Who knows? Anyhow I gave that side of it not a thought till now, but my cake I have thought about on and off ever since. If Mother had put it in a cake tin when she posted it that would not have happened, but she probably didn't have one, and they were not easy to come by in wartime. She certainly wouldn't be able to buy one.

Mr. and Mrs. Tucker invited Winifred and I to spend Boxing Day with them. It was a lovely day spent in a relaxing, friendly and gentle atmosphere, but of course we had to go back to the farm when the day was over. Back in our bedroom I said to Winifred "I'm not staying here any longer. I'm taking a day off to go to the Land Army offices in Truro"

“Oh well, I’m not staying here without you. If you’re going, so am I”, said Winifred.

It was somewhere between Christmas and New Year when we boarded the train for Truro. We did this without prior arrangements of any kind and neither of us knew Truro, but we did have the address. When we left the railway station we began walking not knowing whether or not we were walking in the right direction. We found ourselves in a street of terraced houses, lovely and clean and well kept. The snow was piled up in the gutter where the householders had each cleared the piece of pavement in front of their own home then salted the pavement against frost. In those days this was done by most people young and strong enough to carry out the task, so keeping the pavements safe and free from ice and snow. Coming towards us was a young woman pushing a baby carriage. We stopped and asked if we were going in the right direction. She gave us instructions how to get there, but told us they would be closed for lunch.

"It's too cold to be waiting around. Would you like to come inside and wait?" We thanked her and accepted. This is another incident I have thought of many times between that day and this. It was one of those houses where you step straight off the street into the main room of the house, and to me it was breathtaking.

We stepped from the cold wintry street into a room so bright and cheerful, clean as a new pin, very nicely furnished with wall to wall carpeting. I know that doesn't sound so exciting these days, but wall to wall carpeting was very unusual then. There was a big roaring fire in the grate and standing in the corner was the most beautiful Christmas tree I had seen for years. There were toys on the floor, too. I walked into the room and immediately sat on the carpet near the fire. The lady of the house was a bit put out over this and insisted I sat on one of the easy chairs. I often sat on the floor when I was young, also when I was not so young any more. In fact, I still do it from time to time and I'm now 68. She put her baby on the floor to play with his toys, went into the kitchen and made sandwiches. Beautiful sandwiches they were! Don't forget, everything was rationed!. She brought them into the main room, set them out on a small table and poured some tea. When the three of us had waded through the lot she said "Would you like a piece of Christmas cake?" Oh boy! It was a lovely cake, a good runner-up to my Mum's, and that was the best part of the whole day to me. I'd had my piece of Christmas cake after all. I'm sure while this was going on we must have introduced ourselves, but I'm afraid this is yet another name I have forgotten.

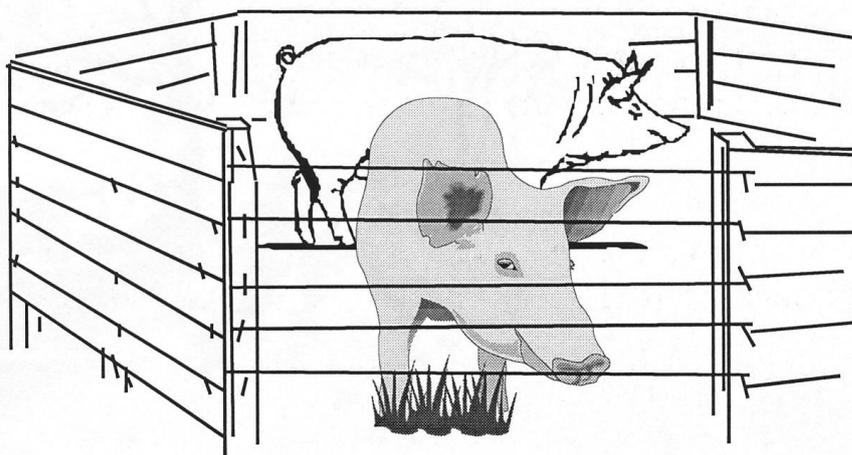
When we had to go we thanked her profusely for her kindness to us, to which she replied "I am only too pleased to be able to do it. My husband is away

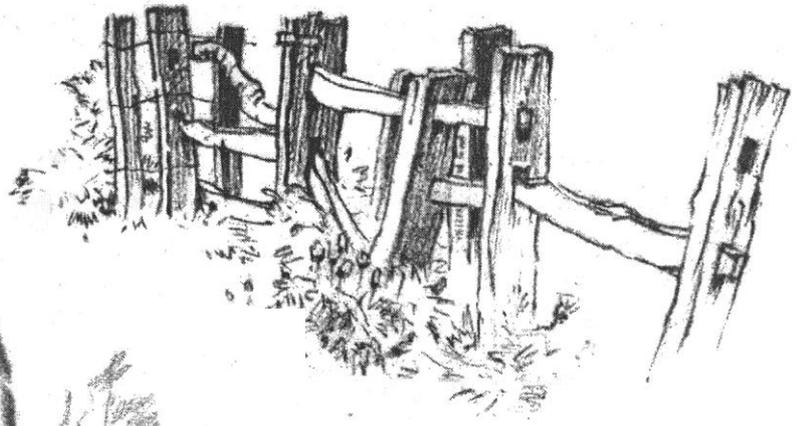
in the army and I only hope that somebody is able to be kind to him". I wonder if that young man came home after the war?

We found the Land Army offices, made our complaint and asked for our transfer. They said they would be in touch. We walked over to the cathedral, had a look around then went back to the farm.

The next few days were difficult ones and they seemed to go on forever. However, New Year's Eve was one of them and we spent the evening with Mr. and Mrs. Tucker, so that was very nice. January 4th was my mother's birthday which sent my thoughts winging homeward, adding to the very strong feelings of home sickness which Winifred and I had been feeling for most of the time we had been there. The sixth of January was a Saturday and on this day we received a letter from the Land Army Office with our transfer papers and travel warrant. We were not to be transferred to the same place and I don't remember the transfer details for Winifred, but I was to go to a farm outside Liskeard, still in Cornwall. Sunday we packed our cases and went to say good-bye to Mr. and Mrs. Tucker.

Monday we were on our way. We parted at the railway station (I think); perhaps we each said we would write, but I don't remember that we did. There is certainly no mention of any letters between us in the scrappy diary I was keeping at that time. I do regret that I wasn't the sort of person to write a proper journal because now I would get a lot of fun reading through all the details. Mrs. X and I were rowing right up to three days before my departure according to this diary. She was inclined to hold forth about the virtues of her "wonderful son" and this we had listened to on and off ever since we arrived there, both of us holding our tongue as to what we thought of him. But about two weeks before our departure I let rip. I told her what I thought of him and his filthy mouth. I said he was not fit to mix with nice people with a mouth like his. Winifred and I noticed a marked improvement for the remainder of our stay. His mother must have had a word with him, but I doubt if the improvement lasted for long.





Chapter Four

A Farm near Duloe

My second billet was a very different set-up to the first. It was situated in a little place called Duloe, six miles outside Liskeard, and the Land Army authorities supplied me with a bike for transport. Mr. Y met me at the railway station with a horse and cart and I rode out to his place sitting beside him on the wide board seat provided for the driver.

Mr. and Mrs. Y appeared to live alone. They were very old. Bear in mind I was only nineteen and anybody over twenty five was over the hill to me, but even I could see that they were old, if not in years then certainly in looks. I could tell that they were older than my mother and father who at this time were around fifty. Looking back I would gauge Mr. Y to be in his middle sixties and Mrs. Y even older, but she was a poorly lady. When I was shown into the house by the back door I was horrified, everywhere was so drab and dirty. The floors were black stone, or possibly slate. My spirits dropped. Oh, no! What have I come to?

As we entered Mr. Y spoke to his wife and told her to get a meal ready. He himself stoked the fire and added more fuel. He then disappeared through the door into the front part of the house with my suitcase and kitbag. I heard him go up the stairs and he soon returned with his arms full of a feather mattress. He put this on the floor by the fire saying "This must stay here to air properly before you go to bed". Thereafter he turned it and shook it time after time after time until it was time to go to bed. He also placed fresh sheets to air by the fire. Mrs. Y made no attempt to have anything to do with this. After we had eaten she and her husband cleared away the dishes out of this room which was the farm kitchen into the next room towards the back door which was the scullery otherwise known as the dairy. The title 'dairy' must have been given in the days when the farm was being fully run. Now, to my eyes, it looked more like a dump.

At about nine o'clock Mr. Y took the mattress up to my room and I followed with the sheets. I had already unpacked my things so was in bed by about 9.30pm. I can still remember lying in a feather mattress. I say lying *in* it because that's exactly what it felt like. My own bed at home was comfortable and that was a loose flock which had to be shaken up in the same way, but this feather mattress was much more comfortable and so lovely and warm it made it difficult to get out of bed in the morning. I've slept on many mattresses since that one and they have all been much of a sameness, but as anybody who has ever slept on a feather mattress will tell you, there's nothing quite like it.

The following morning I was introduced to the stock. There were two beautiful working horses, one dark brown and one a ginger-brown with black mane and tail. He was called Major. There were about a dozen cows all of which had a name, plus heifers, bullocks, sheep and two sheepdogs. For the uninitiated, a heifer is a cow which has had no more than one calf, and a bullock is a castrated bull calf being fattened up for the meat trade. One of the cows was called Bluebell because of the mixture of colours in her coat.

Mr. Y said one day "Bluebell is very fond of apples. If you would like you can give her one every day". I, of course, wanted to start right away and in answer to my enquiry I was told I would find some in the apple loft at the top of the house. It wasn't a loft as such, I didn't have to climb through a hole in a second storey ceiling like I would have at home. It was an attic room under the rafters approached by a second flight of stairs. I turned the door knob and entered the room. I couldn't believe my senses for the smell which filled my nostrils was out of this world. Anybody who has had the pleasure of going into an old apple loft, one which has been in use for decades, will know what I mean. The smell defies description. It's not just a smell of apples, I think it might have something to do with timber being steeped in apple juice. Anyhow, whatever the reason for it, it became my foremost pleasure. I would go up there every day for Bluebell's apple and sometimes I would have one too. There were still quite a few spread over the floor, but they were mostly slightly withered. After all, they were last year's crop, but they had a lovely flavour and were still nice to eat, and anyway Bluebell liked them. I always lingered awhile when I was in there. I never went straight in and straight out again. I wonder if Mr. Y ever wondered what I was up to? This was one of the first of several magic moments I was to experience on this farm.

I think Bluebell was Mr. Y's favourite cow. She had a lovely nature and became my favourite, too. But that didn't stop him from eventually sending her to be slaughtered of course! The day Bluebell was sent to market was a very sad time for me and my first experience of the killing side of farming, but in the meantime Bluebell would get an apple every day.

Not a lot of farm work could be done for the time being because there was too much snow about. I had never seen snow like this before. Oh, yes! Plenty of snow had fallen in Manchester during my young lifetime, but within hours it would turn to slush or just become dirty and hard packed by the trample of many feet. That which lay on the roofs would soon slide off due to the heat rising through the house below. Any which lay within easy reach would soon be scooped up by hundreds of small hands for the game of snowballs and within hours the

whole place would become a mess. The pleasure of freshly fallen snow still remains with me in spite of the dangers it holds for people of my age, but the snow on the farm was something else entirely. The only dirty place was the farm yard. There was so little traffic even the lanes remained looking fresh. The main roads, however, were made passable by the Council, but from where I spent most of my time, to look out across the countryside so white and clean with each branch of every tree with its own covering of snow, it seemed like fairyland. When I walked down the lane from the farm I remember feeling dwarfed by the height of the snow either side of me. It was towering above my head like a tunnel without a roof. I didn't realise that underneath the high banks of snow there lay the hedgerows. This only dawned on me later when they were revealed by the melting snow, but for the time being I walked in Fairyland. I doubt if I, with my limited vocabulary, will convey to the reader my true feelings of that time or indeed my true feelings of this moment as it all floods back over me. The pleasure, the excitement, the wonder of the beautiful countryside covered with virgin snow. This, too, was a magic moment.

In the meantime the animals had to be fed, their pens cleaned and fresh straw bedding brought in. These animals would be out in the fields later on, but for the time being they were either under cover or else in fields close to home. The cows in the shippens and the horses in the stables were easy, but carrying food to the sheep in the nearby field was a little more difficult. However, it soon was done with the experience of Mr. Y, after all, he had been doing it all his life. It was me who thought it was a big job! I enjoyed tending the horses and the cows. I loved the smell of the shippen and the stable, they each had their own distinct smell. The buildings felt warm as I stepped in out of the cold and the animals seemed to be content to be there even though they were tethered 24 hours a day. Perhaps they realised it was better than being out in the cold. I was taught how to groom the horses in safety and how to keep from being hurt by their enormous feet. This was what I was born for. I loved horses. I loved all animals, but horses were special. My girlish dreams didn't include men (unless you include the most handsome film stars of that era), just horses and the lifestyle to go with them. I used to feel that the stork had dropped me down the wrong chimney. What I needed to fulfil my dreams was a rich daddy, one who could have given me the right lifestyle so that all I had to do all day was ride my horse, feed him and groom him, but for the time being Major would have to do. He was my favourite. Perhaps it was his colouring that gave him the edge over the other one, whose name I can't remember. Major was the gingery brown one with the black mane. They were both given an apple each day along with Bluebell.

It was on this farm that I learned to milk a cow (I wonder if I still could) and that's something that isn't as easy as it looks. I was amazed how quickly Mr. Y went through the herd, small though it was. No newfangled gimmicky milking

machines for him! Perhaps he didn't have the money, or perhaps it was too late to change his ways. This was an old-fashioned farm. No milking machines (all farms didn't have them at that time anyway), no tractors and no electric light only oil lamps and candles. All soon to be swept away in the tide of progress. As I remember these things it's like casting my mind back to some former life on another planet!

Back to the warm odour of the cow shed. Mr. Y gave me a three-legged milking stool, showed me how to use it without falling off, placed my hands on the cow in the correct way then said "Pull and squeeze at the same time." Nothing! "Try again!"Nothing. "And again." Nothing. There was obviously more to this than meets the eye. "Keep trying. I'll leave you to it." And with that he got on with the job of milking.

I don't know how long I sat there pulling and squeezing, but I do know I was beginning to despair when suddenly there was a stream of milk which hit the bucket I was holding between my knees with a loud P-I-N-G. "That's a good girl, it will come now." And he was right. Not every pull and squeeze produced a stream of milk - not by a long way - in fact when Mr. Y had finished milking the rest of the herd, in no time at all, he finished the cow I had been trying to milk, turning the cupful into nearly half a bucketful. Perhaps I looked a bit crestfallen because he said "Never mind. It'll come now that you've got the hang of it". He was right of course, each time it became easier and soon I was milking more than one cow, but no matter how long I stayed I don't suppose I would ever have caught up with him.

One day soon after my first lesson I was to be taught another lesson, but not by Mr. Y. Cows' tails are long, and about one third of the way up from the end they grow long hairs which grow down beyond the length of the tail itself. Cows also swirl their tails a lot. This is a lethal combination for it turns their tails into something akin to the dreaded whip once known as the cat o'nine tails or 'the cat'. To make things worse they get beads of mud or dung adhering to the long hairs which in time sets hard, as hard as little stones. This is more of a problem in winter than summer because in the better weather they are in the fields all the time and the weather keeps their coats and their tails cleaner. But this wasn't the summer time, was it, and their tails were well laden. I was sitting on my little three legged stool with my head pressed against the side of the cow, pulling and squeezing, when Mr. Y spoke to me. I lifted my face as I replied and turned towards the cow's rump end. Suddenly she decided to give her tail one almighty swish, the full force of which I caught right across my face. I had no time to think about being brave, the scream came before I could stop it and I think I scared the living daylights out of Mr. Y. He took me outside where the light was better so that he could assess the damage for he must have seen quite a few farm accidents

in his time. This one, however, was nothing to worry about and the beads on the end of the tail had missed my eyes, so once I was over the shock and the sting had disappeared there was nothing left but experience. He did, however, show me how to tie the tail to the cow's leg before starting to milk and this was the order of the day from now on. "And while we're about it," he said "never milk old Daisy there without tying her back legs together. Most of the cows put their foot in the bucket from time to time, but old Daisy there, she's a devil. It takes *me* all my time sometimes. Better still, don't even try to milk her. Leave her for me." Two important lessons in one day. What's more, I was beginning to learn what a nice boss I had.

There were days when there was very little to do while we were waiting for the snow to melt. This time of the year we should have been mending fences, cleaning ditches, maintaining hedges. One day Mr. Y asked me to do some cleaning in the house, but in doing so he broke the rules. House cleaning was something we were not allowed to do, the rule being there to stop farmers and their wives applying for a Land Army girl and then using her as a domestic servant. Anyway, I'd had enough of skivvying in the NAAFI. However, I liked Mr. Y. He was a nice man, a good boss and God knows the place could do with a good clean. After all, I had to live there too. So I made no objection, I just did it. It was mainly the kitchen and the scullery. These were the only rooms in use, the parlour door always being closed. In the evenings we sat in the kitchen and what a comfortless place it was. That didn't matter too much to me at my age, but they most certainly deserved some comfort at their age. I spent the afternoon scrubbing and cleaning and finished off by scrubbing those horrible black floor stones. As I worked across the floor Mrs. Y opened the back door and let the dogs in. They bounced all over the floor with great excitement paddling their dirty feet, straight out of the muddy farm yard all over my freshly scrubbed floor. I yelled out "Oh, no!" but all Mrs. Y did was giggle and laugh. Just then Mr. Y came in, saw what was happening and bellowed at her, "Get those damn dogs out of here". She stopped laughing at once and did as she was told. I had never seen him angry or heard him shout, but it wasn't to be the last time.

I hadn't been there more than a few days and I was clearing the table after a meal, which again I should not have been doing, but I fell easily into the habit, when I saw Mrs. Y go to the window, lift the curtain and with a smile on her face beckon to somebody. I thought we must be having visitors so I went to the window to see who it was. I lifted the curtain, but could see nothing but two cows in an otherwise empty field. I didn't like that, it bothered me. It bothered me even more as time went on because it turned out to be a daily performance. Looking back now I see that poor lady had all the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease and that poor man was bearing the stress of caring for her. I *now* know what that kind of stress is like and I don't think for a minute that I was any help at all!

It was lonely on that farm with only Mr. Y for company, a man old enough to be my grandfather. I couldn't go anywhere after work. There was nowhere to go, and it was too dark to wander the countryside. All I did in the evening was to sit in that kitchen on a hard seat in the glow of the fire and the oil lamp and write letters or knit. There was the radio, of course, but there was very little conversation. Mrs. Y hardly spoke and when she did it was very quietly. There were no family photos to be seen so I assumed they had no offspring, but I never knew because I didn't like to ask. I didn't like to ask because it seemed like prying and they were very private people. Then Terry came into my life and things began to improve.

Mr. Y did tell me he had someone coming twice a week to help out and then suddenly one morning there he was. He was tall, but not very tall. Fair, with blue eyes and of course he had a good physique and healthy complexion. What farmer doesn't? And, as I was to find out later, he was well mannered, kind, gentle and protective of me. He was to become like a big brother. Well, perhaps just a little bit more. The son of a neighbouring farmer, and what a contrast to the last one, he was exempt from the army because he was a farmer, but his father was not allowed to keep him all to himself. He had to share him with two other farmers, hence his two days with Mr. Y. We had lots of laughs together he and I. Of course he teased me a lot and took the mickey, but it was all good clean fun.

The first thing he did was to cover me in milk while we were milking. Suddenly I became aware I was being sprayed with something. Terry was milking the cow next to mine and he just redirected the end of the teat and successfully gave me a ducking. I tried to return his fire, but it didn't work for me. It took me all my time to draw milk at all at that stage let alone use the teat as a gun!

There was much jollity and laughter in the cow shed that morning. It had seemed a long time since I'd laughed like that. Winifred and I didn't have much to laugh about at X's place and since I arrived here there had been nothing to laugh about either. But from then on there was lots of noise and banter between us on those two days each week.

After a week or two we started to walk out together in the evening. It was dark of course, no street lights out there, but because of the snow-covered ground we could see where we were going and Terry probably knew the ground around there anyway. And of course some evenings there was a moon. Gosh! It felt good to socialise. I had felt tied down ever since I left home.

One Saturday I took the bike and cycled into town. The local people referred to it as "town", but to me it was nothing more than an extended village. I saw nothing of it the day I arrived because the railway station was at the far end of the high street

and to go to Duloe we didn't go through Liskeard but out at the same end. So after hearing Liskeard referred to as "town" I expected it to be much bigger. There was a market held there, a proper market with cattle sales and the like. Terry and I went to the pictures a few times so I think that must have been in Liskeard, but my memory refuses to cooperate on that subject. There was more than one pub, but I couldn't say how many. I only remember one of them and I am vaguely aware of a second but that's it. Pubs were never my thing. There was some sort of hall where dances were held and this I put to occasional use later on in the year. I don't remember about the shops. Probably I didn't have cause to use them. Any new clothes I required I would buy from Manchester when I went on leave. I don't think I stayed in town very long on my first visit. Having no friends there, there would be nothing to keep me there.

Mrs. Y's dementia was in daily evidence and, judging from my diary, I was finding it very difficult to accept. The diary says very little except "Mrs. Y is driving me mad". If Mr. Y had taken me to one side and explained things to me I wonder whether that would have helped me to accept it. Perhaps talked about what she was like *before* this happened to her, showed photographs of how she used to look when she was young and good looking. She was tiny in build, softly spoken and gentle of nature, so she must have been rather a lovely person once. This business of lifting the curtain and beckoning to someone only she could see went on several times a day. I remember one time which makes me feel very ashamed. When Mr. Y saw the way things were going between Terry and myself, or more correctly, the way he *thought* they were going he began to play the father role. Bless him! One day he suggested I ask Terry round to tea the following Sunday. This I did and Terry accepted. In preparation for this big day the parlour was opened up. This was the first I had seen of it and, as to be expected, it was a Victorian parlour. I wonder if that door actually had a lock on it? After all they weren't to know what sort of person I would turn out to be. It never occurred to me to investigate. I took dusters and polish and did a little "tickling up", Mr. Y lit a fire in the grate and the room came to life. The table in the kitchen was prepared with food all with the help of Mr. Y. As I remember, *all* the food was prepared or cooked with his help. In fact breakfast every morning was cooked by him completely and was more or less ready by the time I arrived downstairs. We always had a cooked breakfast and there was no shortage of food in the house. All the meals were plentiful, but then that probably went for the whole farming community. The cooking was done on an old-fashioned open chimney fireplace where the fire burned on the hearth and chains and things hung down from inside the chimney, like the sort of kitchen fireplace preserved for posterity in baronial halls these days.

Terry arrived on time. He came shyly in the back door and we both sat on the very old settle which was almost inside the big open chimney. This was where

Mr. and Mrs. Y sat in the evenings, he reading his paper, she playing with her fingers most of the time. Eventually we were called to the table and we got "stuck in". Things went very smoothly. Terry's table manners were good and I had no cause for criticism. Mr. Y was a good host and made sure Terry was not too shy to eat as much as he wanted. Then suddenly Mrs. Y left her chair, went over to the window and lifted the curtain and beckoned to whoever she thought she could see. I began to feel embarrassed and instinctively looked at Terry. I don't know whether I felt horrified at what I saw or not. If I didn't I should have done and I certainly *have* felt horrified many times since. His face was crumpling into what looked like being uncontrollable laughter. My face must have undergone many changes in the next few seconds, but I am ashamed to say I ended up like Terry. How I got through the rest of that meal I'll never know. It was difficult not to meet his eyes every now and again and when that happened we were off again. I thought at the time that we controlled ourselves well because we didn't actually break into open laughter, but Mr. Y *must* have noticed. He was not a fool. Can you imagine how he must have felt? The most annoying part is that I never found it to be even remotely funny before or after that afternoon, but Terry's reaction was obviously infectious and it was very easy to make me laugh in those days. Now when I think of Mrs. Y all I want to do is cry. And that goes for the way I finally treated Mr. Y too. I didn't notice any change in his attitude towards me so it seemed he didn't bear me any malice and things went on as before.

Towards the end of January I received an invitation to stay for the weekend in Plymouth, which was something to look forward to. The invitation came from Edith and Phil, Edith being the sister to my Auntie Hilda (who was really my aunt-in-law and no blood relative), and Phil was her absolutely gorgeous husband. I had never met Phil, but I knew all about him because he was the jewel in the family crown. Of all those gorgeous men who looked at us from the silver screen in those days, not one could hold a candle to Phil. What's more, he was as charming and wholesome as he was good looking. He must have had *some* faults (after all he was a man), but I never heard about them. The whole family thought he was wonderful and I think all the women in the family were probably in love with him. I may add that his wife was quite a jewel, too. They made a handsome couple.

I also received another letter from Plymouth about the same time from one of my 'ships that pass in the night' boyfriends telling me that he was in the Royal Navy Hospital. Nick was in the Royal Marines, but was not in hospital due to battle wounds. It was something natural - like his appendix - that took him there. I had met Nick at a dance when I was home on sick leave from the NAAFI due to a septic finger. We did correspond for some months, but then lost touch. I do still have his photograph, but I do not seem to have kept any of his letters. It seemed like a good idea to kill two birds with one stone, to visit Nick and then go

on to Edith and Phil's place. Hospital visiting during the war must have been difficult. What on earth could you take as a gift? Everything was on ration or 'under the counter', which meant you had to be known *and* in somebody's good books. With me, there was only one thing I could take - fresh eggs. All eggs were supposed to be sent through the Egg Marketing Board for distribution and rationing, but whoever heard of the producers of such things being unable to redirect a few extra for their own use. So off I went with six freshly laid eggs clutched in my hot little hand! I think I must have taken some for Edith and Phil too.

Nick was pleased to see me and very, very surprised to think his letter had sent me, post haste, all the way to Plymouth. I soon shattered any illusions he may have had by telling him that he was only one of two reasons why I was in Plymouth. Never mind, he did get half a dozen new laid eggs out of it and in those days they were quite a valuable commodity.

Edith and Phil's home was beautiful. I have no recollection of the outside at all - whether it was detached, semi-detached or terraced - only the inside. I had well-to-do relatives of my own who had lovely homes, but none of them had anything like this. This was like walking into a film set. I had not seen anything like it before and, of course, they had wall to wall carpeting which in those days was rare. I was most impressed.

Edith was getting a meal ready in the kitchen and I was stood talking to her when we heard Phil's key in the door. "That's Phil. Come on". She led the way out of the kitchen towards the front of the house into the hall and there he stood in all his glory. I know I had been told how handsome he was, but believe me, I was not prepared for this. I could never have imagined a face like his plus a hunky physique all dressed up in the uniform of a captain in the Royal Navy. He literally took my breath away and, what's more, it probably showed. I know he caused a sensation wherever he went because on one occasion he and I went out together. I don't remember the reason for this, but Edith remained at home. We were not out for long, but we did walk through a few streets and pass quite a lot of people. During this short time I became very aware indeed of the attention he received and of the envious glances thrown in my direction.

I wonder how he coped with it. I wonder if he was even aware of it. He certainly didn't appear to be. This was the one and only time I ever saw Phil, but he survived the war all right and eventually finished his career in the Admiralty. I did, however, see Edith once or twice when she came up to Manchester to see her sisters. There were three of them, but Edith was the beauty of the family. Phil and Edith had a son later on. I saw a photo of him at a recent family gathering. The lucky lad looked a lot like his father, but the photo wasn't good enough to be able to say whether or not he too was a 'gatherer of female hearts'. Incidentally, during that family gathering I

was also looking at photographs of Phil and came to the conclusion that he was every bit as handsome as that very young, naive girl thought he was all those years ago!

Now, all too soon, the weekend was over and I had to go back to that dreary house - which would look even worse as it was in stark contrast to the one I was about to leave.

Coming back to Mr. Y's place was something I wished I didn't have to do. My mother and father's home was no palace, but it was a bright, cheerful and happy family home and soon I would be back there for a couple of weeks. Mr. Y had suggested that, if I wished to, I should get in some leave before the spring chores started and next month would be a good time to do it. In the meantime, the routine carried on as before. Terry and I still went walking together only now we went cycling too and that was something I did quite well.

I think Mr. Y may have been thinking I was a bit of a hussy because when I told him I was going to the hospital to see Nick he said to me quite sharply, "What about Terry?" I replied just as sharply, "Well! What about Terry?" He shut up and said no more and neither did I. But it did tell me how he saw the friendship between Terry and I.

One evening Terry asked if I would like to meet his grandmother. He said he really ought to visit her and it could be now if I wanted to go as well. So I agreed, if he was sure she wouldn't mind. It was a beautiful moonlit evening and the roads were clear although there was still plenty of snow about. As we walked, Terry slid his arm around my waist. This was his first move in that direction and I was quite happy to leave it there. He asked me about my weekend and I told him about it and about Nick and how I had met him, that he was coming along OK and would soon be out of hospital. I told him about Phil and Edith and my time with them and about their beautiful home, but not about the fluttering condition of my heart. I had enough sense to keep quiet about that.

Soon we approached some cottages on the left side of the road which, I think, may have been the beginning of a village. Duloe, perhaps, which was part of Mr. Y's postal address. Terry just simply turned the door knob and walked in - imagine doing that these days (1994) - and we entered a lovely, cosy, well furnished, well kept, oil-lit Victorian type home. And Grandmother was a Victorian type grandmother. He kissed her and after the pleasantries he disappeared into the kitchen and came back with tea and biscuits while Grandmother asked me how I liked living in the country and working on the land. We stayed about an hour then walked back.

I don't know whether this was meant to be my first introduction into the family or not, but if Terry did have any ideas of that kind I certainly could have

done a lot worse. However, it would have been too early in my life, about ten years too early, as at that time marriage was not one of the things I wanted.

Since the day of the Sunday tea party Terry and I were allowed to use the parlour instead of always going out, which was nice because it was much more comfortable than the kitchen and much warmer than outdoors. We were now into February and soon it should be a bit warmer, especially so far south. In the meantime, I was getting excited over the prospect of leave and I had received a letter from my father enclosing the money for my rail fare. Did we not get a travel warrant to go on leave, or did we perhaps only get so many a year? I don't remember. I do know that the actual pay in my hand was very low so I probably wouldn't have enough money for the rail fare *and* a jolly time once I got back home. Sunday arrived, Terry took me and my case to the railway station, got my ticket and saw me off, but not before he gave me an orange and a bar of chocolate for the journey. It *must* have been love! Oranges were almost impossible to find and I hadn't seen one for goodness knows how long, and chocolate was rationed and scarce, too. It was a long journey home, but I wouldn't go hungry as I also had an enormous packet of sandwiches.

I don't remember what time my train left, but it usually included night time travel when I travelled between Manchester and Cornwall and this was no exception. I arrived at Manchester some time after midnight and was relieved to find a reception committee waiting for me. My father, my elder brother Albert and my younger brother Bill. We walked the two miles from the railway station through the blacked out streets of Manchester, those that were still standing. Many bombs had fallen here too. I never stopped talking all the way and my father and brothers took it in turn to carry my case while I took charge of a small bag containing some butter and some eggs. The butter was 'farm butter' as against the butter which you'd buy in the shops and it turned out that nobody liked it. Nevertheless, I'm quite sure it didn't go to waste!

Home at last, father put his key in the door and I went down the lobby into the living room and - *there was my Mum!*

Let me tell you something about my Mum. We were very close, she and I. As I grew up I began to feel I would like to buy her all the things she had to go without through most of her married life, due to the lack of money. I never remembered her looking anything but shabbily dressed and she always wore well laundered overall pinnies to disguise this fact. She would say to me "Always wear nice clean pinnies then nobody need know whether your clothes are worn or stitched beneath them"

When she had a few pennies to spare, after the house-keeping had been taken care of, she would pay them off towards some article of clothing which she had laid-by at a local corner shop which was in the business of selling children's clothes. She always managed to keep my brothers looking reasonably respectable although I must say that my younger brother managed, at least some of the time, to make himself look somewhat scruffy. But I think it may have had something to do with the style of boys' clothes in those days. At least on Sundays they looked smart because we always kept our newest clothes as 'Sunday best' in those days, and we were always warned "Don't get those clothes dirty."

That was the boys, but it was a different matter for me. She didn't just buy me cotton dresses which would look crisp and clean when well laundered and be a great deal cheaper, she bought me beautiful dresses. I felt I was the best dressed kid in the neighbourhood.

There was a lot of sateen worn in those days. It was sometimes referred to as 'artificial silk' and perhaps it was intended to be 'poor man's silk'. Some of it was just plain one-colour fabric with one dull side and one shiny side and made up to wear shiny side out. Sometimes it had a woven design known as brocade and sometimes this design was woven with different colours and sometimes not.

At one time Mum went through a phase of buying frilly dresses for me, no doubt they were fashionable at the time. Whatever the reason, she made a heck of a lot of work for herself. I remember having four of these on the go at one time. Not all bought at once, of course, but they did overlap each other in the time I was wearing them. I can see her now, standing at the kitchen table ironing them with the old-fashioned flat iron which had to be heated on the open coal fire or the gas stove and then cleaned of soot before using. These dresses had frills all round the skirt from the waist down to the hem. Each dress had a frill of a different depth which meant that some would be easier to iron than others. But one was a very delicate pink and had very narrow frills of about 1 1/2" to 2" in depth. There were frills also on the bodice and even on the little puff sleeves. There were no ironing boards in those days to make the task easier, well not in our house. Nor were there any drip-dry fabrics which needed little or no ironing. Mum took each frill, one by one, and ironed it separately. Round and round and round she went. It must have taken hours to do and no doubt the dress was worn for only one day and then it had to be done all over again.

She must have got a great kick out of seeing her little girl dressed like a princess. I think that it was at her own expense though, because I can remember seeing great holes in the soles of her shoes and she cut pieces of cardboard to place inside to keep her feet off the pavement. If she had bought cheaper dresses

for me she would probably have been able to afford a pair of shoes for herself. There are some things that can never be forgotten!

I have also never forgotten the way in which she chose to introduce me to my new clothes.

My mother never had any job other than wife and mother. Consequently, she was almost always at home when we arrived home from school. On the rare occasion when she wasn't, it was only because she had stepped out to the corner shop to buy some sugar, or some such item. If she seemed not to be home, I would go around the house looking for her, always ending the search in the bedrooms. She knew this, of course, so when she had some new clothes for me she would lay them out on her bed while she herself would hide under the bed. But she always placed herself in such a position so as to be able to see my face through the wardrobe mirror - I learned this from her many years later. I don't think she would be disappointed at what she saw. I can still remember the thrill and excited pleasure I experienced at such times, so it must have shown on my face. On one occasion there were three dresses laid out. All frilly, all sateen -one pale green, one deep, rich green and one red.

She probably got much more fun from dressing me up than she ever would from dressing herself. I was nearly sixteen years old before I saw my mother dressed in lovely clothes and I was amazed at the transformation. When we walked out together I noticed that she was attracting a great deal of attention from the men who were passing in the street. I had never thought about her that way before. By this time the Germans had started the bombing of Manchester which brought my father work as a joiner and property repairer and therefore money. They do say 'It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good'!

I had been very homesick, but until the moment I walked through the living room door and saw my Mum standing there, I don't think I had realised just how much. In my thoughts of home she had always been at the hub of things, so to speak, and I loved her very much.

As the years went by my love for her deepened, but to my shame I never actually told her so. One day, when she was standing by the kitchen sink, just a little time before she died I came up behind her and as I approached I suddenly felt an almost uncontrollable desire to put my arms round her, kiss her and say "Mum, I love you!", but I controlled that desire. Why I will never know. I think I was afraid of looking daft. I only know I have never forgiven myself for allowing that moment to pass. Probably most people have moments they wish they could re-live. With me, this one is top of the list.

In my own defence, however, I must say that we were never a demonstrative family, but there was a lot of deep, caring love without all the kissing and cuddling which went on in many families of my acquaintance. We three, my brothers and I, even as quite small children would always shy away whenever possible from being kissed especially when visiting aunts tried to do it.

My younger brother was the worst. Before they could bear down on him he would scuttle away on his hands and knees and sit under the table until they had gone. Or, if he was caught, he would struggle like fury to be free and then wipe away the kisses vigorously. I wasn't as bad as that, I suffered it if I couldn't avoid it, but I didn't like it. To me, my aunts didn't smell right - all paint and powder and pongy perfumes.

According to my diary, my journey home was a good one, and what followed was an eternal round of dancing, swimming, horse riding, and cinemas. Even the Opera House - and one party! The first day I seem to have spent at home and the second was spent with my elder brother Albert who took me to the pictures. I also had a portrait picture taken of myself in uniform, which was the thing to do. I still have it. I didn't have one taken of myself in the NAAFI uniform even though the uniform was smart, which tells you something about the fact that I didn't like being in the NAAFI. The third day I went dancing with a friend who lived in the same street and here I collected another passing 'ship' to add to my fleet. His name was Gwyn Jones, a Welshman in case you didn't guess, and another RAF boy. I don't know for sure whether he was being trained as aircrew I only know that before my leave was over I saw him off on his embarkation leave. This meant that on his return from leave he would be sent abroad to goodness knows where, but he wouldn't know where until he got there. However, three months later I received a letter from Prince Edward Island, Canada. I think some of our flyers were being trained in Canada so possibly he was one of them. I only have one letter of his so maybe he didn't write again, in spite of asking me to go home with him to meet his mother. I would most certainly have replied to his first letter because it was an unwritten rule that one must always reply to a letter written to you by somebody in the armed forces. Yes! He *was* training to be a flyer. I have just read his letter and the party I went to with him was apparently held at the Odeon cinema, Oxford Street, Manchester. Maybe it was some sort of a service men's night or something. According to the letter I was with three other men that night as well as Gwyn. There was someone called Ken, another called Alan and a third called Woppy all of whom sent me their love.

They were still all together training to fly at the same place. What's more, that letter is something of a love letter (perhaps I should read all my 46 year old letters) and maybe that is why it is the only letter I have from him. Perhaps I wrote

and said "No. I don't want to get serious". That would sound like me at that age. However, I did see him on eight days out of my eleven days leave, so I must have liked him quite a lot.

Two days after seeing Gwyn off on his embarkation leave I was on my way back to Mr. and Mrs. Y. Mother cried on my departure as usual and it was a lousy journey back.

On my return I found that most of the snow had disappeared and one day while I was taking feed across the field to the sheep there came to me another very magic moment. In the hedge there still remained a little snow some of which appeared to be mixed with yellow. Always the curious one, I walked over to look. "Oh, how beautiful!" There were clusters of primroses all over the hedge half hidden by the snow. I know I must have gasped for I can still feel the feeling I had at that moment. I felt as though I... had discovered them, and so I had in a way, for I had never seen a sight like this before. As the days passed and the snows melted the hedges became more and more yellow until one day it was as if they were covered almost completely with a yellow blanket. This was the moment the primrose became my favourite flower. Nobody else saw this magic. It had come and gone as regular as clockwork every year of their lives ever since the day each of them was born and nobody saw it but me. To everyone else around they were just weeds!

The work calendar had moved on while I was away and things looked more alive around the farmyard. Now the sheep could be moved to fields a little further away from the farm and Mr. Y and I did this one day when Terry wasn't with us. This was to be the first time I would see the sheepdogs in action. Mr. Y was the only farmer I met who treated his dogs with real kindness and up to this point they had been more like pet dogs than sheepdogs. No other farmer of my acquaintance *ever* allowed their dogs into the house.

Off we went to shift these sheep, Mr. Y, his two sheepdogs and me. What I didn't realise at the time, but was soon to find out, was that I was the third sheepdog! I think his dogs were mother and off-spring, one was getting a bit old and the other was very young and had a lot to learn, and that's where I came in. The only difference being that he didn't direct me by whistles! I wouldn't have understood them, would I? None of this mattered at all for I was very young, strong, active and willing enough. Mr. Y positioned us where he wanted us, the two dogs and I and suddenly we were off. The ground was very soft and wet, the melting snow having seen to that, and the more I ran the heavier my feet became. Goodness knows how much the mud on my boots weighed before I was through, but they certainly felt very heavy to me. We drove the sheep down towards the

gate where Mr. Y was waiting and he made sure they went through it. We had to follow, the dogs and I, because there was another field to negotiate.

Now the very worst place underfoot on any farm is around a gate because cattle congregate there most of the year, and they wear away the grass. All that is left is bare soil, the grass never having the chance to grow back again. In the wet season this soil becomes deep, very wet mud and this can be very slippery. This was the wet season! The sheep ran through the gate, the dogs ran through the gate, then I ran through the gate. Well, almost, only I slipped and fell didn't I, face side down. Talk about a mud pack! Fortunately I was wearing my Land Army issue oilskin coat and sou'wester because it was raining so much of my clothing escaped the mud, except for the legs of my dungarees, but the mud did find its way down my gum-boots and up my sleeves. As if I wasn't carrying enough weight! We plodded on and finished the job then I was sent indoors to wash and change, by which time it was time to do the milking. The days were still very short and "time for milking" was almost the last job of the day. Mr. Y was quite concerned over what had happened and asked several times "Are you all right?". And of course I was. Hadn't I had a nice soft landing?

Things went on inside the house much as they had before my leave, except that I now spent less time working inside the house and more outside, but this did not improve the living conditions. One day, a Thursday or a Friday because those were Terry's days with us, Mr. Y asked us to do some muck spreading, and there was no muck spreading machine on this farm. First the muck had to be pitchforked from the pile of muck in the farm yard into the cart, which would then be pulled by the horse into the field. Let me explain what exactly muck is, just in case anybody is in doubt.

During the winter a lot of muck, poshly known as manure, is provided by the cattle and horses which, in that season, spend all day and every day penned up in stables and cow sheds, or shippens. All their droppings fall onto the floor which is covered with straw. A milking house is cleaned out, scrubbed and swilled every day and the contents piled in the farm yard, but this is not so for the bull or young heifers which are penned up separately in smaller houses. At regular intervals they would be given fresh straw bedding and it, in its turn, would collect all the droppings and become well packed down with the eternal trampling of hooves. These houses would not be regularly cleaned out and, in fact, they would be left until the animals were turned out in the Spring. Consequently, this became very hard packed and I have known it to become as high as two or more feet off the ground. What's more, when it was finally cleaned out it was, for me anyway, very heavy work. But it was all 'good stuff'. It was this which was now being pitch forked into the cart and taken by the horse into the fields.

I had never done this before of course, so Terry showed me how to go about it. He dropped it off the cart in big dollops and I picked it up with a pitchfork and shook it all over the field. What fun! I'll say one thing, it gave me a good appetite! After a while he asked if I would like to change places, he picking up and shaking and I dropping the dollops. "Yes, OK" says I and climbed up onto the cart.

Now when Terry was on top of the pile on the cart he would drop a dollop to the left of the cart and another to the right, after which he would say something indecipherable to the horse - this sounded like a foreign language to me - and the horse would move on until Terry said something else, at which point it would stop. This of course didn't work for me because I couldn't speak the language and sometimes real deep Cornish *can* sound like a foreign language. So, after my first command to the horse resulted in my being completely ignored, Terry suggested that he should do that part for me. All went well for a time and then came the hiccough.

To stand on the top of a pile of dung on a moving cart, being pulled by a horse over rough ground, requires that your balance should be at least well synchronised with the command given to the horse and on this occasion it was several seconds out. Down I went, wailing as I fell backside first into the dung. Yuck! The stuff was soaking wet and I could feel it soaking through my clothes onto my skin. I sat there for what was probably only seconds, but seemed like ages, before I tried to get up and since the horse was still moving this was no easy thing to do without getting more of me soaked in these 'sweet smelling' juices. It was like one of those very slow motion scenes in a television drama. Terry seemed to stand there motionless for ages just staring with his mouth half open. When he did move he moved fast towards the cart, but by this time I was beginning to get up. He could, no doubt, see that I was all right and the concerned look on his face quickly turned to laughter. I thought he would never stop. In the end we were both doubled up with laughter, both standing on top of the muck where he had climbed to help me get to my feet. We chuckled for quite a long time over that. Come to think of it, he was quite a giggler.

This was before the days of washing machines so I couldn't just sling my clothes in and have them come out at the end of the cycle all fresh and clean and smelling sweet. I had to steep them in cold water till the following day, then boil water on the open hearth fire, carry it into the dairy part of the kitchen then scrub them with a scrubbing brush in the old shallow sink called a slop stone. Oh! for the luxury of my working class home in Manchester. Not that we had a washing machine, of course, but we did have plenty of hot water running out of a tap.

Terry and I continued to walk out together several times a week. We enjoyed each other's company with no strings attached. Today's promiscuous society will find it difficult to believe, but for all the walking we did in lonely places and all the sitting in the parlour alone, he went no further than to put one arm around my waist or shoulders. That was fine with me. I enjoyed this platonic friendship as it put no strain on me and I never had to be on my guard.

By this time we were well into March, the days were lengthening and we were having quite a few hours of sunshine. One morning after making my bed and tidying my bedroom I came down the stairs into the hall and it was as though I was seeing it for the first time. It had always looked so dark and dreary before, but now, suddenly, it had atmosphere. The sun shone through the stained glass panels in the front door and splashed different pools of coloured light in all directions onto the walls and floor of the hallway. Truly, the whole place had a completely different feel and I was stirred with an overwhelming feeling of excitement. I walked to the front door, opened it and stepped through into the garden. I had never done this before for it had never occurred to me to take any interest in the front garden. It had been covered with snow most of the time, anyway.

As I stood there my nostrils and my senses were filled with a most beautiful perfume, but my eyes saw nothing to account for it as they searched quickly round for the reason. Then I saw them. Hundreds and hundreds of sweet violets, carpeting the whole of the garden seemingly to the exclusion of everything else. I got down on my haunches to examine and smell them and to pick some to take into the house. I was spellbound and I didn't want to leave. It seemed like a paradise. I don't know how long I stayed there, but I do remember how very reluctant I was to break the spell, and I fancy I can smell those violets coming down to me over the years as I sit here and write. Another magic moment and the last one. I think all my magic moments were experienced at Mr. Y's farm. I don't think I was given any more once I left there.

For some time now I had been missing the company of people my own age. I had Terry it is true, but I needed girls too, and my mind was turning to the thought of being in a hostel. In hostels all food was prepared for you and all laundry was done for you with the possible exception of 'smalls'. My mind is not so clear on this, but most definitely all working clothes were laundered by local people engaged to do the job and there was no housework except to make my own bed and keep the room tidy. The only work Land Army girls were allowed to do was on the land. I had been thinking about it, but didn't do anything about it, then came the push I needed. Every night before he went to bed Mr. Y would go to the stables "to see if the horses are all right" and this was a ritual which was never missed. If I was downstairs when he left the house I was never there when he returned. It varied; sometimes I went up just before he and his wife, sometimes

well ahead of them. I didn't always hear them come to bed because I may have been asleep.

This particular night was a wild one, the wind was blowing the trees into a frenzy outside my bedroom window, and there was a full moon across which the clouds scuttled from time to time. I had gone up some time before, climbed into bed, snuggled down into that lovely feather mattress and was well away. Usually, once I was asleep, that was it for the night, but suddenly I was awake again. I felt uneasy, opened my eyes and looked around the room. I couldn't believe what I saw.

Mrs. Y was standing at the bottom of my bed just looking at me and I was speechless and frightened. She was standing in a shaft of moonlight so I could see her very clearly, but she said nothing and my mind began to race.

"God! She's off her head. What's she doing here? What does she want?"

It didn't stop there. I began to think the very worst. I tried frantically to see between the rails of the bottom end of the old-fashioned bed, looking for her hands. Was she carrying a knife? I couldn't see, but it was at this point I found my voice. "Mrs. Y, what are you doing here. What do you want?"

"Jim's gone to see to the horses and I'm frightened on my own."

God! I hoped she wasn't as frightened as I was. I said "Well, you shouldn't have come in here."

Suddenly Mr. Y was standing there as well. I hadn't heard him approach. He grabbed his wife and hustled her through the door, saying "How many times have I to tell you not to go into Dorothy's room?" How many times had he found her in there? Not that it would have mattered much, it was her home, after all. But this time was different and I was very scared and very upset. Mr. Y called to me and asked if I was all right, but all I said was "Yes". I didn't feel I could tell him how I felt. After all, it was his wife I would be talking about. I was lacking in many things, tact being one of them, but I did have enough sensitivity not to do that. Thank goodness!

After this incident the urge to move got stronger and within a few days there was a letter in the post asking for a transfer to a hostel. I didn't tell Mr. Y that could wait till later, but the thoughts ran through my mind. "How am I going to tell him? What can I say to him? I'll not tell him now, it can wait a bit".

If he had been in the least bit unpleasant to me it would have been easy, but how could I tell a man like him "I can't get away fast enough."

It was about this time that I saw Mrs. Y actually making the butter.

"Oh! My hat! Have I been eating that butter all this time?"

She sat by the fire in the none-too-clean kitchen holding a large bowl between her knees, one hand helping to secure it, the other in the cream, gently swishing it over and over in a circular movement. I had always felt her hands, and indeed her whole being, were not as clean as they might be, especially her fingernails. I wonder why she didn't use a churn? They must have had one. Maybe it was no longer fit to use due to neglect. When someone's mind goes I think cleanliness is one of the first things to suffer, whether it is personal or otherwise. Anyway, I never fancied the farm butter after that. I ate it when it came to me spread on bread, but I always used shop butter whenever possible.

However, I had obviously come to no harm for I was as healthy as a prize bull, and I had put some weight on which was noted and commented on by the family when I went on leave. My brother called me "Fat arse", much to my annoyance. Not only had I put on weight, but my complexion had changed to that of a healthy country girl and, looking back, I realise that Mr. Y was aware of this - in the nicest possible way, of course. The day after I arrived back we were feeding the horses and he asked me "Did you enjoy your leave? What did your parents think of you when they saw you?"

"They said I look very well, but I'm getting fat"

Everyone knows how important that is at nineteen, but he replied "You look better for having a bit more flesh on your bones. It suits you. Take old Major here, you like the look of him, don't you?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, he wouldn't look half as nice as he does if he was thin, now. Would he?"

I made no reply to that. I hadn't decided how to react to being likened to a horse, but I don't think I liked it very much.

He had a sister or sister-in-law who lived not too far away and one evening he decided that he and Mrs. Y would walk over to visit her. I was invited to go along too. When I use the term "walk over" I mean just that. Walk over the fields is what we did. It was pitch black. Mrs. Y clung to her husband's right arm and in his left hand he carried a hurricane lamp or storm lantern. This was an old-

fashioned oil lantern with a turn-up wick and a glass cover to stop the wind from blowing out the flame. I walked in his footsteps two paces behind in the assumption that it should be safe enough to place my feet where his had just been. I don't know how far we walked, but it seemed an awful long way in the dark. I stumbled about a bit, but they didn't.

Today, this conjures up a Christmas card picture. A scene in the country with an old man with a lamp, an old woman and a young girl. All that was missing was the snow and the moonlight. The snow had long since gone and it was a pitch black night. In proof that he knew what he was doing we all arrived quite safely and we were made very welcome. I don't remember much about this visit except that the house was lovely and clean and much more brightly lit than the Y's place, the oil lamps were twice the size. I don't know whether it was a farm, I only remember meeting two women, no men. One of the women was working at a table doing some beautiful embroidery. Quite fine work and I remember wondering how she could see to do it, for although the lamps were big they were only oil lamps and the light given off was not all that bright. Certainly nothing like the light I was used to working by at home, and she was far from young.

The visit over we all trundled back the way we had come and arrived back at the farm safely, with no more than a few turns of my ankle on the uneven ground.

That visit taught me something - life didn't *have* to be dreary and miserable just because people lived with oil lamps.

Two weeks went by and still no reply to my letter to the Land Army offices in Truro so I wrote a second letter, again asking for a transfer to a hostel. I told Terry what I was doing and why, but I don't think he told Mr. Y otherwise I think he would have spoken to me about it. Terry looked a little bit shaken when I told him and he said he would miss me.

Two weeks after the second letter I received a visit from a Land Army official. She wanted to see over the house, well, she wanted to see my room. She wanted to know if I had another room I could use beside sitting in the kitchen, she could see for herself that there was nothing to sit on in there but wooden benches. I showed her the parlour and said I could use it when I wanted to. I told her that I needed to be with young people and that I was used to a clean, well run household at home. She asked about Mr. Y and I made it quite clear that I had no complaints in that direction. I must have mentioned Mrs. Y, mustn't I, because there was no way I had been able to come to terms with her from the day of my arrival, but for the life of me I can't remember what I said or indeed if I mentioned her at all. The official seemed to be holding back and had still not said whether I could have a

transfer or not. I told her I was happy enough doing the farm work but that I would prefer not to have housework to do. That did it! I had hardly got the words out of my mouth when they were pounced on.

"You mean you have been doing housework?"

"Yes."

"Don't you know you are not to do housework?"

"Yes, but if I don't do it, it wouldn't be done at all."

By the change in her attitude I knew I would get my transfer, but it was not to be to a hostel. She said there were no vacancies in any of the hostels and it would have to be to another farm. She left me and went outside to see Mr. Y.

My heart started thumping. I was going to have to face him soon, any minute now in fact. What would I say to him?

I was laying the table for tea when he came in through the back door. I couldn't look at him and I just went on with what I was doing. He came over and stood by my side and said very quietly "Why didn't you tell me if you were not happy here? You shouldn't have done it like this." I made no reply which probably made things worse, but I didn't feel that there was anything that I *could* say. And, yes, he was right. I shouldn't have done it like that.

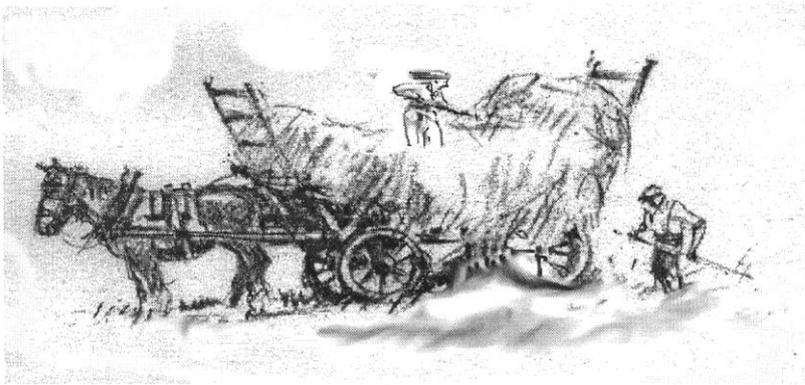
Oh! The agonies of youth. I don't know what I thought I was doing. I wanted so very much to get away yet at the same time I didn't want him to know. Did I think I could just disappear like a puff of smoke and have everything back the way it was? As if I had never been there? I was so ashamed that I wanted to crawl into a hole and hide. I know I hurt him, but how do you tell somebody you like and respect that you're sorry, but you have to leave because you can't stand his potty wife any longer. And that was the way that I saw Mrs. Y.

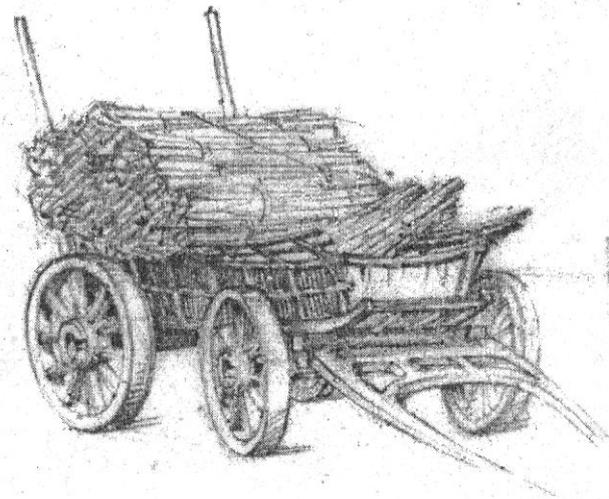
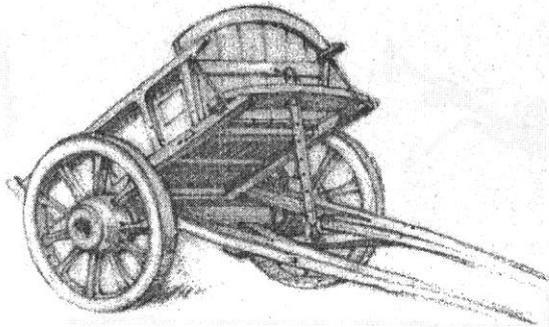
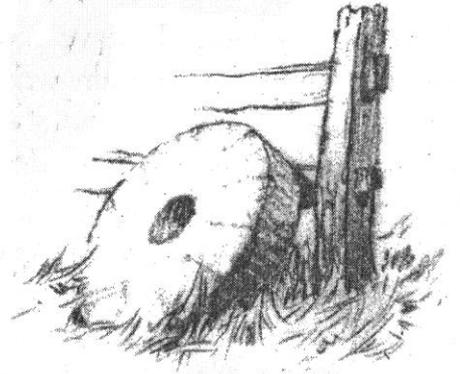
Then there had been the day when *I* went over to that window in the kitchen and *I* lifted up the curtain and *I* looked out just as I had seen her do so many, many times. When I realised what I was doing I dropped the curtain as if it had burned my fingers. Had I been about three years older I would have handled it differently, but I was only nineteen and a very young nineteen at that. More like a seventeen year old.

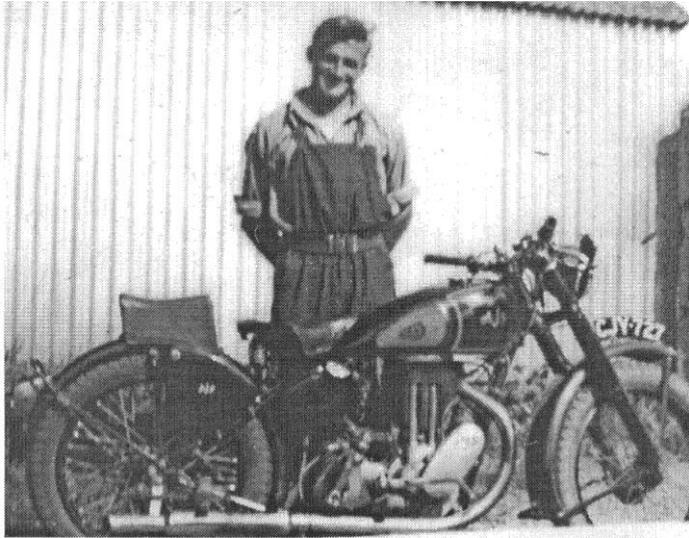
The most surprising thing about all this is that it was so much out of character for me to have difficulty speaking my mind. From a very early age whatever I had to say I said. I grew up speaking my mind and I've grown old

speaking my mind. Believe it or not, I still feel the shame I felt all those years ago and not just because I am writing about it. My mind has floated back many times over the last fifty years and always with that same deep feeling of shame and regret. Wouldn't it be nice if we could go back and say "I'm sorry."

I worked there till the end of the week. For some reason that I never knew I could not move into my new job till the following Monday and I was lodged in the Land Army Hostel in Liskeard over the weekend. This was good for it gave me the chance to make contact with girls around my own age and at the same time gave me a short taste of hostel life.







Terry Arthur



Nick.
Royal Marines

Chapter Five
A Farm near Liskeard

I arrived at Mr. Z's farm near Liskeard on Monday March 19th 1945. There was plenty of money here and Mr. Z was referred to as a 'Gentleman Farmer'. He and his wife were a good looking couple in their early thirties. She was a pretty blonde with blue eyes and she was pregnant. He was tall and dark with black hair, blue eyes and could be termed as 'handsome', but it wasn't long before I realised I didn't like him.

My first impression was how clean and spacious the farm yard looked, probably because it was concreted which made it much easier to keep clean. The house was lovely. Beautifully clean and beautifully furnished and the kitchen was everything a kitchen should be and more besides. This was the first time I had ever seen an Aga kitchen range. Every farm kitchen should have one. In those days an Aga was fuelled by coal or wood. It never went out, which meant that the kitchen was always warm and the kettle which was kept full of water, was always hot. This is a necessary luxury when people are up at the crack of dawn. There was always a good supply of a sort of bread-bun. I had never tasted anything quite like them before, they were not just a bread mixture nor were they sweet; perhaps they were something Cornish. I seem to remember that they were a yellow colour, perhaps they were saffron bread which, I believe, is a speciality of Cornwall. Mr. Z and I had one of these every morning with a cup of tea before we went out into the cold early morning mist to fetch in the cows for milking. We would chain each cow into her stall- they each had their own stall and knew where to go - and we then fed and milked them, after which we would go into the house for our breakfast. I would be ravenously hungry by this time and ready to do justice to the full English farm breakfast put down before me each morning. At the Y's farm we had breakfast *before* we went out to work, and that was also a full farm breakfast.

After breakfast it was time to take the cows back to the fields. This was easy. All I had to do was unfasten their chains and the rest they did themselves. I would follow them out just giving them a little encouragement then fasten the gate behind them as the last one made her way through. Now the shippens (cow sheds) had to be cleaned out, floors - and walls when necessary - swilled and scrubbed. Cows can be messy beggars. On this farm milking was done by machines which meant that more than one cow could be milked at one time. In the case of this farm it was four. All we had to do was fix the four rubber cups of each machine onto the cow's udders and wait till the milk stopped flowing, then switch off the machine, take the four cups away from the cow's udders, pour the milk into a larger receptacle then apply the machine to the next cow. Much quicker, of course, and therefore probably better for the cow. But there was something rather nice about hand milking. Perhaps it was the intimacy, the closeness of man, or in my case,

woman, with the beast. Anyhow, it would be debatable whether the machine was any quicker than Mr. Y, but if a farmer had a lot of cows it would certainly be less work. What little skill I had acquired with Mr. Y I soon lost because I never used it again properly. I still needed it to some extent because after taking off the machine the cows had to be 'stripped out' by hand as the machine in those days did not finish the job. I wonder if modern machines do?

The next job was the scrubbing and scouring of the milking equipment. This was done with a paste called GUMPTION which meant that everything had to be very thoroughly rinsed. This was a very wet job and there was a great deal of water used. After this they had to be sterilised by steaming, which meant they were placed into a metal steaming chest which stood taller than I did. This had a door which had to be lifted into place whilst at the same time fastening four wing nuts, one at each corner. I was strong in those days, but nevertheless I found this to be a struggle. All this equipment was made of stainless steel and, therefore, of some considerable weight. So was the sterilising cabinet. I never could understand why that door was not on some kind of hinge. Maybe it tightened up closer by wing nuts than it would any other way so preventing the scalding steam from escaping before doing its job.

There were two lovely old cottages on this farm known as tied cottages because they were for the occupancy of any farm labourers who were employed there. Beautiful, but primitive, there was no water laid on and no electricity, whereas the main house had both. One of the farms I worked on had electricity which was supplied by their own generators. I don't remember very clearly, but common sense tells me it was this one because the next farm on which I was billeted was very close to Warrington and so was probably supplied from the Warrington grid, whereas this farm was a mile or two from Liskeard which was just a small town. The cottages, however, were lit by oil lamps and their water was drawn from a well at the bottom of the garden.

Bill, one of the labourers, I remember very well indeed, but of the other I have only the faintest recollection which suggests to me that he was not there all the time. Maybe he was only there when an extra pair of hands was needed. I thought of Bill as being a small man. Perhaps he was about my own height, five feet six inches. He was very lean in stature with a very lined face, but not with age. I would say, perhaps, that he was in his thirties; his hair was very black and his face was very, very brown. Looking at him made me remember my history lessons. There were some Spanish sailors who ended up on the coast of Cornwall after the Armada was sunk and he looked like one of them. I would say that he could definitely be a throw-back. I liked Bill and he and I got on well together. He was married to Doreen who was a bit younger I would say and she was expecting her first baby. There were several times I spent the evening with them and

sometimes all day on a Sunday and it was on one of those visits that I was introduced to peanut butter. I had never heard of it before. There were a lot of Americans around so it had probably leaked out from one of the camps at some time. I liked it very much, but after I left there I never saw it again and it was many years later before it appeared in the shops, or before I discovered it in the shops. Bill and I worked together a great deal; hedging, mending fences, cleaning ditches; doing all the jobs which had to be done between harvesting and sowing, and one of those jobs was muck spreading.

"Oh no! Not again!" I was thinking of the last time, when I ended up sitting on top of the pile! Not so this time, because they had a mechanical muck spreader. One man drove the horse which pulled the muck spreader and another horse and cart filled with muck followed slightly behind and to the side, with a man keeping the spreader supplied with muck by tossing it from the cart into the spreader. I walked about looking for muck which had been slung out in too big a dollop, then it was my job to pick it up (with a pitch fork, of course) and shake it about a bit. They did well to call Mr. Z a gentleman farmer. When there was really mucky work to be done he was nowhere in sight. I don't think I ever saw that man looking anything but clean and smart, not even when he *was* working.

After one of these muck spreading days we were making our way back to the farmyard and I asked if it would be all right if I were to ride on Duke. I was asked if I could ride and I told them yes, I could, so I was helped to mount as he was a very big horse. This was to be a bare-back ride. All went well for a while just talking and walking our way back to the yard then, suddenly, Duke took off - taking me by surprise. I was hanging on like grim Death. I had never ridden bare-back before and there were no stirrups to help me. I heard Bill shouting to me "He's heading for the stable - Don't forget to duck." That moment came almost as soon as Bill finished shouting. I saw the stable doorway just ahead of me and thought "Oh, my God!" I threw myself forward, flung my arms around his neck and hung on for dear life. He stopped abruptly, but not until he was through the doorway, then he calmly walked into his stall. And that was how Bill found me when he and the other man caught up with me - still lying along Duke's back with my arms around his neck, trying to pull myself together. I was just a little wobbly and so were my legs. As soon as they came into the stable I got down from the horse and tried to brazen it out, pretending everything was fine. I'm sure that they could tell from my face that I was shaken. Apparently he did this every time he came within that kind of distance from the stable after a day's work, presumably because he knew once he got into the stable he would be fed. Usually the men kept hold of his reins which, of course, meant they were in control, but on this occasion I, had hold of the reins and *he* knew the difference. I rode him back on many occasions after that, but of course I always knew what to expect.

Beside the farm horses Mr. Z had a most beautiful hunter called Michael. He was a lovely ginger colour (Some of us humans have hair that colour.) He was much the same in colour as Major on Mr. Y's farm. I discovered him one day when I was walking on the land in my off-duty hours. I never saw him anywhere near the farmyard and I never saw anybody ride him. He seemed to have a great deal of freedom, just grazing all day. Perhaps Mrs. Z would ride him, but of course she was pregnant at this time. In the meantime, he had to settle for me. Once I had discovered him I visited him regularly, taking him tit-bits to gain his confidence for he was very difficult to get close to at first. After a while I began to groom him and it wasn't long before he looked forward to my visits. When he saw me coming he would come to meet me. We spent many hours together Michael and I. I'll bet he missed me when I was gone. I never asked if I could ride him. He was very big and very high spirited and I was wise enough to know he was way out of my class. But that didn't stop me wishing I could.

I had been settled in Mr. Z's farm for about six weeks when, one Sunday afternoon, I was called down from my room where I had been writing letters. "There is somebody outside to see you". I came down feeling very puzzled. Whoever could it be? Nobody ever called on me. There *was* nobody to call on me. I went outside, for they hadn't been asked into the house, and there they stood - all three of them! They looked like three peas in a pod. They all wore the same tweed suits, the jackets of which were known as Norfolk jackets and they all wore caps on their heads. I never liked a young man to wear a cap and would certainly never have walked out with a young man wearing a cap. My father always wore one for work and although it never did anything for him it didn't make him look stupid either, possibly because he was a mature man in his forties and fifties. But my two brothers refused ever to wear one except to clown around in poking fun at my father. They were just objects of fun to 'us young uns'. The three young men were obviously in their Sunday-best clothes and thought they looked absolutely splendid, but not to me they didn't!

Motor bike gear, working overalls and, when he met me after work, sports jacket and flannels is how I had always seen Terry and he always looked perfectly acceptable for the occasion, but I had never seen him in this light before. He was shy, I always knew this, but not with me. Now, standing before me with his two friends he seemed shy, awkward and stupid. And so did they. All three of them just stood there shuffling awkwardly and grinning like the proverbial village idiot, only in triplicate. Worse, Mr. Z was there and he was laughing and I was very embarrassed.

We walked a little way from the house back down the lane leading from the road to the farm. Terry said "We've come to see you" and from what I can remember that is all he did say. The others said nothing at all. He must have said

something else, I suppose, but I do remember that he was rather tongue-tied. Perhaps it was the presence of his two side kicks or maybe it was because we hadn't seen each other for some time. I didn't have a lot to say either. Everything was wrong somehow. I had been missing Terry quite a bit, especially the first few weeks. If he had come a few weeks earlier, on his own and on his motor bike, things would have been different. He wouldn't have been so awkward and tongue-tied and I would have been more appreciative. As it was, he probably noticed my embarrassment and my eagerness to get rid of him. Whatever the reason, the thing that we had between us died that day. I stopped missing him and he never came again. Maybe he didn't come to see me on his motor bike in those early days because of the shortage of petrol. He would, of course, be given a ration because of his work - going from one farm to another, but on that day they walked about seven miles each way to pay me that visit. Of all my 'ships' very few of them did I regret losing touch with. Terry was the top of the list.

Next time you do any weeding spare a thought for the land girl. The most daunting job I ever had to do was weeding. I was taken out to the corner of a field full of crops with hundreds of straight lines of small plants disappearing over a tiny hill into the distance. "Start here, work to the end of the row then come back up the next one. The whole field has to be done", then he was gone, leaving me to get on with it, but not until he had shown me how and taught me the difference between the weeds and the crops. Here was little me, all by myself, in this big field thinking "good grief! I'm going to be here forever. My spirits dropped to my boots and I felt as if he, Mr. Z, had said "...and don't come back till you've finished it!" Well, needless to say, I got stuck in, but it was very slow going. Before this I had never used a hoe, in fact I probably didn't even know that they existed. That was the longest half-day I had ever spent. I didn't go out there till after mid-day and I don't remember how much I achieved, but I do know that it wasn't much because I was not pleased with how little it appeared to be. The following day was better because there were three of us. The trouble now was that their expertise made my efforts look even worse. They were coming back up the second line when I was still trundling up to the half way mark of my first one. I think they did about three to my one! I must say, though, that I did pick up *some* speed before the hoeing was done, but I never did keep up with the men.

It was about this time that I started to feel a bit uneasy about Mr. Z. He started to pay me too much attention and I didn't like it.

It was now May 1945 and in the time I had been here I had been in the habit of cycling into Liskeard to meet with the Land Girls from the hostel. We would meet up inside the Fountain hotel where I became known as the 'Orangeade girl'. This hotel was the only pub that I ever visited frequently in the whole of my life. It was a gathering place like all country or small town pubs, not only for the

locals, but in this case for the Land Girls and some American soldiers - not to mention traders on market days. It was a very friendly place and there was always somebody in there who was known to me, and if not then I would sit and drink my orangeade until somebody arrived. I met a woman here who was known as 'Cookie'. If I ever knew her real name it is long since forgotten and I can only assume, like most people would that she was, or had been, a cook. She was a woman in her middle forties with a fairly ample figure; a motherly sort of woman, and she used to 'Mother Hen' us Land Girls. If any of us wanted to stay away from our billet at weekends there was always a bed with Cookie. I only took advantage of this opportunity on one occasion. I usually went back to the farm. Some of the Land Girls were friendly with some of the Americans who somehow nearly always had army transport at their disposal. These soldiers seemed to be hell bent on seeing as much of the area as possible and always in the company of pretty girls. The girls from the Land Army Hostel were in great demand and what was more natural than that I should get drawn into this? I never liked the American soldiers and wouldn't have anything to do with them, but on two occasions I did get drawn into this arrangement. On the first occasion several of us piled into a truck and went whizzing off to see Polperro and Looe and any other beautiful spot en route. What a lovely memory this is.

It was a gorgeous day in spring, just the right sort of weather to show off two such picturesque little towns. I had never seen anywhere quite like them before and I was absolutely enthralled. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. Bear in mind that these two beauty spots were completely unspoiled - no traffic to speak of, there were more horse-drawn vehicles than there were motor cars and no yellow lines - there was no such thing in those days. Also, of course, there were no crowds of people. The Americans loved it. I think that they could not believe what they saw either. It was only a short distance to Looe from Liskeard, about ten miles or so, and Polperro was a mile or two further along the coast. We stayed quite a while in each place, but, nevertheless, we were back in Liskeard well before sunset. On this first occasion it happened quite unexpectedly. The Americans came into the pub, asked the girls if they wanted to go for a drive and they all piled into the truck taking me with them. But the second occasion was arranged and was very nearly the cause of me being assaulted. After dropping us back in town the men beat a hasty retreat as they had to be back in camp by a certain time. But before they went they made arrangements with the girls to do the same thing the following Saturday. Would I like to go too? Well, why not? I had enjoyed today and so long as I wasn't expected to pair off with any of them, and that didn't happen today, so .. "Yes. Thank you!" was my reply. I picked up my bicycle from the hostel and cycled the few miles back to the farm.

When the day arrived I decided to leave my bicycle at the farm and walk into town because I noticed when the men started off back to barracks they took

the same road as I did back to the farm. I thought I would probably be given a lift back instead of having to go to the hostel and pick up my bike in order to cycle back to the farm. The best laid schemes of mice and men .

We were to meet in the Fountain Hotel where we waited, and waited, and waited yet a bit longer until it became very obvious that the men were not going to show up. Well, after all, they were soldiers and if a soldier doesn't keep a date there could be many reasons why, even at this late stage in the war. I don't know if the other girls ever found out the reason for it, but I never did. I wonder if those men were ever seen in Liskeard again. Anyhow, the outcome was that we turned our attention to enjoying our Saturday off in some other way. Liskeard had a cinema and a hall where a dance was held on a Saturday night. We chose to go to the dance, but because it was a bit dead we left early. Some of the girls went back into the pub, but I started walking back to the farm. We were now in the latter part of the daylight hours.

I had gone some distance out of town when I became aware of a man walking some distance behind me. I wasn't worried in any way, he was probably a local man home on leave. He must have been because he was in the uniform of a paratrooper and there wasn't a paratrooper's camp anywhere around here. I paid no further attention for a while until I came to a spot which I knew to be the last few houses along the road and then my brain came into gear. My instinct told me to knock at the door of one of the houses, but the argumentative part of me told me "He is so far behind me I could be wrong. I am in the country now, not in the city, and country people are nice people. If he is a local man he is probably known to the people at whose door I would be knocking. Wouldn't I feel daft if I was wrong? So what did I do? I walked past those last three houses without the precaution of knocking at a door. The sun had set by this time and it was about to become dark at any time and of course the distance between us began to close as soon as we were well past the last house. What could I do to defend myself? The advice given to me at various times in the past should this moment ever arrive came flooding back to me. The very first thing I did was to get into the middle of the road so it would be more difficult for him to get me behind the hedge. Bearing in mind that there was very little traffic passing along these country roads in fact, I knew that there was very little chance of being rescued by a passing motorist.

By now he had closed the distance between us and was walking by my side. He was unfastening the neck of his tunic and was breathing heavily. Presumably this was meant to convey to me what was on his mind, as if I didn't know already. He didn't speak and he hadn't touched me, but for all that, I knew the crucial moment had arrived. When suddenly I heard the sweet fluttering of angel wings in the form of an army truck. A short way back I had turned a bend in the road so as yet I couldn't see it and by now it was getting dark. "Suppose it

doesn't stop for me", I was beginning to panic. I knew about the rule that said army personnel were forbidden to pick up anybody asking for a lift. I couldn't let that happen. He *must* stop. There I stood in the middle of the road with my arms outstretched; determined not to move; determined to make him stop. Then I saw it coming at a fair speed towards me I was torn between my safety from the truck and probable rape. But there was no contest and I stood my ground. All vehicles in wartime had shields over their headlamps and these had slits in them which allowed a very much reduced portion of the light through and this was directed carefully downwards. I remember keeping my eyes on these headlamps while the truck still travelled towards me. Only when I heard the brakes applied did I step aside, and none too soon at that! Only then did the man start to run. I ran the short distance to the truck and told the men in the cab what had happened. By now there were heads poking around the rear of the truck anxious to know what was going on. The officer said to the sergeant "All right. Let her in the back." The tailboard was let down and I climbed into the back of the truck. As I sat down I saw the man running hell for leather back towards Liskeard. If there hadn't been an officer in that truck that paratrooper may probably have been given the hiding of his life, because more than half of those soldiers were for giving him a good hiding. Things were being said such as "While we are away from home some bastard like that comes along to molest our women folk." As it was, the truck went on its way. I asked one of the men seated near the cab to knock on the window when we arrived at the end of the long lane leading to the farm. The sergeant let down the tailboard and lifted me down and the officer asked if I would like him to walk me back to the farm. The farmhouse could not be seen from where we stood. "No, thank you. I'll be quite safe now." said she, hopefully!

(This was the fourth time in my short life this sort of thing had happened to me, and for the fourth time I kept it to myself. I didn't tell a soul until sometime in the 1980's when I was telling a friend snippets of my Land Army days. I wonder why I did that? It certainly wasn't because I was unaffected by the experiences. Far from it!)

Once I got into my bedroom I became in a bit of a state and I slept very little that night. It will be fifty years this coming May since it happened and just writing about it after all these years has also put me in a bit of a state. God only knows what all those women who *are* raped must go through. The following Saturday I went into town again and, needless to say, I did not leave my bicycle behind. I knew, of course, that a bicycle is no safeguard, but I did feel that I had a better chance with it than without it. It was market day and as I sauntered around I became aware of a very distinguished middle aged man talking with another man. He was introducing someone to him with obvious pride and that somebody was a soldier wearing a paratrooper's beret. The paratrooper turned and I saw that he was the same man I had encountered the week before. He saw me, but he showed no

embarrassment or remorse at all. All he did was leer at me and I, was the one who was embarrassed and ashamed. It crossed my mind to tap his father on the shoulder and tell him what a wonderful son he *really* had, but I didn't, of course. I just beat a hasty retreat. Later on in life I would have handled that moment differently. I would probably have made it known to anybody who was within earshot what a skunk this proud-looking young soldier really was. But this happened at the beginning of June and I must now go back to the beginning of May.

My scruffy little diary tells me that it was May 5th when I met Mons. Mons Meager was his full name, a very unusual name to be sure. I was told his father called him that because of the battle of Mons in the 1914-1918 war. I would have thought that soldiers would want to forget battles rather than go through life with a constant reminder of them. I do know that my father would never, under any circumstances, talk about his part in the first World War. The most information we, my brothers and I, ever got out of him was that one scar was caused by shrapnel and the other by a bullet.

I sat in my usual corner in the Fountain Hotel drinking my usual orangeade and waiting for somebody from the hostel to arrive. Cookie was in and we had been sitting together for a while when suddenly an apparition walked in. He was tall, fair haired, blue eyed and beautifully bronzed, and as if to emphasise all this he wore a white suit which was unheard of in Britain in those days. "Wow! What a bobby dazzler!", was my reaction. Cookie rose from her seat and went to him. "Hello, Mons. I heard you were home. Let me buy you a drink." She told him how well he looked, but by this time he was surrounded by local people who were all pleased to see him. I sat there watching this from my corner seat and soon Cookie came back and sat beside me. "Mons is home on three weeks leave. He has been in Africa with the 8th Army for a long time." "Oh", says I, "no wonder he has such a lovely tan." Some time later he disengaged himself and came across to sit with us. Cookie introduced us and that was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

For the next two weeks I was in town nearly every evening as well as weekends. He and I did a lot of walking, a lot of talking and quite some drinking - well he did, but I stuck to my orangeade. We also did quite a lot of kissing and cuddling, in other words we were very happy to be together. One evening we went to the pictures to see Vera Lynn. Mons' two sisters came with us on this occasion. Little did we know what we were in for. As always, there was a newsreel to sit through before the main feature, and usually a "B" picture as well. we settled into our seats, the lights went out and the newsreel started. Hell! What a shock! We suddenly found ourselves looking at the liberation of the concentration camp in what had been German-held territory. I remember crying out and making a quick movement. Mons made a grab for me perhaps because he thought I was fainting. I

don't know what I was doing; I think maybe I wanted to run away. I have, of course, seen those same pictures on numerous occasions since, but that evening, in the cinema, I couldn't look any more. I spent the rest of the newsreel with my face buried in Mons' shoulder. I didn't actually cry as such, it was much worse than that. I felt so raw it was as though I was suddenly turned inside-out. I have no recollection of the main feature or the "B" film, in fact I only know we went to see Vera Lynn because I read it in one of Mons' letters before I started to write this. Everything else about the rest of that day is also a complete blank.

May 8th was V.E. Day, Victory in Europe Day. What a lovely feeling it was to know the fighting was over (Well, the biggest part of it was.); to know that there would be no more bombing raids on our towns and cities; the lights would go on again in our streets; we can throw away the black out from our windows and we will be able to hear our church bells again. That was something I had the pleasure of almost immediately. Being in the quiet of the countryside I could hear the ringing of the bells floating over the fields from various churches around. They had been silent such a long time, but they worked overtime that day. I think I am correct in saying that, by order of the Government, they were to be used only in case of invasion to warn the public. Oh what a beautiful sound this was. I always did like to hear the church bells, I still do, but it is a rare sound indeed in Manchester these days, in fact it is decades since I heard that sound around where I live. It was part of my childhood, eating a cooked breakfast to the sound of church bells on a Sunday morning. I wanted so much to be home with my family on this very special day. I wanted to see their happiness and relief, especially my mother's. This was a Tuesday and, according to my diary, the next two days were a national holiday. The first of them I remember very little about, I probably helped with the milking and feeding the animals and in the afternoon I was out with Mons. I had intended to buy some new shoes, but I had lost my purse which held two pounds and 18 clothing coupons. So that put paid to that! My wage for a week's work was one pound ten shillings, or in today's currency one pound fifty pence, so I lost more than a week's wages, which was not a nice feeling. As for the clothing coupons, well, I couldn't *earn* any more of those. I would just have to do without until my next issue. Those things were like gold dust!

The second day I remember quite well. Cookie, Mons and myself spent most of it together. There was such merry-making in the streets of the town, street parties here and street parties there, everybody seemed to be so happy. But there must have been some unhappiness somewhere. Even a town as small as this must have lost at least a few men-folk in the fighting. But for the time being it didn't seem to show. That evening there was dancing in the square which went on till midnight. The place was ablaze with light and there was a live band, which must have been fairly good because not once did I think it was rubbishy. Bearing in mind when I went dancing at home I was used to good dance bands in the city

ballrooms and I was used to listening to only the top 'Big Bands' on records at home.

When we had danced ourselves to a standstill I went back with Cookie to her place with two or three other Land Girls. There were not enough beds, but there was always enough room on the floor. Cookie had several mattresses piled in one corner and we pulled one each onto the floor. There was plenty of blankets and I, for one, slept like a log.

Cookie had me up early enough to cycle back to the farm in time for milking the following morning. I was a bit late and Mr. Z was already at work in the cowhides, but I felt no remorse. I thought I did very well being there at all. I certainly didn't feel like work as I was still 'on a high', as the saying is these days.

Cookie gave me a bit of breakfast before I left, just a cup of tea and a butty, but when you remember that everything was rationed and she did this quite regularly, those cups of tea and butties would mount up to make a hole in her rations and the Land Girls would not be able to give her any of theirs because their ration books would be held by the hostel warden. Perhaps she was able to scrounge a bit of this and a bit of that if she was working somewhere as a cook. I didn't think of this at the time I just accepted what came my way in the typical way of all thoughtless youth.

Saturday came round again and Mons and I did what we had been doing each day since we met, we walked and talked and cuddled and kissed and then he suggested that we sit down on a milk churn bench. This is a place where a farmer would leave his churns full of milk to be collected by the Milk Marketing Board. We sat there for a while admiring the view then, instead of whispering sweet nothings in my ear, he whispered "Dorothy, I must tell you something. I am engaged to be married."

For a while I was speechless, then I was angry; angry because he didn't tell me right at the beginning. "If that's the case, where is she and why isn't she here with you?"

" She is in the WRACs (Women's Army). I met her in Africa and she is still there."

"Oh well! That's it then! I won't be seeing you again. I can't do that to her, not while she's stuck out there all those miles from home." I said.

Walking back to Liskeard seemed to take forever. When we finally arrived, I mounted my trusty steed and rode off into the sunset. "There goes another 'passing ship' to add to my collection." I thought.

I stayed on the farm the following day, which was Sunday. The previous one had been spent with Mons and I had expected to do the same this week, but not now. I went over the fields to see Michael taking with me his combs and brushes and a carrot from the kitchen. I hadn't been with him long when who should I see coming over the hill but Mons. He came to ask me not to stop seeing him, but to just spend the last few days of his leave with him. He was right when he said "It has been so nice being with you.", for that's how I felt too. So I said "OK.", but on condition that he wrote to his girl, Vera, and told her about me. Many years later, Vera said something to me during a conversation which proved to me that Mons had kept his word.

It was round this time that Mr. Z made his move. I had been feeling uneasy about him for some time. One morning, after milking, I had washed and scoured the milking equipment and placed it all in the sterilising cabinet, then I commenced the daily struggle with that blasted door! It didn't always give me so much trouble, but if I didn't get it just square-on, the hasp and staple would not marry up correctly. Because it was heavy and it was wide I was more or less spread-eagled against the thing. He came up behind me and applied his strength and height to the situation and the problem was solved at once. But why was I still pinned between his body and the cabinet? I turned my head to look up at him and he put his arms around me and said " Well, what shall I do now?" "I don't know," I said "but whatever it is you decide be quick about it, then I'll go in the house and tell your wife!" Suddenly I must have become too hot to handle because he dropped me like a red-hot brick and his face underwent quite a change in expression. I had never seen a facial expression change from one extreme to the other like that before. He had steel-blue eyes and he was a handsome man, but I never really liked him. As I looked up at him I realised that his expression was a mixture of fury and hate and I was to see that look more than once from now on. When I told Bill what had happened and what I had said he laughed and said "Oh dear! He wouldn't like that. He thinks all he has to do is look at a woman and she's his for the taking." I also learned from Bill that there had been a Land Girl before me and that she and Mr. Z had often "warmed the hay" together. I wonder why she left. Did his wife find out? Nobody told me the answer to this, but I was never interested enough to ask. Soon, it began to dawn on me that I would have to move on. I couldn't stay here, not in the home of a man I couldn't trust. Every time our eyes met there were sparks flying and in the house I was uncomfortable. I was afraid his wife would notice. I never told her, of course, but if she had questioned me I may have done, because I wasn't very good at lying in those days.

Later on in life I learned to lie with the best of them if I had to, especially if I was forewarned, but I now call that "Acting out a part."

Mons and I spent the last three evenings of his leave together and on the last evening, which was Wednesday 16th May, I went to his mother's house for tea. I had been there several times before of course, but just to meet up with Mons and leave my bicycle there while we went off together. There was a formal sit down meal with his two sisters present, plus the husband, Bill, and two children of Inez who was the eldest. His younger sister was called Vera, the same as his girl friend. Both of his sisters had jet-black hair and very dark eyes and in that respect were very like their mother. Mons must have been like his dad because he was fair haired with blue eyes.

It was a very nice meal in happy and friendly company with just a tinge of sadness because Mons would be leaving early the following morning. However it seemed unlikely that he would be going out to fight again now that the fighting in Europe had stopped, and definitely not for three months anyway, because anybody on leave from a fighting zone after a long tour of duty was kept in Britain for at least three months. In the event, Mons was sent to join the army of occupation in Germany after his three months were up.

After the meal was over we sat around and talked and Mons' mother wanted to know how I liked being billeted with the Zs. This of course opened the floodgates. I told her I had been reasonably satisfied until a few days ago, then I told her about the incident in the dairy, the details of which Mons already knew. When I finished she said "Oh, he's still at it then. Like father like son. They have always been noted for it. His father was a dreadful old lech. No serving girl was ever safe when he was around. He used to jump out from behind hedges at them. He's dead now , but he'll never really be dead while his son is alive; he has a reputation nearly as bad as his father's. You ought to get away from there, lass."

I had, of course, already come to this conclusion and I had always wanted to go into a hostel so, yes, I would be having another shot at it. I went to see Mons' mother several times between that day and the day I left Liskeard. I would do little things for her like a bit of gardening from time to time. I never remember seeing her standing up. Whenever I was there she was always sitting down. I came away with the impression that she couldn't stand. To me she seemed very old, always dressed in black and she was heavily built. But now when I look at her photograph I can see her hair was raven black with no trace of grey. I think she was not as old as I took her to be. Maybe she was sick. I never knew.

Mons and I wrote to each other twice a week for a while then one letter told me that Vera was now back in England and was waiting for her demob. He

said he had some leave due before going over to Germany and Vera also had leave and they would spend some time in Liskeard. Vera was from Northampton so they would have to divide the time between both places. His letters didn't come so often now and eventually they dropped off altogether, naturally enough. However we did keep in touch for many years once a year at Christmas time.

Eventually I stayed with them for a weekend in the late 1960's. I have always been glad about that because Mons died of cancer not very long afterwards. Now, in the 1990's I have my doubts about Vera's health, because I had no reply to my last letters.

The rest of May passed in much the same way as it did before Mons came into my life. Meeting with the girls from the hostel in the Fountain Hotel, going to the local cinema and the Saturday dance. The writing and receiving of letters, some of which were still coming from my 'passing ships'. This did at least prove that they were still alive and that was pleasing. Those who stopped writing I will never know about.

It was about this time I was introduced to the local solicitor. He was a young man, certainly within call-up age. He was extremely polite and well behaved and he befriended the Land Girls. His name was Jim Hayes, but he was known to us as 'Jampot'. When I asked one of the girls why, I was told that it started because of a tie which he nearly always seemed to be wearing. It was yellow and had what looked like tiny jam tarts all over it. Anyhow, Jampot they all called him so of course, so did I. He drove a beautiful blue sports car and, of course, he received a petrol ration on which to run it. He had to travel backward and forward to Bodmin to the law courts on legitimate business, but whenever possible he would have at least one Land Girl with him. We would be taken to wherever he was going, but more often than not it was Bodmin. While he was in court we would spend the time getting to know the place. It was a lovely arrangement and he wanted nothing in return as far as I was aware, certainly not from me, anyhow. I remember on one occasion he left me in the car while he went off somewhere for a short period of time. It was a beautiful summer day and the hood of the car was down. Suddenly I became aware of being the centre of attention; either me or the car or both. They were mostly young people. They came close to the car scrutinising both it and me with admiration and envy. I felt like a celebrity and I didn't mind at first, but after a while it became a bit unnerving and I felt at a disadvantage having to look up towards these people because the sports car was so close to the ground. They displayed no aggression, but I was relieved to see Jampot return just the same.

We were now into June and on the first of the month Bill and I visited his wife, Doreen, in the nursing home where she went to have their baby. The sight of

him did nothing to make me feel maternal. I was not that way inclined and, anyway, I always thought new-born babies were ugly little blighters and this one was no exception. He was red and wrinkled and wore a shock of thick black hair. He was probably the ugliest one I had seen so far, probably because of the black hair. However I did say all the things that were expected of me, which made his parents happy, and it wasn't long before I could say all those things in true honesty because, like all babies, he soon *became* beautiful.

I was due to take some leave about now, so I was looking forward to going home. Mr. Z tried to stop me from going, and I probably would have postponed it for somebody else but not for him because by this time we were enemies and I was going to be glad to get away. What's more, I intended applying for another transfer as soon as I returned. I went around visiting my friends; I groomed Michael, gave him a carrot and a cuddle then took the 7.20pm train for Manchester. This was Saturday the 9th June and for the first time there was nobody at the station to meet me. I arrived home tired and hungry. The house was in darkness and nobody was home. There was mail on the doormat which included my letter posted some days ago telling the family I would be home. There was nothing to eat in the house because nothing that would perish had been left. It was, of course, much too late for the shops and I couldn't even get into my bedroom. The door was locked! I went to sleep in my mother and father's bed, hungry and disappointed. My father's brother and his family lived in the next street so when I got up I went there straight away in case Uncle Bill was going out to work. It was Sunday, but it was possible. Auntie Hilda gave me some breakfast and I asked Uncle Bill if he could get into my bedroom for me without damaging the door. "Not without damaging the lock. You won't be able to re-lock it when you go back". I said, "That's OK." To me this was necessary for there were clothes in there that I wanted to wear. And why had it been locked in the first place? When the door was open we found my dad had put a lot of his tools in there, security against burglars I suppose, but Uncle Bill had no trouble getting in so neither would they. The lock was on that door because when we were very little dad kept his tools in there for our safety sake. Later, when the room was allocated to me, the lock remained on but was never used.

My parents had friends with a lovely holiday bungalow in Abersoch in Wales which my father had helped to build. As a victory celebration they had all cleared off on holiday and apparently didn't come back till a month later. In those days Abersoch was a beautiful unspoiled village. I was very disappointed indeed because ever since V.E. Day I had longed to be with them, we hadn't had chance to celebrate together. However, after the first disappointment I didn't let it spoil my leave. I did all the usual things I did when I was on leave - dancing, riding, swimming, skating, cinema and visiting; only this time I added scrubbing and cleaning and polishing to my activities. So the house was shining like a new pin

for when my mother came home. My mother always did this for my homecoming, so I never saw the house looking any other way.

I had a friend living a few doors from me called Doreen Gillon. She, too, was in the Land Army and home on leave which was good. We usually managed to meet up when we were home without any prior arrangement and this occasion was no exception. I slept with Doreen three nights out of the eight I was home. This was suggested by her mother who did not like the thought of me going home to an empty house. Doreen's father was a professional soldier with the Royal Marines and was around the age of fifty by this time, but to my knowledge he was never sent into the fighting. Her brother, Jack, was also in the Marines and her brother Stan, who was extremely handsome, was in the Guards. They all came through the war unscathed and Stan stayed in the Guards as a professional soldier. He was on leave with Doreen and me.

I stayed home only for eight nights. Things were busy on the farm and I was only entitled to eight, although fourteen days leave always made much better sense for such a long, tiring and expensive journey.

I arrived back quite ready for work and the weather was good. I enjoyed working and hay-making time was here, so I got stuck in with enthusiasm. There was a lot of work to be done which meant that Mr. Z was doing a bit, which in turn meant he and I were in each others company more. It was about this time that his wife went into a nursing home to have her baby. I had said to Bill and Doreen that when that happened I would not stay in that house with just him. "Don't worry. Mrs. Z's mother is coming to stay". Which is what happened and she stayed for some time after mother and child arrived home again.

It was the second day of July when I finally wrote to Truro for another transfer. I cannot remember what reason I gave, but I certainly did not give the real reason. I knew that if I did he would only deny it and being a 'gentleman' they would probably believe him and that would make me look bad in their eyes. Anyway, whatever my letter said it met with a refusal which I received within four days. I wrote a further letter on the ninth, "Either you transfer me into a hostel or I will go home and stay there." Thursday the twelfth I received a visitor from Truro who would, no doubt, be speaking to the Zs as well as to me. I don't know what she said to them, but whatever it was he now knew I was leaving and I was a good worker. I was strong and willing and whatever I was asked to do I never found beyond my capability. Now he would have to start afresh with somebody else. As for me, all she tried to do was coax me to stay, then she left me to think about it. Saturday the fourteenth I went to Truro. "I've come here to tell you face to face that if you will not transfer me into a hostel I will go home and stay there. My

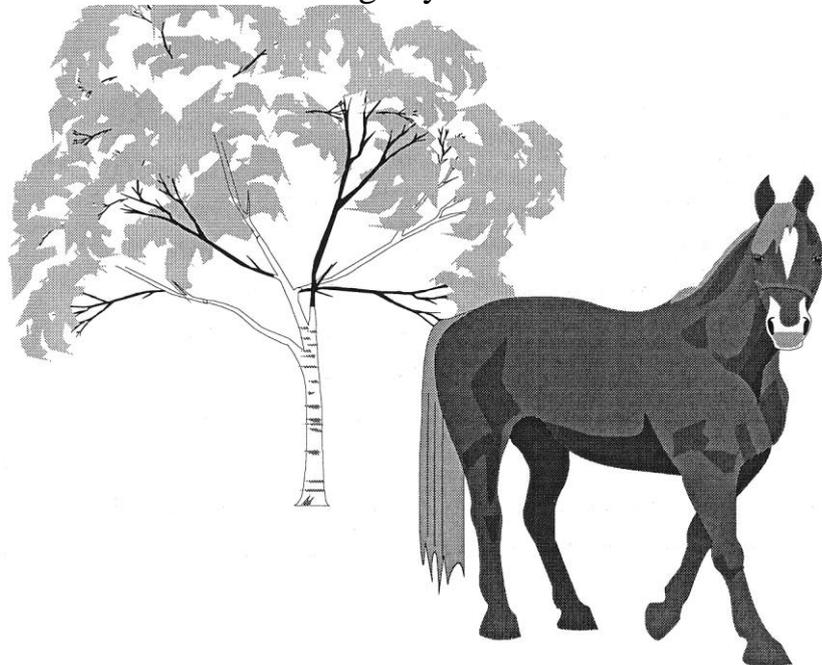
cases are packed and I will leave for home tomorrow." That did it. Arrangements were made there, on the spot. I would be moving on Monday.

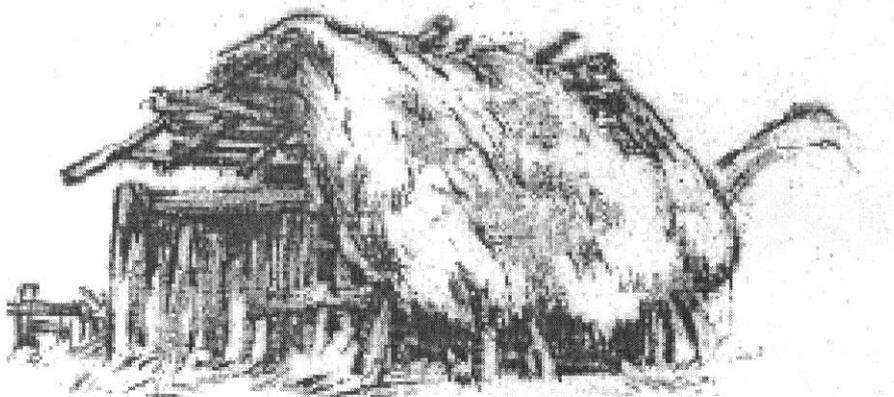
While this had been going on I had been busy visiting all my friends and saying good-bye, for it was unlikely I would be that way again. I also spent a great deal of time with Michael that last month. He would miss me, I knew, for we had become real friends. I certainly missed him, the beautiful creature. I also missed Bill and Doreen and the cooing of the wood pigeons in the trees outside my bedroom window.

Monday morning arrived, but my travel voucher didn't, so for the second time I stayed at Pencubit Hostel in Liskeard until the following day. The girls all went out to work that day leaving me alone in the hostel. I had requested moving in here, it would have been ideal from my point of view. I knew most of the girls, I wouldn't have far to move and I could have kept all the friends I had made, but "No! I'm sorry, there is no vacancy" Perhaps it was just as well. I wouldn't have wanted to meet that paratrooper again and I wouldn't have wanted to see Mons and Vera together, so it all worked out for the best. The strange thing is, no matter how hard I try I cannot put faces or names to any of the girls from that hostel in Liskeard, and I find that sad.

I do wish I had had the sense to keep a proper journal of my wartime years because, among other things, I would love to know what reason I gave to the people at Headquarters for wanting to transfer again. On the day I visited them to drive home my threat perhaps I ended up telling the truth, maybe that's why they got me out of there so fast. In my previous experience it had taken a week.

My travel voucher arrived on Monday July 16th and I moved out of Pencubit Hostel in Liskeard the following day.





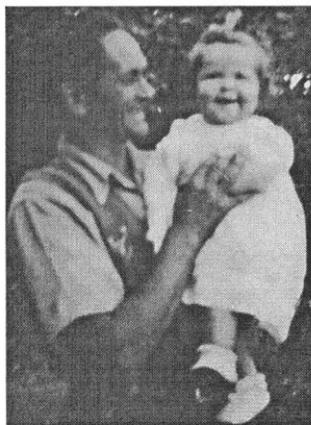


Mons Meager
8th Army



Mons' family.
Back row:-
sister Vera; unknown;
unknown; Mons and
his wife Vera; sister
Inez with husband
Bill.

Inez' children are on
the front row with
Mons' mother.



Bill and Doreen Welsh
with their second child
Brenda



Chapter Six
Crag Hostel, Wadebridge

Crag Hostel, St Breock, Wadebridge, Cornwall was my new address. The house had been somebody's lovely country home, probably requisitioned for the duration of the war. Beautiful, yes, but still stuck in the nineteenth century, and I was back to the oil lamps again. A lot of the buildings which were requisitioned by the authorities were virtually destroyed by their occupants and I doubt if there would be any compensation given. But whoever owned this one had struck lucky because the warden who looked after us guarded that house as if it was her own. Her name was Miss Fitt and you can imagine what we did with a name like that. She was my idea of what some ladies from the 'County Set' might look like. I would describe her as being quite plain to look at with short straight, black hair and a tendency towards flat brogue shoes and severely tailored clothes, mostly suits. She was lady-like, but very much in control and knew how to give orders without getting anybody's back up. Everybody liked and respected her and therefore did as they were asked. Her age would probably be somewhere in her forties. When this lady said "Don't come into the house wearing your working footwear." then we didn't, the idea being that we left them in what was known as the drying room where we left all our working clothes and anything which got wet during the day would be perfectly dry by the following morning. You may feel that not going into the house wearing outdoor footwear covered in mud would be an unnecessary request. Not so. The girls in a Land Army hostel could be a very mixed bunch and one, at least, of the girls at 'The Crag' would have gone to bed in her muddy boots if she felt like it. We were encouraged to use the back stairs which was no problem because they came down into the drying room and kitchen area. So after taking off outdoor clothing and footwear we went straight upstairs to bath and change before sitting down to eat. But there was another staircase and it was beautiful. It was wide and impressive and after it had gone up so far it split both ways and went the rest of the way both to the left and to the right. It had beautifully highly polished twisted spindles, or stair-rails and a wide banister which was also highly polished. Miss Fitt was for ever reminding us to be careful not to scratch the banister with our rings, especially engagement rings. This caught on so well we even reminded one another.

Some of the big bedrooms were partitioned into smaller rooms so as not to have too many girls in one room. The room I was in had just three of us in and we were well blended and got on together extremely well. One was called Elsie Johnson and the other was Dorothy Clegg from Yorkshire.

When we were outside the hostel the forewoman was in charge during working hours. She was also very lady-like, but well in control. Her name was Eileen Dawson from Blackburn and I considered her to be a lovely looking woman

of about twenty eight. She was the driver of our truck which was similar to an army truck used for transporting soldiers.

There was a man called Harry Curtis who was in overall charge of the work. Eileen took her orders from him. If there was tractor work being done it was very often he who did it. There were about six other men in the team and there was always at least one man with us when we were working.

I enjoyed farm work very much, one of the reasons being as the months moved themselves through the year so the jobs changed. We never worked on the same job for very long, except milking and feeding of course. However, working from a hostel meant we went from farm to farm doing whatever job was in season, consequently each job went on for a much longer period of time than it did when billeted on a farm. But it did mean we got around quite a bit and some of the locations were lovely, especially those on the coast. It was quite something to be working on the top of a cliff overlooking the sea, particularly on a beautiful summer's day, and, whenever there was easy access to the beach, that's where we would be found during our lunch break. After we had eaten we would spend the rest of the time paddling and clowning. No question of resting in preparation for the hours of hard work which were to follow. What wouldn't I give to have such staying power today. I have a photograph of a group of us drying our feet after such an occasion. I don't remember who took it, but somebody must have had a camera. What is more, whoever it was must have known somebody with access to film. Having just spent a bit of thought on this I have come to the conclusion that the camera probably belonged to Eileen, the forewoman. There are seven photos altogether, five of which were taken out at the place of work and two back at the hostel, one with Eileen and Elsie and one with Eileen and the warden, Miss Fitt.

I remember that on the day the photos were taken the job we were doing was picking potatoes. When we were first introduced to such a job and shown just how much had to be done, very often field after field after field, my first reaction was usually " Oh heck! We'll never get through that lot." But we always did and the farmers were usually pleased with the time taken. It wasn't unusual to receive a bonus at the end of the job, which was entirely voluntary. I can still remember what a nice feeling it was to receive this unexpected money. On the whole, we were a happy crowd and both Eileen, the forewoman, and Harry, the boss, encouraged us to have fun while we worked whenever possible. Keeping up our spirits probably helped to keep up our speed, especially when potato picking. This was a back-aching job even for the young, although the first week was always the worst. Travelling from farm to farm meant we saw a lot of the beautiful countryside of Cornwall and sometimes Eileen would take a detour just to enable us to look at this place or that. It was on one of these detours that I was introduced to Newquay. We piled out of the truck to take a little walk and, if I remember

correctly, there were road blocks and pill boxes along the front. Or was that some other place? Well, I am going back fifty years and that's expecting a lot of anyone's memory. But I *am* sure of two things. One was of our inability to walk on the beach because mines had been laid in case of invasion, and the other was the colour of the sea. All I expect from the sea is that it should be either blue, green or grey and I certainly wasn't prepared for what I saw this day. I was positively enthralled. It showed me every colour from turquoise to deep purple. While I watched, many shades of blue seemed to interchange with one another as the sea carried out its movements. We couldn't stay long because we were on our way to work, but all I wanted to do was stay and watch. Eileen laughed and said "I thought all the elements were right for it this morning, that's why I brought you here. But it won't stay like that all day, it varies according to the light." Some of the other girls had seen it before, but Eileen must have seen it many times to be able to determine just what was the right time and conditions for it. I have never forgotten what I saw that day, but I have never been back to Newquay from that day to this. I wonder if it still happens or whether the eternal pollution of our planet has destroyed it.

There was also something else I learned on one of these detours. Did you know that there is a difference between a Cornish pasty and a Cornish pasty? One day we were going home earlier than usual because we had finished the job we were hired to do. It had been a hot tiring day although it was cooling off a bit now and as we climbed into the truck Eileen said "Would anyone like a Cornish pasty?" That seemed to be a popular question as there were cries of delight from everybody except me. "Well, we'll not be expected back at the hostel at this time, so the meal may not be ready." With that she fastened up the tailboard and climbed into the cab. She drove along the country roads, turning this way and then that, until we came upon a tiny group of houses. I think this may have been termed a hamlet for it certainly wasn't big enough to call a village. she stopped just as we were about to leave the hamlet behind and we all piled out. There was one tiny little shop and Eileen went ahead of us. "Do you have any Cornish pasties ready?" she asked. "How many do you want?" Eileen waved her hand towards us - there were probably about ten of us. The lady laughed and said "There is a batch ready to come out, there probably will be enough." We waited a little while. I could smell them cooking and I was ravenously hungry and impatient. Then eventually there it was in my hand and very hot indeed, so it had to be eaten slowly, carefully. But Wow! I have *never* tasted *anything* as good in my life! I bought one several times after that and they never varied. They were always filled with good quality meat and vegetables and beautifully cooked. Were they really *that* good, or was it just because I was so hungry? Or maybe the memory of them has been enhanced over the years? Later on in the year I was not just hungry but cold as well and therefore even more appreciative. I have no idea of how much the lady charged, but whatever it was they were worth every penny. Every time I got the opportunity

I would buy a Cornish pasty elsewhere, but *never* were they *anything* like hers. That must be how they are *supposed* to taste. Certainly, Cornish pasties of today are nothing but rubbish, even when bought from so-called 'high class' confectioners. I wonder how the present day Cornish pasty, made in Cornwall, would measure up to the ones in my memory.

My diary records that August 6th was Bank Holiday Monday and we had all been invited to a dance at the St. Merryn army camp.

Miss Fitt always gave us a late pass on these occasions and Harry Curtis always gave Irene permission to use the truck as transport. I can just picture it. Twenty young women all dressed to kill arriving in an old army truck! Anyway, it took more than that to dampen our spirits, and at least the weather was good. There were to be other times when it was pouring with rain and the surround to the camp was nothing but mud, but as I say, being young, our spirits were not easily dampened. These occasions always reminded me of the story of Cinderella. At the stroke of midnight Irene would gather all her 'chicks' around her and lead the way out to the truck and she would count us all too, to make sure she wasn't leaving anybody behind. I think most of the camp dances we went to were on RAF stations, but if they were holding a dance on this particular day maybe the Army beat them to it. On one of these occasions Irene came away with a large piece of fabric given to her for the girls by somebody in some sort of authority. Perhaps a Quarter Master Sergeant as they were the ones in charge of the supplies, but I am pretty sure this was from an RAF station and I don't know the correct title for Q.M Sergeant in RAF terminology. However, this piece of fabric was shared out among us resulting in a piece about twenty inches square for each of us. After some debate we decided that it was fit for nothing else but a small headscarf. I thought it was ugly. It is the most harsh yellow colour, just like the yellow No Parking lines in the streets of today, but you never looked a gift horse in the mouth, not during the war. It was given free and without coupons. I think it may be wool, or at least have wool in it because it now measures eighteen inches and I remember when I washed it some years ago I thought it had shrunk. Somebody hit on the idea of turning it into a memento, "Let's all sign our names on one another's." What a good idea that was. The fabric is perfectly plain and lends itself to having signatures all over it. When embroidered along the lines of the signatures they were, of course, permanent and this is the state of mine to this very day. What is even better, I can tie most of the faces on the photographs taken by the Press in September 1945 to their signatures on the scarf. What a wonderful memento it turned out to be, but as a scarf it was never worn.

On one occasion after an invitation to a camp dance one of the girls asked if she could borrow one of my dresses. I immediately refused. I would never dream of borrowing anybody else's clothes and I didn't like the idea of anybody

else wearing my clothes. "It's all right for you, but I'm poor. I haven't got money to buy lots of clothes." The only reason I had plenty of dresses was because I looked after them and wore them year, after year, after year. So when I did buy a new one it was just added to the number. However, as the time approached to leave for the dance she was still languishing on her bed because she 'had nothing to wear', so I relented. I loaned her the dress I liked the least and very nice she looked too. I thought she looked better in it than I did and I took the reason for this as being that she had a much smaller bust than I did. Apart from that we were of very similar build.

Having a very practical mind it didn't take me long to work out that I was just as poor as she was, the difference being I used what money I had, thirty shillings - or £1.50 - for a week's work, wisely. She wasted hers on cigarettes and, together with others, did her utmost to get me to do the same.

I don't think I was the only one who was not a smoker, but for some reason I was the one selected for conversion. Mind you, I *was* the new kid on the block as they say and maybe the others had already been put through the same pressure, but for now it was my turn. The worst time was when we were travelling back from work. That was when everybody seemed to be smoking and of course, true to tradition, I would be offered one, too. "No. Thank you. I don't smoke." "Oh come on, you can't be the odd one out." "No. Thank you." This went on for some weeks with added remarks like "Did Mummy tell you not to?" "That's right. Be Mummy's little girl and do as Mummy tells you." "Mummy will never know. Anyway, you're a big girl now."

I was fast losing my patience with this and one day my patience came to an end. "I'll show them!"

There were two rows of seats in the truck, one on each side and when we were all together it was a tight squeeze, so somebody had to sit on an upturned bucket. One of these buckets would be occupied by me whenever possible. I would always try to be the last one in so as to be right by the tailboard. This way I could avoid some of the smoke. Here I was on my upturned bucket when this persuasion started all over again. I turned to one of them with my hand stretched out. "All right. Give me one." There were great whoops of delight. They had got to me at last, or so they thought. All eyes were on me as the cigarette was lit for me. They were anticipating lots of laughter as this 'greenhorn' took her first drag. In fact the laughter was already there on their faces because they knew exactly what was coming, or thought they did. I sat in a very relaxed manner with my knees apart and one forearm resting on each knee. I drew on the cigarette, taking the smoke down into my lungs, held it there for the length of time an expert would have done, then exhaled - again very expertly. I repeated this three times. By now

the look of fun had faded from every face to be replaced by one of disappointment accompanied by cries of "Oh no. I thought you said you had never smoked before." and "You've been kidding us." I put the cigarette on the floor, squashed it well down with my foot, turned to them and said "OK, you've had your fun. Now let that be an end to it." and it was. They never bothered me again, but they never believed me either that that was the first time I had ever smoked a cigarette. It was also the last time. The look of expertise was due purely to observation and the determination to be completely relaxed during the performance. I had watched my father smoke for the whole of my life and much of that time he had sat in exactly the same position as I did. It was his favourite position.

I wasn't sick nor did I even feel sick because I inhaled the smoke correctly. I felt it go down into my lungs, I even felt it spread out along the passages of my lungs and in doing so it left me wondering why people who try it for the first time ever want to do it again. It left me with a burning sensation which I have never forgotten. I didn't find it at all enjoyable. What's more, I could always find much more sensible things to do with my money such as buying pretty dresses that smokers thought they should be allowed to borrow, for example!

On August 13th my diary records how much I was enjoying the harvesting. It was hot, thirsty work and the hours were long, usually until sunset or thereabouts. But I can't remember that I ever thought of it as hard work. Perhaps that's because I enjoyed it so much. I think this harvest date was quite early, perhaps due to the very hot weather we had been having and being so far south. In later years I experienced harvesting as being from mid-August to mid-September, but that was in the north, of course. While I was in the Land Army I experienced farming methods from the most primitive to the most up-to-date. I saw corn cut by hand with a scythe, I saw combined harvesters and I saw every method in between. But the prettiest and most picturesque were the primitive methods. To see a complete field of corn stooks standing in straight rows in the late evening sunshine casting long shadows across the short golden stubble. Wow! That was quite a sight. After a long, hard day just to stand drinking in a sight like that always gave me a very satisfied feeling.

Sometimes the sheaves of corn had been cut and tied mechanically and all we had to do was gather and stook them. Sometimes the corn would be left spread all over the field after being cut by a man with a scythe. We would then have to gather it in our arms and tie it into sheaves before forming it into stooks. Stooking was done by propping five or six sheaves one against another, tripod fashion, so that the breeze could circulate between them, so drying out any remaining moisture from within.

In contrast, there was the combined harvester. This machine trundled it's way up and down the field greedily gobbling up everything in its path. Then like some greedy monster which had eaten too much it spewed up, discarding bales of straw to one side of it and bags of threshed corn to the other together with bags of chaff or husks. At the end of the day the field was left looking as though it had been raped. The bales of straw and bags of chaff were left strewn everywhere and the bags of corn were taken away immediately and placed under cover. And I was always left with a feeling in the pit of my stomach which I didn't understand. I have that feeling now, and I still don't understand.

Tuesday August 14th was V.J. Day, Victory over Japan. At last the fighting had finally stopped and my diary tells me that the announcement was made over the radio late that night. Wednesday 15th was taken as a holiday in celebration. My room-mates Dorothy and Elsie and myself took ourselves off to Bodmin. Dorothy was meeting her husband there. He was in the army and, presumably, he was stationed somewhere fairly close by. This cannot have been the situation for long otherwise, surely, they would have been spending time together on a more regular basis, but I cannot ever remember this happening before. Anyhow, Elsie and I stayed with her until he arrived then we went to a dance at Camelford aerodrome. My diary tells me no more and I can't remember any more. I only know we would have no transport so we must have used the railway and for Bodmin we would go south from Wadebridge and then north again from Bodmin to Camelford. Maybe we met somebody we knew in Bodmin and were given a lift or maybe we just hitch-hiked. I'll never know now.

I was getting this very strong feeling all over again of wanting to be with my family, just as I had over V.E. Day. I just *had* to be with them. Last time I didn't feel I could just walk out because I was part of a small team, but this time it was different. If I went home I would be leaving eighteen other girls to carry on and none of them seemed to be wanting to do the same. So, after work on Thursday 16th I hopped aboard a train for Manchester. I had no money. I couldn't even buy a ticket, but I always travelled in my uniform and felt quite sure that I would be dealt with kindly. I wasn't wrong. I made it all the way to Manchester without being challenged, but of course now I had to get past the barrier. There was no problem there either. I was just given a slip of paper enabling me to pay later. By now it was the early hours of Friday morning and still dark so I had to get a taxi. This was the second time I had arrived home on leave without a welcoming committee, but then on each occasion nobody knew that I was coming, did they?

The house was in darkness of course, but not for long and soon everyone was awake and drinking tea and I was sitting on the bed next to my mother laughing and talking and drunk with happiness. The rest of the day I just enjoyed being home with my folks. All the 'black outs' were gone from the windows and

all the tape cleaned off the glass. The tape had been put on the window panes in a criss-cross fashion in order to help stop flying glass if, or when, a bomb was dropped nearby. It was lovely to see the windows without it again.

It would be my twentieth birthday in just under two month's time, so my brother Albert took me out to buy me a birthday present, a beautiful fountain pen. It was a bit early, but he didn't expect to be seeing me again before Christmas, so why not give it to me now. Everywhere I went there was a sense of relief and light heartedness. The following day, Saturday, I went to see my friend's mother, Mrs. Gillon. She more than most had jolly good reason to feel light-hearted with husband and eldest son, John, in the Marines and youngest son, Stanley, in the Guards. I think it was the Scots Guards. Stanley was home on leave just for the weekend, like myself.

My mother did not have that kind of a worry. My father was too old for the call-up, my eldest brother, Albert, was medically unfit and my younger brother, Bill, was too young. So that just left me and I was in no danger from bullets. There were lots of other dangers, but I never mentioned any of them to my parents, no sense in worrying them. They were glad to have me back in the fold when the time came.

Sunday I stayed in the house all day just soaking up the homely, happy atmosphere. Also most of Monday till Albert took me to the pictures, first house, in the evening. I then took the midnight train back to Cornwall on borrowed money. It was very expensive for just four days, but I needed it, and it did the trick. I went back to work with a light heart. For legitimate leave there was no worry about money because, like all the other forces we were issued with a travel warrant, but to take off at any other time we had to foot the bill ourselves.

It was about this time that I started to walk out with a boy called Geoffrey, the son of the people who kept the local post office. He was about my age and a nice lad, but like all lads of my age he was immature and had no conversation. Consequently I found him a bit of a bore. This relationship was very similar to the relationship I had with Terry at Mr. Y's farm. I don't think it ever got to the kissing and cuddling stage. If it did it has left no memory and there is certainly no mention of that in the diary. With hindsight, I wonder why he was still at home with his mother and father. If he was as old as I was he should have been either in uniform or doing some sort of war work. If he failed the medical for the armed forces perhaps he was strong enough for farm work. I have no memory of any mention of this. Of course he could have been much younger than I thought and if that was the case no wonder I found him boring.

Sometime in September I damaged my foot. This is all a little hazy, but I think something sharp went through my boot. The consequence was my foot went

septic and I was packed off home to recuperate, but fortunately the injury wasn't as bad as it might have been. I don't remember how long I was home, but I wouldn't think the doctor would sign me fit for work until it was completely healed because of the danger from the soil. People working on the land can eliminate much of the danger these days by having an anti-tetanus injection, but I don't know if the injection was even available then. If it was, *we* were not safeguarded by it. We were, however, warned of the dangers of the soil coming into contact with open wounds and Irene always carried a First Aid kit in the truck.

When I returned it was to find that the press had visited the hostel and had taken photographs of the whole gang, plus Miss Fitt and her household staff. All the gang that is, except Irene Dorothy and myself, all of whom were on leave. Needless to say, all three of us were really annoyed to have missed out on this. Nevertheless, I did buy the photographs and have always been pleased that I did. There are three of them, 10" by 8". They are extremely good and I have found them a very helpful aid to my memory. They have served to trigger off a memory of many an incident long since forgotten while I have been reaching back to the past. All I had to compensate me had been a septic foot, plus some extra time at home, of course. At least Irene and Dorothy were with their husbands for two or three weeks. Even so, we felt it would have been nice if the gang had been complete.

We were now into November 1945 and four of us, myself, Dorothy Clegg and Elsie and Pat, two local girls who did not live in the hostel, were singled out to work for a man called Mr. S. When we were transported to our place of work the first morning we were surprised to say the least, because it was a beautiful country cottage - and not a small one! We were to tidy up the garden, which was not exactly what the Land Army was all about, and even worse, when that was done we were to start on the house. So far as I had been led to believe, that was absolutely taboo and I, for one, felt resentful about it. However, since there was nothing we could do about it we just got on with it. The job took us two or three weeks and eventually I came to appreciate being there because it was very late in the year and some days were very cold and very wet. So, on the worst days, we worked indoors. I can only surmise at this late date that the rule about Land Girls doing no house work had been waived on this occasion, perhaps due to the lack of other work. On the farm at this time of year there would be hedging and ditching to do and maintenance work of many kinds, but the farmers would be doing this themselves. It was not the kind of work for which they brought in the Land Girls, but I took part in that kind of work when billeted on a farm, of course.

Mr. S was a man in his late middle age. He came almost every day to see how we were progressing. He was a man with an eye for the ladies, especially

young ones, so we soon learned to be wary of him, especially as we never saw him completely sober. We nick-named him the 'dirty old man'.

I suspect that this cottage had not been lived in for quite some time. It wasn't terribly dirty, it just had that deserted, neglected look about it. We were required to do everything that we would have done had the house been our own, even to turning out drawers and wardrobes. In short, we were to get it ready to be lived in again. I wonder if somebody had left it to go away to war and was now about to come home again. If that were the case I would never have resented doing the job, but we were never told the whys and wherefores of the situation. Whoever they were, the lady of the house liked to have plenty of tablets of soap in the drawers and wardrobes, and not utility soaps, but highly perfumed pre-war luxury soaps. All I had been used to up to this date was ordinary, everyday, toilet soaps of a much cheaper brand. As soon as I encountered this luxury soap I knew the difference and my mind was awakened to the appreciation of it. So much so, I am ashamed to say, I stole a tablet. It did go to a good home, though. I used it sparingly and made it last and last and last. My appreciation is just as acute to this day for I don't wear perfume as such, but highly perfumed, luxury soap is something I am never without.

Mr. S was very pleased with our work on the cottage and, I must admit, so was I. When we had finished it looked beautiful and I wished it was mine. He showed his appreciation by bringing a picnic hamper filled with a luxury tea. He set it all out then called us in from the garden, sat us round the highly polished table covered with a lace tablecloth (and us all in our muck) and watched us tuck in. We never saw him again for that wasn't the kind of place we would go back to season after season.

That weekend Dorothy Clegg and I spent in Plymouth. We started out at 9.30am on Saturday and arrived back at the hostel at 5.30pm on Sunday. The first thing we did on arrival was to book a bed each for the night at the YWCA, the Young Women's Christian Association. This had to be done as early as possible because they were in great demand, then we set off to see the town, or what was left of it. Plymouth came in for a terrific bombardment from Adolf's bombing raids so almost everywhere we looked we saw destruction. But that was nothing new to me because I had seen Plymouth before. Besides, Manchester also took a bashing. I don't know whether Dorothy had seen this kind of devastation before, I only know she was from Yorkshire and if I ever knew from which part I have long since forgotten. However, our spirits didn't stay low for long. We window shopped and ate in restaurants and laughed a lot and on Saturday evening danced at the YMCA.

The YMCA and the YWCA were all part of the same Association and although it had existed before the war, I think, during the war it was run strictly for

the benefit of service men and women. It offered accommodation and food from the canteen, a games room and, of course, the inevitable dances.

We did a bit of hitch-hiking Elsie, Dorothy and I, but always in two's and three's and always in uniform as that increased the chance of a lift. There was very little traffic on the roads in those days so we couldn't afford to be choosy if we wanted to get about. I hitched a lift in all kinds of vehicles - in the cab of a milk lorry transporting churns of milk to the Milk Marketing Board's dairies - in the back of a farmer's truck on his way to or from town - in an empty truck or a jeep driven by Americans, but *never* by our own army or air force, due to British forces' regulations I believe - even in a taxi on one occasion, just Dorothy and I. We climbed in and shut the door before we realised it was a taxi. We didn't have enough money to pay for taxis and we immediately apologised for our mistake and reached for the door handle to get out, but the driver said "No, no! Sit down. I won't charge you. I'm going back to town anyway." So for once we rode back in style, but it was rare to get a lift in a car. There just wasn't many of them about.

We would walk along the road just sticking out our thumbs whenever we heard an approaching vehicle without even looking properly to see what it was. Not that it mattered since we would have got into it anyway. One such lift sticks out a mile in my memory. A truck ran past us as the driver made the effort to stop and we ran up to the front of the truck to speak to him. "Want a lift, ladies?" "Yes, please." "Well, don't be too eager. You'd better take a look at it first." With that, he let down the rear end of the cattle truck. Oh, no! As I remarked earlier on, cattle can be messy beggars. He had just delivered a load into town and 'it' was everywhere - all over the floor, the sides and even some on the ceiling! How on earth they managed that I *don't* know. We stopped dead in our tracks. There were four of us on this occasion and we discussed the situation. "You would have to hold on tight to the wall." he said. The sides of the truck were slatted with strips of wood and did provide a good finger hold. "I will try not to throw you about, but there will be *some* movement of course." he cautioned. "Oh, come on. Let's risk it!" somebody said and the next minute we were all inside, each of us choosing our position between the dollops and holding on to the slats on the sides. The driver climbed back into his cab and away we went. He may have taken care not to throw us about, but we were thrown about nevertheless. People he passed en route - and there must have been *some* - must have wondered what on earth was going on. There were squeals, there were moans, there were shouts and there was laughter not forgetting the odd scream here and there, but when we emerged not one of us had come in contact with any of the dollops, which was good going when I think about it. We probably stunk to high heaven just the same for it was not an open truck and the driver had no choice but to fasten us in there. I'll bet he had many a good laugh about that because he would be able to hear all our vocal efforts. I don't know where we were going on that occasion, I only hope that once we were

out in the fresh air again we freshened up a bit. I have a picture in my mind of people's noses twitching as we passed them in the street.

The year is now drawing to its close. In five weeks time it will be Christmas and, naturally enough, there is talk of Christmas leave. Being in a hostel, there is no question of who can take leave and who can't. There is no holding of the fort to be done here. So far as I know we all went on leave. I was particularly looking forward to it and I had some making up to do because last Christmas had been the most miserable time of my life. And the Christmas previous to that one had been spent in the NAAFI quarters on Lindley aerodrome and, naturally, it was the welfare of the service men which was first and foremost in that situation. I was informed by Irene that if I wanted to take any poultry or eggs home for Christmas then now was the time to order. Did I want to? Golly! That would be the best Christmas present I could ever take home no matter how much money I had. Not many of us took advantage of this, but those of us who did climbed into the truck and Irene drove us from one farm to another placing one order here then another order there. They had to be spread out over an area because food was still rationed and farmers were supposed to send all their produce to the appropriate place for distribution. I ordered a goose, two chickens and some eggs. That having been done seemed to somehow enhance the mounting excitement I was now feeling, but since there was yet another five weeks to go I just had to settle down again.

After our cushy number at Mr. S's house the four of us were back with the gang working out in the cold picking potatoes at a place called Lenoe. November 16th sounds to me to be a bit late for that job, but perhaps so far south the time limit is extended. We were, however, rained off at 3.30pm on our first day back and the job was completed two days later when we then moved to an indoor job. A great deal of our work in the hostel was to do with potatoes. If we were not planting them we were weeding them, if not weeding we were picking them. Now we were riddling them. We sat around in a semi-circle with a mountain of potatoes before us, the mountain being taller than the men. We sat in a squatting position on anything we could find - an upturned bucket, a box, a bale of straw - not the most comfortable of positions, especially the upturned bucket. Buckets were made of metal in those days and all those that I saw had a what looked like a metal collar around the lower outside edge of the bucket. After sitting on that sharp rim for any length of time you soon began to know about it, if you see what I mean. Not so much for me, because I always had a little bum which fitted neatly inside the rim of most of them. But most of the girls were heavier in that area than I was and were therefore sitting on the edge of the collar. Still, those who were suffering most could usually find an old sack to use as a cushion.

We each had a metal riddle much the same as the ones used to sort out the cinders from the ashes of a domestic fireplace in the days of coal fires, only these

had a wider mesh. The idea was that we filled the riddle with potatoes and shook it about a bit so that the smaller ones fell through the mesh. Those that remained in the riddle were put into hessian potato bags and sent to market. Those that fell through the mesh were used as next year's seed. Not exactly a mind bending job, but, as usual, because we were so young we found fun in everything especially when the men of our team were there, too. When there was a mixture of the sexes there was always plenty of banter being thrown to and fro, and it was always clean, too. All the time I worked with those men I never saw or heard anything disrespectful. They were really great. We worked on this job for only two days. Did we complete it in that time, I wonder, or did we just do as much as the farmer needed us to do? There were a heck of a lot of potatoes in that shed!

Pulling sugar beet was to be our next job. I didn't know there was such a thing as a beetroot from which sugar was made. I had always been told sugar came from sugar cane. Was it pure necessity which brought this about, I wonder? After all, the sugar cane fields were on the other side of the world and it wasn't possible to grow our own. Well, whatever the reason, it was going to be here to stay and cane sugar today (1994), is a more expensive product. The sugar beet job was situated on an aerodrome by the name of St. Mawgan and there were aeroplanes taking off and landing all day at fairly regular intervals. We, of course, waved them all off and welcomed them all back which was a rather nice diversion for us. On one occasion a larger than usual aeroplane landed and out stepped a crowd of soldiers in jungle battle dress. They were troops home from Burma. We waved and cheered like mad and when they saw us they did the same thing. That was a rather nice moment, but that's all it was because almost immediately trucks arrived and whisked them away. Working on an aerodrome was rather reminiscent of my days in the NAAFI.

Friday 14th December had arrived and it was time to revisit the farms where we had ordered our poultry and eggs. Harry Curtis, our boss, drove me in his car that evening to pick mine up from Mr. Blake's farm, then later on Geoffrey, the boy I was walking out with arrived with two dozen eggs for me and with a promise to send me a duck and a further dozen eggs later on. I don't know whether he kept that promise or not, but I do remember the delight in my mother's eyes when she received so many eggs all at once. All she had been used to in the past five years was one egg for each member of the family once a week, or was it once a fortnight? Except when I came home on leave and managed to bring some with me, of course. When I said that Geoffrey had promised to send some more through the post my mother and father exchanged glances then my father said "Is that the same person who sent the last lot?" "Yes. Why?" "Don't send any more, Lass, they were no good. They were not packed properly and they were smashed to bits." Apparently the postman said to my dad when he handed him the parcel "I don't know what that is, Mate, but I think you've had it." The raw egg had come

through to the outside of the parcel. What a terrible disappointment for them. They hadn't told me before because they didn't want to disappoint me, but they probably would if it had happened a second time. The funny thing is, the day I bought those eggs from Geoffrey's mother I was going to parcel them myself but Geoffrey said " No, don't do that. Let us do it for you. We know how a parcel should be packed." Oh well. They probably would have arrived smashed just the same. After all, it is rather a lot to expect that eggs would travel safely through the post even in the little half-dozen egg boxes available today.

Saturday 15th December and there was great excitement in the hostel. Everybody was packing to go on leave at the same time and that wasn't easy, especially with bunk beds. Normally when packing the neatly folded garments are laid out on the bed together with the suitcase into which they are to go, but with three girls in a little narrow room and only narrow bunk beds one of which was shoulder high, mine, it was a tussle. But we managed and finally we were all ready. Usually official leave, for me anyway, had been two weeks, but this Christmas leave was to be three weeks and I intended to enjoy every minute of it.

I arrived home at 8.30am on Sunday 16th and spent the rest of the day washing and ironing my clothes. My friend Doreen Gillon was not home yet, in fact she didn't arrive till 22nd December, and she had only two weeks leave, so it would seem that we were very lucky to have been given three weeks. Maybe it depended entirely just how much work was available at each individual hostel. In the meantime, I did very little gadding about. I just did some visiting, some letter writing and hung about the house a lot helping my mother spruce it up for Christmas, although a lot of that had already been done. I did, however, go riding and I also made enquiries as to the possibility of a job at the stables. I couldn't stay in the Land Army forever. There would be no further use for us soon and the thought of having to go back indoors to earn my living was not a happy one. I had not liked any of the jobs I had done before the Land Army and "Yes." came the reply, this job was mine if I wanted it and I could take my time to think about it. After Christmas would do. The wage they offered was one pound ten shillings (£1.50), the same as the Land Army, but without board and lodgings. My father gave me his opinion and I allowed myself to be influenced by it. "That is a very low wage and you can't go anywhere from a job like that. It's a dead end job. It is the sort of job that pays pin money to such as the daughter of a rich man. Somebody who doesn't have to work for her living." It was a shame because I knew that was a job I would really have enjoyed doing, but father was right, of course. I didn't take the job so I must have known he was right.

I went to the city centre a couple of times to look at the shops and I went to the hairdresser to have a perm. I chose Lewis's on Market street Manchester for this. Oh dear! I remember that day as if it was yesterday. In fact, I doubt if I will

ever forget it no matter how long I live. I went into the salon all dolled up and looking as near to a 'million dollar baby' as I could manage. I sat in the chair indicated to me, the hairdresser protected my clothing in the usual manner and stood behind me discussing how I wanted my hair doing while we looked at each other through the mirror in front of me. While this was going on she was handling and looking at my hair, of course. The discussion over, she left me for a short time then returned and said "Could you follow me please, Madam, I just want to put you into another chair."

Nothing so unusual in that. I have been asked to change my seat on many occasions. I followed her across the salon into a cubicle and sat down in front of the mirror. "I won't keep you long, Madam." she said as she left. After a minute or two another woman came in dressed like a nurse. She put her hands to my hair, lifted and looked at it and then said "I'm sorry, Madam, we can't do anything for you today because I'm afraid you have lice in your hair." *The world stopped turning.* I sat there looking at this woman through the mirror for what seemed like for ever. She must have known I was stunned because she became even more gentle and repeated what she had said. When I came to, the shame set in. I tried to explain it away, but how could I do that when I had been completely unaware of it. I babbled on about living in a Land Army hostel and that one of our number was a bit of a dirty beggar and maybe I had caught them from her? Or could I have caught them from cattle or sheep? When the babbling stopped I wanted to know how quickly I could be rid of them. I did not want to spend my leave trying to get my hair clean again or being constantly afraid that people would find out that I was lousy! She then said "I don't want to tell you this, really, because it is highly dangerous and you must promise me that during the time you will be doing this that you will keep your head wrapped in a towel and stay away from fire - and do not smoke! After my assurance that I would obey her she confided, "Paraffin. That's the secret. Soak your hair in paraffin then wrap it in a towel for a few hours. When you wash it you will be completely clean, even the nits will be gone. Whereas with other methods the nits have to be allowed to hatch and then the hair treated for a second time, this way you will be free from them the day after." "Does that mean I can come back tomorrow and have my perm?" Yes, it does, but you will have to be cleared by me first."

And that's what happened. My father did the soaking after which he followed me about the house like a puppy dog and he was on pins until the treatment was complete. So was my mother. I went back to Lewis's the following day and asked to see the nurse. She was delighted to see me and passed me as 'clean' saying "It's easy to see you're not used to having dirty hair." I never told anybody about this, not even Doreen, and I never mentioned it back at the hostel. I can't help wondering, however, about my two room mates. Did they go home lousy, too. Did I infect them or did they infect me, or did the girl who's name I

can't remember infect me and maybe them too? As I said to the nurse, I was completely unaware because my head had not been itching. My room-mates did not mention they had been lousy, but then I didn't mention it to them either, did I?

Doreen came home on Saturday 22nd and on Sunday 23rd the constant gadding about started. Riding, skating, but no swimming - wrong time of year. A constant round of the cinemas and there were plenty of them in those days; and dancing, often twice a day, at the YMCA in the afternoon and at a ballroom or hotel in the evening. During this Christmas leave I added three more to my fleet of 'ships'. One bell-bottomed sailor and two more air crew, one a pilot and one an observer. All three were local men on leave, but only the sailor kept in touch for a while. His name was Gordon Halpin. The Observer was Ken Woolam, who I saw later in the year at a dance in the Yew Tree Hotel which is where I met him. We said nothing to each other except "Hello" as we glided past each other on the dance floor. After spending three very pleasant evenings together you would think we would have had more to say than just "Hello" to each other. John, the pilot, I never heard from or saw again. Like I said, "Ships that pass in the night."

I was supposed to be back in the hostel by January 6th, but, unexpectedly, I was home till February 8th. For about ten days of that time I had been waiting for a travel voucher to arrive to take me back to Cornwall. It must have been an oversight. As my leave had been drawing to a close I became aware that my mother was not as well as she might be. She had just become 51 years old, on 4th January, so it was probably the menopause. Anyhow, whatever it was I thought she needed a bit of cossetting. I knew by instinct that she wouldn't get that from three menfolk, so I arranged to stay a bit longer. When I finally took the all night train back to Cornwall on the 8th February I took a certain amount of worry with me. I felt if I was nearer home I would be able to pop home regularly and keep an eye on her.

Two days after my return I received a letter from Geoffrey asking to see me on Wednesday. How did he know I was back, I wonder? It can't have been just good timing. Maybe he delivered the mail to the hostel and, if so, he would be on the spot to make enquiries as to the date of my return. It was quite usual in those far flung, out of the way, places for the people who kept the post office to also deliver the mail. I don't ever remember thinking of him as being the postman, but then I wouldn't be there when the post arrived as we left for work at eight o'clock.

On my return I found things had changed to some degree. We were fewer in number than we were before Christmas. The Welsh girls were no longer there, perhaps they didn't return after Christmas? Now that the war was over we were free to do as we pleased unlike the men and women in the armed forces who had to stay until they were officially demobilised. There were two studious girls who were working some notice. They probably had something definite to do with their

lives and wanted to get on with it. Miss Fitt, our warden, was no longer there, but then she left at the back end of 1945. Probably she went back to that 'county set' life I had decided she belonged to. Irene missed her very much because she and Miss Fitt were friends. I think the woman who took her place must have been all right because I can't remember that we had anything derogatory to say about her.

Men were beginning to return to work on the land for it was, after all, more than nine months since V.E. Day. This meant that, soon, not so many Land Girls would be needed.

We were well into the middle of March now and it was time to sow. Some farms had what they called a drilling machine. This was dragged behind either a horse or a tractor and it dropped the seeds in sparingly along the furrows. It also worked for potatoes - those eternal potatoes! Those machines didn't do *us* any good of course, because the farmer who had one didn't need the Land Girls. Only the farmers who didn't have one needed us. So here we were walking along the furrows with a bag of potatoes slung across the front of our body into which we plunged our right hand while helping to keep the bag in position with the left. You take a step and drop a potato - - take a step and drop a potato - for mile after mile. It must have been miles we walked doing that. Down one furrow and up the next, down and up; furrow after furrow; field after field; farm after farm. It's a wonder we could face potatoes for the rest of our lives. I remember one situation when we carried them on our backs a hundredweight at a time. We were unloading a truck and had to carry sacks of potatoes into a shed and stack them there. The man on the truck placed them carefully on our backs and the man doing the stacking took them carefully off our backs. I had the strength to carry them, but would not have had the strength to stack them. The toughest looking girls proved to be the ones with least staying power not only on this occasion but on others too.

I was still feeling concerned about my mother and felt that I ought to be nearer home, but I didn't want to leave my friends and I certainly didn't want to be billeted on a farm again. By the end of March I had decided to write to Truro Headquarters to find out what was available. I'll bet they thought "Oh, no. She's on the move again.", but I had been very happy here and I didn't want to move. This I told them in my letter so they would know that they had at last managed to satisfy me and that it was a hostel posting I really needed. In my letter I asked for a place in Lancashire as near to home as possible and I explained my reasons. The reply came back that there were no hostel vacancies in Lancashire and, what's more, there were no vacancies of any sort in Lancashire, but there was a vacancy in Cheshire. This was very near to Manchester, probably nearer than anything else.

I then went to see Mon's mother and his sisters Vera and Inez and her husband, Bill. Mons was still in the Army. These were straight-forward good-byes with a promise to write, which I did, but not for a long period of time. The pubs

were open by this time so I headed for the Fountain Hotel. I couldn't go without seeing Denholm the publican for I had spent many happy hours drinking Orangeade in his pub. Denholm was behind the bar as he I would get, but there were no vacancies in the Cheshire hostels. I replied that because of unfortunate experiences while billeted on farms I really did not want to put myself in that situation again. They gave me time to think about it.

In the meantime, life went on as usual. On Saturday, March 23rd 1946, Dorothy, Elsie, myself and one or two others all went to Truro for the day. I had been in Cornwall since 1944 and I hadn't seen the cathedral yet, not properly anyway - just a quick look around at Christmas time 1944 with Winifred. Some of the others hadn't seen it either so that was the first thing on the agenda. I was most impressed. My diary calls it 'positively beautiful'. That was the first time I had really looked at a cathedral and I remember feeling all the awe and fascination an experience like that is supposed to create. By now, of course, I have looked at so many I just take them in my stride. Not that that makes them any the less fascinating or awe inspiring, it just means that I am a tougher nut to crack these days. I completed my 'thinking time' during the next couple of days and informed Headquarters of my decision. I would accept the farm in Cheshire, but if there was anything at all about the people or the place that made me in the least bit unhappy or uneasy I would go home and stay there, so severing connections with the Land Army altogether.

At 9.20am on Saturday 30th March I caught the train to Liskeard for I wanted to say a final good-bye to the friends I had made there. Instinctively I knew I wouldn't see them again once I was back up north and my first call was to see Doreen and Bill who lived in the labourer's cottage on Mr. Z's farm. I pedalled my way along the road between Liskeard and the farm on a bicycle I had borrowed from the hostel and I was about two thirds of the way there when a car approached me going the same way, but instead of overtaking me it kept pace with me for a few seconds so, of course, I turned my head to see who it was who was driving it. It was Mr. Z, and his cold, steely blue eyes still full of hate were boring into mine and his face was like thunder. I think that could be termed as threatening behaviour. It certainly sent a shiver down my spine. He said nothing, but he didn't need to. I wouldn't have been surprised if he had refused to allow me to set foot on his property, but when I arrived at the farm yard he was nowhere to be seen and I just carried on straight through to the cottages. Not many people had a telephone in those days so Doreen and Bill had no idea I was coming. They were delighted to see me nevertheless, and I was invited to stay the night. I accepted and stayed there on Sunday night too. I remember that I enjoyed my stay very much. I enjoyed the happy atmosphere and the peace and tranquillity of my surroundings. Doreen and Bill seemed to be very happy together and their baby was beautiful. We kept in touch for many years, but finally, after about twenty five years, we let

go. I don't know who let go first, them or me, but we were strangers by this time and it had become difficult to write so it became just a card at Christmas and then, finally, nothing. I stayed with Doreen a few more hours on Monday and when Bill came home for his mid-day meal I said my good-byes and was overcome with emotion.

I then went to see Mon's mother and his sisters Vera and Inez and her husband, Bill. Mons was still in the army. These were straight-forward good-byes with a promise to write, which I did, but not for a long period of time. The pubs were open by this time so I headed for the Fountain Hotel. I couldn't go without seeing Denholm the publican for I had spent many happy hours drinking Orangeade in his pub. He seemed pleased to see me and I bought my very last Orangeade from him. I was just about to wander along to the railway station to see about my train when who should saunter in but Jim Hayes, otherwise known as Jampot, the solicitor with the beautiful, blue sports car. When he saw me he sat down beside me and asked about my life. I told him about the latest developments and that I had come to say good-bye to the friends I had made here. I didn't see Cookie though and I would very much liked to have done. Jampot and I sat talking for a while and when I made a move to go saying I had to catch a train back to Wadebridge he said " Oh, don't bother about that. Stay a bit longer and I'll take you back in the car." This I gladly accepted knowing from past experience that he could be trusted. I told him that I didn't have a late pass so I would have to be back by eleven o'clock. Sure enough, I was back just before eleven and there were several of the girls saying goodnight to their boyfriends outside the hostel. I created quite a stir and they wanted to know where I had been hiding him. I must admit that I did feel rather special to be driven up to this lovely house by this good looking man in his beautiful sports car. Just like a fairy tale!

On Saturday 13th April 1946 I boarded a train for Manchester. I planned to spend a week at home and then travel on to my new billet on April 22nd. The train headed north carrying me towards the next chapter in my still young, life.

My friend Dorothy Clegg stayed in the Land Army till her husband was demobbed and Irene Dawson, the forewoman, did the same. Elsie Johnson had no immediate plans for leaving the Land Army.



The eternal potato fields



Me

Elsie Johnson

Dorothy Clegg



Forewoman
Irene Dawson



Lunch break
on the beach



The local men in
our team minus
the boss, Harry
Curtis.



Press photo of the team at Crag Hostel

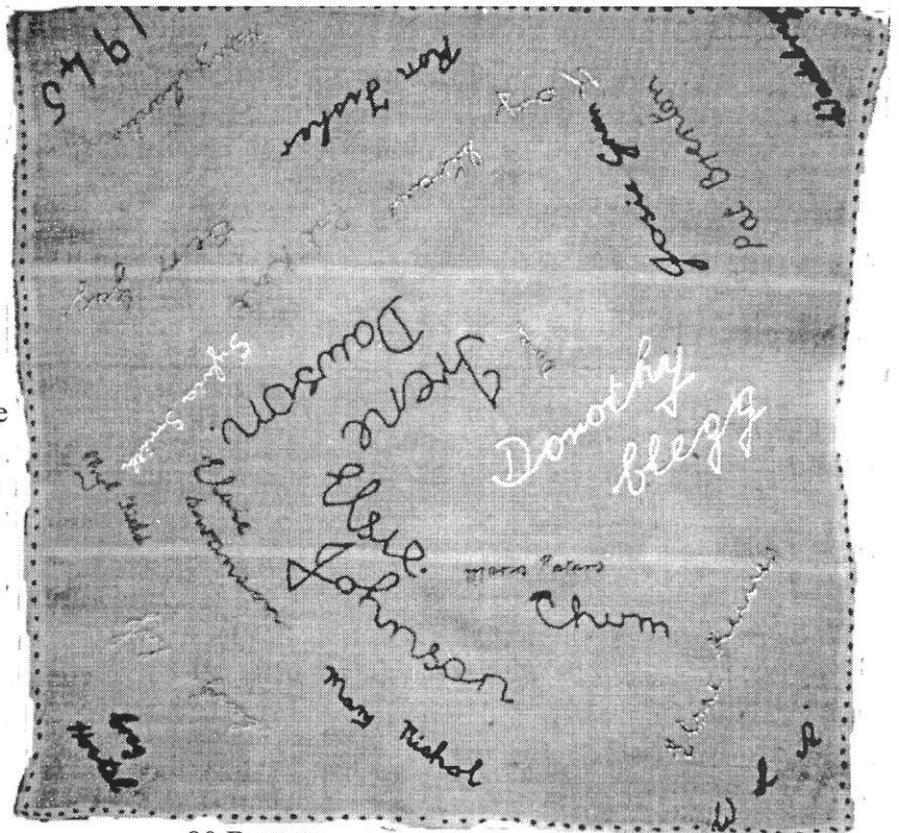
Back Row: Mona Peters; N/K; N/K; Dolores; N/K; N/K; N/K.

Middle Row: Josie Green; Elsie Johnson; Elsie Reeves; N/K; Pat Brenton; Sylvia Smith; Phyl Field.

Front Row: Kay Straw; Elsie Swanson; N/K; Miss Fitt; N/K; Ivy George; Mary Nichol. (who tried to make me smoke)

Dorothy Clegg, Eileen Dawson and I were not at the hostel that weekend.

The signatures of the group members embroidered on the yellow scarf.



Chapter Seven
Cop Holt Farm, Winwick

April 22nd 1946 was the day I started my new job with Mr. and Mrs. Houghton at Cop Holt Farm, Winwick, Warrington. There are no further entries in my diary from that date onwards, so anything I write from now on is pure memory and nothing more. Scrappy as my diary is, it did serve as a memory jogger and helped to keep events in chronological order. So, although my life at Cop Holt Farm was quite eventful, the recording of those events in chronological order is going to have to take pot-luck.

The place was lovely and clean both inside the farmhouse and outside in the farmyard. Mr. and Mrs. Houghton were young; Gwyn was about twenty five and Ernie about thirty five. They had a little boy of about five years of age and a baby on the way. A girl named Mary Lane who was about my age and helped in the house, lived in; and another woman came once a week to do the washing. No wonder the place was so clean with three women to keep it that way. I was off to a good start because I liked these people; they were my kind of people. There were no airs or graces about them and they were honest-to-goodness, hard-working, down-to-earth folk and we all got on very well together. However I think that perhaps there wasn't as much money here as maybe they would have liked because, after I had been there a couple of weeks or so, I was asked if I could wait for my wages for a while as there was a money problem. Mary was also asked. We both agreed to wait and duly received our pay two or three weeks later.

It was on this farm that I first learned to drive, if it could be called that. One day Ernie took the tractor out with me riding 'side-saddle' on the mudguard. Instead of going overland, as he usually did, he turned down the driveway and out onto the road. We went along for a while then turned right into the gateway of the farthest-flung field of the farm. There, he connected a plough to the back of the tractor and proceeded to start ploughing with me still riding on the mudguard. After he had done three or four furrows he stopped the tractor and said "There you are! Now do you think you can carry on from there?" I was amazed! I had never done any tractor work of any kind and to be asked to make my debut by ploughing was a bit daunting to say the least, not to mention surprising. Among the many things I had learned during the past few years, the high regard in which ploughing was held was one of them. There was a great pride interwoven with ploughing not to mention one-upmanship. There were contests held locally every year for the most perfectly ploughed field and here was little me, the Land Girl, being asked to plough this field! Usually this honour was kept for the farmer or his ploughman. I had been given some preliminary instruction on the tractor a few days before, but all I did then was drive it round the farmyard. My amazement was obviously showing because before I could answer he said "Don't worry. It's easy. All you

have to do is turn the tractor round at the end of each row and come back with two wheels down in the furrow. You can't go wrong. Don't forget to lift the plough before you turn, though." He hung around long enough to make sure I had got the hang of it then off he went leaving me to it. I never knew just how far away he went. Perhaps he was near enough to keep an eye on me. He was right, it *was* easy and I enjoyed every minute of it. I enjoyed having all that power at my finger tips; I enjoyed the way the field was looking with every furrow I completed. I was beginning to understand the pride side of ploughing. In other words, I thought I had done it all myself, which of course I hadn't. The most important furrows were the first three which Ernie ploughed. If they were good then the whole field would look good. I do remember that the following day Ernie ploughed a furrow or two before he turned me loose again, so he was probably doing a bit of correction here and there. A stitch in time saves nine, so to speak, but it certainly didn't look crooked to my eyes. Now then, if ploughing was this easy why was there so much pride involved, I wondered. Ernie supplied the answer to that, "Oh it's only easy with a tractor, but to plough a whole field to perfection with horses, now that's a different matter completely. You can't ask the horses to keep two feet in the furrow. With a tractor all you need to do is to get your first furrow straight and the rest will follow." So now I knew that all those contests that I had heard so much about were held with ploughs pulled by horses. And what a lovely sight horses made as they went about their duties on the farm in those days. They may soon be gone for ever I should think, although I have recently discovered that contests are still held at country fairs and such; presumably with horses.

One day as I concentrated on my ploughing - one has to keep a watch on what the plough is getting up to behind as well as what ones self is getting up to with the tractor in front. As I turned my attention away from the plough behind and back to the tractor in front I suddenly became aware of the scene at the far end of the field. I was about halfway across the field at this point but my attention became more and more concentrated on what I saw the nearer I travelled towards it. I was beginning to feel very uneasy so I stopped the tractor and just sat there. The hedge on this side of the field was kept low, about five to six feet high. What I was looking at was a row of human heads which appeared to have been placed on top of the hedge. All perfectly still and all looking in one direction. At me! I don't know how long I sat there, I only know it seemed like forever at the time. While I sat there trying to work out what was going on a faint glimmer of understanding began to filter through. I remembered what my father said when he saw the address I was going to. "Winwick? There's a lunatic asylum there." Today of course, it would be called a Mental Hospital. Now the scene in front of me was beginning to make some kind of sense. These poor souls were mesmerised either by the general scene of a field being ploughed or because a girl was driving the tractor, or maybe both. There was no movement. They said nothing to me nor to each other; they just looked. By this time I had pulled myself together and decided

to carry on with what I was doing. I reached the end of the furrow, turned and headed back for the far end of the field. I was feeling a little shaken but I was all right. By the time I reached the other end of the furrow and had turned the tractor round I saw Ernie heading towards me. "Is everything all right? I heard the tractor stop." That's what comes of having a trained ear, I suppose, and of course it's amazing how sound travels in the countryside. I told him why I had stopped the tractor and he just laughed, "Oh they're all right. They won't harm you." Clot! Why didn't he warn me? If I had been of a nervous disposition I might have taken to my heels, never to be seen again! I saw the same scene several times after that. I would wave to them and say "Hello" and sometimes some of them would wave back. On that particular day, by the time I got back to that end again there was no sign of any of them. It was as if I had dreamt it all. I wonder if being in such close proximity to the mental hospital would have an effect on the selling price of that farm?

The size of the kitchen was about normal for a farm kitchen and the massive heating range meant that there was never any shortage of hot water. All the food was prepared and eaten in this room. The food was very good and, true to character, I always paid the cooks, Mary and Gwyn, the compliment of clearing my plate. We ate at an enormous kitchen table of scrubbed whitewood. Normally there would be Ernie and Gwyn and their little boy Peter - who was a proper little chatter box - Mary and me; but occasionally there would be friends there for a meal and sometimes, when Ernie had engaged them, some helpers and they would be fed too. This created a lovely family atmosphere. This was a happy house. We all clowned about and laughed a lot and there was always somebody getting one over on somebody else in a prankish sense.

Having been in a hostel I had become accustomed to taking a bath every day after work. Since there was an abundance of hot water I automatically continued in this habit until one day Gwyn took me to task over it saying she was sorry it couldn't continue as the soap ration wouldn't stand the strain. There had never been any problem with soap rations in the hostel, where we had each been given what we were due and it had always lasted longer than the ration period. Anyhow, we compromised. I had one bath a week with the household ration of soap and the rest of the time I used a tablet of soap which my mother had sent to me and that lasted for about three months. I never have used a lot of soap in the bath and the compromise worked out very well. I don't think Gwyn noticed that the soap *was* being used too quickly, I think it was more a case of she *thought* it was going to be used too quickly.

The Houghtons didn't get out together very often so whenever the opportunity arose Mary and I used to baby-sit for them. Whenever Mary and I were together we giggled and laughed so much we behaved like a couple of

drunks. We always ended up rolling around the place holding our stomachs because we were hurting with laughter. Goodness knows what we found so funny, but I wish I could have some of it now. I can't remember when I last laughed like that. One night when we were baby-sitting we exhausted ourselves in this way and then found we were hungry. I have already said the food was good and plentiful at this farm - no farm ever went short of food, war or no war - but there was one thing both Mary and I yearned for which we never seemed to see and that was what we called real butter. We did get farm butter which was made by Mary and/or Gwyn, but anyone who has tasted farm made butter will know there is a very big difference between that and shop-bought butter. I once asked Mary, "Why don't we ever get any proper butter?" and she said "I don't know. It seems to be kept in the larder." I wonder if Gwyn kept it to trade for things she would otherwise be unable to get, things that had nothing to do with farming? Anyhow, we were hungry and we were going to make some toast; bread toasted on a toasting fork in front of a roaring red fire. That beats all your grills and your electric toasters. I went into the larder and came back with a packet of *real* butter. "We can't use that," said Mary, "Gwyn wouldn't want us to." "She won't know, not if we do it my way." I carefully unwrapped the packet and cut some thin slices of butter which we laid on the toast, then ate immediately without spreading it. Boy! Did we enjoy it; it was gorgeous. Needless to say, this set us off again into fits of helpless laughter. I re-wrapped the butter, moving it ever so slightly along the paper so leaving equal space at each end then I re-folded the paper carefully back into its original creases so that at a casual glance you couldn't tell that it had ever been opened. We were on pins for a while waiting for someone to say something to us, but nobody ever did, so as far as we ever knew we got away with it. We agreed that Mary would be the most likely one to hear it mentioned, but nothing was ever said. I think I have the makings of a fraudster. I only hope all this time later, that Gwyn had no comeback from anyone for giving short measure.

The milking was done by machine, but I can't remember ever having to wash or sterilise the equipment. I think Mary and Gwyn must have been responsible for that. They fed the chickens and collected the eggs so, yes, it seems feasible that they would be responsible for all dairy equipment too. It was probably done in the room that was off the kitchen. There was access directly from outside and the back staircase went up from there too, but I have very little memory of that room for some reason.

We rose from our beds at a more civilised hour than at my previous farm in Cornwall. We didn't get up till 7.30am. It seems that not all farmers think it necessary to get up in the middle of the night. We brought in the cows, fed and milked them and then went for breakfast although most of the time Ernie had them all fastened up in their stalls by the time I arrived. I think he used to wake me up on the way downstairs. By the time we had eaten it would be getting on for nine

o'clock and we then turned the cows out, cleaned the shippens and were ready for the day's work.

Ernie had a prize bull known as Spud. His real name was about as long as your arm, but he was nicknamed Spud. He was a magnificent creature but very unpredictable which made him dangerous. Before I arrived, Ernie had two skirmishes with him and as a result Spud had a shield fitted to his face. The shield was of metal and had two eyeholes in it. A leather strap went round Spud's face and underneath his chin and two others were fastened to his horns. Ernie made a big thing of introducing me to Spud who was penned up at the time. Needless to say, my heart went out to him, "Oh; poor thing. Why has he got that on his face?", which was probably the reaction that Ernie had expected. "Never at anytime or for any reason whatsoever, must you remove that shield. You will be putting yourself in great danger if you do. While he is wearing that he can never charge at you. A bull puts his head down to charge, but when Spud tries to charge with that on his face he can't see where he is going. He has to lift his head to see through the eyeholes and while his head is in that position he can't charge."

So that was my lesson for that day, but it didn't alter anything. I had never been afraid of farm animals and Ernie's lesson did nothing to alter that, it just made me wary and watchful of Spud. When I was fetching the cows in I kept an eye on him and if I thought he was getting a bit too close to me I just made more space between us. In this way I managed to keep out of trouble and still brought the cows in most days for afternoon milking.

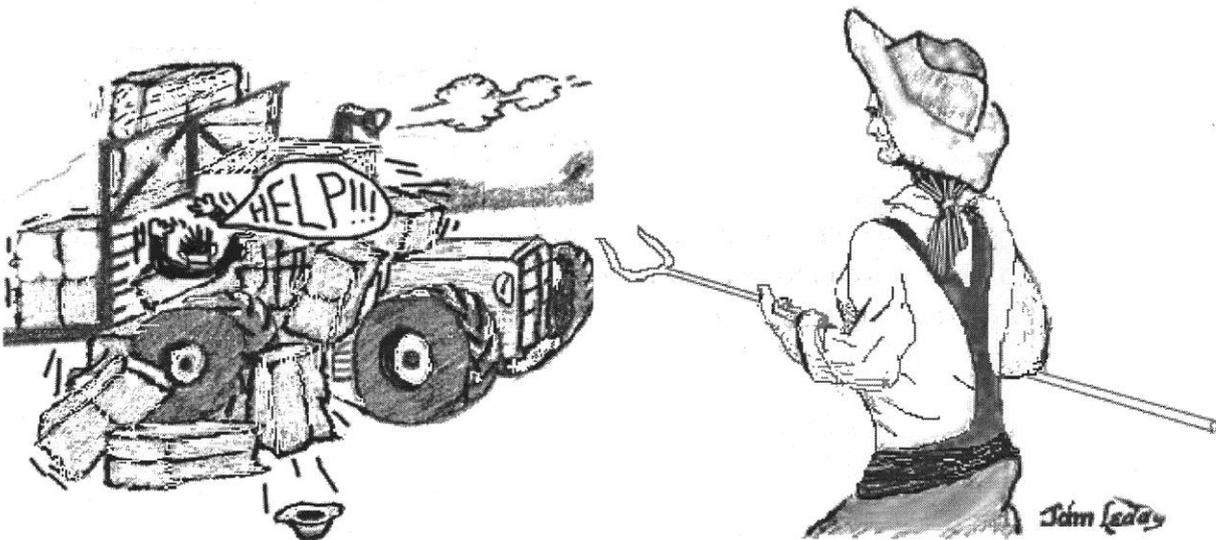
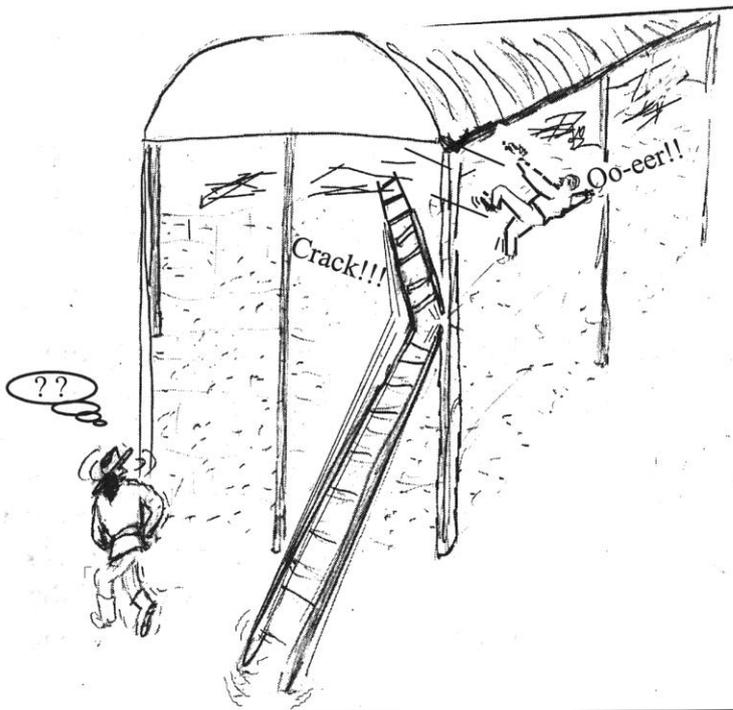
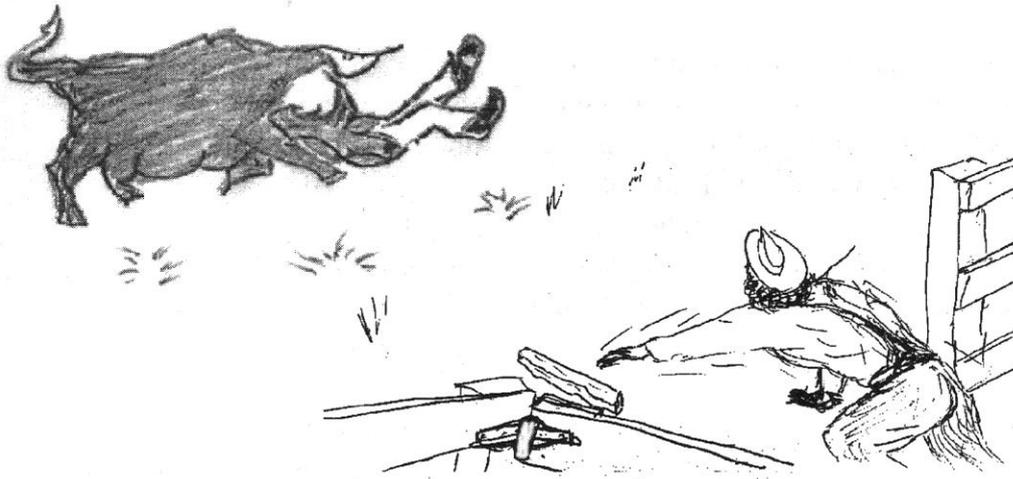
One day some time later Ernie asked me to go and fetch the cows. This was usually an easy task as by a certain time in the afternoon the cows would have virtually brought themselves home and would be gathered on the other side of the gate that gave access to the farmyard. All I had to do was open the gate, go to the back of the herd and encourage them forward through the gateway ahead of me. So what was different about this particular day? Everything was just the same as usual; nothing startled me; frightened me or made me uneasy in any way and yet in answer to Ernie's request I said "No." He looked irritated and asked me why I was refusing but I didn't have a reason so all I could say was "I don't want to. You get them in." So he did just that, muttering and chuntering as he went through the gate.

He made his way to the back of the herd and proceeded to wave his arms about and shout at the cows in the manner of all farm workers who are moving a herd while I stood watching from the farmyard side of the gateway. Finally they were all through with the exception of Spud and I shifted my gaze in order to start closing the gate immediately Ernie passed through. When I looked back at Ernie I became rooted to the spot. I just stood there gaping for what seemed like forever.

The bull had him on the ground and was vigourously trampling and goring him. Suddenly I came to life as if someone had thrown an electric switch and moved a few paces forward. Realising that was silly I back-pedalled; I had to have a weapon. I swiftly looked around, saw a pitch fork, picked it up and ran forward to help. "No! No! Go back, go back!" came Ernie's voice and I stopped in my tracks not knowing what to do. "Get that piece of wood near the fence. There!" he managed to indicate the direction that he wished me to take.

I ran towards the fence, dropped the pitch fork and picked up the piece of wood. It was about two feet long, four or five inches in diameter, heavy, and seemed to be quite dense and hard. I ran towards Ernie with this in my hand not knowing what I was going to do with it. While I was still a reasonably safe distance away he shouted "Stop there! Throw it to me then get back behind the fence." He was still on the ground underneath the bull and it continued to use its hooves and horns to attack him. That shield was probably preventing the bull from tossing Ernie, but it could see what it was doing while Ernie was lying there on the ground. My aim was good and the piece of wood ended up within his reach; thank God. Once he had that within his grasp he stood a chance. Most people, including me, would probably have hit at the bull's body, but Ernie didn't. He hit Spud's front knee joints and Spud immediately backed away. Almost immediately Ernie was able to roll away and get to his feet. Spud, feeling deprived of his prize, threw his head back to look through the eyeholes of the shield then came for him again, for which he was rewarded with a few more wallops across the knee joints and one or two across the shield area. This made a lot of noise which made the bull back off allowing Ernie to make his escape. I started forward to help but Ernie's command came loudly, "Stay where you are!", so I did.

We made our way into the shuppen and sat down. Outwardly he looked no different, but he must, surely, have been affected. I was so shaken myself that maybe I was in no fit state to note how he really looked, but there was no blood drawn; of that I am certain. We didn't milk or feed the cows, neither of us being in a fit state for that, we just chained them up and headed towards the house for tea. He had asked me not to say anything in the house as his wife was pregnant and he wanted to spare her any worry, but as I sat down in my usual place I was shaking. Out there, when all this had been going on, I had not been afraid for myself - perhaps my brain was too busy trying to find a way to get Ernie out of his situation - but now that it was over I was turning to jelly; probably made worse because I was trying so hard to pretend that nothing was wrong; but Gwyn knew *something* was wrong. I couldn't eat. All I wanted to do was drink and I remember the sound the cup made when it clattered against my teeth as my hand shook. A classic case for hot sweet tea, as the First Aid manuals of those days would have recommended, only nobody knew I needed it and there was no sugar in the tea I was drinking. I sat there with a lovely china cup in my hand trying desperately



hard to control the shaking when, suddenly, the handle came away from the cup and the hot beverage fell into my lap. I had been gripping it so tightly that I had forced the cup from the handle. I jumped up as the hot tea landed, knocking my chair over in the process. Simultaneously, Ernie jumped up and made a grab for me, perhaps thinking that I was about to faint or worse, but I avoided him and rushed out of the room. Gwyn and Mary must have wondered what was happening. I ran up the back stairs to my room and lay on the bed while poor old Ernie did the milking by himself. He made excuses for me saying that I hadn't been well all day and that I should be left alone and allowed to come downstairs when I was ready.

Ernie and I thought this was going to be our big secret, but it soon became clear that all my efforts to conceal the state I was in had been in vain. The following morning the lady who came to do the washing asked Gwyn "How's Ernie today?" and very soon the whole truth came out. The whole incident had been viewed by several people from different locations; too far away to be of help, all they could do was stand and watch. Apparently Ernie's body came up in bruises from his shoulders to his ankles so he wouldn't have been able to hide the truth from his wife anyway. Also if I had been able to behave naturally and say what was wrong I might have been given some hot, sweet tea which was what I badly needed to help me cope with the shock. Plus, they wouldn't have been one lovely china cup short of a set! But most important of all was that Ernie had not been broken in mind or body and he could so easily have been. If I had carried out my job as ordered that day and Spud had fancied having a go at me, I would most certainly have been broken - probably into lots of little bits. Why did I refuse to fetch those cows in? I had no reason to refuse, I just did. It was weird.

I learned two things that day which, fortunately, I never needed again. First, if in trouble with a cow or a bull go for the knee joints of their front legs; that is their most tender spot. Secondly, in the countryside you never know who is watching you. People can see for miles and sounds will carry surprisingly clearly. In this incident, the people who watched had also heard most of it. This had not been the first time that this had happened to Ernie, and on one occasion the offending creature had been a cow with a young calf. Yes, they can be vicious too. Ernie told me that it is most unusual for a cow to behave this way towards humans, but if you do get one which is this way inclined then she can be as bad, if not worse, than any bull. A cow will always try to defend her very young offspring if there is a dog about, of course. It has occurred to me at this very late date that I don't think I wondered or thought of enquiring how Ernie felt at that very early stage. I was too busy trying to get control of myself, but I did ask him the following day when we were alone in the shippin. I suppose that was better than nothing. That's youth for you.

I'd like to talk about Mary Lane, the girl who helped in the house. She and I became firm friends and I always called her Mary because she said she liked the way I spoke the name, but to almost everybody else she was Molly. Mary was a typical Irish colleen, although I'm not sure if one or both of her parents were Irish. Pretty as a picture, she had black wavy hair, bright blue, laughing eyes and a highly coloured complexion, but she also had a volatile temper. There is a phrase which has been used many times during my life "Irish as the pigs in Dublin" and Ernie used this one day during a conversation in the farmyard. His wife, another farmer and Mary and I were there too. I hardly noticed it had been used because it was so casual, there was no malice behind it whatsoever, but Mary noticed. Before anybody knew what was happening she threw herself at Ernie and rained blows down on him with her clenched fists. This, needless to say, took him by surprise and it nearly knocked him off balance. However he soon had her under control by taking hold of her wrists and keeping her at arms length and by this time of course he was just laughing. By the time he let go of her wrists some of the steam had gone out of her and she flounced into the house and slammed the door. Gwyn said "I wish you would watch your mouth!" When I next saw them together it was as if nothing had happened and no mention was ever made of the incident. Many years later, Mary and I were reminiscing and she giggled and blushed as she confessed to having had a secret crush on the unsuspecting Ernie around that time. Maybe that was why something so important to her had been so easily and quickly forgiven.

Mary and I were very much alike in many ways. I, too, had a volatile temper - still have if it comes to that. We liked the same things and, as I have already mentioned, we laughed at the same things or indeed at nothing at all as the case may be. For some reason we used to spar together, most of it verbally, but from time to time we would test each others strength like a couple of daft lads. Sometimes Mary would win and sometimes I would, but looking back on it I would say that Mary had the edge on me. One day, however, this all got a little out of hand. It started as the usual sparring match, developed into a bit of push-and-shove and ended up as a wrestling match outside in front of the house and there we were rolling in the muck. Well, there wasn't much of that, it was pretty clean, really, but it wasn't long before we were not alone. There was Ernie and Gwyn and two German prisoners of war who by this time were coming to work on the farm on a regular basis. If it hadn't been for the audience we would probably have called it a day long before we did. That is what usually happened when we couldn't get the better of each other, but this time it was different. Neither of us wanted to be seen to be giving in, consequently we were stretching ourselves to our physical limits. Mary turned out to be the one with more staying power and I was the one who gave in. She had me pinned down to the ground at the time and I didn't have the power to get out from under her. We never went that far again, in



Mary Lane went to New Zealand in 1952/3 returning five years later for a short visit. On the sea journey back to New Zealand she met Kevin Horgan.

The strawberry coloured swimsuit I sent her in 1953 was just right for the summer sun. . .



. . . but not for the ice and snow of 1960 in which she is pictured here with Kevin.

In 1967 their three children look happy on the garden swing.



fact we didn't do quite so much physical sparring ever again. Perhaps we had established who was top dog.

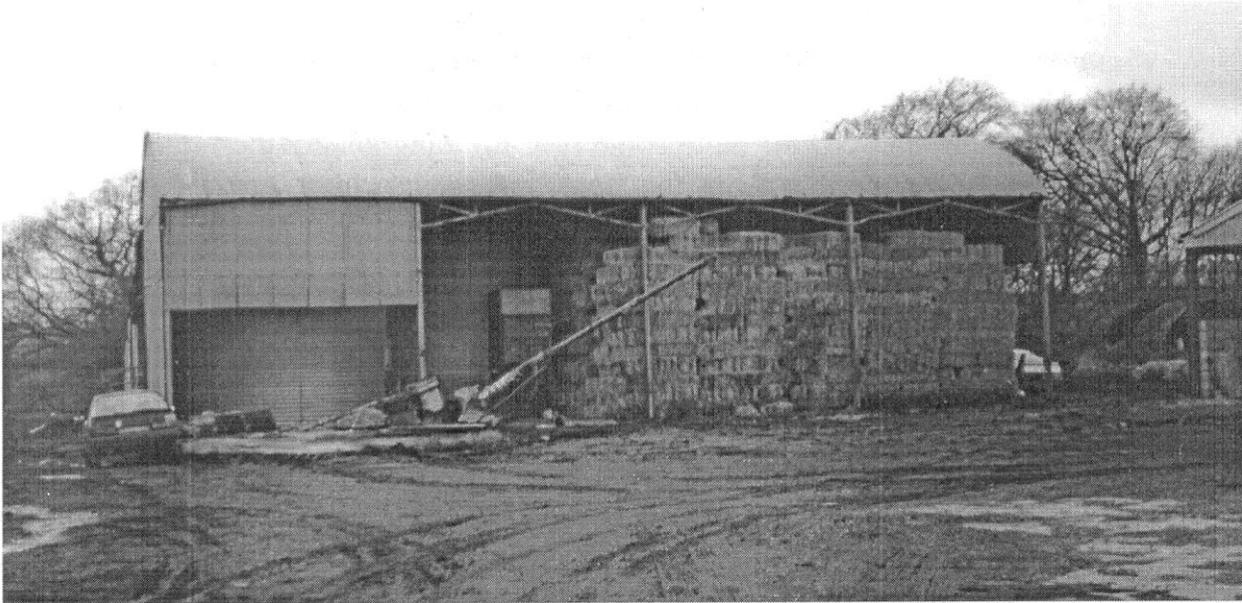
As soon as I arrived on the farm we were into muck spreading. All the cattle sheds were in close proximity to the house and they were formed into a square leaving a square patch of land in the middle with sheds on three sides and that was where the waste matter from the animals was stored in one big pile. Each time the sheds were cleaned the manure was tossed on top of the heap, which soon became taller than any of us. This was left from one springtime to the next, but for some reason the smell was never noticeable in the house although, Heaven knows, the smell was strong enough when it was being moved and the internal heat was amazing. We gradually dismantled the pile from the top down, carted it out into the fields and loaded it into the muck spreader - a mechanical one, thank goodness. By the time we had finished there wasn't a single bit of cow dung to be seen on that square of land. We swilled it and scrubbed it till it shone and it was lovely to see it looking so clean. It would be some time before it became piled up again because we were having a lovely spring and the cattle were out in the fields. Only the milking herd's manure would make any mess from that time until the beginning of the winter.

Haymaking would be starting soon so it was time to do some sweeping and tidying in the hay loft. I hadn't come across it before, but apparently there was an initiation ceremony in this area for young people coming into a farming career. Although I didn't really come into this category, considering the length of time I had been doing this work and the varied experience I had, but it seemed that it had been decided that I was to go through the procedure. I was told there was an owl in the barn which had to be captured for its own safety before the hay loft could be filled with fresh hay. Ernie started to talk about this at the dinner table at mid-day and we were going to tackle it in the afternoon. Apparently, my job was to stand and hold a net beneath a certain aperture through which the owl would be chased. There would be someone in the hay loft encouraging it to choose the correct aperture. OK, I had never seen anybody capturing wildlife for any reason whatsoever, but this sounded plausible and I went along with it. I was last to leave the house after dinner, however, and Mary and Gwyn took the opportunity to put me in the picture. I was to get a ducking and Mary had been chosen as the person up in the hay loft to give me that ducking, but dear Ernie had reckoned without female loyalty. Gwyn had decided to turn the tables on her husband. She couldn't really let three men get away with this against three women so, when the time came, I pretended to be gormless and not understand the instructions Ernie was giving me on just how to hold the net and just exactly where to stand. He took the net from my hand and demonstrated his own instructions and when he was in exactly the right spot, down came the cold water and soaked him to the skin, not to

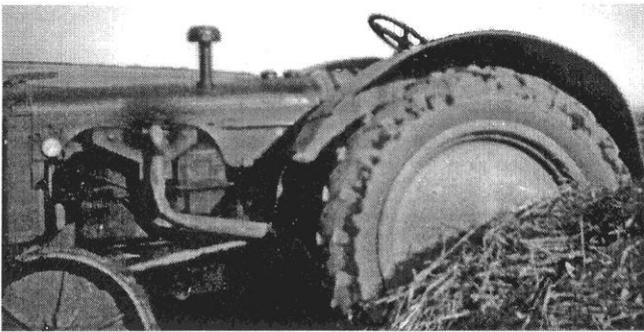
mention taking his breath away. The difference was Mary had substituted a bucketful of water for the bowlful that was meant for me, and her aim was good. She stood there in the doorway of the hayloft heartily laughing her head off as was everybody else except poor Ernie. He stood there in astonishment, wondering what had gone wrong then he made his way into the house to change into some dry clothes, shaking his fist at his wife as he went. It took a long, long time before he lived that down, but he was a nice man and he could take it and it wasn't long before he was laughing too.

The weather was beautiful and haymaking time had arrived and there was I with trouser legs and shirt sleeves rolled up as far as I could get them in order to get as sun-browned as possible. We didn't wear shorts or sun-tops anywhere except on the beach in those days and certainly not at work. More hands were needed for haymaking than could be supplied by the Houghton household and since the end of the war Ernie had been allowed to have prisoners of war from a nearby camp. So here they were, Germans, four of them, and all I wanted to do was walk away. I wouldn't mix with them, I wouldn't talk to them or even look at them. I tried to pretend that they weren't there. I hadn't learned to accept that probably most of the German soldiers were just like our own. Men who didn't fight in the war because they wanted to, but because they had to and lots of them were perfectly decent people who would never commit any atrocity. All that came to me half a lifetime later, but it has never included liking them. At that time, as far as I was concerned, the only good German was a dead German. Yet here they were; talking, laughing and stuffing their faces with Gwyn's lovely food and generally having a happy time. After seeing the dreadful newsreel pictures of the concentration camps liberated by the advancing allied forces I tarred every German with the same brush, and to me they should all be dead. So you see, I had a bit of a problem. Whenever they were around I would be in an emotional turmoil and, however hard he tried, Ernie could never break that deadlock. I would have no contact with them. The haymaking went off fine, but was spoiled for me by their presence. Haymaking and harvesting, for me, had always been a very happy time; everyone enjoying themselves. Usually there was lots of lovely sunshine, lots of happy banter and lots of laughter. We were always kept well supplied with pleasant drinks brought from the house, with the odd tasty snack from time to time. It was a hot, thirsty job and I, for one, used to get very hungry along the way so snacks were always welcome. The hay was not made into bales as was becoming the fashion, but brought in loose in the old way. To make hay, the grass was cut and left lying in the fields to be dried by the sun, then two or three days later - maybe more according to the weather - it would be turned. The cutting of it had formed it into rows with a space between. We went down each row and with a long wooden rake about two feet wide, we would turn each row into the space at the side of it. If the weather was really good this one turning could be all it needed.

If not, then maybe once more or even twice would be necessary. When it was dry enough we went down each line dragging the hay into piles that looked like little



The Dutch Barn. Where Ernie's broken ladder left him sprawling in the mud.



A tractor similar to the one on which I had my first driving lesson.



igloos sitting in row after row all the way down the field. Before this had been completed the carting had started and the little hay igloos were pitchforked into the cart. A pitchfork has a very long handle to enable the worker to reach very high with it, but it has only two prongs and it would be impossible to pick up hay unless it had first been put into piles. The cart was piled high with as much hay as it would hold then taken to the farmyard behind the tractor. Once there, it was pitchforked into the hay loft which was situated over the shippons for easy feeding purposes. There was an aperture in the floor of the loft just above the stalls, making it easy to drop hay through at feeding time. There would be too much hay for the loft so the rest would be put into the barn. After the field had been cleared we walked down the rows again dragging the long wooden rakes and this brought together most of the residue which was formed into much smaller piles, but still worth carrying away to storage. The cows and sheep were then turned into the cleared field to finish the job. Whatever was left they would eat and they would be given none of the stored hay until winter came. Meantime the grass was young and lush and they would feed on that until the grass stopped growing later on in the year. The hay, together with other forms of food, would keep them fed through the winter.

Ernie and I went into the hayloft the following day to 'ease' a bit of working space into the great mound of hay which had been packed into it. We spent a bit of time re-arranging and pushing and shoving it about a bit. When we had done all we could and I was about to descend the ladder I suddenly found myself flat on my back with Ernie on top of me. Oh God! No, not again! "What *are* you doing?" I hissed. "I just want to show you how its done." he replied. "I know how its done, thank you very much. Let me go, please." which he did immediately, saying "Oh! You do, do you?" I had always thought him to be a nice man, but this proved he was after all *only* a man and no better than all the rest. I must have matured a bit since my last incident of this nature with Mr. Z in Cornwall for my reaction wasn't as vicious. It didn't even occur to me to threaten to tell his wife perhaps because I liked them both so much. I think I may have been more disappointed than angry; after all he had just spoiled what I felt to be a rather nice relationship and he must have known it. He couldn't help but notice the difference in me because I hardly spoke to him for weeks after that. I never felt the same about him again. That complete trust, which probably was a very naive trust, was gone and with it went that lovely relaxed and happy spontaneity. Now I was back to having to be wary again.

Between haymaking and harvesting there was a problem with the roof of the Dutch barn. A Dutch barn is a metal construction with a metal roof, about two storeys high to the eaves, and open on all sides. There was usually a short metal skirt just below the roof area. When it was stacked with corn or hay it was the outer layer which kept the rest of it protected from the elements. If stacked with

sheaves of corn then the stubble end of the sheaves would be placed to the outside. The idea worked very well and erection must have been a fraction of the cost of an old-style barn; and twice the height meant twice the space. Ernie placed a long ladder up against one end of the barn and said "There is some repair work to do on the roof. I want you to climb to the top of the ladder and stay there while I go on the inside. I'll show you what I want you to do when I get in position." I wasn't afraid of heights and had climbed a few ladders in my short life, but never one as long as this. I stood at the bottom of the ladder looking up at its full height and noticed how it seemed to bend and flex in the middle. My instinct took over once again and I said "No. I don't like the look of that ladder." "There's nothing wrong with the ladder. It's perfectly safe," says he. "haven't you climbed ladders before?" "Oh yes. I've climbed ladders before, but I don't like the look of that one." "Look," he said, "I'll show you the ladder's all right; there's nothing wrong with it.", and with that he started to climb. I said "*You* climb the ladder and I'll go inside and climb up the straw bales." With that, I turned away to make my way round to the straw bales. Before turning the corner out of his view I glanced back and saw that Ernie was right at the top of the ladder and at that moment I saw the ladder break. I stood there breathless as I watched his body struggling, twisting and turning as he fell twenty or more feet through the air towards the ground. He landed feet first but then fell in a sprawl face downwards into a pool of muddy water. I just stood there gaping, perfectly still, as if rooted to the spot. Ernie picked himself up quite quickly and without much effort and we stood there, silently, looking at each other. I think it must have been relief that he hadn't killed himself or broken anything or maybe it was because he was covered in mud (including his face) I don't know; but, for whatever reason, I broke into hysterical laughter. I remember it went on for some time because I ended up holding my stomach muscles. I kept saying "I told you I didn't like the look of that ladder." then off I would go into more shrieks of laughter. Ernie tried to stop me from laughing, but the harder he tried the worse I got. I think I was probably hysterical and, apparently, Ernie thought so too for he eventually slapped my face after which the laughter immediately ceased and I became tearful and concerned for his well-being. I began to tremble, but I was nothing like as bad as I had been over the incident with the bull. I should think that he was immensely thankful that it was he who fell and not me, for I would most certainly not have known how to twist and turn my body in the air the way that he had done. I am quite sure that his airborne acrobatics were a determined effort to ensure that he landed on his feet, although I never actually asked him. I wonder if he was insured? If it had been me and I had been badly injured what would have been the legal position. It doesn't bear thinking about. However, fifty years on is a bit late to start worrying about that and, in any case, as I weighed only half as much as Ernie, perhaps the ladder would not have broken.

I have mentioned how the cow sheds formed into three sides of a square, their doorways facing into the square. There was another shed set apart from the rest on the edge of the farmyard and its door faced out towards the fields. During the time I had been there I had seen it used to house the bull or young calves. For some reason this had not been cleaned out in the way that the other sheds had. The routine in this shed had been to continually put clean straw on top of everything that was already there. This didn't matter too much as long as enough straw was placed there and I would say that this was definitely the case. In fact to do it this way was to give a central heating system to the shed because, in those conditions, the bottom of the pile starts to mature and creates quite some heat in doing so. As the months go by the animals are raised further from the floor and so, in effect, are given under-floor heating. Only when it is time to clean it out did one wish that it hadn't been done this way.

The shed was ten or twelve feet square and the bedding, by this time, was about half way up the walls. Worse than that, it had been packed down tight by months of trampling hooves which made it difficult to remove. This was one of the few jobs I was asked to do where my strength proved to be inadequate. I felt utterly useless, but, as usual, there was a way round it. Ernie ended up doing all the hard work. He ripped and tore it up then tossed it outside where I picked it up with a pitchfork and loaded it onto the cart which was taken away by the tractor. The shed was then swilled and scrubbed, floor and walls alike, till it was like a new pin and ready for the next inhabitant. Later, I was glad I hadn't known while I was working so hard just who the new inhabitants would be.



Cop Holt Farm. In 1946 this was the back of the house. It is now the front.

Chapter Eight **The Enemy Within**

A few days later at the dinner table Ernie dropped his bombshell. Two German prisoners of war were coming to live on the farm and they would be living in the cow shed that I had recently helped to clean out. I didn't like this and neither did Mary. I told Ernie that if I didn't approve of them when they arrived I would probably move on; I didn't *have* to work with Germans. He said he had chosen carefully and that these two men seemed to be "nice enough fellows". They had already worked on the farm with others from time to time and he had had the opportunity to choose those he would allow to live on his farm. When they arrived they were total strangers to me, but, as I have already said, I refused to even look at them let alone talk to them. Living on the premises gave them the privilege of freedom of movement which meant they could come and go from the farm premises whenever they felt like doing so, as long as it was not when they were supposed to be working. I don't remember whether they were under curfew or not, I never took any interest what they were up to in the evenings; they were out of my sight and I preferred to keep it that way. All that day and part of subsequent days were spent turning a cow shed into a home. The first day it was whitewashed and beds were erected, perhaps supplied by the prison. It seems likely that they moved in on a weekend which would have given them two whole non-working days, except for milking times, to spend on their future home. And that's exactly what it looked like, a home, by the time all the bits and pieces had been brought together from goodness knows where. There were pieces of carpet, oil lamps and orange-box-type furniture to hold what few possessions they had. There were two oil stoves; pictures on the wall, little ornaments about the place and little covers. They must have been thrilled to bits. They had their own little pad. I took no part in this, of course. The only reason I know so much about it is because they left the top half of the door open a great deal to air the place, which probably still smelled of cattle. This type of door is usually used in a stable to let air out and keep horses or cattle in, but in this case it kept cattle out. If they were out of the place when I passed by, being a woman, I would look in. They kept it lovely and tidy and I never saw it looking a mess. I got used to seeing them about the place and soon it began not to bother me so much.

They were never allowed into the house. At meal times they would wait outside the back door for food to be passed out to them. The elder one was called Wilhelm and I thought of him as being something like my father's age, fiftyish. He had been a miner before his call-up and carried the blue scars on his skin to prove it. He had suffered in the war, his wife and family having been slaughtered by the Russians, or so he said. The Russians were known to behave like this so we had no reason to doubt him and, after all, that is the way Adolf's troops behaved towards

the Russians while they were occupying Russian territory. In time I came to accept Wilhelm. He was quiet, polite and unassuming, but Walter; now he was a different kettle of fish altogether.

He was about five years older than me, say in his mid twenties. He was a pushy, arrogant bastard who loved himself dearly and therefore couldn't understand why I didn't love him too. He was about six feet tall, built like a Greek God and had the most magnificent tan I had ever seen. At every possible opportunity he would make sure that I, and everybody else, saw as much of it as propriety would allow. During some of the most beautiful weather in Cornwall I never saw anybody working in shorts, but he did and they were the briefest shorts I had ever seen - that any of us had ever seen. They were like the shortest shorts of present day living, unseen and unheard of in 1946! He could also be described as handsome of face, but I didn't like his face and I didn't like him. He gave me the creeps. He had probably been captured by the Americans because he had spent some time as a prisoner of war in America, working on the land. Hence the magnificent tan and the short shorts. They were probably in general use over there. The shorts were not the only thing he brought away with him, he also brought highly perfumed soaps which he probably used to barter for other goods or maybe for friendship.

We were all outside the farmhouse one lovely sunny evening although why we were all there at the same time I'm not sure. In any case, Walter made that his opportunity. He gave Gwyn a beautifully packaged bar of soap and another, similar, one to Mary. No such thing as utility wrappings in America, obviously! Then it was my turn. The one he offered to me was heart shaped and magnificently packaged in scarlet and gold. It sat there in his outstretched hand and you can imagine how everybody else reacted to that. I wasn't only annoyed, I was also embarrassed and I refused it. "No, thank you." I said. There was a chorus of voices saying "Oh, why not?", "Don't be silly, take it.", "It's beautiful, take it." I don't know whether or not his voice was among them, but this just made things worse and I turned and went into the house. A little while later Mary followed me in and in her hand was the heart shaped soap. "Walter wants you to have it." she said, as she put it on the table in front of me. "Well I gathered that, but I don't want it. you have it." I know they all thought I was round the twist and I certainly had never had a present like that before, especially from a man.

On a previous occasion he proudly showed us some family photographs including, if you please, some of himself dressed in his Hitler Youth Movement uniform sporting the swastika. Now, I ask you, how much thicker could he get? I was hostile enough as it was, but after that there was no way I would ever get less hostile towards him. He tried everything he could think of to win me over, one way being to shower me with lavish compliments not knowing that this always

worked opposite to the desired effect even when it was not being tried on by a German Nazi. This sort of behaviour from men always, without fail, annoyed and embarrassed me and made me very suspicious of their motives. That having failed, he tried to make me jealous. On one occasion another Land Girl was hired for a couple of days and he followed her about like a puppy dog, laughing and talking all the time, but at the same time catching my eye whenever possible with leering glances to prove to me that if I didn't want him then there were those who did. The Land Girl appeared to enjoy his attentions very much - there were always a few who were quite happy to fraternise with the enemy. He was, after all, a very handsome man. Thick, but handsome. When he wasn't working he would dress himself up in what passed for his best clothes, special prison uniform with bright yellow patches on his back. But let's face it, he was the kind of man who would have looked good dressed in sacking. He would take himself off down to the village with a swagger and flaunt himself there, so he probably had enough female company to make him happy. I only knew this because he was the talk of the village, and I was not alone in my hostility. Mary and I went to her parents house one weekend. We were waiting for the bus at the end of the driveway when who came swaggering towards us with a village girl on his arm but Walter. He was swaggering from the shoulders downwards, but his face was leering again. He obviously enjoyed what he thought was putting one over on me. As for me, it just made me feel hostile towards the girl too, for fraternising with the enemy. I wonder if he knew Mary and I would be at the bus stop? Mary saw the funny side of the situation and started to laugh and, laughter always being infectious between us, it wasn't long before I was laughing too.

My feelings towards Walter never changed, but my feelings for Wilhelm did. He was a nice, gentle man and I began to feel a certain empathy towards him. Incidentally, I had encountered prisoners of war while I was in the hostel, but they were Italians and I didn't feel quite as hostile towards them. It was probably the atrocities committed by the German Nazi Party which was responsible for my excessive attitude towards the Germans. Mind you, it hasn't changed all that much to this very day.

Ernie was engaged in some sort of agricultural testing programme on the farm. One field was split up into sections and sown with different types of corn then labelled and inspected from time to time by men in 'posh' suits. I don't remember anything about the results, I presume each section was harvested separately to assess how much corn each produced, but I remember nothing at all about it. I only remember the general harvest of the year. We grew quite a variety of crops including turnips, swedes, cabbages and kale, which was a kind of cabbage. Kale didn't grow all tightly curled around itself like other cabbage does, it grew loose and long and it was used as winter feed for the animals. Then, of course, there was the eternal potatoes, but not in such vast quantities as I had

become accustomed to. Ernie used a storage method which I had never encountered in Cornwall. After the potato harvest was complete he sent some of them to market and then dug a pit for the rest of them. He lined it with straw and tipped the potatoes on top of the straw until they formed quite a mound. He covered the potatoes with more straw and, finally, with the earth taken from the pit. This was known as a “clamp” and it looked just like a gigantic grave. They would stay there until the following spring when they would be uncovered and the seed potatoes sorted from the rest and planted. Perhaps he didn’t have enough storage space in the barns and this was the next best thing. Whatever the reason, they didn’t seem to be any the worse for it. The ones I planted in April didn’t seem to me to be any different to any other seed potatoes I had handled.

When ready for harvesting from the field, cereal crops have to be cut and collected and the seed separated from the chaff by threshing and winnowing. The seed is knocked or rubbed out of the husks by machine or by hand - threshing; the husk or chaff, being lighter, is blown away by the wind, bellows, a fan, or some other device - winnowing. The seed, of course, is kept for human food. The chaff is collected into sacks for animal feed or bedding and the stalks tied into bales for the same purpose. A variety of methods are used to achieve this separation and this may involve several different machines such as scythes or cutters, threshers, binders and balers; or the use of one machine which does all of those tasks in one operation, the combine harvester.

Farmers who didn’t own their own combine harvester or thresher, and very few did, would hire one and they always came with their own operator. The thresher was drawn up at the side of the stack and someone would feed it from above, standing on a platform placed near the mouth. Someone else would keep the man on the platform well supplied with sheaves by tossing them across to him from the stack. As the stack reduced in height they had to be thrown upwards, all this with the aid of a pitch fork.

In one of the barns there was a stack of barley sheaves from the previous year’s crop waiting to be thrashed.

I was kept at ground level away from the dangerous part of the machinery, it wasn’t unknown for people to get caught up in it and become severely injured, but there was plenty to do all the same. There were three outlets on a thresher, one for the corn, one for the chaff and one for the straw. When the corn sacks were full to the top with corn I would stop the flow, tie the mouth of the sack with binder twine and then call for help in removing the heavy sack from the machine. I then fixed a fresh sack in position and off we would go again. Corn sacks were much bigger than potato sacks and when full were much too heavy for me to lift. A similar procedure was followed for the chaff, but I was capable of

lifting those, even though the bags were of the same size, for chaff was a fraction of the weight of corn. Chaff, or husk, is what the ears of corn are made from and the seed is housed in this casing from the day it first begins to form until the threshing viciously tears it from its bed. I remember, when sitting on a stack of those bags, how soft, bouncy and comfortable it felt - like sitting on beautifully upholstered furniture. The straw was spat out by the machine in the form of bales tied up with binder twine. All I had to do was remove them to the place where they were being stacked and make sure that the ball of binder twine didn't run out, in which case the thresher had to be halted to insert a new ball. When harvesting, another farm machine known as a binder, hence the term binder twine, would pick up the loose lying hay or straw from the field, pack it tightly together then spit it out further along in the form of a neatly tied rectangular bale. This same principle was employed within the thresher. There was, as you can see, a lot going on and my attention was fully occupied even though it wasn't very hard work, physically. It was, however, very dirty work and everybody always looked filthy after a day's threshing. It was a dusty job.

Before I left the house after breakfast that day, Ernie gave me a piece of sticking plaster measuring about two inches by three. "What's that for?" I asked. "To stick over your navel." came the reply. There was a deadly silence and I looked at him as if he wasn't right in the head. "We are threshing barley." he explained. "You'll know about it if you get that stuff in your navel." I looked to Gwyn for confirmation and she nodded, so off I went to my room to apply the plaster. An ear of barley looks quite different to an ear of wheat, and an ear of oats is different again. From each seed of barley there grows a fine long stalk and when they are all intact these fine stalks give the barley a feathery look. The stalks are quite strong and flexible until the barley is ripe and then they become brittle and break into millions of tiny pieces which stick to warm flesh as if glued there. I had done threshing in Cornwall, but not barley, it would seem. I wonder if I would have been warned in this way *had* it been barley. I had a bath after work, but that didn't shift it all. It was about a week before I felt free from it; and I kept the plaster on until I did!

It was getting close to corn harvest time, mid-August to mid-September up here in the north. I don't think there is a prettier sight anywhere than a field of golden corn gently swaying in the breeze. Many is the time I have stood gazing upon such a scene and always with the same result, a feeling of complete peace and quietude. A feeling of being close to God. Over my sixty-eight years I must have spent many hours just gazing at such a scene, although some must have been much more picturesque than others. Ernie's farm was the least picturesque of all. It was very flat with no sea or river, not even a stream, but there was a small wooded area. However, to enjoy a golden cornfield in full sway you don't need any of these things. I think oats give off the deepest colours of gold, then wheat and last

comes barley which, in my opinion, is hardly gold at all. The only corn which I ever harvested in my Land Army days was wheat and this harvest was to be no exception.

Unlike his hay harvest, Ernie's corn harvest was to be a very modern affair. He hired a combine harvester made by Massey Harris, *the* big name in farming equipment in those days. I may be mistaken, but I think they went into liquidation some years ago. This monster machine must have been quite new because it was bright red and very clean. Believe me, farm equipment never got cleaned or smartened up. Most machinery wasn't even put under cover to protect it from the elements, but just left in fields from one season to the next to rust away, much to my disgust and that of my father, when discussed, but that's another story.

The harvest soon got under way. The weather was beautiful and we were all treated once more to the sight of that beautiful, bronzed German torso, but we all managed to keep our minds on what we were doing in spite of that. The combine harvester didn't only cut the corn it did everything that the thresher did too - all in one fell swoop. Consequently, in no time at all, the field was littered with sacks of wheat, sacks of chaff and bales of straw. There were two tractors on the go and different trailers were being loaded with corn, straw or chaff. Ernie concentrated on taking in the corn, I took the straw and the chaff was left till last. There was an army of workers. I don't know where half of them came from. Farmers and their workers would all band together at harvest time and in this way every farmer's harvest was finished much quicker. Ernie and I drove the tractors, his loaded with corn, mine with straw. I would drive up to the barn where the straw was to be stacked, get the trailer into the position which the men wanted and unhook it from the tractor. I then attached an empty trailer to the tractor and went back to the field for the next load. I made three deliveries in this way with no problems. On my return to pick up the fourth load I hung around waiting for it to be completed. If it had been ready for collection I may just have hitched it to the back of the tractor and trustingly started to tow it away, but I had watched this trailer being loaded. I presumed at the time that these men were farm workers and knew, therefore, what they were doing. Nevertheless, I didn't like the look of that load. But then, what did I know with my limited experience? The only tractor work I had ever done had been done on this farm. Soon it was pronounced ready to go, hooked up to the tractor and Ernie said "OK, Dorothy. Take it away." to which I replied " I don't like the look of that load, Ernie. It's too loose. It doesn't look right to me." "Oh, yes. It'll be all right. You haven't got far to go. "No, no; I'm not taking that." I said. Without another word Ernie climbed up onto the driving seat, probably in a huff, started up the engine and began to move forward. He had travelled no more than a few yards when the whole of the front end of the load collapsed on top of him. Was I psychic, or what? That was the third would-be injury I had escaped due to my instinct. None of them could be put down to my

experience as a farm worker because I hadn't had enough experience. There have been many times in the years between then and now that I have thought 'Somebody up there' must have been looking after me! Ernie was unharmed, I'm glad to say, but I have never forgotten the spectacle of him sitting on that tractor seat with half a high load of straw bales showering down on top of him while he made desperate attempts to protect himself. There is enough weight in one single bale of straw to make it unsafe for it to fall from any height onto the back of anyone's neck and I don't know how many bales, in all, hit Ernie. If he was badly bruised or anything he never let on to me, but if I had been in his place the less said about the incident the better.

By this time I was beginning to think he had nine lives, or maybe I had nine lives; or perhaps we both did. This was the third time in four months.

The days were getting shorter and autumn was fast approaching. Spud, the bull, had gone, Ernie having decided to play it safe and cut his losses. I gathered he was a highly-bred bull and worth a lot of money, but whether he brought a good price or not I don't know. For the time being at least, Ernie would hire a bull when one was needed and think about buying another later on. So there was no need to wonder where Spud would be housed now that his home was being used by the prisoners. There was still plenty to do of course, like potato picking, whitewashing cow sheds, some ploughing, hedging, fencing and ditch clearing. This just meant keeping the ditches clear of debris so that rainwater was able to get away during times of a heavy downpour. There was always a certain amount of general repair work to be done and, of course, the daily milking.

It was about this time that a salesman came to the house. I think Ernie knew a man who knew a man, if you see what I mean. Things which were 'nice' were still difficult to get on the open market, but this man had quite a few nice things for sale. I bought my mother a blue and white bedspread for her and father's bed, and no coupons were needed. I think that type of reversible fabric is called damask. It was woven with the design the same on both sides, but on one side it was predominantly blue with white, while the other side was predominantly white with blue. It was expensive and it was, I think, black-market, but it was worth every penny to see my mother's face when I gave it to her that weekend. Mary and I had been doing quite a bit of socialising over the past few months. I had stayed at her mother's home and she had stayed at my parent's home. We had walked and talked together, we had danced, we had been to cinemas and theatres and, in fact, we became quite close. Soon I would be twenty one years old, come October. I think Mary was a little younger, but I can't remember any mention of her twenty first birthday. Probably we were separated before then because I had only a few more weeks at the Houghton's farm, but I didn't know it at the time.

I had a week at home when I was twenty one, which was the fourteenth of October, 1946. Mary stayed with us for two days and Sylvia, a friend from my NAAFI days, also spent two days with us later on in the week. For my birthday, Ernie and Gwyn gave me a dressing table set which consisted of a hand mirror, a hair brush, a comb and a clothes brush, all matching, with an embroidered design of roses on the back. It was beautiful. The only trouble was I didn't have, and never have had, a dressing table in my bedroom because the room was too small. Mother and father had two boys and one girl, consequently I had to have the smallest bedroom. It has only just occurred to me after all these years, to wonder if it was bought from the same man from whom I bought my mother's bedspread. Yes, it must have been, because lovely things like that were so very scarce. I never used the dressing table set. It was kept in its box for over thirty years and only when I came to move house, in 1977, did I give it away to a young friend of mine. My mother and father gave me a five pound note for my birthday which sounds very little now, but in those days I could have bought myself a complete new outfit for that - which is what I did after I had been demobilised, but in the meantime it sat in the Post Office Savings account. Five pounds amounted to more than three weeks wages for me. My brother, Albert, bought me some records of Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy and my other brother, William, still has those records, together with the sort of equipment needed to play them. I must also add that he has about two thousand other records too, not to mention a substantial collection of audio tapes. This collection ranges from the late 1930's to the present day.

On the day of my birthday I went out with some friends to a pub for a drink. This wasn't my way of enjoying myself, but they wanted to take me, so I went. I had a sherry. One, and one only. I didn't particularly like alcohol and I never would have more than one. They had several before we left, and as we left one of the girls said "Take your glass with you." "What for?" I said. "Because it's your twenty first birthday and you can keep it as a souvenir." I just walked away from the table and headed for the door feeling glad that I would soon be out in the open air. I hated a smoky atmosphere. Before I got to the door she was by my side, stuffing the sherry glass into my pocket. Some people are stupid! I thought it would be inadvisable to make a fuss about it so I walked out with the glass in my pocket. My mother and father were not very pleased, but it took its place in the cupboard alongside their glasses and nobody ever used it. Mother always said "No. Not that one. It's Dorothy's."

I still have it to this day. So that girl was right, it is a souvenir.

Back at the farm things went on as the season demanded with nothing very memorable happening, except maybe the day I picked up an injured sparrow. As I held it gently in my hand wondering what I could do to help it, Ernie came

and said " What have you got there?" "An injured sparrow." I replied. "Give it to me." Trustingly I delivered it into his hands. I thought he was going to help it, but all he did was break it's neck - right there in front of my eyes! I had never seen such callousness. My parents would have tried to help it. My first instinct was to hit out at him and before I knew it I was thumping at him just like Mary had done a few months before. I shouted and thumped and cried and when he took hold of my wrists as he had done with Mary, I kicked him. This wasn't difficult because my legs were long and I could kick high in those days. He couldn't get much further away than the length of his own arms because I bent mine in order to reach him. Anyhow, there was no harm done and when I calmed down he said "Do you realise that a sparrow eats enough corn in a year as would feed a man for a day?" I was unimpressed and my reply was "That's no reason to do what you did." "On the contrary," he said, "it's a very good reason." That was probably my very last Land Army 'lesson for the day'. Multiply what that sparrow would eat in one year by all the millions of other sparrows and the answer would be " What a lot of corn!", so I suppose he had a point; but I, couldn't have done it. I knew that he shot the big birds and hung the corpses on the trees to scare away the other birds. All farmers did that and probably still do. I didn't like to think about it; it was remote from me because I was never there when the shooting took place. Nor would I ever have consented to take part in such an activity. He was right, though, especially when you consider how close the country came to bread rationing earlier in the war before the Women's Land Army became properly organised.

On one occasion he wanted me to help him in the killing of some chickens. He had separated the chosen ones from the rest, the idea being that he and I would kill them that afternoon after dinner. When the time came I just walked past him and carried on with the job I had been doing before dinner. He called me back with a reminder of what he wanted me to do. "No." I said, "If you want any killing done you'll have to do it yourself." It was bad enough seeing them hanging there when, such a short time before, they had been scratching happily in the farmyard. Ernie slit their throats and then hung them up by their feet for the blood to drain from their bodies.

One morning at breakfast the bombshell was dropped. I would soon be surplus to requirements, in two weeks' time in fact. Ernie said " Now that the servicemen are being demobilised they want their jobs back." and his farm labourer was no exception. I had been aware that this would happen if I didn't get out first, but I think I would have stayed with the Houghtons for much longer given the chance. I was happy there. The question was, should I call it a day and go back to my civvy job, or should I go on from there to somewhere else? Land Army Headquarters contacted me with an offer of a vacancy for a gardener at a girls' boarding school. "That sounds interesting." I thought, "Yes. Let's give it a try."

Chapter Nine
Not the Happiest Days

I arrived at my new job about three weeks before Christmas; or maybe a little earlier. The school was a beautiful, large, old house - more like a baronial hall - standing in extensive grounds. There were many things about this job I don't remember, but there are events which I remember very well indeed; or should I say, one event in particular, but I'll come to that.

I don't remember anything at all about my room, but I suppose I must have slept in the house, probably in the maids quarters. It is possible that at least some of the kitchen staff and other household staff slept in, so my room was probably in the same area as theirs. I remember that I ate in the kitchen with the household staff and the gardener and that everything was very amicable.

One memory, however, is very vivid - the picking of sprouts. I had never seen sprouts growing before and I was quite fascinated, but, by heck, it was a cold job. It was slow and delicate work with not much about it to keep you warm, the weather being snowy and frosty. Sprouts grow clustered together almost from base to apex of a central stem, so to pick them you have to use your finger tips to pluck them, one by one, from the stem. They were practically frozen hard and it made my fingers so cold I could hardly use them, and there were a lot of sprouts needed. There were about one hundred girls at that school, plus the teachers and the household staff, and that's a lot of sprouts to pick on a cold winter's morning.

Teachers and pupils ate together in a large hall and I saw little or nothing of any of them. Perhaps this was due to the long dark nights. Maybe in the summer they would use the grounds, but at this time of year it was going dark by the time their lessons were over. It was now close enough to Christmas for the school to be breaking up, but first there was to be a Christmas party. This was to take place at tea time, but had nothing to do with me. In the middle of the afternoon, however, when I came in for a hot drink, one of the women said to me "You will be going to the party, won't you?" "Me? No I'm not going." I said. "Oh yes. You must! You'll enjoy it. A place has been set for you."

I don't like parties now and I didn't like parties then. I grew out of parties about the age of fourteen when I began to notice how stupidly many adults behaved at a party. No way would I behave like that. It put me right off. This, of course, was to be a children's party and, although I didn't want to go I felt obliged to go and so, just to be polite, I went. I hadn't taken any civilian clothes with me to this job. The weather was very cold and the warmest clothes I possessed was my uniform. Besides, if I didn't like the job I wouldn't be staying, so why carry a lot of luggage about.

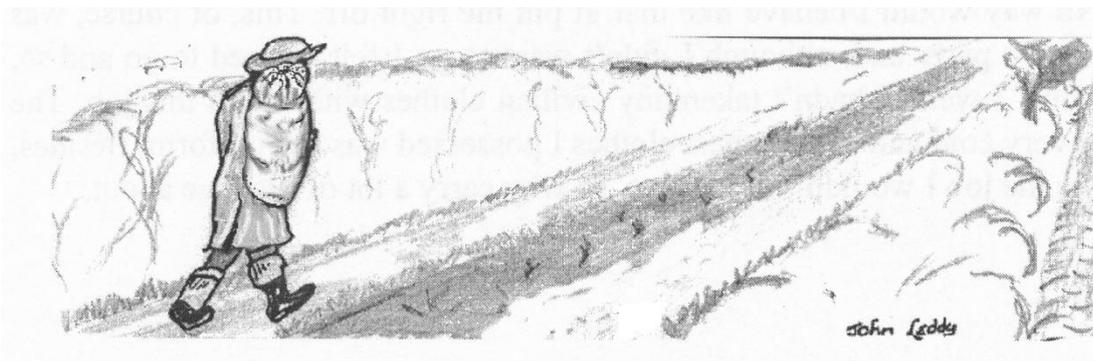
"I only have my uniform with me." I said to the woman, "I didn't bring any dresses." "That doesn't matter," she said "you look lovely in your dress uniform." The

decision was made for me and it seemed to be unanimous. I was proud of my uniform and I knew I looked good in it, so that was that. When I had bathed and changed out of my working clothes into the dress uniform I sat about the kitchen till the cook thought it was time for me to make my way into the hall. One of the women came with me to show me where I should sit then off she went back into the kitchen leaving me feeling like a fish out of water. The seats gradually filled up all around me, teachers at the top table and children of from eleven to eighteen at various places in the hall, and I didn't know one of them. Nearly all the seats were filled when suddenly I became aware of one of the kitchen staff standing by my side asking me to go with her. I stood up and followed her, feeling rather puzzled. She led me back into the kitchen where I was informed that the Headmistress was annoyed with me for going to the party in uniform. Well! Not only did *my* temper flare, but every woman in that kitchen was disgusted.

"How dare that woman show me up in that way and how dare she degrade my uniform. Would she have behaved that same way towards a soldier in uniform, a sailor or an airman ? Would she have degraded their uniform too? Just how dare the likes of her, who sits tight on her fat job while others were sent out to endure hardship; into the fighting forces, into munitions factories, the NAAFI, the Land Army. How dare she have the audacity to turn up her nose at a uniform" I was beside myself with fury and I made no secret of it. The silly old fool must have known a place was being set for me. I don't know whose idea it was originally, but she must have given her permission. There was no way any of those kitchen workers would do that off their own bat.

Later on, after I had cooled down, we had our own party. I never wanted to go to their silly party in the first place, but I wouldn't be letting her get away with that. I was the one who would be having the last word.

When I went up to my room I packed my kit bag with my working clothes and the following morning I went down to breakfast in my dress uniform. When the eyebrows went up I said " I'm not staying here to be treated like that. She can pick her own sprouts." to which there was applause all round. When I had eaten I put on my hat and coat, said my good-byes all round, slung my kit bag over my shoulder and walked out of the door.



Chapter Ten
But That's Another Story

I caught the local bus into Blackburn then took the train to Manchester and that, finally, was the end of my bit towards the war effort. I wrote to Land Army Headquarters telling them why and holding back none of the indignation I was feeling.

My mother and father were very annoyed also. Although they only knew what I told them they knew also that, whatever else I was, I was never a liar. My mother said that I should write to "John Bull", which was a sort of newspaper. I don't remember whether it was a weekly or a monthly, or maybe even a daily, but it was the paper to write to if you had a grievance in those days. Mother's words were just one of those throw away remarks which are not intended to be taken seriously, but because of the state of mind I was in, I took it seriously and off went my letter to "John Bull"

Some days later a young reporter called to see me and we talked about it. He said "Somebody who can write a letter like that should be working for the newspapers. Have you ever thought of going into journalism?" Whatever else that letter was it was certainly not lacking in passion, but as for journalism? "No. I don't think so. Thank you." He said he had visited the school and talked with the Headmistress who told him "I couldn't let her sit there in that condition. She was filthy. She came straight in out of the garden." So not only were those children being taught by someone with wrong values, she was also a liar. The reporter sat there listening to me blowing my stack for a while then he managed to get a word in edgeways. "Well, if it is any consolation to you, I believe you." He cast his eyes over me and said "I only have to look at you to realise that what she said can't be true. It's difficult to imagine you looking dirty let alone going to a party in all your muck." So that was the end of that.

It didn't matter that she didn't end up in the newspaper. What did matter was the shock she must have felt at being investigated by the press. Hopefully she learned the last lesson of my Land Army career, a lesson on how to treat people. Maybe she took a long hard look at herself. I wonder if she was allowed to read my letter to "John Bull". Who knows?

If it hadn't been for her that job might have turned out to be the outdoor job I was hoping to find after leaving the Women's Land Army, but it wasn't to be.

I kept in touch with the Houghtons for about three years and I kept in touch with Mary for about twenty five or thirty years. For the first few years we saw quite a lot of each other then after about three years it slackened off a bit.

Mary emigrated to New Zealand in 1952/53. I was detained in a long stay hospital at the time and she came to see me and say "Good-bye". We kept up a correspondence which was good because it told me what a good life she was having out there. She came back to Britain about 1957 during which time we enjoyed each others company quite a lot. We visited the Houghtons together which seemed a little weird. Their little boy was now about eighteen and they had two other children, one of which had been on the way while I was working for them, but I had never seen her.

We sat and talked and drank tea with Gwyn for a while and then we walked across the fields to find Ernie who was working with the tractor. We learned that they were intending to emigrate to Australia, but I never learned whether they actually did so or not.

During the few days that Mary and I spent together she told me that she had been secretly in love with Ernie 'way back in 1946. She also said that Ernie had told her that Wilhelm, the elder of the two prisoners, was in love with her. I wonder if Wilhelm is still alive and what sort of life he had once he got back to Germany with no family to go back to.

Mary went back to New Zealand after about six weeks. She travelled by sea, which is a long journey, during which time she became friendly with a man called Kevin Horgan. She eventually became Mrs. Horgan and they had three children. We lost touch eventually mainly because after a certain length of time, it's like trying to write to a stranger.

I did have thoughts about following her out to New Zealand and in a letter dated August 1961 Mary did her best to encourage me to take the plunge. She finishes by saying " There is a bed here waiting for you as soon as you are ready."

I did try writing to an old address a few years ago, perhaps in the early '80s, but had no reply of any kind, so I guess she is lost forever. I wonder if I would have emigrated with her if I hadn't been ill at the time.....

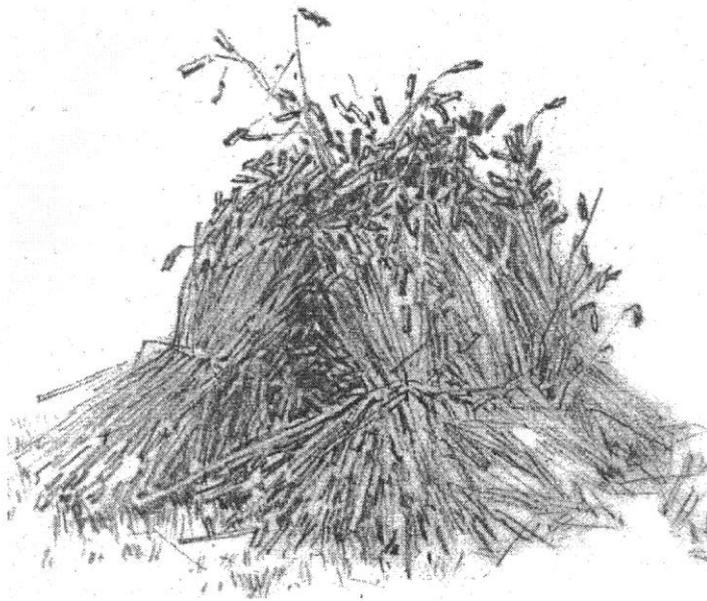
And that really is another story. * *

My uniform, or what was left of it, I donated to the Manchester Costume Gallery at Platt Hall, Manchester, sometime in the 1980's. I wish very much that I had kept it complete because the Gallery at that time had nothing at all on the Women's Land Army.

I think I can honestly say that I thoroughly enjoyed my life in the Women's Land Army except for the few occasions when it was spoilt for me by certain individuals.

When people ask me "How on earth can you remember so much after all these years?" I reply, "It's not so much my memory, it's just that it never went away."





The writer down through the ages



18 months old.



About four or five.



Thirteen; in a concert given by my dancing school in Platt Fields, Manchester.

19 years old. 1944/5.





1955
Aged 30



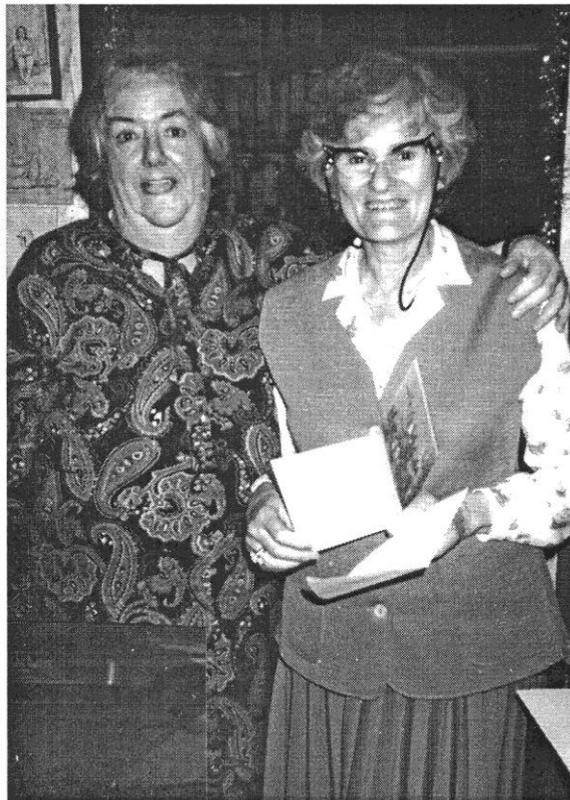
1966:
Aged 40;
with a python at
Belle Vue Zoo
Manchester



1966



1973
aged 48



1985. My 60th birthday; with my friend Mary Turner who encouraged me to write this part biography.



1994 aged 69

Fifty years on . . .

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*Fourteenth of
October 1995*

1995

The year 1995 marked the 50th anniversary of the ending of the Second World War and also the year of my 70th birthday. The 14th October, my birthday, was the day chosen by members of the Women's Land Army Association to hold a commemoration parade and arrangements were being made for permission to hold our own March Past, to lay wreaths made in facsimile of the WLA badge and hold a service at the Cenotaph in Whitehall.

When I learned that this was being planned I became quite excited. I thought that this must be a good omen. Wouldn't it be lovely if I could meet up with someone from my past? I wrote to the BBC for more information and, after receiving names and addresses for contact, all the arrangements were made. Realising that few of us, if any, would be recognisable - one to another - after fifty years, I decided to go well prepared.

I collected some photographs of myself in uniform, one of the team taken outside the hostel and one each of Eileen Dawson and Elsie Johnson and placed them inside a plastic bag which I pinned to my anorak so that they could be easily seen. On the day of the service I wandered through the crowd asking every woman there if she had worked in Cornwall, but nothing came of this - there was nobody there from my past.

This was a great disappointment, but not really surprising. After all, I was 70 years old and I was one of the youngest. Many women would probably be too frail to attend and of course some will have died. We had been over 80,000 strong, but only about 200 of us gathered together on this very special day. Among those who did attend were several in wheelchairs and several who were nearer 80 than 70 years of age.

One young woman was wearing her mother's uniform and I asked her "What's your story? You are obviously too young to be wearing that uniform for real." She told me that she was wearing the uniform because her mother, who was with her, couldn't get into it herself. Jolly good she looked, too!

It gave me quite a turn when I first saw her; it was like going back 50 years. The uniform was not complete, but there was enough of it to make it work. The hat and breeches seemed to be authentic, but she wore gaiters instead of knee-length socks. However these may also have been authentic because, in the early days, gaiters *were* issued to some girls. The rest of the uniform was composed of substitute items.

There were quite a few hats being worn and there was a small contingent of the Land Army Forestry Corp. who had tried to recreate their uniform. It was a brave try, but it didn't quite come off. Originally, the Forestry Corp. wore the same uniform as

the rest of us and only the hat badges were different. We started out all wearing the same hat, but somewhere along the line the Forestry Corp. changed over to the beret. I don't think I ever knew the date of the change-over. I would have liked to have taken part in the wearing of uniform - well, the hat, anyway - but what was left of my uniform I gave to the Manchester Museum of Costume some 10/15 years ago.

I am glad I was there for that special day. The march past and the service were very moving and it was the first time that the WLA had been allowed to pay their respects in this way. I was informed by a member of the WLA Association that they had put in a request each year since 1945 for permission to take part in the Remembrance Day Commemoration March Past and each year their request was denied. This special concession, which was grudgingly given, was to be the one and only time it would happen, and even then protocol demanded that we had to be escorted by a member of each of the three armed forces.

Anyhow, the weather was good to us. It was a beautiful bright, sunny, autumn day and it was most appropriate in my opinion that October had been chosen for this important occasion, because, to me, that is when the farming year starts. In the days of the WLA, ploughing didn't start until the harvest was in and by October it was usually well on its way.

After the March Past we walked across London to Waterloo Station. We had been given special permission to dine at the Union Jack Club which is a huge building run as a hotel for service personnel and their families and after I had dined I said my farewells to the people I had met then took a taxi back to Euston Station where I boarded a train for Manchester.

I was back home by about 6.00pm and immediately called round to a friend's house to give an account of my day and to collect my dog. About an hour later we were back home, my border collie and me. I had left my bed at 5.30am courtesy of British Telecom's 'wake-up' call, so it had been a long and eventful day and I had enjoyed every minute of it. However, it was not over yet. It was still my birthday and I had yet to open my presents, so Katie and I sat by the fire while I did just that. My friends were very generous to me and I received some beautiful presents.

Now, with hindsight, I get a very warm feeling knowing that I was part of the Women's Land Army. I'm proud to know that without us this country would have suffered the hardships of much more severe rationing. If my memory serves me well, bread and potatoes were not rationed until after the war when the wartime government gave way to an elected parliament.

Yes, I think we made a difference.



14th October 1995. Lining up in preparation for our march to the Cenotaph.



Holding one of the two wreaths which we laid on the steps of the Cenotaph. The second one was from the Timber Corp.

Fifty Three Years

on . .

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June 1998

Fifty Three Years On - 1998

Mary Lane's family have been traced. I am now corresponding with her daughter, Lynn, in New Zealand.

Mary died in 1995 and the news left me feeling very upset. What's more, I feel cheated. Perhaps because the actual tracing proved to be so quick and easy, not to mention at little or no cost. I had always been of the opinion that to trace Mary would be a very long-winded and expensive process - if not impossible. In fact all the time it took to find Mary's family was three hours one afternoon via the Internet. I had been wanting to get in touch with Mary for many years. What a pity the Internet was not available to me years ago.

Kevin, Mary's husband, died some years ago. The business he started all those years ago must have been a success because the Horgan firm seems to be well known in Riccarton, New Zealand.

I am also in touch with Gwyn Houghton now aged 78, who lives in a bungalow in Merseyside. Neither Gwyn nor her husband Ernie ever did emigrate. Ernie was forced to give up farming in 1958 due to the effects of 'farmer's lung' somewhat similar to the more widely known disease of 'miner's lung' or emphysema which is caused by dust particles blocking the passages in the lung. Ernie was just 58 when he died in 1973. What was that about a farmer having an easy, healthy, life?

His sister's husband took over Cop Holt Farm in 1958 and it is now farmed by Ernie's nephew, Alan Smith, and his wife, Vanessa, with whom I am also in touch. They made me welcome in the old farmhouse, now much changed, the front door now being at the back of the house, for example. An aerial photograph in Alan's possession and a look at some of the remaining buildings - including the Dutch barn - brought back happy memories indeed.

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### Dedication

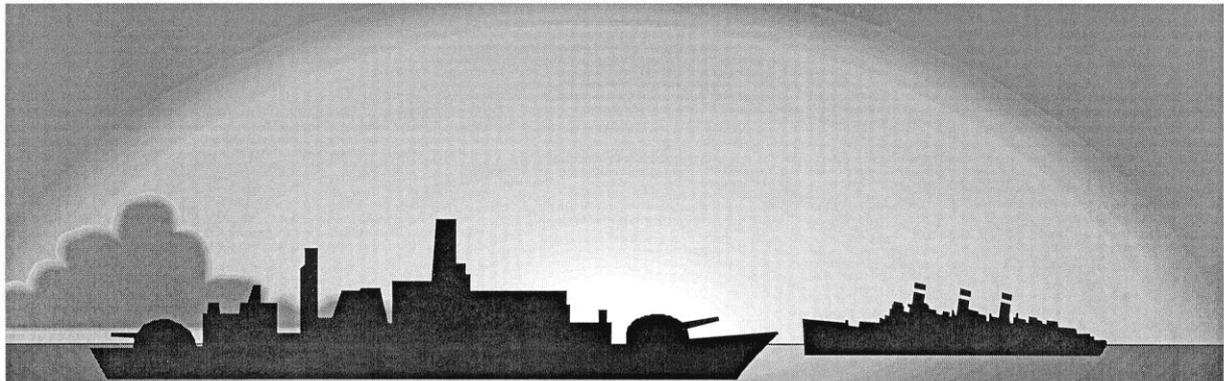


I wish to dedicate this work to my late friend, Mary Turner, without whose encouragement in the 1980's I may never have even thought about putting pen to paper.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the hard work put in on my behalf by my close friend Edward McLernon of Lochmaben, Scotland. He copied my handwritten manuscript and printed it for my proofreading, repeating the process many times. Without his help this work would have been difficult to complete. Thank you, dear friend.

I would also like to acknowledge, firstly, the original freehand sketches created at extremely short notice by John Leddy of Levenshulme, Manchester. Secondly, the hints and drawings contained in *How to Draw the Countryside* by E.G. Earthrowl; The Studio Publications, London & New York 1948



*“ Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing,  
Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness;  
So on the ocean of life we pass and speak one another,  
Only a look and a voice; then darkness again and a silence. ”*

*Longfellow*



*A*



*many*



*few*



*the*



*of*

## *The Friendly Ships that Passed in the Night*

### 'D' Flight Lindley Aerodrome, Nuneaton

Denis Meakin - Ron Wilcock - Eric Gray - Harry - Vic - Smart and many others.  
Jean and the rest of the NAAFI girls

### Budbrooke Barracks, Warwick.

Private John Ankcorn - Roger Maltby and Leslie, the two American soldiers I met on the River Avon.  
Nick, Royal Marines.  
Sylvia the cook, and all the other NAAFI girls.

### St Austell, Cornwall.

Winifred - Mr. & Mrs. Tucker.  
The young mother who invited Winifred and I into her home at Christmas 1944.

### Duloe, Cornwall.

Mr. & Mrs. 'Y' - Terry Arthur - Phil, Royal Navy Captain and Edith.  
RAF Gwyn Jones - Ken - Alan - 'Woppy' who did their air crew training with the Royal Canadian Air Force  
on Prince Edward Island, Canada.  
John, Merchant Navy

### Liskeard, Cornwall.

Bill & Doreen Welsh - 'Cookie' - Jim Hayes (Jampot)  
Mons Meager - his mother - sisters Vera and Inez and Inez' husband Bill and their two children.  
Denholm, landlord of the Fountain Hotel.  
Land Girls at 'Pencubitt' W.L.A. hostel.  
A truckload of American servicemen.

### Crag Hostel, Wadebridge, Cornwall.

Dorothy Clegg - Elsie Johnson - Irene Dawson (forewoman) and the rest of the girls at the hostel.  
Local men in the team; Harry Curtis - Ron Fisher - Bert - Jago - Chum.  
Geoffrey from the Post Office.  
Gordon Halpin R. N., bell-bottomed sailor.  
Ken Woolam, RAF Observer.  
John, RAF Pilot.

### Cop Holt Farm, Winwick, Warrington.

Ernie and Gwyn Houghton.  
Mary Lane.  
Wilhelm and Walter, German prisoners of war.

### The school on the outskirts of Blackburn.

The gardener.  
The household staff.

There were several other young men in the armed forces whose faces  
flit across my memory, but names, times and places escape me.  
With no letters or photographs to help, not even a mention in my diary,  
I am unable to give them a place in this piece of work.

*First draft completed on 14th October 1995;  
Dorothy's 70th birthday!*

*Many Happy Returns, Dorothy!*



*Dorothy Wildgoose's account of a long personal battle with spinal tuberculosis, and her triumph, is now held in Manchester Central Library.*

*An accomplished photographer and member of Manchester Amateur Photographic Society, Dorothy finished her eventful working life in the Local History section of the Central Library and she has used her time since then to write, in longhand, of her life experiences. Her words open windows to a time of struggle that is not really so very long ago, but perhaps too soon forgotten. They are worth the reading.*

*Last week, Dorothy celebrated her 85<sup>th</sup> birthday at home in the company of Margaret, Susan and Julie, good friends from Manchester Central Library who informed her that there is now a Women's Land Army web site. Dorothy has asked me to post a copy of this work there.*

*EMcL Dumfries 21<sup>st</sup> October 2010*