

COLLINGHAM IN THE GREAT WAR

Women on the Land

Women had traditionally worked alongside the men in Collingham's fields for many years before the outbreak of the war. Although most assisted their fathers or husbands at key times such as sowing and harvesting, some were farmers in their own right.

The Lileys

The Lileys are a good example of how entire families worked together. Charles Liley (1817-1891) began the dynasty that spanned at least four generations of cottagers and farmers in South Collingham. He and his first wife Sarah (née Thompson) had six children, including Henry Liley Snr. (1849-1935).

Cottager **Henry Liley Snr** had four children with his first wife Maria (1850-1876). After her death he married Sarah Harvey (1858-1943) and had a further 6 children, all born in Collingham. His son **Henry Jr**, (1875-1957) the youngest of his children by Maria, farmed in South Collingham all his life. Two of his sons with Maria, William and James, served in the first world war. James (1890-1916) was killed on the Somme.

Henry Jr, a carrot farmer, was raised by his grandparents and married **Jane Roberts** in 1898 and they had five children. It is Henry Jr's family which appear on many of the postcards and photographs. Jane and her daughters all worked on the land.



Above: L-R Jane Liley (1876-1959) ? Henry Liley Jr., Henry Liley Snr., Charles Liley (born 1904)
Front: George Liley (1909 – 1978) Doris Liley (1913-1996) Photo c. 1917/18



Above: L-R Charles Liley with his sisters Elsie (1899-1976) and Edith Liley (1901- 1918) and mother Jane. Father Henry Liley Jr behind. Photo c 1916/17. Edith died of the Spanish Flu in December 1918. The flu was sweeping through the nation at the time.



Above: Jane and daughter Elsie helping unload their carrot crop at Collingham Station c 1919.



Above: *This photograph of the Liley sisters is dated 1928 but may have been taken earlier.*

The Bocoeks

Like the Lileys, the Bocoeks were a long established Collingham farming family. Various Bocoeks played significant roles in the war including Annie Lois Hoe (née Bocoek) who adopted a Belgian refugee, Elodie Tanghe, and May Bocoek (below) 1894 – 1962 who participated in the first Women’s Ploughing Match to be held at Collingham Farmers’ Show



in 1916.

The Newark Advertiser, Wed 8th November 1916 reported the event as follows¹:

‘Collingham Show Ploughwomen at Work’

‘A feature of the 75th Collingham Agricultural Show held on Thursday (2nd Nov) was the Classes for women competitors. In consequence of the shortage of men the necessity has arisen, and will become accentuated with the advent of the New Year, for the substitution of women’s for men’s labour in certain departments of agriculture. The class for women milkers showed that women could do this class of work, also the lifting of carrots, but opinion was divided on the subject of ploughing. There were only three women entered in this class but, generally speaking, the work was well done and praised by the farmers as an illustration of what women can do in a national crisis. The winner was found in a lady from Coningsby, Lincoln who thus won the first match in which she was a competitor. The clamor of deliberation with which she did the work was freely commented upon. The second prize was a local young lady, Miss M Boccock, who regularly ‘goes to plough’ on her parent’s land; and the third-prize winner was Miss Pinder, of Scarle. Mr D Nicholson, who every year presents the ploughmen with medals, presented the women with lockets.

Results:

Women (all England)

1st Prize Miss E M Jackson, Tattershall Thorpe, Consingsby

2nd Prize: Miss M Boccock, Trent Farm, N Collingham

3rd Prize: Mrs Pinder, Church Farm, South Scarle

May Boccock married Collingham Stationmaster William Huntley in 1924. She died at Station House in 1962 aged 68. Her husband outlived her by a considerable margin, dying at ‘Twin Gates’ on Station Road in 1999 aged 97. The couple didn’t have any children.

The Women’s Land Army (WLA)

The [Women’s Land Army](#) was formed in 1917 to recruit full-time workers on the land to replace the shortage caused by farmers and agricultural labourers serving in the war. The women were needed to help increase food production, especially as the war progressed and blockades prevented imported wheat and meat getting through.

In preparation, local parish councils were sent letters from the Secretary of the Agricultural Union to ascertain ‘the number of women currently employed on farms and the number likely to be available.’ North Collingham Parish Council minutes for February 15th 1916² show they ordered the Clerk to reply and state: ‘there was not at this present time any

¹ See p 70 ‘Straight Furrows’ by N Pickerill 1950 (copies in Collingham Library & Newark Library)

² North Collingham Parish Council Minutes held in Inspire Nottinghamshire Archives Ref: PAC/84/1/2



Iconic recruitment poster from WW1

scarcity of labour.' Whether a labour shortage arose as the war progressed is not recorded. However, from 1916 onwards the Newark Rural Tribunals were kept busy hearing the pleas of Collingham and Brough farmers and tradesmen desperate to keep their male employees on their books. The pleas often fell on deaf ears as the panel told the men to use their wives and daughters instead.

There was a rigorous enlistment policy for the WLA. Of the 30,000 women who responded, half were turned down as unsuitable.

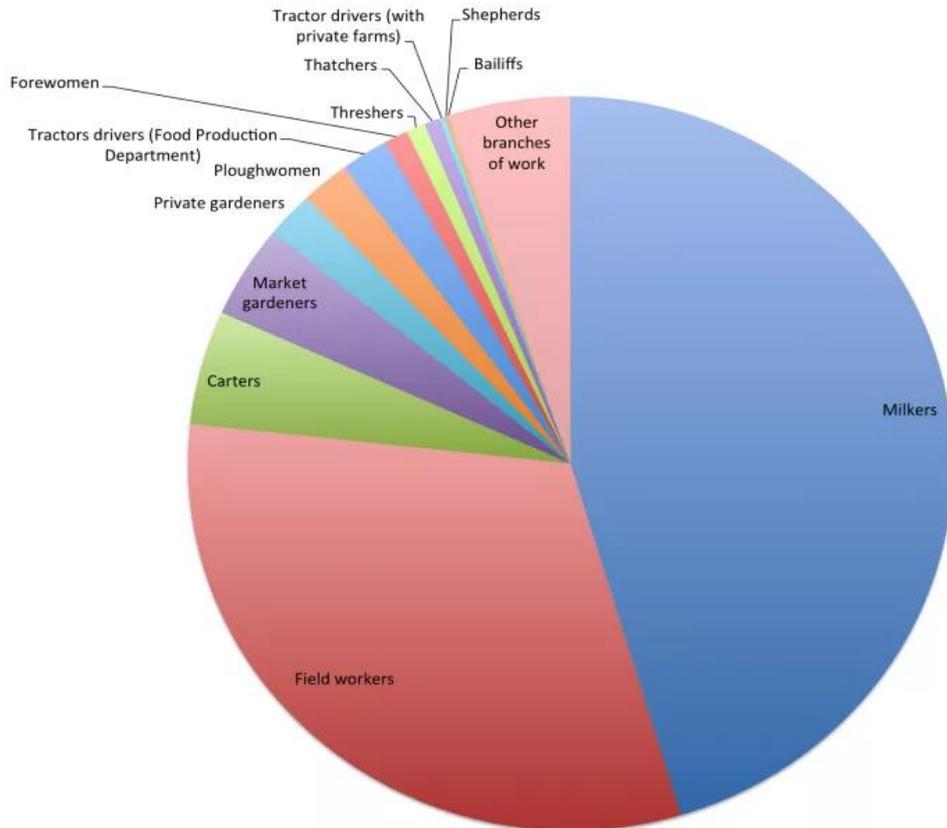
In Newark, the Agricultural Board was responsible for recruitment and overseeing the 4-6 week training required in one of the three areas: agricultural, timber and forage. Women were then placed with a farm where they had to 'live in' in the majority of cases. Unlike the voluntary nurses in British Red Cross Voluntary Aid Detachments, women were paid to be in the WLA. Pay was £1 a week with free board and lodging.

Hours were long and the work could be arduous and isolating. In 1918 a Mrs Hobbs was in charge of the Newark women's branch. The Newark Advertiser June 1918 reported on disquiet among farmers about some of the women's attitudes, although how this discontent manifested itself was not outlined. It was felt the 'girls' needed better supervision and money should be found to get capable forewomen to 'instil military discipline.'

Pie Chart Showing Roles Fulfilled by Women in the Land Army by 1918

Agricultural Section

The piechart below shows the employment figures for the Agricultural section in autumn 1918, broken down by types of occupation for 12,649 Women's Land Army members.



*Employment figures for the Agricultural section of the Women's Land Army (WW1)
August 1918*

Source: Women's Land Army website [Agricultural Section](#)

Despite the misgivings of some of the Newark farmers, in general the role women played in the WLA was recognised as invaluable in keeping food production levels as high as possible. The WLA was disbanded in November 1918 and reformed again in 1939 at the outset of World War Two. It was during World War Two Collingham had a Women's Land Army Hostel on Woodhill Road (currently Graff Electronics).

Pictures of Liley family and May Boccock c/o Collingham and District Local History Society

