

Stories of the Great War

Lottie Bond 1866 – 1942

During World War One, 23,000 women were recruited to work full-time on the land, to help replace men who had left to fight in the war. In January 1917 Dame Meriel Talbot formed the Women's Land Army on behalf of the British government. There were three sections to the Women's Land Army: Agriculture, Forage (haymaking for food for horses) and Timber Cutting. The majority who worked in agriculture were milkers and field workers, but some were carters and plough women working with horses as well as market gardeners. The main aim was to increase food production during the war and to release further men to fight at the front.



Lottie Bond (née Unwin) was living with her husband Albert and six children at Besbury in 1911. Her eldest daughter, also Lottie, was married and living in Swells Hill. Originally from Oxfordshire, she seems to have had no agricultural background or family connections – her husband had been a printer but had suffered ill health for some time, and, at the age of 47, she was undertaking work as a carter to support the family at the outbreak of hostilities. Her eldest son, Albert Thomas known as Tom, volunteered for the Gloucestershire Regiment in August 1914, serving in Mesopotamia where he was hospitalised at Basra. For some months those at home thought that he had been killed but he was transferred to the South Staffordshire Regiment, serving in Egypt. Upon his discharge in 1919 he was in the General Hospital, Leicester, suffering from chronic dyspepsia, thought by the M.O. to have been caused by the conditions in the Middle East in 1916 and 1917. Her second son Hubert was 18 when conscription was introduced and probably served. Although her two youngest children, Charles and Marie, were still at school, Lottie might have seen advertisements suggesting women working would enable more men to fight as she joined the Women's Land Army upon its formation in 1917. In addition to her haulage business, in greater

demand during the war, she worked in agriculture in the district, helping with all tasks on the farm; Lottie also worked for thirteen weeks in 1918 on the construction of Minchinhampton Aerodrome, delivering materials but also undertaking manual work.

Following the Armistice, Lottie continued with the haulage business, moving such diverse products as coke from Stroud Gasworks and grain for Stroud Brewery. Her name is given in the electoral register for 1918, so she must have been in the first group of women to be enfranchised. She also purchased a governess cart which was used as a form of taxi for the more affluent. By the mid-1920s both Tom and Hubert were married and living in Swells Hill and Hyde. In August 1938 Lottie and Albert celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary; she had only given up working just before her 70th birthday; before her death in 1942 she saw the land girls of World War II at work in the fields around Minchinhampton.

Diana Wall