

the story of wooler hostel



the Joan Pringle ROOM

JOAN PRINGLE (né McIntyre) considered she was the first real 'townie', from Wallsend, to join the W.L.A. at Wooler, having seen a newspaper advertisement. She remembered the bus journey of 1½, from the Haymarket, Newcastle to the first Wooler billet at Surrey House, Haugh Head. (She then moved to a new base at Fenton House.)

Joan and a friend, Rene, who had joined simultaneously, were collected the next morning by a farmer and taken to where they were to work. Their first job was sorting potatoes. These had been stored in an outdoor 'clamp', many of them had become rotten with an accompanying stench. At another farm she remembered picking buckets full of stones from the land. These were then used as hard core for road building but would have ruined plough shares.

The two girls moved to various farms, as required. However, they eventually received an offer, from one particular farmer, to be billeted at his farm as a permanent base and they decided this would be preferable. Their work here followed the farming year.

Haymaking involved tossing and turning the cut grass until it was dry. It was then forked into small 'pikes' and then into larger ones. Eventually the hay would be made into large stacks each being encircled with straw rope. The making of straw rope, with a special three pronged weaving tool, was a wet weather task. Harvesting followed haymaking. Sheaves of the cut cereal crop were propped up against each other creating 'stooks'. The crop could then dry before being carted into the farmyard to create a stack which would eventually be threshed. The culmination of this was celebrated with a harvest supper – it proved to be a very sociable time. Potato picking time soon came around together with harvesting and preparation of other root crops for stock feed. Joan remembered lambing time; it was hard work, checking on all the sheep which were about to lamb. She also learnt to plough using heavy, Clydesdale, horse. Joan admitted she had led a sheltered life, prior to this new life in the country, and had great difficulty understanding the local dialect. She was befriended by the locals and shown how to make 'clouty mats'. This was Friday night recreation!

