

the story of wooler hostel

the Women's Land Army 1938-1954

LEFT TO RIGHT: LADY JOHNSON, ELIZABETH JOHNSON, PEGGY JOHNSON, OTHERS UNKNOWN.

This building has its origins in the **Women's Land Army (W.L.A.)**, founded on the eve of the outbreak of World War II to fill the void arising from the conscription of male agricultural labourers. Women not conscripted into the forces or factories and who did not have domestic responsibilities, or work in reserved occupations, were employed as farm labourers to enhance the much-needed food production at home in Britain.



The Northumberland organisation was initiated in June 1938. On 26th August 1939 it was announced at the Glendale

Show that almost 100 young women from Northumberland had volunteered to work on the land in the Women's Lady Army.

The minimum age for joining the W.L.A. was 17 years. Until 1940 volunteers were employed directly by the individual farmer, who provided two weeks training and accommodation in the farmhouse or farm cottages. The Ministry of Agriculture paid him an allowance of 15 shillings (75p) per week, and the trainee 10 shillings (50p).



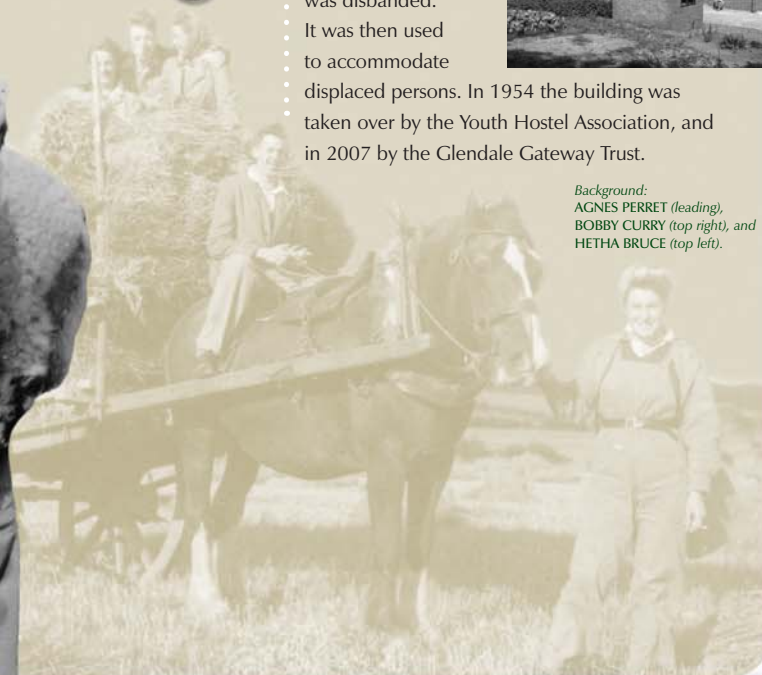
In 1940 Surrey House, Haugh Head (just south of Wooler), along with Pawston Farm near Mindrum, were requisitioned to pioneer the idea of hostel-type living. In 1943 Wooler Hostel was purpose-built to accommodate the Land Army Girls. It was managed by the Young Men's Christian Association until 1946, when county officers took over. According to the W.L.A. magazine, Wooler was one of nineteen hostels opened that year, about half of which were purposely built.

Most of the girls recruited to work from a base in Wooler came from towns, particularly Newcastle. Adapting to life in the country and manual farm work with its long hours proved challenging. Some of the girls could not cope with the hard life and resigned from the service. However, most adapted to their new life. Many married locally, and remained in the area. Some of their experiences are given elsewhere in the hostel.

The hostel ceased being a base for the W.L.A. in 1950, when the organisation was disbanded. It was then used to accommodate displaced persons. In 1954 the building was taken over by the Youth Hostel Association, and in 2007 by the Glendale Gateway Trust.



MURIEL WHILLIS



Background: AGNES PERRRET (leading), BOBBY CURRY (top right), and HETHA BRUCE (top left).

