

Remembrance, Retrospection, and the Women's Land Army in World War I Britain

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article explore les défis méthodologiques auxquels les historiennes et les historiens sont confrontés lorsqu'ils veulent étudier les entrevues faites avec d'anciens membres de la Women's Land Army. Ces entrevues, conservées au Imperial War Museum de la Grande-Bretagne, ont été conduites près de 60 ans après la fin de la Première Guerre mondiale dans le cadre du développement de la Women's War Work Collection qui visait à mettre en lumière le rôle des femmes lors des guerres du vingtième siècle. Alors que ces sources sont certainement utiles aux historiens, le temps écoulé entre les événements et leur remémoration met en évidence la nature problématique de la relation entre histoire et mémoire. L'auteure soutient que le temps écoulé entre les guerres et les entrevues ainsi que l'expérience acquise au fil des ans qui a donné forme à la fois à la mémoire et à l'identité des interviewées font en sorte que les entrevues ne doivent pas être abordées telles des sources historiques, mais plutôt comme des études basées sur l'expérience personnelle. L'aspect problématique de ces entrevues est aggravé par la manière dont elles ont été menées, c'est-à-dire comment les interviewers les ont structurées de manière à guider les interviewées dans leurs réponses. Cet article participe donc à une réflexion sur la validité et l'utilité de ces sources orales.

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BONNIE J. WHITE

Abstract

This paper explores the methodological challenges posed by interviews with former members of the Women's Land Army held in Britain's Imperial War Museum. These interviews were conducted approximately 60 years after the First World War as part of the Women's War Work Collection that was created in an effort to capture the role of women in the wars of the twentieth century. These documents are certainly of value to the historian, although the decades that passed between event and recollection highlight the problematic relationship between history and memory. The author argues that due to this temporal gap and the continuation of lived experience that shaped both identity and memory in the intervening years, the interviews lose their evidentiary primacy and must be approached as secondary sources, albeit ones grounded in personal experience. This challenge is exacerbated by problems with the interview process itself that guided how the Land Girls' narratives were reconstructed by the interviewees. This paper works toward a re-evaluation of the usefulness of these oral interviews.

Résumé

Cet article explore les défis méthodologiques auxquels les historiennes et les historiens sont confrontés lorsqu'ils veulent étudier les entrevues faites avec d'anciens membres de la Women's Land Army. Ces entrevues, conservées au Imperial War Museum de la Grande-Bretagne, ont été conduites près de 60 ans après la fin de la Première Guerre mondiale dans le cadre du développement de la Women's War Work Collection qui visait à mettre en lumière le rôle des femmes lors des guerres du vingtième siècle. Alors que ces sources sont certainement utiles aux historiens, le temps écoulé entre les événements et leur remémoration met en évidence la nature problématique de la relation entre histoire et mémoire. L'auteure soutient

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How World War I is remembered has garnered increasing attention from historians over the past 20 years. For historians, the relationship between memory and history is highly problematic and has led to a re-evaluation of the ways in which personal narratives corroborate, change, or to some degree augment the way contemporary representations of the war are reconstructed. While the time lapse between memory and experience exists in all areas of historical research, an oral interview recorded many years after the event foregrounds questions regarding the reliability of memory and the value of memory as a source in the recreation of histories of World War I. Memory is never stationary or fixed; rather, memories are continually evolving and historical meanings are dependent on time and context. Historians must remain aware of how memories are encoded with meaning from both the past and present, signifying that a person's memories are continually reconstructed and reprioritized in direct relation to the continuation of lived experience. Equally important, historians must be cognizant of the imprinting that occurs when memories are converted into history. How memories are retrieved and why they are retrieved can be as important as the memories themselves. The potentially problematic relationship between memory and history is exemplified in the oral history interviews with former members of the Women's Land Army (WLA) that were conducted in the 1970s and 1980s and held by the Imperial War Museum (IWM). This paper explores the way in which history has been created by the oral interviews and how an individual's perception of her wartime experience was influenced by the creation of that history.

Until recently, the history of the Women's Land Army had been shaped by the work of labour historians who were interested in how women's involvement in the male dominated agricultural industry did or did not change the status of women in early twentieth century Britain.¹ The focus has been whether women's roles in wartime industry changed the future of British women by making their wider employment more acceptable or at least not the subject of public disdain. Missing from the narrative was how the women of the Land Army felt about their wartime experiences beyond the work performed. This question has not been overlooked by historians, but rather speaks to the difficulty of finding a satisfactory answer. Those interested in the organization, structure, or the general operation of the Land Army can turn to government documents, primarily those of the Food Production Department, the records of the County War Agricultural Committees, and the private records of key individuals of the Board of Agriculture. Those interested in the personal accounts and self-evaluation of former Land Girls, however, must rely on newspaper editorials, magazine articles, memoirs,² the scant few diaries that remain,³ and the interviews conducted or held by the IWM. The interviews held by the museum provide personal testimonies of the women's experiences and promise to offer keen insight into the social aspects of the Land Army.

The interviews, however, present a number of challenges for historians. Most of the women interviewed had been between 16 and 20 years old during the war and they generally reported positive experiences despite the fact that the official documents indicate disciplinary troubles and problems with recruitment and retention.⁴ Many of the women's accounts are also plagued by inconsistencies and inaccuracies that have the potential to skew the historical record, which raises the issue of memory as a historical document. The intervening years between the war and the time the interviews were conducted undoubtedly explains some of the inaccurate accountings and alerts historians to changes in perspective that may have altered how events were remembered decades later. But does this limit the validity and usefulness of the interviews as documents of World War I? Are they documents of the war or are they records of collective remembrance shaped by retrospection? While the interviews are limited as primary

accounts of women's wartime attitudes and experiences, the personal narratives provided by the Land Girls are valuable as secondary sources, in that they help historians corroborate primary evidence and also alert historians to the complex relationship between memory and history. Using the interviews as secondary, rather than primary, sources gives them value as part of the postwar collective memory.

The Women's Land Army was born out of necessity. As an importer nation, Britain's food supply was endangered by unrestricted submarine warfare initiated by the German government in 1915 and the particularly harsh winter of 1915–1916 that threatened the spring harvest. The voluntary removal of men from the domestic workforce in the first two years of the war and the subsequent introduction of conscription in 1916 reduced the number of available workers and jeopardized the ability of farmers to significantly increase arable cultivation at home. In January 1917, Lord Selborne established the Women's Branch of the Food Production Department, whose primary responsibility was to bring women workers to Britain's farms. As a wartime organization that had women engaged in traditional male labour while wearing breeches, the Women's Branch had to carefully construct an image of the Land Girl as hard-working yet feminine, patriotic yet willing to return to the home once the war ended. The creation of the Land Army transgressed traditional gender roles, but only temporarily, and only to help ensure the survival of the nation. The Selection Committee was given careful instruction to select girls of good temperament, as the "whole success of women's work on the land depends upon the suitable women, and only the suitable women, being selected."⁵ Priority was given to those women with agricultural experience and those aged 21 years and older.⁶ The Women's Branch was initially responsible for providing women with preliminary instruction, a wage of 15 shillings a week, a uniform, and a free rail ticket. Initially, no training was promised, but some women chose to support themselves in agricultural courses. This system did not last long. Higher wages were needed to entice women to try agricultural work and training was necessary to convince farmers to hire women workers. Women who did not have previous agricultural experience were required to complete six weeks of training, either at an agricultural college where she would bear the cost of the course

herself, or at a training farm. If she chose the latter, she would train for six weeks without pay to offset the cost of training and boarding. As the war progressed, the labour shortage persuaded many farmers to accept alternative labour and women became an increasingly common sight on British farms. The number of women employed on the land is a source of debate among historians, but it is estimated that by the end of 1917 29,000 women were employed on farms.⁷

The work of the Women's Land Army in World War I represents a small but important part of the Women's War Work Collection at the Imperial War Museum. The history of women was included from the museum's inception as the National War Museum in 1917 (renamed the Imperial War Museum in January 1918). A separate section dealing with women's war work was created under the direction of Agnes Conway, the daughter of the museum's first General Director, Martin Conway.⁸ Conway and her fellow volunteers approached women from a number of organizations about contributing to the collection by providing pictures, uniforms, and other historical ephemera. Under the auspices of the IWM's committee, the aim of the collection was to emphasize women's contributions to the war. A significant amount of information covering the years 1917 to 1920 was collected.⁹ Interviews were conducted very early on in the museum's history, but a Sound Department was not opened until January 1972, and interviews with former Land Girls did not take place before that year.¹⁰ The Sound Department currently includes 33,000 recordings from the men and women who participated in the major conflicts of the twentieth century, beginning with World War I. The inclusion of women's voices both supported and advanced the museum's primary objectives: not to simply memorialize the war, nor simply to fill a void in the written record, but rather to capture the stories of women who participated in the war, as articulated in their own words, thus creating a living record that would inform and educate future generations about women's experiences and contributions to the war effort.

The Women's War Work Collection is unique in terms of the museum's holdings in that it contains far more personal testimonials than any other collection at the museum. While the Women's War Work Collection does not consist solely of first person accounts, it

does contain over 2,500 interviews. Within this collection, employment and munitions represent the largest percentage of holdings.¹¹ Of the more than 300 interviews and private papers of Land Girls held at the IWM, the overwhelming majority are from the Second World War, with fewer than 30 accounts from World War I. Of these 30, approximately half are sound recordings. The majority of the sound recordings were conducted between 1974 and 1983 and the interviews were carried out in a coordinated effort by the IWM, the British Broadcasting Corporation, and Southampton Museums.

Evaluating the usefulness of the interviews is challenging and depends on the historian's research focus. Those interested in confirming the daily work activities of Land Girls as found in written documents will not be disappointed, since many of the interviews give at least an overview of the tasks the women were required to perform. Likewise, those researchers interested in the enlistment process will find similar corroboration in the oral interviews. Those interested in the Land Girls' stories as communicated by them and on their own terms, however, will likely be dissatisfied with both the quality of the interviews and their content. This paper seeks to explore the challenges these interviews present to historians by examining the interview process, questions relating to age and memory, and the objectives of the interviews in general.

The interview process was and remains an important part of the narrative captured on tape. With the opening of the Sound Department, the Keeper, David Lance, began examining interview strategies to determine the best way to enhance the museum's oral history collection. The purpose of the collection, according to Lance, was to "collect interesting and significant information by questioning men and women about their personal experiences within prescribed subject areas Opinions and attitudes may also be of interest and value, provided they generally derive from some personal knowledge on the part of the informant."¹² Lance believed that the spontaneous interview, allowing the interviewee to construct his or her own narrative with little interference from the interviewer, was best. The spontaneous interview, however, was time consuming to organize and potentially expensive to transcribe and so the museum opted to adopt a hybrid of the spontaneous and chronological models.¹³ Starting at

the beginning and working through one's life would allow the interviewer to extract information on the topics deemed most important to the museum, while at the same time allowing the interviewees to construct their own narratives. The idea was for the interviewer to provide necessary structure to the interview, but not to interfere with the participant's telling of events. The questions were to be concise, never rhetorical or leading. The pace of the interview was of special importance. Interviewers were instructed to allow the participants enough time to answer the questions asked and, within reason, to avoid interruptions.¹⁴ Facial expressions were to remain neutral to avoid leading the interviewee, and the interpolative "yes" or "I see" were discouraged. It was also important for interviewers to follow up on questions that were left unanswered, or questions that were answered unsatisfactorily. Interestingly, several of the interviews did not follow this strategy. Instead, the interviews are highly constructed with the interviewer asking questions in quick succession and redirecting the participants when answers or commentary digressed from the topic under discussion. Rather than letting the conversation progress naturally, interviewees were ushered in one direction or another in order for the interviewer to retrieve specific information as quickly as possible and in chronological order. As one might expect, conducting the interview in this way meant that the tape/interview had to be stopped frequently to allow the interviewee to collect her thoughts. The tape was then restarted and the interviewer picked up at the point before the interview went off course. The problems associated with this interview strategy are most clearly illustrated in the interview with Beatrice Gilbert. The interview picks up mid-story, alerting historians to the unrecorded pre-interview conversation. The interviewer then redirects Gilbert to specific questions, stopping her story before its conclusion. In the 20 minutes that follow, the interviewer asks questions in quick succession and in some instances did not even wait until Gilbert had finished responding before moving on to the next question. During the course of the interview it is also apparent that other conversations are taking place in the background as the interviewer had a separate dialogue with his assistant. The interviewer's attempt to direct the conversation is distracting, both to Gilbert, who at times struggles to respond to the questions quickly, and to the historian.¹⁵

In an interview with Vera Raymond, the same interviewer started and stopped the interview when “incorrect” answers were given. For example, when asked about her training, Raymond could not remember where she was trained and asked for a moment to think. Rather than giving her the time she requested, the interviewer’s assistant gave her the answer. The interviewer then stopped the interview and indicated that it would be restarted and the question restated. Given that the interviewer indicates at the outset of the interview that Raymond was only 16 years old when she joined the Land Army and that more than 60 years had passed since the time in question, remembering the details would likely be difficult. Nevertheless, Raymond quickly confirmed that the information provided to her was correct, possibly alluding to a pre-interview conversation that is not available to the researcher. Raymond then apologized to the interviewer and asked him if she had made a mistake. After a brief delay the interview restarts and Raymond gives the correct answer.¹⁶

Requesting interviewees to remember events quickly and in chronological succession is an unnatural way for people to recall memories, since people live and reconstruct their lives in terms of themes, grouping memories and making sense of them within the context of specific events.¹⁷ The past, therefore, is not “preserved” intact, and memories do not retain the form or function they once had. Rather, memories are fragments connected to epochs in one’s life.¹⁸ The past is a time-sensitive construction that is culturally and historically specific. The natural recapitulation of events will change each time the story is told, meaning that a master narrative cannot be recalled.¹⁹ Individuals construct a history of their own lives. They preserve and protect the memories that are most important to them, while unconsciously allowing other memories to fade or be forgotten all together. The ability to more easily recall memories deemed most important to the interviewee may reassure researchers that some memories have been safely preserved, but Geoffrey Cubitt argues that the selection process means that experiences are altered, in part by the present that continues to give memories meaning. What is remembered is not necessarily determined by what was most significant at the time of the lived-experience, but rather what is most important at the time of recall.²⁰ Therefore, the process of remembering is critical

to the oral interview and to what future researchers can take from the interview once completed.

One of the drawbacks of the tape recordings, as indicated in the Gilbert interview, is that the interplay between the interviewee and the interviewer is largely absent. We do not know what happened in the intervening time between when the tape was stopped and restarted. The circumstances surrounding the interview — where it was conducted, whether or not a pre-interview was conducted, or how much time the interviewer spent with the interviewee — are omitted both from the interview and the transcription. The expected silences and the conversation one has with one's self, a natural part of remembering, are also absent. Unlike in many written primary sources, the interviewer was part of the story, guiding which version was told by which questions were asked and what areas were overlooked. The interviewer was also not objective in terms of the questions asked. The interviewer was part of the museum's oral history project and played a role in enhancing the museum's collection. The museum itself offered a history, a "version of the past as it is articulated in the museums' displays and histories available for the public to view."²¹ The museum's ability to shape history, and its general objectives, were therefore transferred to those who make it. Since both interviewer (and the museum) and interviewee were part of the narrative, omissions or exchanges that took place while the tape recorder was turned off change the way researchers will understand and use the information garnered from the interview.

It is important that historians understand the value of oral history interviews, what they tell us about the past, and the limitations or obstacles that researchers must contend with. Oral history interviews, like the ones held at the IWM, do not necessarily tell us how people lived in the past; instead, they reveal what people thought about how they lived, how they evaluated their own experiences, and what they desired to do rather than what they actually did. More importantly, perhaps, oral history "tells us how that past lives on into and informs the present."²² The past has the ability to influence the present by the way that the past is represented in the present, but this does not mean that the past is a construction of the present, whereby what one did in the past determines present behaviours or attitudes.

Memory is a combination of past and present and the act of remembering blurs the distinction between periods of lived experience. History is an intellectual process with a sustained focus on the past, which is then interpreted and rearticulated by the historian. The event or events in question are refracted through a number of lenses. In this instance, the refraction began with the oral history project and what it hoped to accomplish. The interviewer then asked questions based on the primary objectives of the project and then guided the interviewee toward or away from certain topics, often in a particular order. The interviewee worked to recall memories of the events in question, but did so through a retrospective and historically distant framework that had its own attendant problems.²³ The historian then attempts not only to glean information from the interviews, but also, with fidelity, to question the available evidence and interpret the information to answer larger questions about movements, narratives, ideas, and people. Not only does the interviewee rediscover, reconstruct, and reinterpret her past experiences and articulate those memories in response to specific questions, but then the historian also goes through the same process as he or she creates history. What the historian has to be aware of is that the person participating in the interview has already created one version of events and that the historian then uses that history to construct his or her own narrative of events. While these kinds of questions may be asked of various types of historical documents, the problems are compounded when examining the oral history interviews held by the IWM. The central question here is to what extent does the process of “making” history jeopardize the reliability and validity of the Land Girls’ experiences during World War I as communicated many years after the fact?

Researchers interested in memory have revealed three important trends. First, while the process of remembering is complex, individuals generally remember events or details better than how they felt about past events, and they remember events early in life better than events later in life. Second, history and memory are very different things. Memory is a life-long discourse, continually changing throughout one’s life. The past is re-imagined within the context of the present and memory thereby shapes and is shaped by the present.

Third, memory is fairly reliable, within key parameters.²⁴ In order to understand the value of the interviews held by the IWM, historians need to examine what the interviews reveal not only regarding the ins-and-outs of agricultural life, but also how the women felt about and evaluated those experiences, the factors that influenced which memories were revealed, and to what extent the passage of time altered the women's perceptions and memories of past events.

The interviews held by the IWM support all three conclusions. Helen Poulter, for example, recalled in great detail events and specific information from her childhood. Poulter remembered where she lived, what school she attended, and her first job when she was 14 years old. She also remembered her father's sudden death in 1915, when she was just 18 years of age; her mother's death two years later; and her sweetheart's death the same year. When asked about her feelings on the war, the details lacked such clarity. Her father told her there was trouble with Germany, but she did not remember the specifics. Later in the interview, when asked if the war was wrong, she answered, "No, it was the Kaiser, wasn't it? He was going to come over and take everybody over. He was worse than Hitler."²⁵ Clearly, her personal experiences and losses during the war influenced her interpretation of the war as a whole. The Kaiser was not only responsible for the outbreak of the war, but he was also responsible for her personal losses, thereby compounding and magnifying his guilt. In terms of the Women's Land Army, some of her memories were quite precise. On the one hand, she recalled the rate of pay, the uniform, the tasks she was required to perform, the names of individuals she worked with, and the families she billeted with. On the other hand, she was able to recall only a few details surrounding her decision to join the Land Army. When her mother died in 1917, she suggests that it was her doctor who thought she could benefit from some fresh air and suggested she join the WLA. At this point, the story became a bit disjointed. She recalled a rally and newspaper advertisements for the Land Army, but could not remember the circumstances around her decision to enlist. She stated, however, that she underwent no preparation for the Land Army. From her perspective the girls knew neither what they were getting into nor were they provided any formal training. The girls were simply taken to cottages in the woods where she

and her friend were billeted. For a fortnight she did not even have a uniform and wore a black mourning dress and high-heeled shoes.²⁶ Poulter was also unable to comment on her relationship with Mrs. Wilken, the farmer's wife, or how she got along with the remaining male workers. In response to the interviewer's question about women doing men's work, she replied, "It was just something that happened," and left it at that.²⁷

Unfortunately, many of the accounts given by former Land Girls follow this general trend. Beatrice Gilbert remembered joining the Land Army in 1914 and vaguely remembered the war as a happy time in her life. The majority of this short interview, lasting 21 minutes, focused on a parade Gilbert participated in for the WLA and a Land Girl competition where she won five shillings. Gilbert noted that her family was opposed to her joining the Land Army, but no explanation for their objection was provided in the interview.²⁸ Kathleen Gilbert's interview began with a detailed overview of her childhood. A significant portion of the interview was dedicated to her family's history: where they lived, when they moved, the details of the family home, and the start of school when she was four years old. Gilbert remembered with great clarity her enlistment with the WLA. She recalled where she enlisted, who she enlisted with, and the details of the uniform she wore. She also remembered her first day of work: planting cabbage, the old men and boys who still worked on the farm, being taken to the stables to meet the eight horses she would be responsible for. However, when Gilbert was asked about her contribution to the war effort and whether or not she felt she was doing her bit, she replied "Oh yes, I was doing it because I didn't have any time to do anything else." When asked if she was treated well by the farmers and other labourers she responded, "Oh, treated well by everybody." When asked if she liked wearing the Land Army uniform, she replied, "Oh yes, I didn't take any notice of it." While she was able to recall details from her childhood and the ins and outs of her daily work routine, her memories of World War I were indistinct. Her love of horses, her reason for joining the WLA in the first place, was at the forefront of the memories of her war work. She professed that she willingly spent most of her time in solitude — just her and her horses, as she lovingly referred to them.²⁹

Former Land Girl Eva Marsh was 21 when she joined the Land Army. The majority of her interview focused on her family life, and offered few details of her work experience. She recalled with enthusiasm her school years, leaving school at the age of 14, and spoke forthrightly about her mother, her relationship with her sisters, and her work around the family home in the years leading up to the war. With regard to the war years, she remembered wanting to “do something” for the war effort, but could not recall the particulars that led to her enlistment with the WLA. She remembered marching in a procession of Land Girls as part of a recruitment exercise, that she underwent six weeks of training, and that soldiers teased her when she wore her uniform into town. Apart from saying that she was sad to leave the Land Army, which she did at some point during the war, but could not recall exactly when, she was unable to answer specific questions about her time on the land or what she knew about the causes and general course of the war. She apologized to the interviewer for her inability to remember and seemed embarrassed that she could not provide more complete answers to the interviewer’s questions.³⁰ In many of the interviews, the women remembered the work, the billets, and their uniforms, but did not recall the details of their training, what they did in their leisure time or during holidays, or what they knew about the war itself.

Land Girl Annie Edwards was also able to recall specific details about her work and was even able to provide an approximate schedule of her daily routines. She noted that she was quite strong and healthy, the best worker the farmer had, and that local farmers liked to come and watch her work in the fields, according to her, because they had not thought her capable of such work. She did not feel that there was any tension or conflict between male and female workers, nor did she feel resented by those released for military service, and felt she was respected for her work ethic. In fact, she mentioned that she often did extra work, but received no extra pay. The memories Edwards recalled and her interpretation of those memories offers some insight into how she viewed her war work. She said that she was brought up to help other people and that working with the WLA would not contradict her religious values. Here she referred to wearing trousers and doing men’s work, which she believed God would

understand because it was for a good cause, the war. The interviewer, however, did not pick up on this important point and instead redirected the conversation to where she was when she heard about the outbreak of the war. Apart from this brief insight into her motivations and attitudes toward her own war work, she offered little information about her overall experiences. She did not recall what she knew of the war, receiving news of the armistice, or how she felt when the war ended.³¹ As for why she joined the WLA, she stated that she asked her mother if she could join and her mother agreed. Her father also supported her decision because it meant extra money in the family pot. Here, again, the interviewer did not press Edwards to talk about her family's situation or how she viewed her own role as a provider for her younger siblings. Instead, the conversation was redirected toward training. At the end of the interview, Edwards mentioned briefly that the war did not change her, alluding to concerns that women would be "altered" by farm work. She clearly thought it was important to include the fact that while her father had agreed to her joining the WLA, he remained concerned that she would "go loose or wild." She firmly stated that she never had and that she remained "just the same" as she had been before the war. Edwards expressed to the interviewer her father's concerns that while she was away from the family home and employed with the WLA, parental control was not possible and that it might lead her experiment sexually or possibly to be taken advantage of. At the same time she assures the interviewer, 70 years after the fact, that even in the absence of supervision she did not stray from her values. She knew nothing about the "facts of life."³² Again, however, the interviewer did not press Edwards to explicate beyond these few words.

While Edwards' interview reveals more about her wartime feelings than Marsh's, access to any interiority in either case was restricted by the interview process. It is apparent that the focus of the interview was war work, to reveal the nuances of each girl's work experiences, rather than to uncover how the women felt about those experiences, a point to which I will return. The glimpses into Edwards' private feelings are exciting for historians interested in the personal experiences of former Land Girls, but are far too incomplete. Further, these insights must be considered within the broader framework of the interview. According

to Edwards, she joined the Land Army in 1915 after a medical exam and did not sign a contract, but she still had to have permission to leave the Land Army.³³ These points are particularly interesting. The WLA did not exist in 1915 and although there was a medical exam, those who went into the Land Army proper were required to sign a contract. Without a contract, women were free to vacate their posts without notice. What is noteworthy about Edwards' interview is not the factual errors, but rather what it reveals about what was important to her. She seemed keen to impress upon the interviewer that she was a good worker, a good Christian, and a proper woman. When considering the interview overall, the war years appear as a brief interlude in the grander narrative of her life. The work she performed during the war was an experience that was reminiscent of a life lived. It is possible that Edwards used the interview as part of her life review, a developmental task occurring late in life.³⁴ A person may render the past in such as way as to reaffirm familiar or acceptable behaviour, or simply as a way to make sense of a life lived. Others may refer with fondness to a "simpler time," which was possibly the case with Eva Marsh and her horses. People tend to view their lives looking back by examining what type of life they lived and whether or not it was a success or failure. While this is a natural process for the elderly, Alistair Thomson indicates that some individuals go beyond a private evaluation and seek to affirm their worth or to be remembered by making their story part of the permanent record.³⁵ Thompson reminds us that the process of remembering or why we remember is an important part of the narrative. Participating in the interview is in itself important, even if the historian never fully uncovers the reason for the interviewee's participation. Gail Braybon argues that "the women who have come forward to tell their stories have been self-selecting; those who still had painful feelings about the war, or who disliked their wartime jobs, were unlikely to have volunteered to be interviewed."³⁶ Braybon's argument does not undermine the stories told, but serves rather as a word of warning. More than 60 years passed between the events and the retelling of the events and the interviewee's own sense of self had altered over the course of her life. Edwards downplayed the importance of the war in modifying her identity and instead emphasized the successful continuity of identity, or at least the continuity of a self-selected identity.

Memory is the construction of a version of the past, a complex blend of myth, half-truth, and fact. While the Women's Land Army had long since been disbanded by the 1970s,³⁷ the image of the dutiful Land Girl, popularized by propaganda images of healthy, attractive ladies working diligently on the land to stave off an impending food shortage became part of a historical evaluation of women's broader roles within British society over the course of the twentieth century. The memorialization of the Land Army ³/₄ the popular representation of its history ³/₄ signals to historians the way memory attends to particular constructions of identity based on gender, class, and lived experience, and that those memories are encoded with established memories of the war itself. Janet Watson argues that memories of the war may have been displaced in the interwar period once men and women could reflect on those experiences with a certain degree of homogeneity of an event passed, but the memories and rhetoric of the war continued to be reflected in identity formation and the reconstruction of memory as the war years grew distant.³⁸

The popular image of the WLA as a form of patriotic war service for women was alluded to in Grace Elsey's interview in 1977. Although she had never worked on a farm, she had always wanted to live in the country. She was not attracted to farm work, but rather to an idealized version of country life. Elsey knew nothing of the Land Army in 1917 and had no inclination to enlist with such an organization. However, upon viewing a poster for the WLA, her mother remarked, "there is our grace," referring to the Land Army as a laudable part of Britain's war effort. While her mother approved of her joining, her father not only refused to sign the papers, but tore up the first set she brought home, indicating male prejudice regarding a young lady's participation in traditional masculine work.

Elsey, however, gave two accounts of her time with the Land Army and shed light on the subjectivity of memory. Elsey recalled that she joined the WLA because her sister did, but noted that she did not like the work and found it entirely distasteful. Although Elsey had little interest in farm life and wanted to be stationed with the Women's Timber Corps, she was dissuaded from doing so because the work was deemed too difficult, and she was instead ushered into the Land Army where she was trained as a cow girl. The interview also

revealed that she did not have good relations with the farmer's wife, that she believed the wages were inadequate, and that she felt that she was treated unfairly at times. Apart from stating that she told the farmer that the wages were "enough to put a girl on the streets," none of these issues were discussed in any detail. Yet, when asked by the interviewer if she "never wanted to do it again," she replied, "No, no, we thoroughly enjoyed it."³⁹ When asked if her life was changed by war work, she explained that both she and her sister met their husbands while with the Land Army and continued to be employed on the farm once the war ended. She also stated her belief that the men deserved a medal for tolerating the women who only had six weeks training during which they had only learned to milk cows. The interview ended here, without reflection or further commentary, but it supports the standard view that women worked the land in a patriotic supporting role, and that while they temporarily digressed from accepted standards of womanly behaviour, they were unchanged by their experiences. They remained women, feminine, and suitable for marriage.

It is unclear from the interview what contribution Elsey believed she and the other Land Girls made towards Britain's war effort; but what is clear is that whatever their role was, they perceived it as secondary to the role played by men, both the men at the front and the men who stayed behind to work the land. Elsey's recollection of her time with the Land Army was shaped, at least in part, by the marriage that resulted from her time on the land and her understanding of women's wartime roles. The war years represented a moment in time when she bonded with her sister over wet feet and the drudgery of farm labour, and found love that eventually took her from the land and back home. Therefore, her memories of the WLA were augmented by numerous postwar experiences that caused her to remember her time in the Land Army as a happy, despite her distaste for the work and negative experiences during the course of her employment.

The manner in which a narrator arranges a story reveals a great deal about the relationship between the narrator and her own history. Historians should not be naïve in thinking that remembering is spontaneous. The story of one's life has been structured and modified with each re-telling. A person narrating her own story means that she does

not yet know the ending, and the details of the past can be manipulated to produce a more favourable outcome. Most striking about Elsey's interview is the symbolism it displays, evoking the well-worn tropes of heroic men and their supportive women. While not all women were unnerved by agricultural labour and many surpassed male expectations, and perhaps even their own, Elsey's narrative fits nicely with the accepted vision of the Land Army, a vision that continued to be supported and defined in the postwar years. In 1919, the women of the Land Army were thanked for their service, both in wartime and in the months following the armistice, and the WLA was disbanded. While women continued to work in agriculture, the Land Army proper was consigned to history. It was a patriotic wartime organization that played a small but important role in the war effort; however, once peace was restored, its work was done. The men returned to the fields and reclaimed the land. This general narrative of the war provides signposts for the person remembering, and the memories that are recreated are not purely autobiographical memories. They reveal little about the person's self-awareness or what part the events played in the construction of one's identity or life narrative. Rather, a collective understanding of the war structures the memories that are produced. Collective memory shapes subjectivity and has the ability to restructure a person's memory of past events.⁴⁰ It incorporates fragments of the culture the person was part of, orientates those memories to the present, and shapes the memories that are extricated and communicated. While Elsey's interview does little to extend our understanding of the Women's Land Army, she offers a symbolic reconstruction of the past. Although her memories are not necessarily objective, they speak to the way that identity (and history) is generated by the conflation of memory and imagination, self-awareness and self-interest.

When analyzed collectively and in conjunction with written documents these interviews reveal the difficulty of separating history, memory, and fact from fiction. When listening to the interviews, researchers are made aware of a number of inaccuracies and omissions in the accounts, generally related to factors surrounding enrolment and working conditions. For example, several of the women interviewed claimed to have joined the WLA before its formation in 1917,

while others claimed that they received no training and were never issued a uniform. In his study of long-term memory and oral history methodology, John Neuenschwander argues, “[n]inety-nine per cent of what the interviewee does share should be accepted as an honest if not wholly accurate account of what transpired.”⁴¹ In other words, the participant does not seek to fool the interviewer, but rather offers the narrative of events that makes sense at the time of the interview. Stories are told differently to different audiences and individual memory and social memory are often intertwined, especially if stories have been shared many times among persons with similar experiences, because the interviewee cannot reconstruct events in isolation.⁴²

To this end, individual memory can become mixed with social memory. When Doris Robinson was asked if she felt patriotic during the war she stated, “I think so. My husband was in Gallipoli and my brother-in-law had been killed.” She believed her family was patriotic because her father had been in the Boer War and her son was in the “last war,” referring to the Second World War. For the next several minutes she talked about the three wars without making a clear distinction among them.⁴³ Robinson’s understanding of her own patriotism was conflated with her family’s history, and while the two did not have to be distinct or in contrast with each other, her personal feelings and experiences cannot be isolated from her family’s military service. It can be inferred from her comments that she believed she was patriotic because her family was a “patriotic family,” but the interview revealed little about Robinson’s own feelings of patriotism at the time. Did she join the Land Army out of a sense of duty? In what ways was she inspired by the patriotic impetus of the time? What was *her* understanding of patriotism and how did *she* choose to express it between 1914 and 1918?

While Robinson’s patriotism should be viewed as an honest account of her feelings in 1992, questions related to patriotism and memory are difficult for historians to evaluate due to changes in perspective, once the war ended, on the part of those who lived through the conflict. In the immediate aftermath of the armistice, redeeming the sacrifices of those who had fallen was expected and necessary. But the pilgrimage from victory to evaluating the cost of war in the inter-

war years meant that many people came to question what Britain had really won for its efforts. Adrian Gregory notes,

By a slow and hesitant process, the British came to renounce the war. They are still renouncing it. The verdict of popular culture is more or less unanimous. The First World War was stupid, tragic, and futile.⁴⁴

In 1939, the British people, reluctantly, did it all over again. The necessity of the second war revealed in retrospect that World War I had not eradicated German aggression and the pursuit of a lasting peace proved to be an elusive goal. Gregory argues that the “British still seem to take the First World War personally,” rejecting the popular belief that Britain’s young men died for the preservation of freedom and democracy, believing instead that those who perished did so in vain.⁴⁵ Gregory’s conclusions, however, must be dealt with carefully. His purpose is to uncover, contemporaneously, the attitudes of Britons toward World War I, and in doing so, to avoid the perspective of the Great Depression and the Second World War. To accomplish his task, he eschews the use of oral history sources. Adding oral accounts from the later twentieth century would bolster Gregory’s argument that the British people have ultimately rejected World War I; but, as he rightly feared, those opinions cannot be divorced from the larger perspective of the twentieth century. Hindsight brings with it perspective, but also the re-experience of past events. Memories of the war are a multifaceted collage of snapshots — fragments of the past re-articulated in the present. Both contemporaneous and retrospective accounts are tainted by perspective, albeit of a different variety $\frac{3}{4}$ just as the events of the twentieth century cloud the retrospective accounts of interviews from decades later, so the contemporary documents are influenced by propaganda and other mitigating factors that shape those narratives. If the historian aims to uncover wartime attitudes, the interviews present unique obstacles to interpretation, but these obstacles cannot be completely overcome by returning to the contemporary record.

Asking a person if she was patriotic is a cumbersome and leading question. Returning to Braybon’s earlier caution, the women who

came forward to be interviewed likely had positive memories of the war, despite losses suffered. Of those persons interviewed, not one stated that they were unpatriotic. Alessandro Portelli has observed that interviewees will often give the interviewer the expected answer, especially if the question is leading.⁴⁶ Listening to Robinson's interview it is apparent that she was confused by the question "were you patriotic?" Of course she was and while there is no clear articulation of her patriotism as experienced during the war, she reminds us that World War I, however it is judged today, remains part of Britain's military heritage and illustrates the difficulty of separating memory from history.⁴⁷

Keeping in mind the connection between past and present as memories are recalled, the timing of the interviews is important. Studies dealing with memory indicate that the details of events are freshest in the days following an event. Between the event and the nine months that follow memory fades, but remains relatively consistent between nine months and 40 years.⁴⁸ As the time lapse between the event and time of recall expands beyond 40 years, memory again fades and the context changes as one approaches the end of her life. The issue of age and the amount of time between the event and the interview have led to mistakes and omissions in the Land Girls' accounts. The women interviewed were between 79 and 97 years old, meaning that, on average, 60 years had passed between their time in the Land Army and the interviews in the 1970s and 1980s. In many instances, the women could not recall the events in question; they had no ready answers and their hesitations were apparent. When Patricia Vernon was asked whether or not she received any training, at first she replied that she had not. After thinking about her answer, she indicated that she went to a farm and that might have been training, but she was not certain. Later in the interview when she was asked what she knew about the war, she replied, "we were only 18 and still in training. We didn't get any war news." When the interviewer asked her whether or not she believed the war changed men's attitudes towards women's work, she responded that she had not had relations with men and that she had no interest in a boyfriend. Either she misunderstood the question or misunderstood the context for the question. She told the interviewer, however, that she might remember

at a later date because she got flashes of memory and had to write things down before she forgot them again.⁴⁹ Here, the interviewee was candid about her inability to recall events with any certainty, but not all of the participants were so forthcoming about their difficulty recalling specific events nor were necessarily aware of the impact that the passage of time had on their ability to remember.

The issue of age and memory is also a source of concern when dealing with Doris Robinson's interview. In 1992, when the interview took place, Robinson was 97 years old. At the outset of the interview, Robinson mentioned that she left school when the "first war came." She said that her husband was in Gallipoli and she wanted to do something for the war so she went into nursing. Robinson explained that she did not care much for nursing, so she left after a couple of months and joined the WLA. Robinson worked her first post at Hampton Farm for two years, before transferring to another farm on the Thames, which she eventually left when she got married. Robinson reported that she was never issued a uniform, did not sign a contract when she joined the Land Army, was paid one pound a week, and from this paid 18 shillings per week for lodgings.⁵⁰ All Land Girls were issued a uniform (although not necessarily upon joining) and a green armband indicating that they were officially registered with the WLA.⁵¹ While she may have been paid one pound a week, it is unlikely that she paid 18 shillings per week for lodgings.⁵² If the amount of pay was correct, she would have worked very hard for only two shillings a week. In terms of why she joined the Land Army, she recalled an advertisement in *The Times*, but was not certain if that was what led to her joining. She claimed that she worked for the WLA for three years, presumably 1917 to 1920, and left to get married when she was 22. She was born in 1895 and would have been 22 in 1917.⁵³ When questioned about the timing of events by the interviewer, she insisted that the timeline given was correct.

In this instance, it is possible that Robinson worked in agriculture before joining the WLA, and may have conflated memories from the early and latter years of the war, which would explain why she believed that she did not have a uniform and would also account for the discrepancy in her timeline.⁵⁴ What is known is that Robinson worked for the Land Army and had a uniform, as established by the

pictures she showed to the interviewer. She also presented him with a certificate signed by the Minister of Agriculture confirming that she worked for the Land Army proper, but no date was indicated. While Robinson was forthcoming in her recollections and committed to the validity of the memories she recalled, it is important to distinguish between events and narratives and between history and memory.

While we cannot confirm when or for how long Robinson worked with the WLA, historians should not discount Robinson's recollections in their entirety. It is important to recognize that her account of events, as presented on the day of the interview, cannot be correct. The Gallipoli Campaign took place between April 1915 and August 1916 and Robinson could not have joined the WLA at that time. She also mentioned that her husband joined the Territorials at the outset of the war, went over the top, and was taken captive by the Germans, remaining a prisoner-of-war until 1919.⁵⁵ The timeline offered by Robinson must be discounted. As has already been established, Robinson recollected that she and her husband married in 1917 when they were both 22 years old, but also stated that he was a POW during this time. Earlier in the interview, Robinson noted that in 1982 her husband was 60 years old, which he could not have been if he had fought in World War I. These errors are important. Generally, people remember with more clarity what they regard as significant events rather than seemingly less significant events. Robinson recalled the number of cows on the farm (although we cannot confirm it), but did not remember when she got married. She only remembered that she and her husband married when they were 22 years old. The interview speaks to the continued disintegration of her memory, when she recalled, incorrectly, that her husband was 60 years old when he was diagnosed with diabetes in 1982. Incorrect reconstructions of history must be acknowledged and redressed. The oral interviews are valuable in certain respects, but they do not fill in the gaps in the narrative. The problem for historians of the WLA in World War I is that the surviving records are limited.

The limited nature of the interviews is further evident upon listening to the conversations with Olive Crosswell and Marjorie Stone about their wartime experiences. In many instances, the answers given by former Land Girls to questions regarding the war effort and the

details of work were vague and unrevealing. The interview with Olive Crosswell in 1983 provides no details about her experience in the Land Army beyond the work performed.⁵⁶ The interview with Marjorie Stone revealed little about her wartime experiences, but over the course of 64 minutes it was revealed that she never actually worked with the WLA. In response to her father's insistence that she find war work, Stone explained that she found employment on a local farm, where she worked for three years, but did not join the Land Army proper. According to Stone, she never would have joined the WLA because she knew that she would not care for farm work. Stone was unable to recall when she sought agricultural work or when she left, vaguely remembering that it was sometime during the war. During the course of the interview, Stone seemed confused by the interviewer's questions regarding the WLA. It took some time before she understood that the interviews being conducted were in regards to the Land Army itself.⁵⁷ Stone was 83 years old at the time of the interview and it is unclear to what extent she really understood the questions asked or if she understood the purpose of the interviews generally.

The incompleteness of oral history is not intrinsically a problem because the historical record itself can never be complete, whether oral, written, or otherwise. The oral histories discussed are a valuable part of the historical record. Combining independent accounts related to enlistment with the WLA, the type of uniform worn, delays in placement on farms, or problems with the distribution of uniforms allows the historian to make qualified deductions about the Land Army and the women's work experience. In this way, factual details can be corroborated and the objectivity of the interviewee need not be questioned. The interviews are also useful to historians interested in the interview process of the 1970s and 1980s or in the ways that the continuation of lived experiences beyond the war years shaped memories of the war itself. Here the value is in the retrospective accounts as re-remembrances of past events; not necessarily the facts they reveal, but rather what they reveal about the interviewee, her motivations, and what she remembered about her experiences. In spite of flaws in the interview process and the problematic relationship between memory and history, without the interviews the perspectives and voices of former Land Girls would be lost.

Yet, what the interviews reveal about the actual experience of serving as a Land Girl and how these women felt about their war work is ambiguous. Brian Bynum has aptly pointed out that a central problem with oral testimonies is that they all too quickly become “unrecursible. Properly speaking oral sources are people; in a short time they die and there is no dependable way of consulting them once they are dead.”⁵⁸ These absences are important if we want to move our understanding of the Land Army beyond a purely discursive perspective. What is unique about the oral source is that its interactive potential dies with the interviewee $\frac{3}{4}$ the interview can no longer be expanded or clarified by anyone. Further, because the interview includes a primary narrative (interviewee) guided by a secondary narrative (interviewer) the articulation of the primary narrative is altered. Consequently, the interview can no longer be considered solely a primary document, but rather a primary source that has been altered by postwar remembrances and retrospection.

What can be learned from the interviews must be evaluated within the broader context of the interviews themselves and what the interviewer/project hoped to achieve. Here we must scrutinize what questions were asked to the interviewees and which voices appeared most prominently. Various people conducted the interviews, but the questions asked were generally consistent across the interviews. Specifically, the interviewees were asked to provide details of their work experience before the war and if they were not working, what type of work they did at home. From here a general chronology was followed: what factors led to you joining the Land Army; did you go to a recruitment depot; did you undergo training; what type of work did you do on the farm; did you work with other Land Girls; were there any men on the farm; where did you live; how much money were you paid; and what did you do when the war ended (return home or continue to work)? These questions provided a general framework for the interview, as well as contextual signposts for the interviewees. The questions were quite specific, allowing researchers to use the information as corroboration for the official documents, while at the same time alerting researchers to potential problems or contradictions.

Intermixed with these questions were statement questions that hinted at certain answers. For example, the women were asked, “I

suppose the work was easy, was it?" Or, "I suppose you laid in bed all day?" Or, "I suppose you made a lot of money and enjoyed the war quite a bit?" The purpose of the questions seemed to be to correct popular assumptions about the nature of women's work. In response to the statement questions, the women recalled how difficult the training and work conditions were and how little money they were paid. Questions, such as "Did you go to dances?" implied that life on the land was enjoyable, as evidenced by wartime recruiting posters that showed contented Land Girls singing in the fields and caring for young animals.⁵⁹ Such questions afforded the former Land Girls the opportunity to reply that they rarely went to dances because they did not have the time or energy to do so. Most of the women seemed surprised by the question, stating collectively that they did not have much leisure time. While the interviews allowed the women a certain degree of agency, telling their own stories in their own words, the script followed by the interviewer suggested advocacy — filling in women's roles by putting them back into the story. By phrasing questions in the language of contemporary discourses about women's work, the interviewer presented the opportunity for the women to offer interesting insights into the ways in which they understood their own work experiences and the broader impact that war work (and the war itself) may have had on their lives. The problem with this approach, however, is that the language used in the questions did not facilitate discussion beyond the contradictory answer that was expected, and the interviewers did not follow up with supplementary questions. For example, when Beatrice Gilbert was asked how she managed working in all weather conditions, she simply replied that she was a hard worker and managed just fine.⁶⁰ The question was probably prompted by wartime concerns that women were not suited to working in bad weather and that they certainly were not be able to work in the rain and snow. This context was likely unknown to Gilbert. Similarly, the possibility of a discussion about the changing role of women in the postwar years, as indicated by the interviewers' question "Did the war change men's attitudes towards women?" was poorly received by the interviewees. Most did not understand the context and the majority of the women responded that they did not work with men. Questions about pay prompted the former Land

Girls to explain that they did not make much money, missing the opportunity for them to comment on the criticism that women who engaged in war work often spent their money frivolously. The concern of the researchers in the 1970s to recover “women from and for history” opened a dialogue about how this could best be achieved.⁶¹ In this way, the interviews provide an important reference point for discussions about the co-production of history in oral interviews. In the interviews the woman remained live actors and their stories reflected their lived experiences, but the arrangement and articulation of those experiences follows an interpretation of the past that sought to reassert the role of women in the war and call attention to their contributions.⁶²

In many ways, the oral history interviews under examination here present a methodological challenge for historians. They are recollections from those who lived through and experienced agricultural work during World War I. Yet the time lapse between the experience and the collection of those memories means that they have largely lost their primacy.⁶³ It is more accurate to conclude that they exist somewhere between a primary and secondary source. They need to be corroborated as would other primary sources, such as a diary entry from the war. Certain facts or dates need to be checked to ensure the accuracy of the author’s account. But the amount of time between the event and recollection means that the interviews are more memory than experience. They comment on the past with the retrospection and distance that characterize secondary sources. The value of the interviews as a source lies not in their first-hand accounting of the war, but rather in the relationship between experience and recollection or between history and memory. One is not synonymous with the other; instead, they shape and are shaped by one another.

In spite of these drawbacks, the interviews are profoundly important in understanding the relationship between source material and history as recreated by the historian. The sum of memories does not constitute history, either for an individual or for a specific period of time. But the act of forgetting or the retrieval of inaccurate memories offers the historian a methodological opportunity. Through his own extensive research on the relationship between his-

tory and memory, Alessandro Portelli has revealed that the “discrepancy between fact and memory ultimately enhances the value of the oral sources as historical documents.”⁶⁴ What is important is not the facts but the narrator’s self-awareness, because each recollection is “actively and creatively generated by memory and imagination in a effort to make sense of crucial events and of history in general.”⁶⁵ Through this process, the historian is made acutely aware not only of how memory is reconstructed, but also how history is understood by those who lived through it and continue to be a part of its making. The reality is that people do not remember the past. Rather, they remember the present and re-articulate the past to suit present needs. Certainly, key moments are remembered, sometimes with unfettered clarity, but most memories are called forth. The person remembering goes through a process of pulling memories through time to the present. The historian who wishes to use these memories must not only be aware of this process, but must also avoid making the mistake of expecting such memories to be snapshots of the past, somehow recorded by the brain and reproduced at a later time.

Interviewing the elderly does not present fundamental methodological problems outright, but the information provided must be dealt with carefully. For several of the women interviewed, the war was a time of significant change. The loss of family members, the forging of new relationships, and the difficulties that followed in the postwar period for many Britons changed memories and ultimately changed the history that was reconstituted during the course of the interviews. Finally, the objectives of the IWM’s oral history project, specifically the desire to reassert the role of women in twentieth century British history, must be taken into account when evaluating the evidence gleaned from the interviews. The structure of the interviews indicates to historians that a primary goal of the interviews was to reclaim the role of women’s work in historical renderings of World War I. Yet how the women viewed their war work is unclear from the interviews. Absent are reiterations of patriotism or proclamations of service to the nation. While one could deduce that those women who participated in the drudgery of agricultural life for little pay and in poor work conditions must have been patriotic, Jay Winter warns us that women’s work experiences and how they understood those experiences were

as diverse as the women themselves and the tasks that they were required to perform.⁶⁶ The accountings of the Land Girls may not be wholly accurate or reveal much about their attitudes toward their war work and lives, but their stories emphasize the sacrifices that they made and keep the dialogue about women's war work and their war experiences open as we approach the centennial anniversary of the "first war."

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Endnotes:

- 1 Susan Grayzel, *Women and the First World War* (New York: Longman, 2002), 9–11; Angela Woollacott, *On Her their lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 5–14; Janet Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 6–7, 9–18.
- 2 The Imperial War Museum's Department of Printed Documents holds a few memoirs or selections from the memoirs of former Land Girls. The most fruitful are those of M. Hodgson and F. Westlake. Imperial War Museum (hereafter IWM), Department of Documents (hereafter DPD), 94/27/1, Miss M. Hodgson; *ibid.*, 88/1/1, Mrs. F. Westlake.
- 3 The diary of W.M. Bennett provides a useful overview of recruitment for the WLA. The diary is from 1918, but is largely incomplete. IWM, DPD, 01/19/01, Miss W.M. Bennett.

- 4 Bonnie White, "Sowing the Seeds of Patriotism? The Women's Land Army in Devon, 1916–1918," *The Local Historian* 41, 1 (2011): 18–23.
- 5 Northamptonshire Record Office, "How the National Service Recruit is Selected, Trained and Placed, Lady Exeter Papers, yz9619.
- 6 The National Archives (hereafter TNA), Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (hereafter MAF) 42/8, "Report for the Food Production Department for the period up to 1 June 1918," June 1918, 12–14. Not all Land Girls had previous work experience in agriculture and some came from other wartime industries. In the early days of the WLA, it was common for women to find other employment while awaiting placement, or to leave agricultural work for a more desirable job in another wartime industry. Others left the Land Army proper and found work on local farms to avoid the restrictions imposed on Land Girls by the WLA and the Board of Trade. See, White, 19–20.
- 7 Elaine Weiss, *The Fruits of Victory: The Women's Land Army of America in the Great War* (Washington: Potomac Books Inc., 2008), 11.
- 8 Gaynor Kavanagh, "Museum as Memorial: The Origins of the Imperial War Museum," *Journal of Contemporary History* 23, 1 (1988): 77, 81.
- 9 While the majority of the information gathered by Conway covered the period 1917 to 1920, the earlier years of the war were not neglected. See, Susan Grayzel, Introduction to "A Change in Attitude: The Women's Work Collection of the Imperial War Museum," <<http://www.galeuk.com/www/pdfs/WAWCollectionIntro.pdf>>, (viewed 14 January 2012), 2.
- 10 Deborah Thom, "Making Spectaculars: Museums and how we remember Gender in Wartime," in *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914–1918*, ed. Gail Braybon (New York: Berghahn Books, 2003), 60–1.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 62–2.
- 12 David Lance, *An Archive Approach to Oral History* (London: Robert Stockwell, 1978), 15.
- 13 Interviews conducted using the chronological model tend to be much more rigid with little opportunity for the participant to digress. There tend to be more questions focused around specific topics as the interviewer tries to take the participant through the details of the events (or life) systematically.
- 14 Interviews were, ideally, only interrupted for technical reasons, such as changing the reels.
- 15 IWM, Sound Recording (hereafter SR), Session 3076, Reel 1, Beatrice Gilbert, 1977.
- 16 *Ibid.*, Session 3079, Reel 1, Vera Raymond, 1977.
- 17 Ronald Grele, "Oral History as Evidence," in *Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Thomas Charlton, et al. (New York: AltaMira Press, 2006), 68.

- 18 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 40–7.
- 19 Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 102–4.
- 20 Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 34–7.
- 21 Gaynor Kavanagh, *Making Histories in Museums* (London: Leicester University Press, 1996), 2.
- 22 Grele, 61.
- 23 Ibid., 83.
- 24 Thompson, 102.
- 25 IWM, SR, Session 727, Reel 4, Helen Beatrice Poulter, 1975.
- 26 Ibid., Reel 6, 1975.
- 27 Ibid., Reel 8, 1975.
- 28 Ibid., Session 3076, Reel 1, Beatrice Gilbert.
- 29 Ibid., Session 9105, Reel 3, Kathleen Gilbert, 1985.
- 30 Ibid., Session 7450, Reel 1, Eva Marsh, 1983.
- 31 Ibid., Session 740, Reel 6, Annie Sarah Edwards, 1976.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid., Session 740, Reels 9 & 1, Annie Sarah Edwards.
- 34 Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 18–21.
- 35 Alistair Thomson, “Memory as a Battlefield: Personal and Political Investments in the National Military Past,” *Oral History Review* 22 (1995): 65.
- 36 Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1989), 160–1.
- 37 The WLA was officially disbanded in 1920 and the work of the Land Army was transferred to the National Landworkers' Association (disbanded in 1922). See, Clarke, *The Women's Land Army: A Portrait* (Bristol: Sansom & Company, 2008), 57–8.
- 38 Watson, 301.
- 39 IWM, SR, Session 3073, Reel 1, Grace Else, 1977.
- 40 Jacques LeGoff, *History and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 3–4.
- 41 John Neuenschwander, “Remembrance of Things Past: Oral Historian and Long-Term Memory,” *The Oral History Review* 6 (1978): 45–53.
- 42 R.E. Walton, “Memories from the Edge of the Abyss: Evaluating the Oral Accounts of World War II Veterans,” *Oral History Review* 37, 1 (2010): 26.
- 43 IWM, SR, Session 12582, Reel 1, Doris Robinson, 1992.

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- 44 Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 1, 4.
- 46 Alessandro Portelli, "The Peculiarities of Oral History," *History Workshop Journal* 12 (1981): 103.
- 47 *The Times* (11 November 1996), 15.
- 48 Thompson, 102–3.
- 49 IWM, SR, Session 3075, Reel 1, Patricia Vernon, 1977.
- 50 Robinson explained that she did not sign a contract because "things were based on honesty. That's how things were in those days. You said you were going to do something and you did it." IWM, SR, Session 12582, Reel 1, Doris Robinson, 1992.
- 51 TNA, Ministry of National Service (hereafter NATS) 1/1308, National Service Terms and Conditions of Service, March 1917.
- 52 *Ibid.*, NATS 1/1303, Conditions of Pay and Training, May 1917. Robinson told the interviewer that after she paid for her lodgings she only had enough money left at the end of the week to buy a single egg. *Ibid.*, SR, Session 12582, Reel 1, Doris Robinson.
- 53 *Ibid.*, Reel 2, Doris Robinson.
- 54 *Ibid.*, Reel 1, Doris Robinson. The interviewer continually draws attention to Robinson's difficulty in remembering events. For example, when asked about her work routine, Robinson explained that she was the only worker on the farm and was responsible for all farm labour, including, seven jersey cows, 400 hens, and an unspecified number of goats and ducks. However, there are three other Land Girls in the pictures she presented to the interviewer.
- 55 *Ibid.*, Reel 2, Doris Robinson.
- 56 *Ibid.*, Session 7482, Reels 1 & 2, Olive Crosswell, 1983. See also, *ibid.*, Session 3077, Reel 1, Vyvyan Garstang, 1977.
- 57 *Ibid.*, Session 7455, Reel 1, Marjorie Stone, 1983.
- 58 Brian Bynum, "Oral Evidence and the Historian: Problems and Methods," *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 8, 2 (1971): 82–4.
- 59 TNA, MAF 59/3, photography WLA; IWM, Art 2301, Ursula Wood (1918). For a postwar look at how the WLA was articulated to the British public, see Berta Ruck, *A Land Girl's Love Story* (1919).
- 60 IWM, SR, Session 3076, Reel 1, Beatrice Gilbert.
- 61 Summerfield, 10.
- 62 For more on the deconstruction of oral history narratives, see Sherna Berger Gluck, "Women's Oral History: Is It So Special?" in *Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Charlton, 375–6.
- 63 Allan Megill, "History, memory, identity," *History of the Human Sciences* 11, 3 (1998): 46–7.

- 64 Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 26.
- 65 Cubitt, 87.
- 66 Jay Winter, *The Experience of World War I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 176.