

Buckinghamshire in World War Two

Farming

A great concern at the outbreak of war was how to feed the population. Having been ignored by successive governments for many years, farmers and farming suddenly came under the spotlight as it was realised that every bit of available land should be used productively for growing crops. In Buckinghamshire most of the agricultural land in the northern half of the county was grass and pasture used for sheep and cattle. In the Chilterns and southern half there was more arable land used for growing crops, but across the whole county farms were poor and had little money or incentive to make improvements. Once war broke out a **County War Agricultural Executive Committee** was set up in Buckinghamshire under Lord Addison, a local man who had been minister for Agriculture in the 1929 Labour government. Its challenge was to maintain milk production while greatly expanding the crop production and to do this it had to improve the land and enable the farmers to get as much out of it as possible.



Maps showing the distribution of permanent grass (for sheep and cows) and arable land for growing crops in the early years of the war. (from *Land Utilisation Survey-Buckinghamshire* by DW Fryer, 1941)

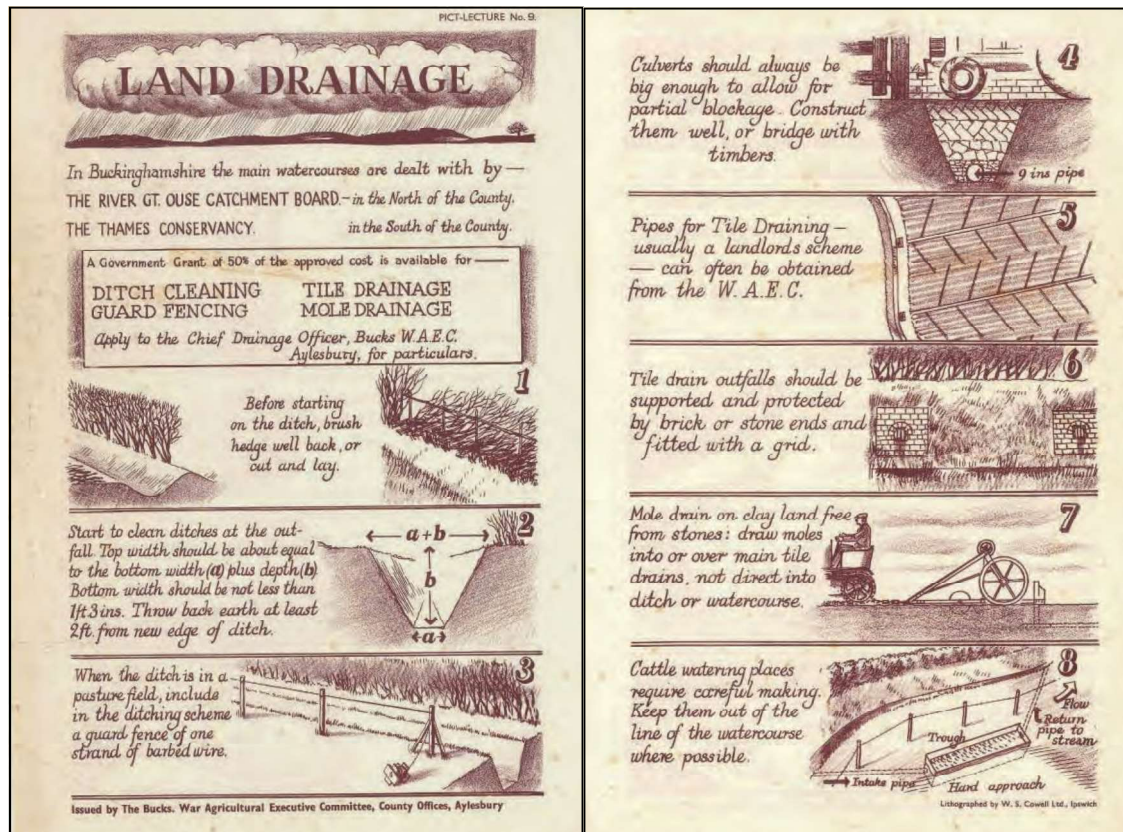
Improving land.

One of the first acts of the County War Agricultural Executive Committee was to conduct a survey of all farms, grading them and making recommendations for improvement. If farmers refused to comply the committee had authority to take over the farm.

Tables were drawn up as to how the farms should be graded—see table at end of this section.

(Taken from CWAEC papers in AR 2/89)

One of the reasons that North Buckinghamshire produced so little in the way of crops was because the thick clay soils had such poor drainage. The County War Agricultural Executive Committee provided grants and schemes for draining whole tracts of land. Although grants of money were made available to finance the work, the real problem was labour to do the very tough work of digging ditches and laying pipes.



Illustrated leaflet showing the work involved in improving ditches and drainage. (AR 2/89)



Photograph of land agent inspecting a drainage scheme at Denham (phDenham104)

The County War Agricultural Executive Committee also had powers to buy up or take over land that lay derelict or where the owner was unknown. Even parklands and golf courses were dug up to be used for growing food.

Farm Machinery



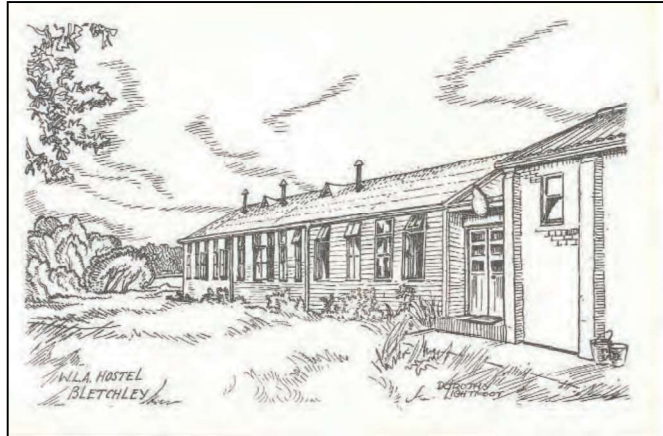
Ploughing with horses at Denham. (phDenham248)

At the beginning of the war many farms were still using horses and hand machinery, although tractors were beginning to be used instead. The County War Agricultural Committee set up depots of tractors and modern farm machinery which could be borrowed by farmers. A deal struck with the American forces when they came into the war called Lend-Lease meant that the Americans sent over new tractors and combine harvesters which were rarely seen before in this country. A scheme called the Goods and Services scheme enabled even quite poor farmers to buy these over a period of years. One of the conditions of buying through these schemes was that the machinery could be used on other farms in the area too.



Ploughing with a tractor at Denham, 1940 (ph Denham 100)

Labour : Land Girls



Above: Women's Land Army hostel at Bletchley (D/X 1522)
Left: Aileen Oxley, County Organiser for the WLA in 1941, in her Land Army uniform. (D/X 1522)

With young men being called up and so much extra work required, the County War Agricultural Committee organised extra labour. The Women's Land Army, commonly known as Land Girls, recruited girls from all over the country to help work the farms. Much milking was still done by hand, and the need for fresh milk combined with the shortage. They often worked in teams and lived in local hostels. Many had no experience of farming whatever. By October 1943 there were 1995 land girls in Buckinghamshire.



Land Girls at work at Hughenden (phHughenden 37)

Labour: Prisoners of War

Prisoners of War were also used by the County War Agricultural Committee to provide more labour. Camps for POW's were set up in Buckinghamshire from 1942. Italian and German prisoners were held at these which were set up at different places across the county.

These minutes from the County War Agricultural Committee record the use being made of Italian Prisoners of War. (AR 2/89)

It was also reported that the Labour Officer had obtained the authority of the Camp Commandant at Hartwell for the Italian prisoners to work in gangs of 12-15 instead of parties of 25 as previously arranged. This would be more convenient from the point of view of the progress of the drainage work, but additional supervision would be required, as it would be necessary to have one supervisor to each working party.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive Committee be recommended to provide six men to act as supervisors in connection with the land drainage work carried out by the Ouse Catchment Board; that an endeavour should be made not release men employed on farmers' ditching schemes in districts in which the main watercourses had already been cleared.

Mr. Morrison referred to three schemes which were outside the area served by prisoners from the Hartwell Camp but were within 20 miles of a Camp at Ettington, Northants, and suggested that the Committee might enquire from the Ministry of Agriculture whether the prisoners at Ettington could be made available for those schemes.

RESOLVED:

That the Executive Committee be recommended to enquire as to the availability of Italian Prisoners of War from Northants for work on drainage schemes in Bucks within a radius of 20 miles of Ettington Camp; that in the event of the men not being available, representations be made to the Ministry of Agriculture for their release; further, that the Ministry be advised that the Committee understood that a request had been received from the Ouse Catchment Board for consideration of the provision of a Prisoner of War Camp in the North of the County, which the Committee strongly recommended.

Both Land Girls and POW's were vital in providing labour and some stayed on after the war to pursue a farming life here.

Labour: Schoolboys

Schoolboy harvesting camps were also started as a means to supply extra labour recruiting boys still at school.

There is a list of the schoolboy harvesting camps organised in Buckinghamshire from July to September 1942 at the end of this section.

Advert for "schoolboy" agricultural camps (AR177/81/251)

Insurance
Experience has shown that the risk of accidents at camp or at work is small provided that ordinary care is taken. Nevertheless, all volunteers attending these camps (in addition to any rights they may have under the Workmen's Compensation Acts, etc.) are covered by a Personal Accident Policy, under which benefits are payable in the event of an accident while they are at the camp which results in death, the loss of an eye or limb, or temporary total disablement.

Loss of Property
No responsibility can be accepted for loss, etc., of property brought in the camp.

General
Camps will not be subject to any income restrictions, but compliance with the camp rules is essential to ensure the welfare of all volunteers.

What to bring with you
1. **Ration Book, etc.** Your ration book complete with coupons appropriate to the week or weeks for which you are at camp and six points for each week of your stay must be handed to the warden on arrival in camp.

Emergency ration cards cannot be accepted. Identity cards must be carried, and volunteers who are insured should bring their National Health and Unemployment Insurance cards with them.

2. Volunteers should take with them the following which cannot be obtained at the camp:

Mug	Thermos flask (or bottle)
Soup plate	Sheet (if required)
Large plate	Pillow Slip
Knife	Tea Towel
Fork	Towel, Soap, etc.
Spoon	Sandwich tin

3. **Clothing.** Volunteers are advised to take with them old clothes and a stout pair of boots or shoes, old mackintosh, a change of clothing in case they get wet. Discomfort and worse may be caused by sunburn and volunteers should, therefore, bring a hat and long sleeve shirt or dress which can be worn while at work.


The next step

The enclosed application form should be filled in and returned as soon as possible to the Regional Secretary, South East Regional Office, Flat 73, Block 4, Bicknell Mansions, London, W.1. Telephone: WE1941. Early application is recommended, particularly where the volunteer wishes to camp in the popular period of late July and early August. Applications from parties wishing to stay at the same camp for the same period (each volunteer must complete a separate form) should be forwarded together. Each application form must be accompanied by the advance booking fee of 6/- per person, for each proposed week's stay. The balance for the first week will be payable on arrival at the camp.

257 WE1721-47914 10/1/43 1/43 Gp. 2. Book & Camp List. A.C.

HELP THE FARMERS TO GATHER IN THE HARVEST —

Join an **AGRICULTURAL CAMP**




During the critical war years the safe gathering of the harvest would not have been possible without the assistance of the great volunteer army of citizens, both young and old, who answered the call to "Lend a hand on the land." This year, whatever the war situation may be abroad, there will be no respite for farmers and farm workers on the home front. The need for volunteers, particularly for potato lifting in September and October, will be as great as ever.

Volunteer Agricultural Camps offer a complete change in pleasant surroundings, good comradeship and a healthy working holiday in the open air. The work is vital and it is hoped that those who volunteer will not only return with a sense of satisfaction from doing just that little bit extra for the national effort, but will also enjoy the opportunity of coming into contact with what is still Britain's greatest industry—Agriculture.

ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE



"Test match."



Spades are trumps

The County War Agricultural Committee also encouraged farmers to grow new crops thought suitable for their type of land. Thus farmers started to grow crops they had never dreamed of growing before and mixed farming of arable and

A Chesham Farmer

One farmer called Tony Harman described how his farm changed during the war in his book *Seventy Summers*. He lived at Grove farm in Chesham. Before the war he had dairy cows, grew wheat and some vegetables. With the County War Agricultural Committee's help he was able to plough up 66 acres of land he had previously rented as rough grazing and in 1943 took on the tenancy of Bury farm at nearby Bovingdon. He kept the cows but started growing a much wider variety of crop including potatoes, sugar beet and oilseed rape, and later grew crops like grass, millet and sunflowers for their seeds. Using the Goods and Services scheme he was able to purchase a caterpillar tractor (very useful on steep chiltern fields), a combine harvester, a drier and pick-up baler and later an American wheeled tractor. It was very hard work but he was later able to write:

"For me the Second World War actually represented a period of very interesting and therefore very enjoyable farming. The variety of crops we grew, the acquisition of new machinery and our expansion geographically all added up to a challenging and rewarding experience" (p.203)

Problems.

The biggest problem with ploughing up the grasslands was a simple one: the land itself was not suitable for growing crops and would require too much work to make it so. Another problem was that farmers, particularly in the north part of the county, had simply lost or never had the technique of arable farming and literally needed re-educating, which was not very popular. Many farmers refused to plough up lands unless they saw their neighbours doing so too.

This letter dated Granborough 1941 illustrates some of the problems experienced by the ambitious plan of ploughing up previously unproductive farmland.
(From AR 2/89)

...At the same time acres were recommended to come under the plough with a view to increasing further the 1941 harvest, although in a certain number of cases there were serious misgivings as to whether the land was suitable for arable. These forebodings were fully justified in many instances. Take one example. The farmer was scheduled with 19 acres. He elected to grow barley on a peal of 4 acres, this is a fair plan & would have been better, but for the depredations of the wire-worm. The other plot of 15 acres situate with but a field between is almost a total failure. The land in the Parish in question is mostly heavy with yellow clay below the surface at 8 or 9 to 10 inches. It could not be ploughed till November because it was too hard. It could not receive surface cultivation till April owing to continual rain. As soon as it was drilled oats, there was a spell of 6 weeks dry weather, the result: nothing for expenditure...

The following maps show the effect of the plough-ups in 1939-40 for Wing District Council in North Bucks and Amersham District Council in the Chilterns (where Tony Harman had his farm). It can be seen how much more had been ploughed but also how piecemeal it was. The Report of 1942 concluded that much more needed to be done in the North in the way of drainage of the heavy clay soils, the provision of tractors and farm machinery, and good farming methods.
highlighted

Maps of Wing and Amersham districts from *Land Utilisation Survey – Bucks* by DW Fryer, 1942

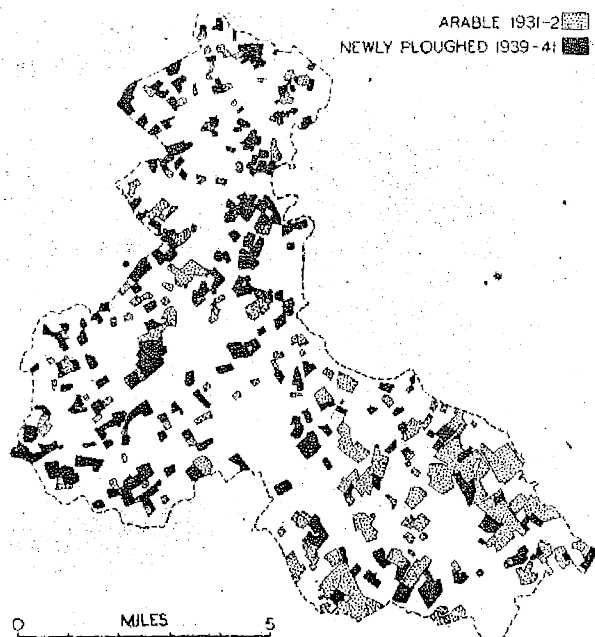


FIG. 24.—Pre-War Arable (dotted) and Ploughings of the 1939-40 and 1940-41 Campaigns, Wing Rural District.

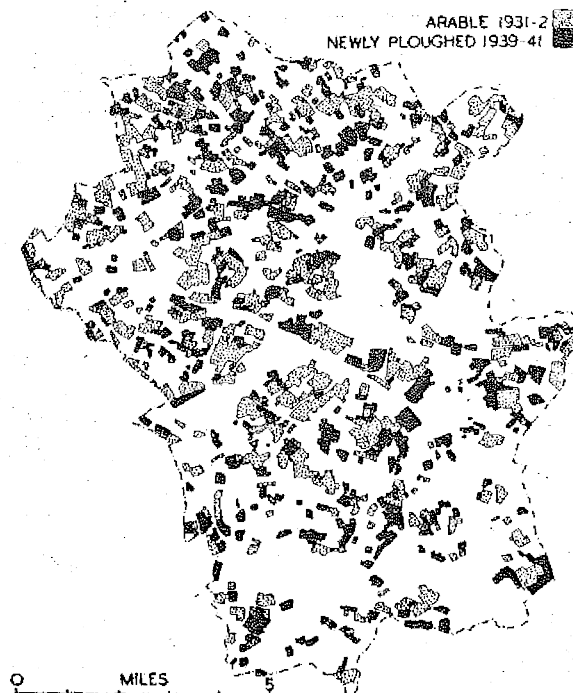


FIG. 25.—Pre-War Arable (dotted) and Ploughings of the 1939-40 and 1940-41 Campaigns, Amersham District.

SCHOOLBOY HARVESTING CAMPS JULY – SEPTEMBER 1942 (AR 2/89/6)

<u>District</u>	<u>Visiting School</u>	<u>Address of Camp</u>	<u>Approx No.</u>	<u>Date</u>
Amersham	Latymer Upper Sch.	Amersham Grammar Sch.	46	15 Aug – 5 Sept
	Wembley County Sch.	Beaconsfield C.E.	40	15 Aug – 16 Sept
	University Coll. Sch.	Holmer Green C. Sch.	35	15 Aug – 14 Sept
	Bishopshalt Sch.	Lee Common C.E.	30	15 Aug – 12 Sept
	Preston Manor County School	Whitehill Senior Girls School, Chesham	75	15 Aug – 19 Sept
Aylesbury	Gunnersbury Grammar School	Brill C.E.	15	15 Aug – 1 Sept
	Latymer Upper School	Haddenham C.	38	15 Aug – 19 Sept
	Harrow County School	Queen's Park C. School	37	15 Aug – 28 Aug
	Hounslow A.T.C.	Queen's Park C. School	70	28 Aug – 19 Sept
	High Wycombe Technical Institute	Whitchurch C. School	26	15 Aug – 15 Sept
	Odd Boys Camp	Waddesdon C. School	30	15 Aug – 15 Sept
	Ealing County School	Standals Farm, Bishopstone (Canvas)	60	14 Aug – 20 Sept
Buckingham	Royal Commercial Travellers' Schools	Buckingham Senior School	30	15 Aug – 15 Sept
	Aylesbury Grammar School	Steeple Claydon C.	20	15 Aug – 16 Sept
Eton	Willesden Tech. Sch.	Stoke Poges C.	23	15 Aug – 5 Sept
	Willesden County Sch.	Iver C. School	57	15 Aug – 13 Sept
Newport Pagnell (North)	Royal Grammar Sch. High Wycombe	Haversham C.	30	15 Aug – 16 Sept
	Acton Technical Sch.	Newport Pagnell Girls' C. School	30	15 Aug – 16 Sept
	Merchant Taylors Sch.	Olney Senior C. School	50	15 Aug – 16 Sept
Newport Pagnell (South)	Finchley Grammar Sch	Bletchley Senior C. Sch.	40	15 Aug – 30 Sept
	Reigate Grammar Sch.	Bletchley Senior C. Sch.	37	30 Aug – 12 Sept
	Tottenham County Sch	Stony Stratford C.E.	60	15 Aug – 13 Sept
Wing	Southgate County Sch.	Wing C. School	36	15 Aug – 17 Sept
	11 th Harrow Scouts	Grove Farm, Ivinghoe (Canvas Camp)	34	6 Aug – approx 1 month
Winslow	Eton College	Swanbourne House Sch.	27	8 Aug – 23 Aug
Wycombe (North)	Isleworth County Sch.	Princes Risboro' C. Sch.	25	15 Aug – 16 Sept
	Harrow School	The Paddocks C. Sch.	12	9 Aug – 23 Aug
Wycombe (South)	Southall County Sch.	Hambleden C.E.	30	15 Aug – 16 Sept
	Spring Grove C. Sch.	Marlow C.E.	36	15 Aug – 12 Sept
	Gt. Missenden district Scouts	Cadmore End, Fingest (Canvas)	12	28 Jul – 22 Aug
	Pinner & Northwood Scouts	Handy Cross Farm, High Wycome	20	15 Aug – 29 Aug
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