

*Susan Read
(Bonar Bridge)*

My first job was on a small mixed market garden/fruit farm in Kent with much RAF/Luftwaffe activity overhead. After a year I moved to a small dairy farm with pigs, poultry, orchard, soft fruit and a large walled vegetable garden. We took the fruit and veg into Newbury market. Also supplied Marks & Spencers. People were so thankful to buy vegetables then and we grew quite a variety.

When I first went to this farm, the cows were looked after by an elderly farm worker and three girls did the rest. The man died and could not be replaced. One girl left and another got pregnant. As her husband was fighting in the Western Desert, she was quietly ousted. It was a shocking thing to happen in those days. So I was on my own with 8 Guernsey cows and young stock, three sows (Mrs Blimp was my favourite) plus piglets in due season, a poultry flock and all the vegetable area to manage plus fruit to pick. Field cultivation and haymaking was done by neighbouring farmers.

It was hard work and, seasonally, very long hours. The owners helped when available and became a second family to me. The daughter was in the Timber Corps, requisitioning timber for pit props, etc. One day after a gale, she found a fledging Tawny Owl on the forest floor. *Wollie* came home to be reared by me. Neighbours helped by catching mice for him and I got quite good at potting rats with an air gun. Eventually he returned to the wild, but used to come back to me for food and even brought a companion with him.

My employer was in the local Home Guard so I used to be included in local exercises. What strange things we did!

In 1945, the men were gradually being released from the Services. The original gardener was demobbed and a cowman was available. I was able



Susan and Wollie (the hand reared Tawny Owl)

to apply for an Ex-Servicemen's grant to go to University in October 1946, so I moved to a large farm in Dorset. Five girls and a man looked after the herd of 100 Ayrshire cows (the calves and followers were reared on a separate farm).

Milking took place in a modern (in those days) milking parlour. The milk was pasteurised on site, then cooled and bottled to go to the schools in Sherbourne, Dorset. We got up at 4.00am to milk at 4.30, because the 100 gallons pasteuriser had to be heated by steam from a (temperamental) boiler. The bottles had to be in the van by 7.00am. A second batch went off at 8.30 by which time we would have finished milking and put the cows out. Breakfast was welcome then.

Out again at 9.00 to return to the parlour, clean the calving boxes, yards and cowsheds by 11.30 or so. Lunch of soup, bread and cheese, then a chance to have a sleep. Then out again at 2.30 to fetch the cows to do the milking all over again.

In Summer we were asked if we would like to help out haymaking. We usually did and were out in the fields till dark. I must admit my time on this farm passed in a blur of exhaustion, but it was fun working in a team for a change.

In September 1946 I was discharged from the W.L.A. and went to Reading University to do a degree in Agriculture and, in due course, a job with the Ministry of Agriculture, with plenty of practical experience to draw on.

*Susan being
Presented with her
Land Army Medal
by
Flower Thomson*

