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REASSERTING LOCAL POLITICS: THE EAST RIDING ‘WAR AG’ DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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The success of the County War Agricultural Executive Committees (CWAEC), known colloquially as ‘War Ags’, during World War Two has been well documented, but how they were affected by local political culture has received little attention. This study examines the East Riding’s ‘War Ag’ and demonstrates that by using the county’s existing political mechanisms, implementation of the government’s war time agricultural strategy was both rapid and efficient. At the outbreak of war, the landed classes and experienced farmers held significant power within the East Riding County Council, a position which was different from many other authorities where such power was in decline. Upon formation the majority of those assigned to the ‘War Ag’ were from this cohort, including its chairman. Crucially their established power base, coupled with their professional credibility, allowed them to commence implementation quickly. Their success was not a given, because at the outbreak of war the morale of the county’s farmers was low, and their relationship with government strained and distrusting. However, they quickly adapted to the nation’s needs, adopting modern practices which resulted in increased efficiencies and profitability, both of which continued into the post war era.

Keywords: agriculture; East Riding of Yorkshire; World War Two; County War Agricultural Executive Committees; landed classes; twentieth century

Introduction

The implementation of the government’s Second World War agricultural strategy aimed at increasing arable production was crucial to Britain’s success on the Home Front. This paper examines how this was achieved in one county, the East Riding of Yorkshire. The Government acknowledged that in order to increase production local administration was essential and devolved the process to County War Agricultural Executive Committees (CWAEC), known colloquially as ‘War Ags’. It is argued that a timely and positive response by farmers to local conditions was key to success. However, the process required

direct and intrusive management by the 'War Ags', an approach which had the potential to encounter resistance. Prior to the outbreak of war East Riding farmers were both demotivated and untrusting of government, so the possibility of resistance to directives from the centre were amplified. However, this did not materialise, and the county's agricultural community quickly embraced the changes, making an invaluable contribution to the nation's war effort. A key element for this success was due the fact that at its inauguration the 'War Ag' consisted of experienced agriculturalists, the majority of whom were senior members of the county council. Importantly in the context of continuity, those initially recruited remained in post for the first two years, and changes after that were not wholesale but gradual. Additionally, the chairman remained for the full eight years of the committee's existence. It is argued that this continuity, coupled with the synergies that their dual roles as councillors and agriculturalists afforded, created a political culture that was a vital element of the successful transformation witnessed. Moreover, the personal characteristics of the chairman were influential in ensuring that any blockages, with the potential to impede progress, were quickly surmounted.

This paper commences by placing the East Riding in context, describing how the county's economy was heavily reliant on agriculture, resulting in a relatively monolithic community. The local authority was heavily influenced by both the landed classes and the farming community; a type of governance that was generally in decline elsewhere, but still broadly acceptable in the East Riding. Both council members and officials from within the authority provided the backbone of the county's 'War Ag'. This contradicted the national trend, as the use of elected councillors was limited in other counties. The county's implementation was speedy, and it is shown that the use of existing council mechanisms, coupled with a cohesive community, were fundamental reasons for this success.

The East Riding's reliance on agriculture to the virtual exclusion of all other types of enterprise resulted in the culture of the county's local governance being based on that premise. Industry was limited almost entirely to one location, Beverley, with its tanning, ship building and light engineering, all of which were conducted on a relatively small scale.¹ The county's industry is summed up by Keith Allison, who stated that even by 1976, 'the East Riding can boast few areas of concentrated industry and its truly industrial landscapes are of only small extent'.² Other enterprise was mainly confined to the four seaside resorts of which Bridlington was the most popular, but still modest in comparison to many elsewhere.³ Filey had a small fishing community, but without a harbour, was mainly a local concern.⁴ This predominance of agriculture meant that the East Riding was a relatively homogeneous community, with fewer tensions between different competing economic or social interests than in many other areas.

¹ D. Neave, *Mutual Aid in the Victorian Countryside*, (Hull: Hull University Press: 1991), p. 9; A.P. Baggs, L.M. Brown, G.C.F. Forster, I. Hall, R.E. Horrox, G.H.R. Kent and D. Neave, 'Modern Beverley: Beverley, 1918–1945', in *A History of the County of York East Riding: Volume 6, The Borough and Liberties of Beverley*, ed. K.J. Allison (London, 1989), pp. 151–154.

² K.J. Allison, *The East Riding of Yorkshire Landscape* (Howden: Mr Pye, 1976), p. 199.

³ N. Pevsner and D. Neave, *The Buildings of England Yorkshire: York and the East Riding* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 340–342.

⁴ Allison, *The East Riding*, pp. 246–253.

At the outbreak of World War Two, Britain relied heavily on the importation of cereals and animal feedstuffs. Much land suitable for arable crops had subsided into wasteland or was used for grazing livestock. Realising the potential for blockades to curtail imports, the government decided that self-sufficiency in food production was essential, and to manage this, radical state intervention was implemented.⁵ The ability for the nation to produce its own food had two advantages. Firstly, should imports be curtailed it would prevent starvation, and secondly, it would release shipping space for war commodities, such as armaments and personnel.⁶ Keith Murray, who wrote the government's official history of the nation's Second World War agricultural strategy, emphasises that arable production was the main goal, and the ploughing up of significant areas of grassland was required.⁷ Government decided that the mechanisation to deliver this strategy would be devolved to the 'War Ags' and they would be coterminous with county boundaries. These Committees had been officially commissioned when war was declared, but had been in the making prior to declaration, a crucial factor in their subsequent success. When Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain summoned their respective chairmen to Whitehall in February 1940, he left them in no doubt regarding the gravity of the situation and the enormity of their personal responsibility stating:

the issue of this war depends as much upon what we can do to produce more food at home as it does upon more conspicuous exploits of our fighting men on the sea or in the air or on the land.⁸

The 'War Ags' had three main functions: administration, technical support, and the issuing of appropriate sanctions. Administration included: overseeing Whitehall regulations, co-ordinating ploughing, improving drainage and the supply of fertiliser and seed. Ensuring the availability of appropriate machinery and implements to carry out those tasks was also within their remit, as was labour mobilisation and the eradication of pests. Their second function was to provide technical advice aimed at increasing production on respective holdings. In the course of carrying out these functions farmers were graded in relation to their managerial performance, three grades were possible. Grade A meant that a farm was achieving 80 per cent of its potential output, grade B, between 60 and 80 per cent and grade C below 60 per cent. In order to improve performance, those given grade C were advised on how to improve performance. If this failed to have the desired effect sanctions, in the form of evictions were not uncommon, and they were often contentious.⁹ Some of the more controversial cases have been studied in detail.¹⁰

⁵ John Martin, *The Development of Modern Agriculture: British Farming since 1931* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 1–7.

⁶ R. Palme Dutt, *Britain in the World Front* (New York: International, 1942), p. 144.

⁷ K.A.H. Murray, *Agriculture* (London: HMSO, 1955), p. 43.

⁸ The National Archives (TNA): MAF 53/45 Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries, Prime Minister's Memo, Feb. 1940.

⁹ Martin, *The Development*, pp. 46–47.

¹⁰ J. Waymark, 'The War Agricultural Executive Committee in Dorset: State-Directed Farming or the Preservation of the Landed Estate?', in *The Front Line of Freedom: British Farming in the Second World War*, eds. B. Short, C. Watkins and J. Martin (Exeter: British Agricultural History Society, University of Exeter, 2006), pp. 143–157; B. Short, 'The Dispossession of Farmers in England and Wales During and After the Second World War' in *The Front Line* pp. 158–178; C. Rawding, 'The Treatment of 'Failing' Farmers in South-West Lancashire During the

Between 1940 and 1945 in England and Wales 13028 different types of occupancies were administered by the 'War Ags'. This figure appears excessive and needs qualification, as it includes two types of possession, which were often non-controversial. The first included common land, playing fields, moorland, marshland and derelict building sites, which had previously been non-agricultural in nature, and did not involve removal of tenancy. The second was land requisitioned with the owner's consent, because the occupier was unable to convert their holdings in line with the government's requirement for arable production. Murray has identified that the latter often involved grassland farmers, 'who lacked the experience or equipment for arable farming, and readily surrendered their land'. However, he concludes that as a result of the dispossession process, hardship and injustice was rare.¹¹ Brian Short is not quite so categorical; acknowledging that although 'War Ags' were predominately successful in delivering increased production, they were not devoid of unfairness and wrongdoing.¹² Short examined a number of eviction cases, including the high-profile case of Ray Walden in Hampshire, who in an effort to resist eviction in 1940, was fatally shot by police. He concludes that, 'local bitterness and recrimination... in some local areas has still not entirely disappeared'.¹³ Janet Waymark assessed the relationship between 'War Ags' and landowners, and the potential for 'nationalisation by the back door', a concept some thought was the government's ulterior motive.¹⁴ Examination of records for the East Riding reveal only limited dissent by individual farmers, and minimal controversy in relation to evictions.¹⁵ An exception was the case of a farm at Walkington near Beverley, where the tenant had been evicted and replaced by the son of a Beverley CWAEC sub-committee member. This had been instigated on the recommendation of the landlord. However, although the circumstances sound controversial parliament examined the case and the eviction was considered justified.¹⁶ Martin asserts that it was not uncommon for members of 'War Ag' committees to be responsible for grading family and colleagues, thus suggesting the potential for nepotism, but he also suggests that such criticism has proved difficult to substantiate.¹⁷ Martin's observation, supported by the decision made in parliament, tends to support that the decision in the Walkington case, which although controversial, was probably justified.

Local political and social networks were crucial to the effectiveness of 'War Ags'. Speedy delivery of the strategy—at a time of generally inefficient arable practices—was very much dependent on the type of local networks that already existed. The East Riding possessed suitable networks, in the form of its County Council, and its

Second World War' in *The Front Line*, pp. 179–193 & B. Short, *The Battle of the Fields: Rural Community and Authority in Britain during the Second World War* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2014).

¹¹ Murray, *Agriculture*, pp. 302–303.

¹² Short, *The Battle*, pp. 6–7.

¹³ Short, 'The Dispossession,' p. 178.

¹⁴ Waymark, 'The War Agricultural Executive,' pp. 143.

¹⁵ TNA: MAF 80/3444, MAF 80/3445, MAF 80/3446 and MAF 80/3447, East Riding County War Agricultural Executive Committee [ERCWAEC] Mins. 29 Sept. 1939 to 29 Jan. 1947.

¹⁶ Hull Daily Mail [HDM], 'Dispossessed Farmer', 22 January 1943, p. 4.

¹⁷ Martin, *The Development*, pp. 47.

Agricultural Committee, and the chairman of both, John Dunnington-Jefferson,¹⁸ used these mechanisms to set up the systems required for timely delivery.

Profile: The East Riding's 'War Ag'

The sixty-two 'War Ags' in England and Wales usually consisted of between eight and ten members, and it was specified that as well as general committee members representatives from one of the farmworker's unions and the Women's Land Army (WLA) should be part of the cohort. To support the committee a professional executive officer was also included.¹⁹ The East Riding Committee first met on 6 September 1939 and seven members were appointed; these included the union and WLA representative, and five further members including the chairman who had already been identified by Whitehall. These five were all farmers or landowners and current county aldermen or councillors.²⁰ Four aspects regarding the profile of the East Riding's committee are particularly important. The first concerns the characteristics of the chairman, a landowner and current chair of the County Council; it will be demonstrated that his influence was key to the committee's timely formation and ultimate success. Secondly, the fact that four of the remaining members were large scale farmers and members of the council is important, because the synergies that this created between the 'War Ag' and the local authority were vital.²¹ The third point concerns the credentials of the union member, W.H. Maulson. In addition to being an experienced farm worker he had also been a county councillor between c.1922 to c.1925, and therefore experienced in the potential machinations and protocols of local government.²² The final point relates to the Executive Officer, H.T. Tate, who had been the authority's Land Agent since c.1913. He was amongst the cohort of 'Principal Officers' within the council.²³ Obviously experienced, Tate would have had a good knowledge of the county's agricultural practices and his connections to his colleagues, on the 'War Ag', and the county's farming community in general, would have been invaluable. At the inaugural meeting Mrs Carver was appointed to the Executive Committee and Chair of the East Yorkshire Branch of the WLA; it transpired that she rarely attended subsequent meetings.²⁴ In November 1941, when national momentum to increase the establishment of the WLA witnessed a step

¹⁸ R. Currie, 'The Organisation and Work of the War Agricultural Executive Committees', *Public Administration*, 18 (1940), pp. 87–104.

¹⁹ Short, *The Battle*.

²⁰ TNA: MAF 80/34 ERCWAEC Mins 6 Sept. 1939 and East Riding County Archive [ERCA]: CCER/1/13/40. East Riding County Council Year Book [ERCCYB] 1939/40.

²¹ The assessment of their status and farm size has been determined by the fact that three members, Dunnington-Jefferson, Henry Beachall and John Cook feature in, ERCA: Y/BC/YOR *Who's Who in Yorkshire 1935*, giving descriptions of their agricultural antecedence. T. Byass farmed Bainton Burrows, clearly a significant holding. A record relating to Byass is contained in HDM, 'Ald. and Mrs Byass Celebrate', 22 April 1953, p.1. Abraham Leonard lived at the substantial Langthorpe Hall, Ellerby. He descended from an esteemed farming family and farmed Wadsworth Hill Farm, HDM, 'Burstwick', 9 April 1920, p. 6.

²² ERCA: CCER/1/13/27 ERCCYB, 1922/23.

²³ ERCA: CCER/1/13/18 and CCER/1/13/45 ERCCYBs 1913/14 and 1939/40.

²⁴ TNA: MAF 80/3444 ERCWAEC 6 Sept 1939 to 19 Nov. 1941, Between these dates Carver attended only 6 meetings.

change, she was replaced. Details of this are discussed below. The original committee remained together for two years before certain members left to be replaced by other senior members of the county's agricultural community, many of whom were members of the council. John Dunnington-Jefferson, the chairman remained in post throughout.²⁵ It is argued that this continuity, particularly in the early years, was instrumental in the success that followed.

Brian Short's *Battle of the Fields* is an account of the CWAECs and his description of how they were constituted nationally reveals some subtle differences from that of the East Riding. Short states that nationally 48 per cent of those selected were farmers or landowners, although only 20 per cent were classed as 'large farmers'.²⁶ Within the East Riding the whole committee with the exception of Maulson and Carver (Union and WLA representatives) were either landowners or farmers with significant holdings. Additionally, county council members held a significant majority on the CWAEC, whereas Short's research shows that nationally few councillors were selected. For example, of the seventy-two chairmen within the English administrative counties who served throughout the period the committees were active, only six were chairmen of their respective county councils.²⁷ Short's findings relating to the rarity of County Agricultural Committees (CAC) members joining 'War Ags' are contrary to findings in the East Riding, where the bulk of the membership came from that cohort.²⁸

Formed after World War One, CACs were often seen as inefficient, and for this reason Short believed that in the majority of cases their members 'were effectively by-passed' when selection to the 'War Ags' was being considered by Whitehall. This view was also taken by a senior civil servant, Donald Vandepier, when he assessed the 'origin, constitution, functions and achievements' of CWAECs in 1946.²⁹ In the East Riding, with the exception of Carver, all were on the CAC when the 'War Ag' was formed.³⁰ Moreover, there is no evidence to suggest that the East Riding's CAC was an ineffective body, potentially making their contribution an exception to Short's overall analysis regarding the general inefficiencies of these committees nationally. Short also states that only eight county councillors and eight aldermen were represented nationally.³¹ His analysis does not appear to represent every committee but the fact that four of those eight aldermen were represented on the East Riding's 'War Ag' is still quite remarkable.

Selecting powerful and influential members of the county council to serve on the 'War Ag' ensured that the implementation process could be speedily executed, thus maximising the county's war effort. However, this was not in itself a guarantee of success, and emphasis must be placed on the way the 'War Ag' was received and

²⁵ TNA: MAF 80/3444 to MAF 80/3448 ERCWAEC 6 Sept. 1939 to 11 Feb. 1948.

²⁶ Short, *The Battle*, p. 94.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 92 and 105–110.

²⁸ Short, *The Battle*, p. 57–58, ERCA: CCER 1/4/27/6 East Riding Council Agricultural Committee [ERCAC] 6 Oct. 1939 and TNA: MAF 80/3444 ERCWAEC Mins, 6 Sept. 1939.

²⁹ Short, *The Battle*, p. 58; Donald E. Vandepier, 'County War Agricultural Executive Committees', *Public Administration*, 24 (1946), pp. 14–22.

³⁰ ERCA: CCER/1/4/27/6 ERCAC Mins, 6 Oct. 1939 and TNA: MAF 80/3444 ERCWAEC Mins, 6 Sept. 1939.

³¹ Short, *The Battle*, p. 92.

viewed. Had that manifested itself in a negative way the outcome had the potential to be different. However, it is argued that the county's prevailing political culture, centred around landowners and yeoman farmers and epitomised by traditional rural governance was a key factor, even though it has been argued that such influence had been in decline in the decades prior to war.³² However, Beckett believes that such decline was more noticeable in national politics than locally; he asserts that even in the 1960s a significant number of county councils 'had a titled person amongst their leadership, and some had several'.³³

Short suggests that location was a factor in determining the type of local governance that prevailed during the tenure of the 'War Ags', and summarises the situation by stating that, 'despite modernity... power remained largely in the hands of the elites' but suggests that such power could be tempered by the rising profile of the 'shopocracy'.³⁴ However, by the late 1930s those from Short's 'shopocracy' still had very limited representation on the East Riding Council, with approximately six per cent of the membership being from small business, and although professionals, including company directors, had increased during the 1930s, the landowning and farming cohort were the most substantial group. 'Justices', 'gentlemen' and 'retired military'—all titles associated with establishment, tradition, and continuity—still had a significant presence. There was no one on the council who portrayed themselves as an 'employee', and political affiliations were on the surface non-existent, with no one representing the Labour Party or any form of socialism.³⁵

Although the status and position of the elites is important when assessing the political culture, the basis and substance of that power is equally relevant. Michael Woods's three elements of elite power are particularly suitable in describing that exercised by the East Riding's 'War Ag'. The first involves access to resources, which includes wealth, time, communication skills and personality. The second relates to networking, so that, 'members of the elite are linked by a network of social or professional relations which may be used for recruitment, or the transmission of influence or patronage'. Thirdly, and Woods believes most importantly, elites have power which is 'discursively constructed', a type of power that has been legitimised by discourses which can be self-reinforcing, because they have the ability 'to control the production and circulation of those discourses'.³⁶ This paper demonstrates that during the formation and subsequent operations of the CWAEC, Wood's three types of power are clearly evidenced, and the East Riding was a county, which in 1939 was still heavily influenced by a traditional form of elite power. The government's view of the county council's political culture supports this. As late as 1950, a Whitehall memo clearly describes how the county's political landscape was perceived, with a senior civil servant describing the East Riding as

³² Martin, *The Development*, pp. 17–18, 22; M. Woods, *Contesting Rurality: Politics in the English Countryside* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), pp. 24–25.

³³ Beckett, *The Aristocracy in England 1660–1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 473.

³⁴ Short, *The Battle*, pp. 41–42.

³⁵ ERCA: CCER 1/13/43 and CCER 1/13/45 ERCCYB, 1937/38 and 1939/40.

³⁶ M. Woods, 'Discourses of Power and Rurality: Local Politics in Somerset in the 20th Century', *Political Geography*, 16 (1997), pp. 453–478.

‘an area of semi-feudal type and the leading personalities on the County Council are mostly landowners’.³⁷

The interconnectivity between ‘War Ag’, the County Council and the prevailing political culture are crucially important in understanding the East Riding’s contribution to the war effort, but to fully appreciate all the challenges, and thus emphasise how effective the East Riding’s ‘War Ag’ was, a third element needs consideration. This relates to the county farmers’ attitude of mistrust due to the government’s continued lack of support for agriculture. Although John Martin identifies that from 1931 there had been some government interventions aimed at improving agricultural efficiencies, he states that these were conducted in a ‘rather hesitant manner’ and ‘by 1931 Britain was the largest free trade area for agricultural produce in the world’.³⁸ Moreover, although some advances had been made, the government’s main policy of free trade had left the farming community both unmotivated and suspicious. Due to this mistrust, delivery by the establishment in the form of the ‘War Ags’ would have required an approach sensitive to those tensions, whilst being robust enough to ensure that increased production commenced with immediate effect. However, the county’s farmers potentially saw the interest that government were now paying to agricultural expansion, coupled with financial incentive, as an opportunity, an opportunity that had turned into reality by the time that the hostilities were over.³⁹ It is perhaps surprising that even though the East Riding ‘War Ag’ appears to have been controlling in nature, its governance was in the main accepted, proving to be both efficient and relevant for the requirements of the day.

Increased Production: Challenges and Opportunities

Before discussing how the ‘War Ag’ delivered the government’s plans, the challenges that it faced need to be placed in context. In the first instance they had the potential to use draconian powers should that be necessary. This caused the farming community some consternation, which Short argues was not lost on the ‘War Ags’, suggesting that ‘few CWAECs wished to become unnecessarily embroiled in huge amounts of paperwork involved in taking legal action against recalcitrant farmers’. As a result, consensus was deemed the most appropriate means by which to deliver the government’s strategy.⁴⁰ However, due to some discontent within the farming community their readiness to willingly accept ‘War Ag’ directives was not a given. During the 1930s, British farming had been in a depression with farmers believing that government support was lacking. John Martin argues that in this period the government had provided some limited support for agriculture, but states that ‘historically’ the decade has ‘been regarded as the nadir of an agricultural depression’. This had been brought about by overseas competition, coupled with a free trade policy that originated in the 1870s. This had slowly reduced the profitability of

³⁷ TNA: ED 154/147 Ministry of Education Memo 22 Nov. 1950.

³⁸ Martin, *The Development*, p. 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 69–72.

⁴⁰ Short, *The Battle*, pp. 147–148.

British agriculture, and by the early 1930s the industry was in a depression. Nationally this resulted in a proliferation of broken down farms and unproductive land, much of which had been abandoned to become 'wilderness'.⁴¹ The following statement made by the East Riding Branch of the National Farmers Union (NFU) in 1932 vividly describes the situation in the East Riding:

The state of agriculture in East Yorkshire is that of a state of paralysis. In a large number of cases payments have stopped and farmers do not attend markets because they dare not meet their creditors. If something is not forthcoming this harvest to help, we are going to have a total collapse in this area.⁴²

Throughout the 1930s the county's farmers through the NFU continued to show their discontent, the details of which are described below. Before discussing that aspect, it is important to note, that in the interim, and unbeknown to farmers, the Government was drawing up contingency plans which, in the event of war, included very significant increases in home grown production. Martin provides vital context of the problem that the country faced. Although there had been some improvements to agricultural production during the 1930s, Britain was still unable to grow, by a considerable margin, the amount of produce required to sustain a Home Front.⁴³ Murray succinctly echo's the problem:

In the three years preceding the Second World War, British farming supplied some 30 per cent, by wholesale value, of the country's annual peace-time food requirements. About 70 per cent were derived from overseas, either as food or as feedingstuffs for conversion into food by livestock in this country—a heavy liability in the event of war and the curtailment of imports by a possible 25 per cent.⁴⁴

Government discussions to address this issue commenced in February 1937 when the Cabinet met to consider policy to negate food shortages should hostilities commence. Initially the talks centred on a strategy aimed at storing bulk imports. Crucially, the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, William Morrison (later Viscount Dunrossil), realised the limitations of such a plan, and proposed that efforts should be made to increase home production. He stated, 'if an announcement was made in favour of food storage without some simultaneous proposal for increasing the fertility of the soil the policy would be very unpopular'.⁴⁵ Morrison had been appointed Minister of Agriculture in 1936, and upon his death his obituary stated that when:

the shadows were deepening over Europe and there were suggestions that agriculture should be placed upon a war footing. He rejected them on the ground that they would entail an injurious and unnecessary disturbance since he continued to argue that war was not inevitable. But in 1938 he announced that the Government had a plan for a switch-over to emergency production if in fact an emergency arose.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Martin, *The Development*, pp. 8–10; Angus Calder, *The People's War* (London: Pimlico, 1992) pp. 418–420; Short, *The Battle*, pp. 32–33.

⁴² HDM, 'Dare Not Meet Creditors', 7 July 1932, p. 4.

⁴³ Martin, *The Development*, p. 35.

⁴⁴ Murray, *Agriculture*, p. 39.

⁴⁵ TNA: CAB 23/87/11 HM Government [HMG] Cabinet Paper 9 (37) 24 Feb. 1937.

⁴⁶ Times, 'Lord Dunrossil', 3 Feb. 1961, p.12.

This portrayal of Morrison's supposed pre-war naivety is an injustice, because at the conclusion of the cabinet meeting in February 1937, it was agreed that a committee should be appointed to 'make definite proposals for increasing the productivity of our own soil with a view to ensuring increased food production in time of war'.⁴⁷ Morrison's decisive action was a vital catalyst for the Government's agricultural war strategy. Additionally, he clearly realised that to maintain a policy that relied entirely on the storage of bulk imports would have been further damaging to the morale of British farmers.

The meeting, and the importance of Morrison's intervention, were crucial. Before his involvement, home production and self-sufficiency were inconsequential to the government's agricultural plans, with major emphasis being placed on imports and bulk storage.⁴⁸ The foresight and wisdom of Morrison, and his understanding that Britain's farming community were crucial in supporting the war effort was vital, an assertion supported in an article written in 1942 in the *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England* by Merrik Burrell, Chair of the West Sussex CWAEC. Burrell wrote:

Each and every county must have had, and will still be having, its own particular problems ... There are, however, one or two generalizations ... It is difficult to think of any other scheme planned before the war to meet war conditions which has worked so smoothly, and with so little need for fundamental alteration, as that for war-time food production devised by Mr. W. S. Morrison, the then Minister of Agriculture, and Sir Donald Ferguson, the permanent secretary ... they wisely trusted the County War Executive Committees to mould the general principles of their schemes to fit local conditions.⁴⁹

Burrell's statement suggests that Morrison along with Ferguson, the permanent secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, understood the nuances of agriculture beyond the obvious geographical and physical elements associated with regional variations. It is clear they were cognisant of aspects, such as culture and tradition, and they realised that in order to manage these issues, local implementation was required by individuals who understood the subtleties of their own communities.

The decision to focus on arable production was made because crops provide more calorific content than meat and products obtained from livestock such as milk and eggs. Livestock and their ancillary products lose about 70–90 per cent of their weight when processed, returning only 10–30 per cent for human consumption.⁵⁰ This was why the ploughing up of grassland, to increase arable production, became a major strand of policy. In May 1937, the Cabinet reconvened to discuss the proposals raised in February. They reached the following conclusion:

Food storage was not only difficult but expensive, and the extent to which schemes for increasing the productivity of the soil replaced food storage might be taken into account in reckoning their cost.⁵¹

⁴⁷ TNA: CAB 23/87/11.

⁴⁸ TNA: CAB 23/87/11.

⁴⁹ M. Burrell, 'War-Time food production: The Work of War Agricultural Executive Committees', *Royal Agricultural Society of England*, 103 (1942), p. 70.

⁵⁰ Murray, *Agriculture*, p. 43.

⁵¹ TNA: CAB 23/88/9 HMG Cabinet Paper 21(37), 5 May 1937.

It was not the intention of government to oversee their policy directly from Whitehall, and agreement was reached that in the event of hostilities, county committees, like those used in the Great War, would be utilised. In anticipation the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries identified a chairman, secretary and committee for every county in England and Wales.⁵² However, the government's war time strategy was classified secret. With the exception of the 'War Ag' chairmen who were told of their role in the spring of 1939 the policy was not divulged to the agricultural community at large until shortly before war was declared.⁵³ Therefore, not appreciating their involvement, and potential for an upturn in fortunes, morale would have remained low up until the very point that their cooperation was required. A factor that could easily have impeded timely progress at a time when delays would have had grave implications for the early war effort. The following examples of East Riding farmers aggrieved state vividly describes the situation as war approached.

Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain decided to address the country's farming community in the summer of 1938 and lay out his plan for the future of Britain's agriculture. His speech, only two months before the Munich Conference, was clearly made with peace in mind, but even when he touched on the possibility of conflict, he stated that trade routes would remain open, and imports would not be impeded.⁵⁴ This was clearly at odds with the government plans commenced seventeen months before. His rationale was conveyed in the following statement:

The first would be that [without importing] we should ruin those Empire and Foreign countries who are dependent on our markets. And the next thing would be as their purchasing power had been destroyed those markets would no longer be able to buy our manufacturers from us. Up therefore, would go our unemployment figures and the unemployed in turn would have to reduce their purchases of the farmer's products. And so, in the end the final sufferer would be the farmer himself.⁵⁵

The county's farmers responded vociferously via the NFU, with both the Warwickshire and East Yorkshire branches meeting independently to discuss the implications of the premier's stance. Warwickshire farmers were 'dismayed and disgusted,' and thought the speech 'insulting' but did not suggest specific action. However, the executive of the East Riding NFU were more radical, making enquiries with members to determine their appetite to approach opposition parties in the House of Commons to ascertain:

If a policy is forthcoming which will ... guarantee a sound economic position for British Agriculture, the Executive Committee would agree to convene a special meeting and to advise all the branches what action they should take at the next General Election.⁵⁶

East Riding farmers, unlike some of their counterparts, were willing to lobby government and consider voting for an opposing political party should that be necessary. However, this stance also suggests that they understood the potential for profitability

⁵² Currie, 'The Organisation and Work'.

⁵³ Short, *The Battle*, pp. 57–58. Some general pre-war preparations were expected by county councils.

⁵⁴ Times, 'Avoidance of War', 4 July 1938, p. 21 and Calder, *The People's War*, p. 26.

⁵⁵ Times, 'Avoidance of War'.

⁵⁶ Times, 'Agriculture in War', 7 July 1938, p. 18.

should they receive government support, signifying that they were willing to embrace change and intervention, in order to improve their position should the opportunity arise. Four months after Chamberlain's announcement, and only nine months before the outbreak of hostilities, further discussions within the NFU took place. On this occasion a resolution was made to lobby government. The *Leeds Mercury* reported the meeting as follows:

At a meeting of the Beverley branch of the National Farmers Union, in the East Riding of Yorkshire, the capital of the Riding and centre of the barley growing area, it was resolved to beg the Minister to rescue us from the tragic present position, and at least extend to all barley growers the provisions of the present oats and barley subsidy as a partial measure ... unless something was done and done quickly, it looked to him as though the East Yorkshire Wolds would go out of cultivation.⁵⁷

The words quoted were those of Henry Beachall a founding member, and chairman of the Beverley Branch of the NFU. He was also chairman of his local bench of magistrates, and upon his death in 1949 it was reported that, 'the industry [had] lost an esteemed and valued figure ... he was a high-class Wold farmer, who specialised in growing barley of the very best quality'.⁵⁸ Beachall farmed a significant holding at Holme on the Wolds near Beverley, was an alderman on the East Riding County Council, and was subsequently drafted on to the executive committee of the 'War Ag' upon its inauguration.⁵⁹ He was clearly aware of the problems that existed and was willing to campaign for improved support for the county's agriculture. As a member of the 'War Ag', County Council, and chairman of the Beverley NFU he would clearly have had the credibility and influence to galvanise the county's farmers, many of whom were NFU members.⁶⁰ It is also probable that he would have emphasised the economic opportunity that increased production presented.

Initially the identification of the selected personnel of the 'War Ags' remained confidential, but in April 1939 the designated chairmen were summoned to Whitehall and briefed.⁶¹ They were informed by Ferguson of the government's proposed plans in the event of war. This briefing raises two important aspects, both linked to the importance of understanding locality in relation to the successful delivery of the strategy. The first was the government's acceptance that farmers, responding to local conditions, were key to success, and secondly, that the process had to be administered locally. Ferguson stated that should hostilities commence, powers would be granted to the executive committees designating them as, 'agents of the minister'. He also explained that only limited preparation could be conducted, but qualified this by stating:

this should not however prevent the County Agricultural Staff obtaining in the course of their ordinary duties the fullest possible information regarding individual farms and recording particulars for use in emergency. The task of the individual farmer must depend

⁵⁷ *Leeds Mercury* (LM), 'Fear of Wolds Going Out of Cultivation', 21 November 1938, p. 7.

⁵⁸ HDM, 'Death of Alderman Henry Beachell', 9 December 1949, p. 3.

⁵⁹ *Driffield Times* (DT), 'Harvest Prospects: Good Supplies of Grain', 26 August 1939, p.6, HDM, 'Death of Alderman Henry Beachell', ERCA: CCER 1/13/45 ERCCYB 1939/40 and TNA: MAF 80/3444 ERCWAE, Mins, 6 Sept. 1939.

⁶⁰ ERCA: DDFU/1/1/5 East Riding NFU Executive Committee Minutes October 1939 to December 1943.

⁶¹ Short, *The Battle*, pp. 57–58.

on the contribution which the county would be required to make towards the national effort...⁶²

At the time of Ferguson's address agriculture was already on the agenda of the East Riding County Council; they had a dedicated County Agricultural Committee (CAC), chaired by Dunnington-Jefferson and containing all the 'War Ag' members except for Mrs Carver.⁶³ The relevance of the connection of the newly formed East Riding CWAEC, and the nucleus of the membership already being established on both the County Council and the County's Agricultural Committee was a critical factor which determined the swift mobilisation of the East Riding's agricultural war effort. Additionally, the fact that the majority of the CWAECs were experienced farmers or landowners, and their union representative was experienced not only in farm work but as someone with council experience, had the potential to reinforce their credibility and make their acceptance more tenable. On 24 August, the Emergency Powers Defence Act was passed and the following day the 'War Ags' were inaugurated and commenced to implement the strategy.⁶⁴ However, the farming community still lacked confidence in the government and to ensure successful delivery, the role and commitment of the CWAECs was clearly important. Murray believes:

The key men were the progressive leading tenant farmers and farming landowners on the County and District Committees. It is impossible adequately to describe the devotion behind the long hours spent visiting farms... often, in surmounting the suspicion and criticism... added to the continuous labour of running their own businesses.⁶⁵

Even though the East Riding 'War Ag' came together for the first time only six days after the declaration of war, they quickly galvanised. By the conclusion of their first meeting, not only had the government's objectives been laid out, but an executive committee, three thematic sub-committees, and eight district sub-committees had been identified and appointed.⁶⁶

Local Delivery

Leadership would have been crucial, and the selection of Dunnington-Jefferson, the current council and CAC chair,⁶⁷ was central in quickly galvanising the East Riding's 'War Ag'. Moreover, as will be displayed his decisive interventions during periods of crises also proved important. Sir John Dunnington-Jefferson DSO was a retired Lieutenant Colonel, substantial landowner, company director and old Etonian. A professional soldier, he had served with distinction during World War One, being mentioned in despatches on six occasions. He was elected to the council in 1922, and became its chairman in 1936, a position he did not relinquish until

⁶² TNA: MAF 53/145 Home Production Policy File Memo 1939/1940, 2 May 1939.

⁶³ ERCA: CCER 1/4/27/6 ERCAC Mins 6 Oct. 1939.

⁶⁴ Short, *The Battle*, p. 61; Calder, *The Peoples War*, pp. 31–32.

⁶⁵ Murray, *Agriculture*, p. 339.

⁶⁶ TNA: MAF 80/34 ERCWAEC Mins 6 Sept. 1939.

⁶⁷ ERCA: CCER/1/1/47 East Riding County Council [ERCC] Mins 1939/40; CCER/1/5/27/6 ERCAC Mins 1936/40 and TNA: MAF 80/3444 ERCWAEC Mins, 6 Sept. 1939.

1968. In total he served the council for fifty-two years, retiring upon the inauguration of Humberside in 1974, aged ninety. Additionally, he was a Justice of the Peace and Deputy Lieutenant and was knighted in 1944 for services to agriculture. In 1958 he was made a Baronet.⁶⁸ Dunnington-Jefferson's longstanding influence and experience in county matters as well as agriculture, was crucial to the success of the CWAEC, and the fact that he was already a known and respected figure ensured that the government's objectives were placed on a firm footing from the outset. There is significant evidence to suggest that by selecting Dunnington-Jefferson as chair of the authority, the East Riding's councillors appreciated the importance of agriculture to the county's economy and culture, as a brief examination of the selection process demonstrates.

In May 1936, due to the death of the council chairman, Lord Deramore, who had been a member for forty-one years and its chairman for twenty-five years, a replacement was required. Dunnington-Jefferson and Thomas Fenby stood for election, an internal process to be decided by the full council.⁶⁹ Fenby, a blacksmith and JP from Bridlington had been on the council since 1910 and an alderman since 1923. He was an experienced politician, and at the time of the process was vice-chair of the council.⁷⁰ He had been a Liberal member of parliament from 1924 until 1929 and was considered, 'relentless in attack ... universally respected for his integrity, and his wide knowledge of agriculture and local politics'.⁷¹ However, despite Fenby's impressive track record, Dunnington-Jefferson, far less senior than his opponent, was elected. The main thrust of Dunnington-Jefferson's campaign revolved around his credentials as an agriculturalist, and during the deciding debate it was stated, 'a great many members of the council were farmers and in a great agricultural county they ought to have an agriculturist at their head'. At the end of the debate Dunnington-Jefferson was elected and it was proposed that Fenby should continue as vice-chair, but he declined stating, 'therefore you cannot expect me ... to allow you to make me a prisoner as Col. Dunnington-Jefferson's vice-chairman'. He also implied that he did not wish membership of any council committee, and he would continue to work towards change stating 'he thought that the council needed a voice on progressive lines, and he intended to be that voice'.⁷² The choice of Dunnington-Jefferson potentially demonstrates that the types of power—resource, associational and discursive, outlined by Woods—were still significant in the East Riding in the late 1930s.⁷³

The following year Dunnington-Jefferson was re-elected chair with the following accolade being paid by Alderman Saltmarshe:

he was sure that the council would agree that during the past year the chairman had done his work in a most admirable manner. There may be troublous times ahead, and they could not do better than to re-elect him.

⁶⁸ ERCA: Y/BC/YOR *Who's Who in Yorkshire* 1935, pp. 68–69; ERCA: CCER/1/1/81 ERCC Mins 1973/74.

⁶⁹ Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer [YPLI], 'New Chairman of East Riding County Council', 2 May 1936, p. 16.

⁷⁰ ERCA: CCER/1/13/15 ERCCYB 1910/1 and CCER/1/1/30 ERCC Mins 1922/23.

⁷¹ Times, 'Alderman T.D. Fenby', 6 Aug. 1956, p. 11.

⁷² YPLI, 'New Chairman'; ERCA: CCER/1/13/27 ERCCYB 1922/23 and CCER/1/1/44 ERCC mins 1936/37.

⁷³ Woods, *Discourses*.

It is possible that Saltmarshe was referring to the tensions in Europe and its implications for the Home Front. At the same meeting Fenby reneged on his earlier stance, and agreed to stand on a number of committees, to which he was duly elected. Dunnington-Jefferson responded by stating, 'he was pleased to see that Alderman Fenby had allowed his name to be placed on several committees'.⁷⁴ As will be demonstrated Dunnington-Jefferson often adopted a decisive style of leadership, probably adapting the experience he had gained as a senior army officer, war veteran and experienced local administrator. However, the dealings he had with Thomas Fenby, an experienced and respected local politician, demonstrate that he could vary his style and galvanise potentially disparate elements when the need arose. He clearly acknowledged the strengths of Fenby and the benefits that his ability and experience could bring to county governance.

As chairman of the 'War Ag' Dunnington-Jefferson clearly paid attention to detail, demonstrated by the numbers of issues that he micro-managed throughout his tenure. In addition to the executive committee several sub-committees, and district committees were formed. Their aim was to devolve the power of the executive to deliver the task in hand. The sub-committees had different thematic mandates, and the district committees were divided across the county to provide geographical resilience.⁷⁵ In the case of the East Riding the district committees were coterminous with the existing Rural District Councils.⁷⁶ Brian Short asserts that 'these committees effectively translated and brought the power of the CWAECs into close geographical proximity.' The district committees had local knowledge, and the sub committees had specialist knowledge.⁷⁷ Some of the smaller counties had less than ten such committees, and exceptionally, some had in excess of twenty. The largest number was Surrey with twenty-seven and the East Riding was the sixth largest with nineteen.⁷⁸ Some chairmen sat on these sub committees, and it could be argued that their tendency to do so indicates the level of overall control they maintained throughout their tenure. Short has profiled the chairmen and throughout the War some committees changed their chairman, resulting in a total of ninety-two being appointed throughout the period of conflict. Of these 67 per cent, sat on fewer than ten sub or district committees, with the remaining 33 per cent sitting on more than ten. Dunnington-Jefferson was a full member of sixteen of the county's nineteen sub and district committees. Only one other chairman throughout the period of the war sat on more, J.R.H. Sumner, of Worcester with eighteen. All executive chairmen were ex-officio members of their various committees, but not necessarily proactive in their involvement. However, Dunnington-Jefferson was a full member of the sixteen he sat on.⁷⁹ In depth analysis of the archival records relating to the East Riding, linked to Short's overall analysis, clearly indicates that the management of the East Riding's agricultural war effort was undertaken under a background of close control. It is asserted that the 'War Ag', and Dunnington-Jefferson in particular, were willing to take positive, and potentially controversial action in order to achieve their goals, as evidenced by the following cases.

⁷⁴ HDM, 'East Riding Council Chairman', 12 March 1937, p. 18.

⁷⁵ Short, *The Battle*, pp. 65–69.

⁷⁶ TNA: MAF 80/3444 ERCWAEC Mins, 6 Sept. 1939.

⁷⁷ Short, *The Battle*, pp. 65–69.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 65–69.

Documents showing communication between the Ministry and the 'War Ags' were recorded in a ministry file entitled, 'Home Production Policy'. The file contains records of advice given to CWAECs c.1939, and a shortage of trained agricultural labour was a recurring problem. A potential solution was the use and development of the WLA, and recruitment was encouraged by the ministry.⁸⁰ In anticipation of conflict the WLA had been formed on 1 June 1939 and it was anticipated that 50,000 volunteers would be needed nationally. However, recruitment was slow. Prejudice was one of the reasons cited for this, with many farmers believing that women did not have the skills and characteristics to carry out the work required.⁸¹ Examination of the minutes of the East Riding 'War Ag', between September 1939 and November 1941, show little pro-activity in the recruitment of WLA members.⁸² On 12 November 1941 it was decided to replace the county's WLA Chairman. Dunnington-Jefferson reported:

that his wife, Mrs. Dunnington-Jefferson had accepted an invitation from Lady Graham, the Chairman of the new County W.L.A. Committee to act as Chairman of the East Riding Sub-Committee, and that Miss H. Carmichael had been appointed Organising Secretary for the East Riding.⁸³

Dunnington-Jefferson's pronouncement appears to be pre-emptive in nature, because only three weeks later he received a directive from the Ministry stating, 'everything possible' should be done to encourage the employment of the WLA in the East Riding.⁸⁴ This was probably in anticipation of the National Service (No. 2 Act) which became law on December 18; legislation which compelled unmarried women between the ages of twenty and thirty years to either join one of the auxiliary services, or take a job in industry.⁸⁵ The introduction of Mrs Dunnington-Jefferson supported by the new act was effective. Data to measure the extent of this improvement is limited because WLA numbers for the whole of Yorkshire were aggregated, and separate figures for the East Riding are not available. Comparison with other counties is also limited, but figures for Yorkshire, Lancashire, Kent and Hampshire are available. In 1940 there was no discernible difference between the four counties; Kent had the largest contingent with about 250 recruits. However, by April 1943, sixteen months after changes had been made in the East Riding, Yorkshire had easily surpassed the others having approximately 4500 members, followed by Kent (c.3200), Hampshire (c.1950) and Lancashire (c.1200).⁸⁶ Figures from the June Agricultural Census for 1940 shows that 'whole time regular women and girls' employed on farms in the East Riding was 467, by June 1943 this had risen by nearly a 1000 to 1433.⁸⁷ Although it is probable that some these women would not be members of the WLA, it is reasonable to assume that a significant number would fall into that category.

⁸⁰ TNA: MAF 53/145 MAF Home Production Policy file memo1939/1940.

⁸¹ Gill Clarke, 'The Women's Land Army and its Recruits, 1938–50,' in *The Front Line*, pp. 101–116.

⁸² TNA: MAF 80/3444 ERCWAEC Mins between 6 Sept. 1939 and 19 Nov. 1941.

⁸³ TNA: MAF 80/3444 ERCWAEC Mins 12 Nov. 1941.

⁸⁴ TNA: MAF 80/3444 ERCWAEC Mins, 3 Dec. 1941.

⁸⁵ Calder, *The People's War*, p. 268.

⁸⁶ Margaret Bullock, 'The Women's Land Army 1939–1950: A Study of Policy with Particular Reference to the Craven District,' (Unpublished: University of Leeds, 2002), Figures extrapolated from Figure 6 within the thesis.

⁸⁷ TNA: MAF 68/3961 and MAF 68/4072 June Agricultural Census, 1940 and 1943.

It is clear that the appointment of Mrs Dunnington-Jefferson as chair of the WLA, supported by the change in the government's recruitment criteria for women, was successful. WLA membership increased significantly after personnel changes had been made and show favourable comparison with other counties. The appointment of the Chairman's wife to a key position was potentially controversial and could have been viewed as parochial. However, this was not a stance adopted by the establishment, as in 1944 Sir John was knighted, 'for his work as Chairman of the East Riding War Agricultural Committee'.⁸⁸ Additionally, in January 1946 both Lady Graham and Lady Dunnington-Jefferson were invited to a gathering in York to celebrate the achievements of the Yorkshire WLA. This celebration was presided over by the Princess Royal, who stated:

Yorkshire had reason to be proud of the WLA. No fewer than 19500 Yorkshire girls had been enrolled in the work and were found in almost every county in England and Wales.⁸⁹

Before the WLA achieved the local success described Whitehall were clearly concerned that the county was failing to fulfil its obligation regarding recruitment. This clearly galvanised Dunnington-Jefferson, who used positive networking, coupled with discursive power to solve the problem. By engaging with Lady Graham, Lady Dunnington-Jefferson was appointed chair of the WLA Sub-Committee, and that combined with new legislation, compelling women to join one of the auxiliary services, clearly had the desired effect. Lady Graham of Norton Conyers, Melmerby, Ripon, a member of the landed-classes, was chairman of the joint Yorkshire Committee of the WLA from 1940 to 1944.⁹⁰ This scenario demonstrates that although local networking was influential, networks at national and regional level, as demonstrated by Dunnington-Jefferson's ability to negotiate with both Whitehall and Lady Graham, were equally important and influential.

On the 4 March 1942 the difficulties of recruiting a Divisional Officer for the Holderness District of the East Riding were reported to the executive. On 11 March Dunnington-Jefferson received a letter from the district secretary suggesting that additional members should be assigned to the sub-committee. Although the CWAEC minutes lack detail, it is clear that the district had some form of personnel issues, and it was agreed that Dunnington-Jefferson should reply to the letter directly. On the 25 March he reported that it had been suggested to all members of the Holderness Sub-Committee that they should resign, and as a result they did so. Simultaneously a list of eleven replacements was produced and were duly appointed. Dunnington-Jefferson was then authorised to select a person to act as chair of the sub-committee.⁹¹ This scenario once again demonstrates the decisive nature of the committee, showing their determination to ensure efficiency within a district, even at the expense of terminating the position of a full committee. Furthermore, in less than two weeks a replacement committee had been recruited, consisting of individuals already fully committed to the war effort.⁹² These circumstances establish that the operation of the agricultural war

⁸⁸ V. Hall, *A History of the Yorkshire Agricultural Society* (London: Batsford, 1987), p.165.

⁸⁹ YPLI, 'The Princess Royal Praises the WLA', *YPLI*, 21 January 1946, p. 6.

⁹⁰ Yorkshire Evening Post [YEP], 'Proud of Yorkshire Landgirls', 12 July 1946, p. 4.

⁹¹ TNA: MAF 80/3444 ERCWAEC, Mins, 4, 11, and 25 Mar. 1942.

⁹² *Ibid.*

effort was not necessarily a harmonious and smooth-running operation throughout its tenure, and it was not always carried out in a utopian consensus for the greater good; but human nature and personal failings had to be addressed, often using a direct and authoritarian management style. Some of the resolutions and processes used would potentially be unacceptable today, but the desperate needs of the time meant that decisions had to be made quickly and with little consultation.

The scenarios described highlight that although informal political networks were important, it would appear that party politics were of less consequence, thus further emphasising the type of political culture that prevailed. When examining council records and press reports relating to East Riding local elections, political associations are rarely mentioned, appearing to be of limited consequence. The degree to which party politics feature in council business during this period also appear to have been insignificant compared to the wellbeing of the county's agricultural policies. However, potential political bias, leading to discontent, was not lost on the Government when they selected the chairmen designates of the CWAECs. This led to some of their selections being contrived, as demonstrated in a memo from the Permanent Secretary Ferguson to the Minister of Agriculture Dorman-Smith written in the summer of 1939, explaining how the chairmen had been selected:

It was felt that it was very desirable to avoid any suggestion of political bias in making appointments... Since from the nature of things Chairmen would in many cases be prominent Conservatives, it was thought desirable to avoid criticism by going out of our way to ensure that certain Chairmen belonged to other parties ...⁹³

Although some Liberals were selected, concern with party politics, and the perception of fairness, appears to have been less important than their ability to carry out their remit. Networking was equally, if not more important, as within the same memo, Ferguson declared:

Very careful consideration was given to the selection of Chairmen ... , and the following principles were laid down. The Chairman should be a man who will command the confidence of all sections of the agricultural community—landowners, farmers, workers etc... Another consideration was rather important in certain counties, namely, the desirability of ensuring the use of the county staff by selecting a chairman who would be able to obtain services.⁹⁴

It is important to note the emphasis that Ferguson places on chairmen being 'able to obtain services', something that Dunnington-Jefferson was clearly able to do through his position as chair of the county council.

Conclusion

In order to assess the importance of local networks in delivering the government's Second World War agricultural policy this paper has concentrated on three sets of relationships at three different levels. The first between Whitehall and the CWAECs,

⁹³ TNA: MAF 53/145 Memo, c.1939.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

the second between the CWAECs and the farmer, and the third, the internal dynamics of the CWAEC itself. They were all managed differently, and each had their own subtleties. This study has clearly identified that the East Riding, unlike many other counties, already had suitable networks in place, which were fit for purpose to deliver the government's strategy, and crucially at the outbreak of war the county's administration still recognised the importance of agriculture and its power base. The selection of chairmen was seen by government as crucial, and clearly Dunnington-Jefferson had the credentials to carry out the task, and in recognition was subsequently knighted.⁹⁵ Interestingly when the CWAEC was terminated in February 1948, and replaced by the peace time equivalent, he resigned his post.⁹⁶

The analysis has also revealed the importance of local networks in implementing national policy, and that the power of landed elites, coupled with the upper echelons of the agricultural community was still extremely powerful in the East Riding at a time when such power was waning in other counties. Additionally, the findings of this paper challenge the inefficiencies that have been identified with County Agricultural Committees, as within the East Riding this committee formed the core of its 'War Ag', while Whitehall purposely excluded such members in other counties. The strong links between the landed elites, the county's farmers and the County Council strongly suggests that the East Riding's economic, cultural and political base was still dominated by agriculture at the outbreak of the Second World War resulting in the transition to increased agricultural production being smoother than in some counties, where power associated with a truly agricultural economy had declined and needed significant resurrection. It has also been suggested that the county's farmers, as well as being aware of the nation's need for increased production, also recognised the financial opportunity associated with these forced changes.

Some commentators have argued that the traditional power associated with the landed elites, and those of the yeoman farmer class, was generally a negative and relatively undemocratic process. However, this essay has demonstrated circumstances in which this mode of power enabled the effective implementation of policy. It was eminently suitable in a time of crises, when clear direction and timely decision making was essential, and the presence of credible expert farmers and agriculturalists on the county council was clearly a very distinct practical advantage. It also appears that farmers in the East Riding came through the war time programme of enforced modernity and associated change with the minimum of grievance. This positive reaction was probably due to the fact that in a county almost entirely reliant on agriculture, the majority quickly identified the economic benefits of such change. Moreover, when the county entered the post war period, many of those who had embraced the imposed changes went on to capitalise on the benefits brought about by the government's support for agriculture, which was aimed at consolidating the progress brought about by necessity in times of conflict.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Hall, *A History of the Yorkshire Agricultural Society*, p. 165.

⁹⁶ TNA: MAF 80/3448 ERCWAEC Mins, 11 Feb. 1948.

⁹⁷ For post war development see Martin, *The Development*, pp. 69–83 & Kenneth Blaxter and Noel Robertson, *From Dearth to Plenty: The Modern Revolution in Food Production* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), pp. 22–23.

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