

Mrs. Bell's family pose for a photograph in the hayfield. Included are Mabel, aged nine, James (four) and John (six) sitting on the horses. Gladys (20), holding the horse's head, and Edith (22), Margaret (18), Isabella (23), William (14) and Jane (16) sitting on the hay.—[N.E.]

Girls run 142-acre farm in Swaledale

At a farm in Swaledale, a mother and four of her daughters are proving their worth as farmers by working, with no outside help, a 142-acre stretch of farmland.

When her husband died last September Mrs Edith Bell, of Low Whita Farm, Low Row, near Reeth, was faced with a difficult decision—whether or not to leave the land which had been farmed by the Bell family for 80 years.

She decided to stay on in the interests of her ten children, and the four elder daughters, Isobella, aged 23, Edith, aged 22, Gladys, aged 20 and Margaret, aged 18, willingly settled down to the task.

They had a high standard to maintain, for their father had a reputation in the district for being a successful man with sound views on farming. He frequently exhibited at local shows and two years ago, at Leyburn, his bulls took the first four prizes

In addition to the land, the sisters found themselves responsible for a large flock of sheep and 36 head of cattle. They had to tackle many of the jobs which on other farms fall to the men, including sheep-shearing and maintaining the stone walls which bound the farm. Under their mother's guidance they soon became a close-knit team each taking her own particular responsibilities.

Eighteen-year-old Margaret looks after all the sheep, for example, and Gladys cares for the calves

They have become familiar figures at Leyburn and Hawes markets where the family is frequently represented by the entire quartette and sometimes by the two older sisters. They hope to enter some of their stock at shows later in the year.

The recent spell of fine weather has given them their hardest task so far—that of gathering in the hay crop. During the past few weeks the entire family has been called upon to lend a hand Jane, aged 16, has taken advantage of a break from her job as a clerk to join her sisters in the hayfields. The school-children, William, aged 14, Matthew, aged 11, Mabel, aged nine, John aged six, and the baby of the family, four-year-old James, have contributed a lot of enthusiasm, if little real help. With the exception of the younger children, the family has often worked until midnight to take full advantage of good weather

The vigour and enthusiasm with which the family, particularly the older sisters, has met a challenge to its ability as farmers has justified Mrs. Bell's opinion that farming teaches young people to be independent and to use their initiative.