

Introduction

At the outbreak of World War One, life for Britain's women was mainly tied to a life of domesticity, their places still largely in the home.

Now, as Britain's men headed abroad to fight, women took their place in factories, shops and offices across the country. And everything had the potential to change

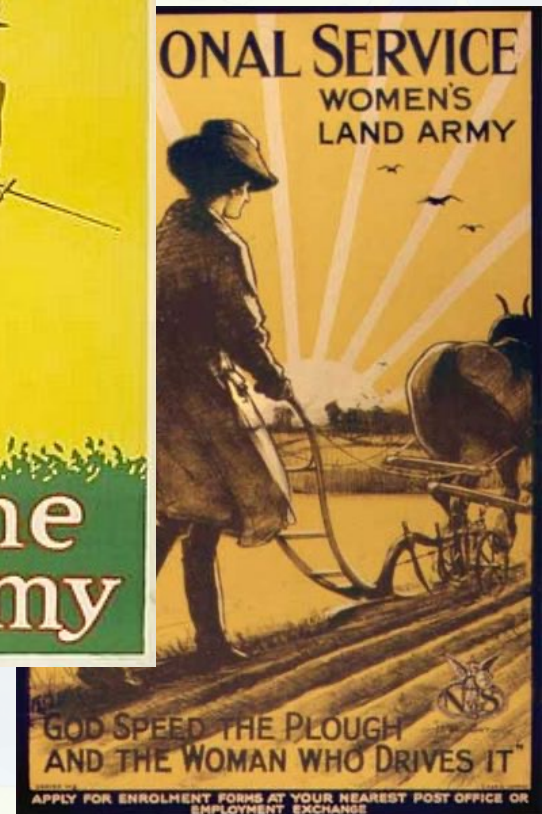
What was life like for the hard-working women who kept wartime Britain going? And, having proved they were a match for the demands of the wartime economy, were their efforts rewarded with better rights and greater freedom when peace returned?

Why Were Women So Important?

Due to the fact that many men were away fighting in the war, there were lots of jobs that the men had left behind that still needed doing, such as farming.

In addition to this, there were jobs to help the war effort, such as making ammunition, like bombs and missiles.

Women took on these jobs too.



Women's Working Roles

Engineers

Spying

Railway Guards

Police

Bus and Tram
Conductors

Women took on many roles
during the First World War

Nursing

Bank Clerks

Postal Workers

Farming

Ticket
Collections

Fire Fighting

Making
Ammunition

What Else Did Women Do?

It's important to remember that whilst men were away and women had to work, they were also running the household and caring for the rest of the family.

Here's some of the household tasks they did:

Mending or sewing clothes

Cooking meals

Keeping local traditions alive, such as sword dancing and morris dancing

Looking after children

Queuing for rations

Writing letters to family away fighting

Putting up black outs

Gardening for home grown food

Watch More...

Kate Adie, a famous BBC war reporter, presented a series of short films about the role of women during the First World War.

www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z9bf9j6#zqkrq6f

Land Girls

Land Girls was the name given to the women who worked on farms and on the land.

They were part of the *Women's Land Army (WLA)*.

These roles were essential to make sure there was enough food.

By the end of 1917, there were 23 000 women working in the WLA. In addition, there were over 250 000 female farm labourers.



The Canary Girls



During the war there was a huge demand for ammunitions including bombs, missiles and bullets.

The work was dangerous because women worked with toxic chemicals on a daily basis. One chemical, TNT, was used in bombs and working with this turned your skin yellow. This is how they earned their nickname 'The Canary Girls'. The women also experienced other side effects including: sickness, chest pains and skin sores.

Life in the Factories

Conditions were poor and the work was hard. What's the real story behind this picture of Woolwich Arsenal?

Accidents waiting to happen

An explosion at a TNT plant in Silvertown, East London, cost 73 people their lives and destroyed hundreds of nearby homes in January 1917.

The gender gap

Though women often earned more than they had before the war, workers in munitions factories were still paid as little as half the wages of the men doing similar jobs.



Yellow peril

Dangerous chemicals caused health problems that would outlast the war itself. TNT, for instance, turned thousands of workers' skin yellow – the so-called 'canaries' of the arms factories.

Work/Work balance

When productivity was all that mattered, there was no work/life balance on offer. In order to keep pace with demand from the front line, 12 hour shifts were common – and some women worked 13 days without a break.

War's end: opportunities lost

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z9bf9j6#zqkrq6f>

Watch short film about Amy Elizabeth May

'For some, life after the war offered new opportunities. The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919 made it illegal to exclude women from jobs because of their gender.'

Nurses

Women were not allowed to fight on the front line in the First World War. However, they were often very close to the front line, nursing injured or dying soldiers.

There were not enough trained nurses when the war began, so many women volunteered as part of *Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD)*.



Not Just Work

With men away at war, women were encouraged to take part in things that they had never usually done before then. One of these included football.

Many female factory workers formed teams. Thousands attended the matches!

One of the most famous teams were Blyth Spartans, who never lost a game!

Their star player, Bella Raey, scored 133 goals.

However, after the war in 1921, the FA banned women from playing and some never played again.



The End of the War

At the end of the war, many men returned home to the British Isle.

Think about how men and women would feel about their jobs at this point?

Would all the jobs still be needed?

What would men do when they returned?

Discuss what the jobs had done for women.



What would women think about men coming home?

What would men think about coming home?