

# WOMEN IN WW1

Even before the War women made up a substantial part of the industrial workforce. Here in the Borders they worked mainly in textile manufacture. Kelso had no textile mills, only Hogarth's and the nail factory, so women here worked mainly in service, shops or farming (either paid or unpaid). By 1915 women were brought into the munitions factories in large numbers; eventually almost a million women were employed throughout Britain. Kelso women worked in the vast factory at Gretna. The government recognised that working women would need day care for their children and provided funds towards the cost of day nurseries, but only for munitions workers. By 1917 there were more than 100 day nurseries across Britain. There was NO provision for women working in other forms of employment and they had to rely on friends and family. German submarines were destroying shipping; the desperate need to grow more food and shortage of farm labour due to conscription, led to the creation of the Women's Land Army in February 1917. By 1918, over 113,000 women (plus prisoners of war) were in agricultural labour from ploughing to felling trees.

Working in a munitions factory was well paid compared with the norm of domestic or shop work, but it was dangerous, unpleasant and long hours. Some of the women worked in large factories filling shells with TNT, a poisonous explosive which could cause toxic jaundice. This turned the skin yellow, caused liver damage and could lead to death. There were several devastating factory explosions with a number of deaths. Many women in factories took to wearing trousers.

Many factories encouraged sport and the foundation of Ladies Football teams. In 1921 women were banned from playing on Football League grounds! The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) suspended its campaigns for women's suffrage, recognising the need to support the war effort. The Representation of the People Act 1918, gave the vote to all men over 21, but only to those women over the age of 30 who satisfied certain criteria. In 1919, Lady Astor became the first woman MP to sit in the Commons.

The first women police officers were known as WOMEN'S PATROLS. Their main responsibilities were to maintain discipline and monitor women's behaviour around factories and hostels, to ensure that women did not take anything into the factories which might cause an explosion and to patrol public areas such as railway stations, streets, parks and public houses.

In Transport, women began to work regularly as bus conductresses, even bus drivers, as ticket collectors, porters, carriage cleaners and in engine workshops. During the war, the number of women working on the railway rose from 9,000 to nearly 50,000. Of course, as soon as the war ended and the men started returning, the women lost their jobs and were forced to return to domesticity.

Women began to pressure for their own uniformed Services before August 1914. A War Office investigation showed that many jobs being done by soldiers in France could perfectly well be done by women and the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) was established in December 1916. In April 1918 the WAAC was renamed Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps. The Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) was formed in November 1917 and the Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF) on 1st April 1918. Altogether, over 100,000 women joined Britain's armed forces during the War.

In 1914 the help offered by Scots doctor Elsie Inglis was turned down by the War Office. She went on to create the Scottish Women's Hospitals on the fighting fronts and Inglis herself went out to Serbia to treat the sick and wounded.

The deaths of over 700,000 British men led to much talk during the 1920s of "surplus women who would never find husbands". However, the new professions opening up to women such as teaching and medicine were only available to women who were not married.