

# Resistance, Employment, Displacement: The Employment of Women in Leicestershire during the First World War

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**D**uring the war the employment of women in Leicester, Leicestershire and neighbouring counties developed in similar ways to the rest of the country. In the early months of the war very few new employment opportunities opened up to them, as they were not seen to be a necessary cog in the war machine. After Christmas 1914 however, some politicians began to foresee that women workers might become essential to the war effort. Consequently, in March 1915, the government invited women to register for emergency war work. What they discovered was that a large proportion of women were totally untrained in most spheres of industry and commerce. It was also soon realised that there was widespread reluctance and resistance to the employment of women from employers. Opposition also came from trade unionists who were particularly resistant to female labour.

As the war progressed and the availability of male labour diminished, particularly after conscription was introduced in 1916, women entered the workforce in greater numbers. They proved to themselves and to most of the population that they were capable of doing valuable and responsible work that had previously been denied them. Even though they were not employed on the same economic terms as men, they experienced new freedoms, economic independence and a sense of value and satisfaction that they were contributing to the war effort.

As soon as the war began, upper and middle class women threw themselves into charity work, fund raising, welfare work, committee work and various other forms of voluntary endeavours. Many of these women had previously served on a wide variety of committees. Consequently it was not new territory to them, but the urgency of it was perhaps more pressing than ever before. Mrs Harrison, Mrs Oliver, Mrs Kemp, Mrs Ethel Clarke and Miss Vincent served on the Leicester War Hospitals Games Committee, (later known as the Leicester War Hospitals Committee). (1) Originally the Committee was formed to provide literature and games for soldiers at the Base Hospital, but within a short period of time they were catering for the needs of ten war hospitals in the county and 'The most important development during the year [1915] had been the organization of a regular and adequate supply of tobacco and cigarettes for all the patients.' (2)

In October 1914 the Leicestershire County Committee for National Relief appointed a 'Ladies Sub-Committee' comprising the county's 'worthy' women who were not only accustomed to working on such committees, but were also expected to do so because of their position in society, and for the respect and authority they would automatically command. Lady Maud Hastings, the Honourable Mrs Mary Packe and other titled women served on this committee. Their purpose was to organise working parties of women to repair soldiers' uniforms, make hospital garments, and other requirements for the St John Ambulance, the Red Cross Society, the Navy League, the Belgian Relief Fund and other such organizations. (3)



*First World War postcard of women sewing for the Red Cross.*

Other committees that developed during the war were well peppered by middle class and, to a lesser extent, working class women. Edith Bond served on several committees, including the Central Committee of Women's Employment and Training, the Young People's Employment Committee, the Leicestershire National Education Union and, along with Louise Donaldson and members of the Women's Cooperative Guild, she helped to form and serve on the Leicester Day Nursery Committee. Maria Leafe, a member of the Women's Labour League, who had taken a leading role in the agitation against profiteering and food hoarding, was elected to serve on the local Food Control Committee, formed in 1917 to '... bring to the attention of all classes of the community the extreme seriousness of the Food Crisis and to induce them to exercise the strictest economy in food stuffs of all kinds.' (4)

Although women served on many of the war committees they did not usually hold positions of power and the Leicester Food Control Committee was no exception. The main officers were all male, apart from Mrs Alice Pemberton Peake, who was the chairperson of the Communal Kitchens Sub-Committee. The School's Sub-Committee, comprising of seventeen men and twelve women, two of whom were Miss Sarah Heron, principal of Wyggeston Girls' School and Miss Agnes Farman, senior teacher at Leicester School of Art, played an important role during a Food Campaign Week, in May 1917. Their aim was to introduce the need for food economy in schools by essay writing on the subject and integrating it into the curriculum, especially in history, geography and arithmetic lessons. The pupils were also given thousands of leaflets to distribute in the community and it was hoped that their parents would take an interest in what their children were doing and learn from them. (5)

Women's committee work was expected, but when it came to paid war work for women it was not so readily accepted. Leicestershire, like the rest of the country, saw much opposition to women joining areas of the workforce in which they had not previously played a role. Trade unions, fearful of the dilution of labour, were particularly opposed to women joining the workforce. This can be clearly seen in May 1915 when a heated discussion on the subject took place at a meeting of the Leicester Trades Council. The attitude of its members towards the employment of women was one of unbending hostility. This attitude was largely due to deep-rooted suspicion that female labour 'would be used as a powerful weapon in the hands of the unscrupulous capitalist class against trade unionism and the principles embodied therein'. (6) Mr George Parbury was particularly concerned that five hundred middle class women had registered for war service and believed that:

If ever these middle class women got into factories they would breed discontent against trade unionism. They were naturally antagonistic to trade union principles. He had no faith in them, and these non-trade unionists must be watched. (7)

Councillor A. J. Hill, representing the Tramway and Vehicle Workers Union, thought that middle class women were the most dangerous because they had 'Government recognition', Mr Mark did not want them as tramway workers and Alderman Chaplin thought that 'one afternoon in a factory would settle them.' (8) The meeting concluded with a resolution being passed, with only one dissenting voice, that, a) women should not be employed until it proved impossible to obtain male labour, b) women should be paid the standard rate paid to men recognised by the unions, c) that a written guarantee should be obtained to the effect that all female labour be dispensed with at the end of the war. (9)

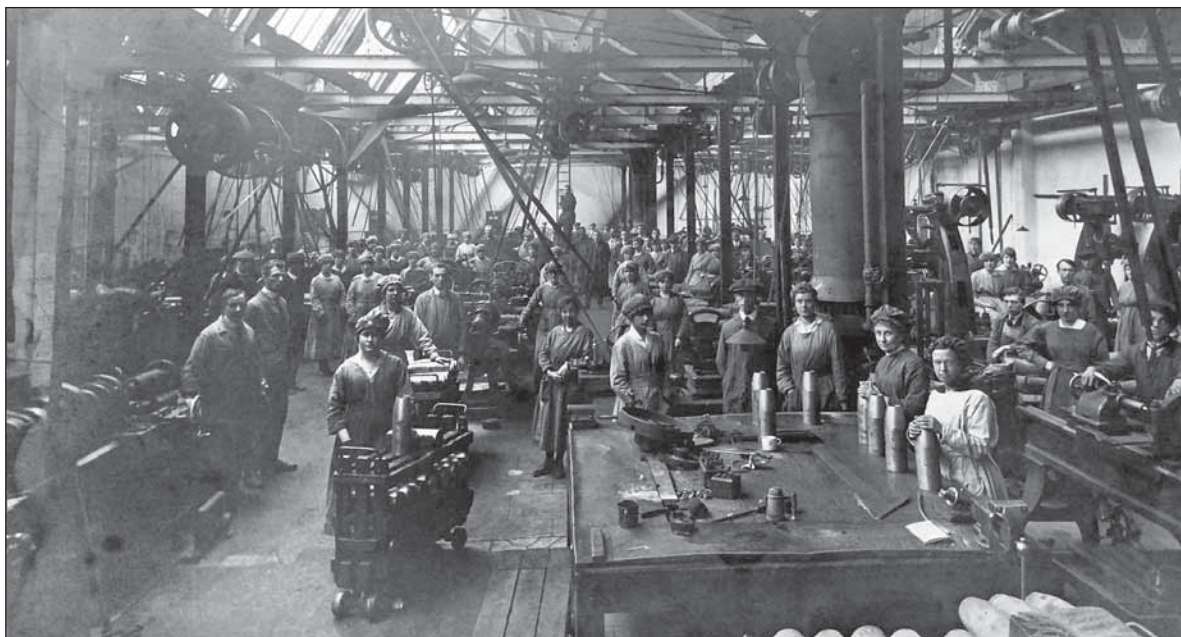
Against the backdrop of such hostility from the trade unions some women had been employed in war work but many others had not. It was not until 22nd May 1916 that the first meeting of the Leicester District Advisory Committee for Women's War Employment was held. Their objective was to stimulate the employment of women in positions left vacant by men joining the colours. The chairperson, Alderman North, made a point of assuring the representatives of trade unions that the Committee would 'not oust a single man from his job'. (10) He also strongly stressed that it would only be a temporary measure and that the jobs would be given back to the men after the war ended. Mr Duncan Henderson appealed to the unions to:

... impress upon their members the need for cooperation with foremen by assisting to teach the girls those operations which it had been decided they could do. There was no desire on the part of the employers to keep women unnecessarily on any jobs usually done by men after the war. (11)

Prior to the formation of the Leicester District Advisory Committee for Women's War Employment, a whole new form of employment for women was born in May 1915, when the Ministry of Munitions was established. Very few women had been employed in munitions work prior to this date. But from now on, the new Ministry could veto trade union practices and directly recruit women for work in munitions factories. However, as discovered in March 1915, the vast majority of women were unskilled and untrained to carry out such work.

The training of women for munitions work was, therefore, critical if shell production was to increase at the rate required by the armed forces. Loughborough Technical Institute, whose principal from September 1915 was Herbert Schofield, played a pivotal role in the introduction of a scheme to train women to a semi-skilled level in shell production. One factory in Leicester to take advantage of this training scheme was The Standard Engineering Co. Ltd. On 13th January 1916, the managing director, H. Stanley Pochin, wrote to William Brockington, Director of Education for Leicestershire, stating that they were about to start manufacturing shells in one month's time and that:

We shall require about 220 females in this factory, and as it is a government factory we shall be pleased to hear from you if you can help us in educating this labour at Loughborough ... you can readily see it will be a very big undertaking for us to educate all these girls ourselves quickly, and help from the Education Committee would be of great assistance to enable shells to be turned out in larger quantities in very much less time. (12)



Women munitions workers at the Standard Engineering Co. Ltd., Leicester. (Reproduced by permission of the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, location mark DE1620/78/13/1.)

As the war progressed, more and more women, particularly married women, joined the firm as fitters, sheet iron workers and shell makers. Working in munitions factories was extremely dangerous work and many women suffered serious medical problems and sometimes even death, due to using highly toxic substances. There was also a very high risk of an explosion happening. One of the worst during the war took place not far from the Leicestershire border at the V. C. Shell Filling Factory, Chilwell Nottinghamshire, on 1st July 1918. The explosion happened at 7.10 pm when a large number of workers were in the building. Fatalities reached 134 and there were over 150 injured, many of whom were women. (13) Despite the dangers of munitions work, women were keen to do it for both patriotic reasons and the relatively high wages they received, although this was variable.

Apart from women working at The Standard Engineering munitions factory, there were numerous firms in the county where women worked in small workshops, as well as large factories. Not all of the women came from the working class. Eleanor Russell, for example, came from a middle class background. Her father, Samuel Russell, was the owner of an iron foundry and mechanical engineering factory in Leicester. In the 1914 edition of the *Wyggeston Girls' Gazette*, it was reported that Eleanor had just gained a second class degree at Oxford and was presently studying social work. However, in 1915, she gave this up to work in a munitions factory:

I first became a munition-worker in the autumn of 1915, when I had the good fortune to be one of a group of 5 sent to the Woolwich Arsenal for training in various processes connected with the filling of

ammunition. Ours was one of the first classes for women held within the walls of the Arsenal, and we were received by the workmen sometimes with jeers, occasionally with cheers. After a week's holiday we were informed that we were to help start work at a new National Filling Factory. There was a doctor, several nurses, a fire brigade, a detachment of women police and a military guard ... [we were] warned of every danger in the whole factory [and] there are usually a few who decide to serve their country elsewhere. Perhaps the greatest dangers the workers run is in the risk of permanently damaging their health through working with poisonous explosives. (14)

The 1916 edition of the School's Gazette recorded that G. Samuel, an ex-pupil of Wyggeston Girls' School, like Eleanor, was recorded as having become an inspector in a munitions factory. (15) She was hoping to go to Newnham College, Cambridge the following year. Another ex-pupil was Lisette Stibbe, the daughter of Godfrey and Fannie Stibbe. She was recorded as doing 'most responsible work in testing instruments manufactured for military purposes.' (16) Like Eleanor, she came from a middle class family, her father being a manufacturer of hosiery machinery, and would not therefore, normally have been destined to work in a factory.

On 8th January 1916, the Health of Munitions Workers Committee issued a report on the welfare supervision of munitions workers. It declared that welfare supervision was a vital part of factory management and that it was 'particularly essential where women and girls are concerned.' (17) The best person to carry out this work they



believed was a woman supervisor of ‘... good standing and education, of experience and sympathy, and tactful and sensible in her dealings with others.’ (18) In an article published in the *Leicester Pioneer* in June 1916, the manager of a munitions factory was interviewed about the welfare of women in his factory. The article, unfortunately, does not mention whether this was a munitions factory in Leicester, but it nevertheless expresses an opinion about the attitude towards women workers:

No man can understand the way a girl’s mind works and therefore it falls to the lot of women to supervise the health, food, housing conditions of girl workers!’ The manager went on to say that his girls were ‘... as good as gold [but] I’m not saying that because they are cheap, for there isn’t a girl here who gets less than 35s a week, nor because they’re submissive, for they are as independent as the devil ... Nevertheless they can’t help being a lot of trouble. (19)

According to F. P. Armitage in *The War-Time Story of a Midland Town*, Leicester did not employ a woman supervisor until 1917. This was Laura Taylor, née Thompson, who before her marriage to Cardinal Taylor was a school teacher. Armitage tells us that ‘She bought food for them in times of stress, gave first aid in cases of accident and reduced sickness to a minimum.’ (20)

Increasing numbers of working women with children during the war prompted concern for the welfare of their infants and a day nursery was established in Rutland Street. Instrumental in its foundation was the Leicester branch of the Women’s Co-operative Guild, Edith Bond and Louise Donaldson, who had formed the Day Nursery Society. Leicester Corporation gave a fifty pound grant towards the

cost of equipping it and continued to help finance the running of two further nurseries opened in Talbot Lane and Melton Road. (21) Just before the Rutland Street nursery opened, ex-pupils of Wyggeston Girls’ School were asked to become volunteers there.

The progression of the war opened up further forms of employment for women, jobs from which they had previously been barred because of the law, a lack of education and training, and the belief that they were simply not capable. Women joined the Volunteer Reserve of Women which provided ancillary work behind the trenches and at home doing such jobs as signallers, dispatch riders, telegraphists and drivers, etc. Elsie Bonsor, another ex-pupil of Wyggeston Girls’ School, aged approximately 21, was reported in the School’s Gazette, of 1917, to be:

... in sole charge of a motor lorry, which she not only had to drive but repair. She is busy in the transport of heavy war material between Leicester and other midland towns. (22)

Clerical work, like so many other jobs, was a male occupation before the war and because of the growing shortage of male clerks the Home Office Clerical and Commercial Occupations Committee issued a circular, on 5 November 1915, to all Local Authority Education Committees. It proposed that as soon as possible, a countrywide scheme for the training of ‘educated women’ in clerical duties should be implemented if the trade of the country was to be maintained. The circular categorically stated that ‘The fact of the temporary character of the work, that it is for the duration of the war only, should be made quite clear’ (23) to the girls and women when they joined the courses. On 11th November, Herbert Schofield, principal

of Loughborough Technical Institute, wrote to William Brockington, Director of Education for Leicestershire, regarding the Government circular, suggesting that only two centres in Leicestershire should initially be established, one in Leicester and the other in Loughborough and that if the scheme succeeded then others could be opened in Coalville, Hinckley and Melton Mowbray. (24)

Before establishing a clerical training course at the Leicester School of Art and Technology, it was decided, on 18th November, to hold discussions with the Chamber of Commerce to see if there was a need for such classes. The Chamber of Commerce contacted over 300



Women munitions workers in the yard of the BU, Belgrave Road, Leicester. The words on the four shell cases spell out ‘A PILL FOR BILL’, ‘Bill’ being a reference to Kaiser Wilhelm. (Reproduced with acknowledgement to Sue Templeman.)

members, of which 103 replied, with only 5 being favourable to the idea and therefore they did not want to fund the running of classes. (25) Consequently, classes did not then go ahead at Leicester School of Art and Technology, but a course was started immediately at Loughborough Technical Institute. On 31 January 1916, a further day course, of eight to ten weeks, began at the New Council School, Hugglescote, Leicestershire, run by Frederick William Lough. By 25th March 1916, there were thirty-six girls and unmarried women who had taken the Hugglescote course. (26)

The Leicester School of Art and Technology, however, did employ seventeen year old Winifred Loweth as a clerk, but only for the duration of the war. In October of the following year the School decided to develop their library and required '... a well-trained person to classify the available material and arrange for its effective circulation. (27) The principal, Benjamin Fletcher, wishing to save money, recommended that a well-educated girl be appointed to the job on a salary of ten shillings per week. (28)

The progression of the war saw further opportunities of employment for women. In November 1915 the Leicester Guardians' Poor Law Infirmary Committee appointed the wife of Mr Norman, who had been the storekeeper before enlisting. This was a common way in which many women kept their husband's job open during the war. Mr Norman had received a wage of thirty shillings per week, but the chairman of the committee did not agree that Mrs Norman should also be paid this amount. He thought she would be better off than most people because she would receive her separation pay. (29)

Women doctors in Leicester began to make inroads into more senior posts during the war. In 1916, Dr Barbara Rutherford took charge of the Borough Hospital until early 1917 when she left to take medical charge of a munitions factory. Dr Mary McNeill also left that year to join a women's hospital in Salonica. Charles Killick Millard, the Medical Officer of Health for Leicester, wrote the following comment about the two doctors 'I wish to put on record that both these women M.O.s proved very satisfactory and efficient and we parted from them with regret.' (30)

In January, 1917, Dr Bessie Symington became the first female consultant venereologist to be appointed by Leicester Infirmary. It had been necessary to appoint a woman to the post because of the growing number of

women infected by the troops returning from the front. Although this was a new opening for women doctors, Bessie's salary was not on a par with her male counterpart, Henry John Blakesley, who received two hundred pounds per annum, as opposed to Bessie's one hundred and fifty. (31)

Despite the growth of new employment opportunities for women, opposition to them continued in many quarters and this can be seen in February 1916 at the Loughborough tribunal acting in accordance with the Military Service Act. A provision merchant had applied for the postponement of two employees, one 29 year old clerk and cashier and another who worked in the grain department. They were granted a one and a two month postponement, respectively, but it was pointed out to the employer that they presently employed no female labour and that 'There were women waiting for such jobs [who were] . . . being trained exactly for such purposes to enable the firm to avail themselves of this opportunity. (32)

In contrast, the Brush Electrical Engineering Company, in Loughborough, did employ women. They were engaged in munitions work, manufacturing vehicle bodies and aircraft construction. Although probably not employees of Brush, Dorothy Hartshorn and Lois Stewart, both ex-pupils of Wyggeston Girls' School were, in July 1918 ' . . . learning to make parts for aeroplanes. They are training at Aston Technical School for 6 weeks and then they expect to go to Coventry. (33) Not very far from Loughborough, at Sutton Bonington, just inside Nottinghamshire, the Hathern Brick and Terra Cotta Company also employed a considerable number of women to make acid resistant stoneware, which was essential to the production of explosives.



*First World War workers at the Hathern Brick and Terra Cotta Company, Sutton Bonington, Nottinghamshire. (Courtesy of the late Catherine and David Crawford).*





Leicester tram conductors, c1916. (Reproduced by permission of the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, location mark DE3736/1628/2.)



First World War window cleaners at the Great Central Railway Station, Leicester. (Reproduced by permission of the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, location mark DE3736/1189.)

Even though many companies and trade unions were unwilling to employ women, they were often forced to, as there were insufficient men available. This can be seen to have happened on 6th October 1915, when, less than five months after the Leicester Trades Council had met to discuss the prospect of women joining the workforce and where Mr Mark had said that he did not want women working as tramway workers, it was decided by the Leicester Tramways Traffic and Works Sub-Committee, chaired by Alderman George Banton ‘... that in the opinion of the sub-committee it is expedient to arrange for the temporary employment of women to act as conductors during the War in consequence of the present short supply of men.’ (34)

Working as conductors on Leicester’s trams made women very visible in an occupation that had previously been denied to them. It is difficult to know how passengers initially responded to them, as it is with other women working outside of the domestic sphere, in such occupations such as window cleaners and jobs connected with the railways. Some indication of concern about the vulnerability and morality of women working in the public arena and with men was expressed by the Leicester branch of the National Union of Women Workers, who, in 1914, which was well before women had really entered these new areas of employment, produced a leaflet ‘... to help women and girls of the town to uphold a high standard of womanhood during these critical times’. (35) More than 1400 copies were circulated and the president, Miss Annie Clephan, ‘addressed several gatherings at Girls Clubs, Factories, Mother’s Meetings, etc. on the subject.’ (36)

It is difficult to know what concerns there were for the morality of women who were increasingly employed to work on the land. However, what is certain is that they were met with the same prejudice and opposition experienced by

their urban sisters. This not only came from farmers, but also from others involved with land cultivation and food production. Colonel Yate M.P., who presided at the AGM of the Leicestershire Agricultural Society in January 1916, expressed the opinion that women could not substitute for men and was much more in favour of boy labour. (37) However, as 1916 progressed it became more and more evident that female labour was needed on the land, and in the summer of that year pupils from Wyggeston Girls’ School volunteered to help with the harvest. G. Jones recorded her experience in the School’s Gazette:

When I decided to work on the land for a month under the Board of Agriculture, my mind was full of hazy ideas about the “simple life”, picturesque milking scenes, and haymaking as gentle exercise – It was a very great delusion. (38)

Setting up wheat shocks in the harvest fields was ‘... a process which involved staggering along with a wheat sheaf taller than oneself under each arm, each sheaf weighing about 28 lbs.’ At first she thought she was not sure if the male farm workers approved of girls working on the land ‘... but towards the end they got very friendly’ with one telling her that he ‘didn’t mind working with a man or a woman so long as she’d talk.’ (39)

This attitude certainly does not seem to have been the normal response to female labour by many farmers. G. Phillips writing in *Rutland and the Great War* said that ‘It took a great deal of time and patience and quiet perseverance to wear down the prejudices of farmers against the employment of women on the land. (40) A letter from Mr Prothero (president of the Board of Agriculture) to Lady Londonderry in September 1917 confirmed that women had had to ‘overcome many prejudices and encounter some ridicule. (41)

Evidence of such prejudice is exemplified at a meeting of the Shardlow Military Tribunal in early March 1916. Several farmers had applied for the exemption of employees on the grounds that they could not be replaced. When asked if they had endeavoured to secure female labour most said that they had not and that:

... they had little faith in women's capacity for work on the land, while at least two hailing from Sawley and Chaddesden respectively, flatly declared that they would give up their farms rather than resort to that expedient.

When they were told that the head cowman at Kingston Dairy was a woman, one of the farmers replied '... that that was an exceptional case' the chairman replied '... that these were exceptional times. (42)

To cope with the deepening crisis of food shortages the Women's Land Army was formed in January 1917. One thousand Women's Land Army training centres were opened throughout the country and the conditions of entry were board and lodgings paid during training, one free outfit and a wage of at least sixteen shillings per week, or the wage rate of the district. This meant that farmers now had to pay a government-backed minimum wage, instead of what they liked, and in many cases more than they had been paying to women, schoolchildren and the elderly.

In December 1917, Vena Grain, a 22 year old woman living in Quorn, Leicestershire, decided to join the Women's Land Army. Her recruiting officer was Lady Beatrice Toller, of Quorn Court. Vena thought that she was her only recruit. She was sent to Hanging Stone Farm, Woodhouse Eaves, where she lived for the six weeks during her training:

We used to live there ... and there was a woman to look after us ... and she used to put a glass of milk out at night, very often there'd be a big moth in it in the morning and you couldn't drink it. (43)

At the end of her training, Vena was designated a gardening job at Lindley Lodge, Nuneaton, Warwickshire, which for her could have been the other side of the world 'I had no idea where Nuneaton was, it was like going to America.' (44) Her main job was working in the greenhouses and the potting shed, which she really enjoyed. She was paid

nineteen shillings a week, of which fourteen shillings was taken out for bed and board:

I didn't have to buy any clothes, because I wore the [Land Army] uniform. There was breeches, boots that buckled down the side, my feet are suffering from them now, and a smock and then in the winter you was provided with a cardigan and a sort of hat, like a scouts hat. (45)

An aspect of the work which Vena found very different to what she had been used to was the fact that 'I'd not worked with men and it brings you out, you see.' (46) But this was certainly not the life for some Leicestershire girls and women as Vena explained:

Before the war ended and they were wanting recruits I had to come to Leicester. There was a lot of us Land Girls and we had a procession in the town trying to recruit people, advertising it, you see. But unless they wanted the life very bad they didn't want to leave Leicester because most of them was on munitions and earning good money. (47)



Window cleaners during the First World War, possibly Leicester, c1917. (Reproduced by permission of the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, location mark DE3736/1189.)





*Procession of the Women's Land Army in Leicester on 17th April 1918. (Reproduced by permission of the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland, location mark DE3736/1179.)*

The procession Vena attended took place on 17th April, 1918. It was organised by Agnes Fielding Johnson, Laura Taylor, Annie Clephan and Miss Story of the Employment Exchange.

Despite the huge contribution Leicestershire women made to the war effort, and the many gains made, not just in the work place but in other social, political and economic spheres, a very large number were only of a temporary nature, as traditional influences and values resumed almost as soon as the war ended.

During the war there had been many debates about what women's position in the workplace would be after the war. It was the main topic of discussion at the annual conference of the Women's Labour League in January 1917. Louise Donaldson, then president of the Leicester branch, spoke very powerfully on the topic:

Is she going to leave the arena of commerce, to lay down her uniform as tram conductor, postman and the rest and go back to her pots and kettles, to unpaid and unconsidered labour, or to the lower alleys of factory work and other industry to which she hitherto traversed? (48)

Some women did choose to go back to traditional roles, but many did not. The passing of the 1919 Restoration of Pre-War Practices Act was devastating for women who wished, or needed, to carry on working. The purpose of the Act was to fulfil the Government's pledge to trade unions to restore pre-war trade practices, trade union rules and ensure that skilled men be given jobs. Any employer not complying with the Act by continuing to employ unskilled, or semi skilled employees, most of whom were women, were fined.

Although the Act was only in place for a year it succeeded in displacing thousands of women from their jobs. Basically, it helped the trade unions to restore the pre-war status quo. The Act did not take into consideration married women who needed to work because their husbands had been killed, or disabled, during the war. Wages were also still very low for working class people, especially women, who needed to work in order for their families to survive. Unmarried women and girls also needed to work but increasingly found it difficult to find jobs in Leicester. This was highlighted at a meeting of the Leicester Trades Council, in September 1921:

Mrs Crooks '... hoped that the position of the unemployed women would not be overlooked.' Mrs [Mary] Bell Richards also '... drew attention to the terrible distress among women in the city [and that] there must be hundreds destitute.' The president concluded by saying that the delegates observations would be conveyed to the Unemployment Committee and 'the position of the women would be considered.' (49)

A report by Sarah Kate Sloane in the 1918 annual report of the Leicester branch of the National Union of Women Workers emphasised '... the necessity of women being welcomed into trade unions [and] equal pay for equal work and equal opportunities for men and women.' (50) A further report by the N.U.W.W. in the same year, looked at the position of women in engineering in Leicester and whether they had formed their own trade union, or been admitted into the men's. What they found was that '... large numbers of the women were already disbanded, engineering being only a temporary employment for women in this town.' (51)

Not only did the new forms of employment for women close after the war, but so too did one of the day nurseries opened during the war. The remaining two were combined into one at St Martin's Vicarage, where places were restricted to children of single mothers, women whose husbands were invalids and unable to work, or unemployed. This action reflects the return to the middle class value that a mother's place was in the home.

The 1919 Sex Disqualification Removal Act only really benefitted middle class women, but even then there were still restrictions placed on what they could do, some more hidden than others, as experienced by Dr Margaret Morton, a Leicester-born woman, who started her medical training at the end of the war. Qualifying in the mid 1920s it took her several years to find a house job due to the fact that very few



hospitals had accommodation for women and 'If you had a man houseman you couldn't possibly have a woman.' (52) Single middle class women, who began to enter the professions, were also forced to resign if they chose to marry.

In March 1921 Eleanor Rathbone (the first woman to be elected to Liverpool City Council in 1909) summed up the situation for women in her presidential address to the annual conference of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship: 'Public opinion had definitely taken a step back, and where, during the war, the cry had been the women are splendid, it is now women out you go.' (53)

Not only did many of the gains made by women during the war disappear, but so did their stories. Writing in the early 1950s, Vera Brittain, a Voluntary Aid Detachment nurse during the war and the mother of Shirley Williams, wrote:

Not least surprising was the failure of the war books which began to appear in the nineteen-twenties to give any adequate picture of the part that women had played. One category regarded war as an exclusively male business; a second displayed women in Andromache-like role of 'smiling through her tears'; and a third represented her as the meanest type of war-profiteer, battenning upon the sufferings and savings of the fighting soldier ... The story of the women who worked in hospitals and factories seemed to be relegated to casual references or hidden beneath soulless statistics. (54)

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