

How were the lives of women on the Home Front affected by the First World War?

Did World War One actually improve women's lives in Britain? Before WW1 women were not expected to work and if they did they did jobs such as cleaning and as nannies in domestic service which were low paid. They were not considered men's equals and as financially they were dependent financially on men they did not have the same social opportunities and it was not considered "proper" for women to smoke or drink. At the time, many people thought that the war helped to improve women's role in society politically and economically: they were earning more money as there were more job opportunities and they gained the vote (suffrage). Mrs Millicent Fawcett, a leading feminist and suffragette said 'The war revolutionised the industrial position of women it left them free.' The war did offer women more opportunities in the job market. Between 1914 and 1918 (WW1), an estimated two million women replaced men in jobs, This meant that there was an increase in the number of women in employment from 24 per cent in 1914 to 37 per cent by November 1918.

'...wages were higher, conditions better, and independence enhanced.'

The war bestowed two valuable legacies on women. Firstly, it opened up a wider range of jobs to female workers and meant that traditional women's employment, particularly domestic service (cleaning/nannies) collapsed. From the 19th century to 1911, between 11 and 13 per cent of the female population in England and Wales were domestic servants. By 1931, the percentage had dropped to under eight per cent. Nearly half of the first recruits to the London General Omnibus Company in 1916 were former domestic servants (cleaners/nannies) and the number of women in the Civil Service increased from 33,000 in 1911 to 102,000 by 1921. The advantages of these jobs over domestic service were obvious: wages were higher, conditions better, and independence enhanced.

Due to this independence and their work women found new respect from their male peers and were eventually granted the right to vote (if over 30 and owned their own property)

However, with these improvements came different changes... some not so positive. They faced work challenges: bullying in the work place; sexism; pay was not equal to that of men; health problems

1. What is another name for the vote beginning with S

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2. Between 1914 and 1918 how many women replaced men in jobs?

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3. Give two examples of jobs that were classed as domestic service

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4. What % of the female population worked in domestic service before 1911?
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5. What % of the female population worked in domestic service in 1931?

6. Give two examples of organisations women worked for during WW1.

7. Give three positive changes women experienced due to WW1.

8. Give 3 negative changes women experienced due to WW1.
