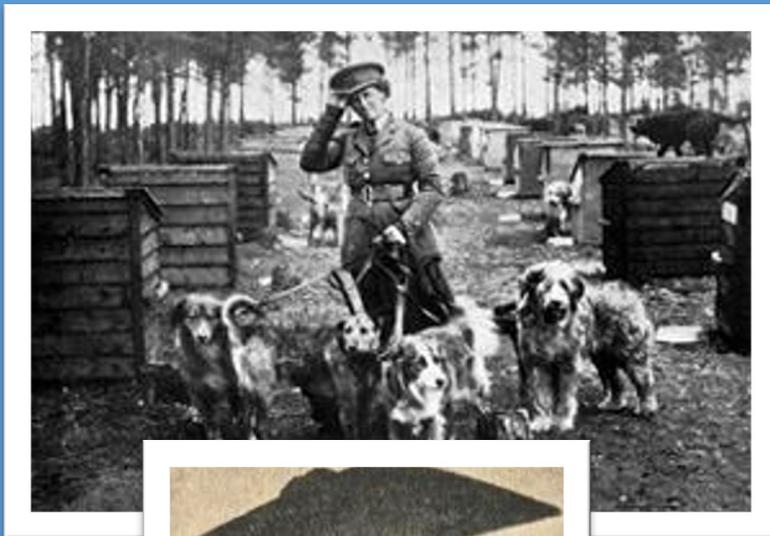




# Southend Schools Festival of Remembrance



## The Changing Role of Women in Southend During the Great War





# Southend Schools Festival of Remembrance



## Introduction

Before the Great War women were expected to get married, stay home and look after the children. Despite the respect for Queen Victoria, girls were lucky to learn to read and do basic mathematics, mostly, they were taught to cook, sew and if rich enough, play an instrument. Poorer unmarried girls went into domestic service, which meant they cooked and cleaned for richer families, like Alice Guy, Eva Forsdick's mother.



For upper working class girls, like Ellen Daly or Nurse Bradford, nursing was considered a nobler profession but was still largely frowned upon by mainstream society. While for more academic young ladies teaching might be suitable, either as a governess for a few children in well off family or at a school. Even as late as the 1960s if two teachers fell in love and wanted to marry, the woman would have to leave her profession to become a wife.



In Southend there were women who challenged these ideas, like Elizabeth Bannester and possibly the first female tram driver in the country, Annie Overton, but they had to fight very hard in order to achieve ambitions that young people completely take for granted in the 21st century. It is still hard to imagine just how restricted and dangerous it was to be female in Southend in 1910.





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This all changed with the coming of the Great War. The country needed hundreds of thousands of soldiers to fight, usually abroad. Women were considered too weak and delicate to be expected to do this so only young men were encouraged to leave their jobs and join up. Between 1914-18, over 5 million men marched off to war, which meant that grudgingly, women were accepted into all kinds of professions that they would have been barred from previously.

Of course, women were still expected to do everything they had done before – if they were married or had children they still were responsible for taking care of the house and children. Southend, like the rest of the country, had a great divide between rich and poor, but the richer families also found their lives harder because many of their domestic servants could earn much better money and more respect from a society at war in the factories so left to go and do war work.



So women who could afford it worked from home or in groups, such as Southend's Queen Mary's Needlework Guild and the Queen's Work for Women Fund. Often this involved knitting to provide comforts for the troops. Gloves and mittens were popular and could be completed fairly quickly. Not all of the

items were suitable and some of the military authorities felt that the well-intended gifts delayed the arrival of more essential war supplies.





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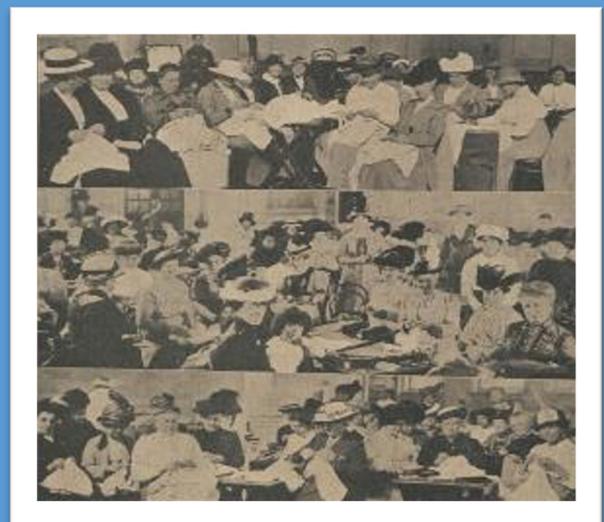


The Guild was formed in 1882 when the Matron of an orphanage in Dorset asked Lady Wolverton if she could provide 24 pairs of hand knitted socks and 12 jerseys for the children. This gave Lady Wolverton the inspiration of starting a small Guild amongst her friends to provide not less than two garments a year each to help the orphanage and other Charities. After a year they had attracted 460 members. In 1885 a friend of Lady Wolverton's, Her Royal Highness Princess Mary Adelaide, Duchess of Teck (mother of the future Queen Mary) became Patron of "The London Guild". The Guild was re named in 1889 to "The London Needlework Guild".



On the death of her mother in 1897 Her Royal Highness the Duchess of York, later Queen Mary, became Patron. In 1914 the London Needlework Guild's name was changed to "Queen Mary's Needlework Guild" and as part of the war effort literally hundreds of thousands of garments were packed up and sent out to troops overseas. Queen Mary requested garments and parcels to be sent to Friary Court, St. James's Palace, London, where, to this day we still coordinate the distribution of clothing to the UK Charities the Guild continues to help. Her Majesty was very much in charge during this time and there was a book printed to cover the work of the Guild from 1914 – 1919.

A report (picture right) in the Southend Standard of the ladies from Southend who joined this group to knit socks and gloves. There was an overwhelming desire to be patriotic and it was seen to be very important to be supporting the war effort and this was a small way that women of the upper classes were able to take part.





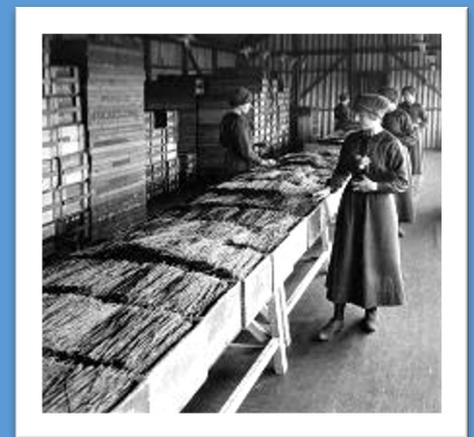
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The armaments industry in Britain was relatively small until the Great War. By Autumn 1914, it was obvious that this new form of warfare fought out of trenches needed huge amounts of artillery, spurred on by the so-called 'Shell Scandal' of spring 1915 where the men at the front were unable to fight due to shortages. The factories that made shells and ammunition therefore, were in desperate need of a workforce and had to employ women.

In Southend, many women were involved in making munitions. The Southend Corporation Electricity Works close to the London Road was partially converted into a munitions factory, which considering the obvious danger from the explosives was unusual. One of the largest factories in the area was Kynoch's Ltd, in Corringham, built on the site of the Coryton Oil Refinery where over 4,000 people worked during the Great War.

The women arrived at Kynoch's by train from all over Essex. The factory produced almost every element of munition; from exploding guncotton to cordite placed inside bullets to the TNT powder that the female workers mixed by hand which caused their skin and their babies skin to turn yellow!

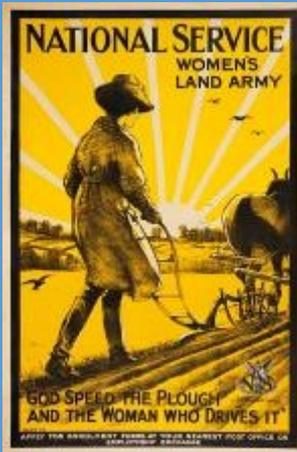


Eventually, lodgings in Fobbing were built for the women, separate from the men and their wage rates rose considerably, although, never anywhere near equal to that offered to the men. Although the war was harsh and terrible things happened, it also was considered a time of great freedom for some women as they could earn a wage at something other than domestic service.





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During a war when food becomes scarce, there is a greater need to produce food to feed everyone. Probably the biggest difference in Southend now to a hundred years ago is the amount of housing that has been built on the farms and orchards that were common a century ago.

When the men who worked on this land left to fight in the forces many young women joined a form of National Service for female civilian farm workers and came to be known as the Women's Land Army. Despite calling itself an 'Army' it was a civilian organisation. Overall, there were 23,000 women across the UK who joined up in WW1, less than a quarter of the 100,000 men by 1915 who had worked on the land who had gone to the Front.



Although there was some resistance at first by the farmers to having women replace the men, there is evidence they were a cheaper workforce as they were paid less, and they were expected to work at least a 50 hour week. Often the farmers also overcharged for board and lodging, too, the argument being that women were less capable than the men. However, the same farmers had members of the WLA threshing, ploughing, tractor driving and working with animals, in fact every job that was required to keep the farms functioning.





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## ANNIE OVERTON

Annie Overton was born in Leigh in 1897. Her father was a baker and her family moved away from Leigh when she was young, her grandparents still lived in Leigh. By the time that Annie was 17 in 1914 trams had become part of daily life in Southend and Leigh and in 1913 the population of Southend had reached 70,000 people. They were also widely used by the many holiday-makers who came to the town.

WW1 destroyed the tourist trade in the town and tram services were reduced to reflect this, as well as the fact that there were no men to run them. For the first time in Southend's history, women were recruited, and Annie was one of the first to be accepted.



The Leigh Society, who researched Annie, believe that she was to go on to be the first female tram driver in Britain. Apparently, the men she worked with called her 'Jimmy' so she would feel one of the boys.

Hamilton of Leeds were very against the use of female labour on trams, preferring disabled servicemen if "only a leg or arm were missing below a certain point."





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CAREY AUSTEN (born Nunn)

Carey Austen (born Nunn) and although all census records and her marriage certificate show her as another daughter of William and Ann Nunn she was actually born in 1881 in the workhouse at Rochford, the daughter of her elder sister Elizabeth. The workhouse building was later enlarged and became Rochford Hospital where most of the babies were born to families in Southend until the maternity unit moved to Southend Hospital earlier this century. Elizabeth, Carey's natural mother, later married and had more children; her husband was a widower so she had step-children as well

It appears that Carey never lived with her birth mother but grew up in various homes with her grandparents, first at 11 Hadleigh Road cottages, then in Norfolk Terrace which was near the Cricketers Pub and later at Salisbury Ave. She married in 1903 and lived in West London and a year later her daughter Gladys was born but sadly the marriage didn't last and she returned to Salisbury Ave in late 1910 where her son, Gilbert James, was born in January 1911. As I have already said her grandparents died in 1913 and 1914, but she stayed in Salisbury Ave with her children and her Aunt Flo and she became Head Cook at Westcliff High School for Girls. However, Gladys studied to become a music teacher and they needed a bigger house so they moved around the corner into West Road, Carey died there in 1978 aged 97 years and was buried with the rest of the family in North Road Burial Ground.

Gladys carried on teaching and living in West Road until, aged 94 she became ill and died quite quickly in Southend Hospital in 1996. Her ashes were buried between the two graves.





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## ROSINA SKY

6 February 2018 marked the centenary of some UK women being granted the right to vote in parliamentary elections, after decades of campaigning. One such woman was Rosina Sky. She led the charge for votes for women in Southend. She was born in Whitechapel in 1859, the daughter of a Russian tobacconist and pipe manufacturer. She married William Sky, and they had three children together, before divorcing. This was extremely unusual a hundred years ago and would have made Rosina's life very difficult.

As a single mother of three, Rosina ran a tobacconist shop of her own in Southend at 28 Clifftown Road. As a woman in a man's world, Rosina had all the responsibilities of running a business with none of the rights accorded to men in the same position. She was treasurer of the Southend branch of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), and a member of the Tax Resistance League, whose slogan was 'No Vote, No Tax'. Their key argument was that it was unjust for women to pay tax when without a vote they had no say in how it might be spent. We believe that she and Elizabeth Bannester (Southend's first female councillor) would have at the very least, known each other.

As can be seen in the local newspaper article, in September 1911, bailiffs seized goods belonging to Rosina in lieu of the taxes she had refused to pay. The goods were publicly auctioned, accompanied by a parade of the WSPU in Southend to protest. Further goods were confiscated from Rosina and sold in June 1912. She continued to run her shop until her death in 1922.

The Representation of the People Act 1918 gave the right to vote to women over 30 who met a property qualification – 8.4 million women in total. With so many men having been killed in the First World War, there was a fear that if equal voting rights were given female votes would outnumber male voters, and the country would end up with a 'petticoat parliament'.

(It's also worth noting that before the Act, only 60% of men over 21 had the right to vote. This meant that many of the men returning from military service would not have been able to vote. In addition to granting the vote to women, the Act also extended it to all men over 21, an additional 5.4 million men.)





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## RUFINA (ROSE) TIANI

Rufina's parents, Orazio and Mariantonia Tiani were born in a small village in Italy called Settefrati (Seven Brothers) and they came to London in the 1890s. Rufina was born in 1901 in Stratford, London.



She moved with her family to 239 North Road in 1905 where her parents ran a sweet shop and Orazio, whom everyone called Harry, made ice cream. At this time the family must have decided to anglicise the children's names, because Rufina was known as Rose on the census. We think that she was known as Ru-



fina at home.

Rufina had six brothers and sisters. This is the wedding photograph of one her brothers, Crescenzo Tiani. He was marrying Edith Sparrow. It's hard to imagine that this was probably the only photograph taken of that event, so this was a treasured item and people took having their picture taken very seriously because it was so expensive.

Rufina Tiani got married in 1924 when she was 23 to William M Martin. Two of Rufina's brothers, Antonio and Fillipi died of tuberculosis and were buried in North Road Burial Ground in Westcliff-on-Sea. Harry, despite living and working for most of his life in Southend was very unlucky and hadn't filled in his naturalisation the forms. When World War II broke out in 1939 he was interned. Harry died in 1943 aged 80.





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## BLANCHE RICHARDSON

Blanche was the youngest daughter of Thomas Riley Bannon and was described as, "A lady who adored all helpless things, dogs, babies and flowers." She married Edwin Hautenvill Richardson in 1894 and she and her husband acquired a land estate for farming on Carnoustie, East coast of Scotland where they had two sons. It was in Carnoustie that they were both able to pursue their mutual interest in dog training.



As a girl Blanche loved dogs and with her husband went on to learn all about the history of how dogs worked with soldiers and, she and her husband, a fellow dog-lover, trained dogs on the farm they had bought in Scotland.



When war broke out in 1914, there were no military dogs of any kind in the British Army save for one Airedale Terrier, who served with the 2nd Battalion Norfolk Regiment as a sentry. Blanche and Edwin were convinced of the essential role dogs could fill in wartime and had built up a large kennel of dogs who underwent experimental training to this purpose.

Their first two trained dogs, Wolf and Prince were a huge success, being faster and more nimble across shell holes and muddy fields, as well as being harder to spot than soldiers. In 1917 Lt-Col Richardson was asked by the War Office to build his British War Dog School. Blanche isn't mentioned but we know she continued to work with her husband in Shoeburyness.





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