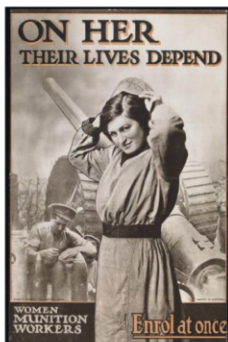




# New Opportunities



WW1 poster recruiting women for Munitions work

The outbreak of war led to unemployment as demand for traditional goods diminished. Derby foundries changed from domestic products to wartime necessities.

Between 1914 and 1918 an estimated 2 million women replaced men in the workforce across the UK resulting in an increase in female employment from 24% in 1914 to 37% in 1918.

Domestic service suffered most. In 1911 between 11% and 13% of female employees were domestic servants, by 1931 this had dropped to 8%. Servants saw the chance for higher wages, better working conditions and greater independence.

The 1911 Census demonstrates that 79% of working age women in the Parish were not in paid employment. 16% were domestic servants, the majority of these working on the Harrington Estate. Only 1 individual was working in a factory in 1911.



Are YOU in this? WW1 Recruiting Poster

## MUNITIONETTES

Work on the production of shells was vital to the war effort. Hal Kerridge who served on the Western Front explained:

*"Well, for every shell that we fired they fired a dozen. Oh, we were overwhelmed ..... So they removed .... all the restrictions about women's labour and said 'you can employ women where ever you like on whatever you like, whatever they're capable of doing - put 'em in the shell factories' and that's when we started to get shells and more shells and they were our saviour"*



Russell and Sons advertisement for kitchen ranges.

In December 1915 the national Shell factory number 12 opened in Peel foundry off Meadow road, Derby – the site is now under the loop road which connects St Alkmunds Way to the A52. It made shell casings and aero engine cylinders for Rolls Royce. Around 250 women were employed there during the war years.

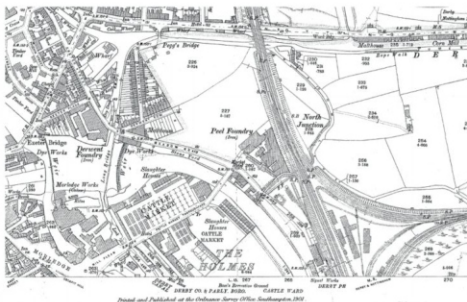
Midland Railway also devoted a large area of their works to regrounding shell cases.

The largest local munitions factory in the area was built at Chilwell near Nottingham and many women from Derby worked there. It opened in January 1916 and used toxic chemicals, mixing TNT and Amatol to fill the shells. By March 1916 7,000 shells a week were being made and it was said that most of the shells used at the Somme offensive in 1916 had come from Chilwell.

In 1916 2,000 women worked at Chilwell, all earning well above the national average wage because of the dangerous nature of the work. Many suffered from very poor health.



Crane Girls, Chilwell Munitions Factory. No consideration of Health and safety here.



Map showing location of Russell and Sons Peel foundry.



Transporting shells inside Chilwell Munitions Factory

Below are some reminiscences from girls who worked in the shell factories.

*"I was very frightened at first. There was large machinery making dreadful noises. My job was to fill the shells. Most of them were large, for big guns like Howitzers to fire. This was called stemming. The powder was poured into the shell case and rammed in with a broom handle or mallet. This had to be done a bit at a time and it took a lot of effort to get it all in."*

*"We were not allowed to wear our own clothes as no metal at all was allowed – and there were lots of metal in our corsets. No Jewellery was allowed. Only wedding rings and these had to be bound with thread. We were given caps that covered most of our hair and calf length dresses and aprons or trousers in some factories and had to change before we left the factory."*

*"The job was very dangerous – not only because the shells could explode but the powder got into our eyes and throat and lots of girls were very ill with it – some even died. In factories where TNT was used the workers went bright yellow and were called 'canary girls'"*



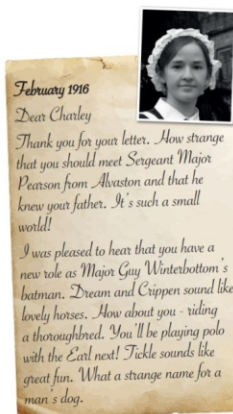
Canary Girls in Uniform



Women Machinists- Munitions Factory

## Alice in Munitions work

Alice and her fellow workers met with some hostility from the men employed in the shell factories.



*"You know how I complained about all the extra work we had to do now that you boys have joined up? Well, Elspeth (the kitchen maid) and I decided to leave and go to work at the Shell factory on Meadow road. Miss Baum was furious but we said we felt we had to help the war effort!*  
*The wages are very good and we only work a 12 hour shift. We get a hot meal at lunch time and our work clothes are provided. It's very noisy though and quite frightening. I can get to the factory in just over the hour if I catch the 25 tram from Alvaston to the terminus by the train station."*

*"It is lovely to have so much free time but it is difficult living back at home and having to share a bed with my sisters after all that time at the castle. My sister Eleanor has just left school and the housekeeper begged father to let her come to the big 'House as scullery maid. She is working very hard and finding it difficult but I expect she will get used to it as we all did. She cannot apply for other war work for a few years so it's the big house or nothing."  
*That's all for now.  
Look after yourself Charley  
Your friend  
Alice**

