

# EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN 2018

## Introduction

### Women won the right to vote in the UK 100 years ago...

The Representation of the People Act was adopted in, eventually paving the way for universal women's suffrage in the country. But the landmark act only granted a sliver of the UK's female population the right to cast a ballot.



Under the 1918 Representation of the People Act, women over the age of 30 who either owned land themselves or were married to men with property were given the right to vote.

This exhibition looks back in the archives and showcases the stories of women and events, and how their lives have changed over the last 100 years.



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## The McCorquodale's Strike 1915



McCorquodale's strikers having tea in Bradwell Vicarage Garden

*"Some of the more radical girls, they got together, they formed a little committee and they went to McCorquodale's asking for a rise in wages and McCorquodale's refused. I would think three quarters of the women probably came out on strike."*

May Brooks



Strikers march through Wolverton

**GIRLS STRIKE AT THE ENVELOPE WORKS.**  
 Yesterday week the whole of the employees of Messrs. McCorquodale and Co.'s Envelope Works, numbering over 800 males and females, were "blown out" by the hooter just after three o'clock. It is alleged that a war bonus had been distributed by the firm to some of the workers.  
 For some time after they had left work a great many hung about the Stratford Road discussing the situation, and it was evident a move was being made to organise a meeting for the following day to consider the position of affairs, and adopt a line of action acceptable to the majority of the workers. Late on Thursday night we got into communication with the Manager, Mr. H. E. Meacham, who politely declined to discuss the matter at all.

*"It was all quite exciting, at least to the younger element it was. McCorquodale's gave in and I understand that since then they have been very good employers."*

May Brooks

McCorquodale's printing works in Wolverton provided employment for railway workers' daughters. Most of the 800 workers were women – but supervision and management remained in the hands of men.

When war broke out, printing became a vital weapon with a huge official demand for ration books, posters, leaflets, enlistment orders and hundreds of military forms. With their husbands away at war, many women had control of the family purse for the first time and became more aware of differences in the way men and women were paid.

From the Wolverton Express 1915: *The work girls and men at Messrs McCorquodale's works were locked out on Thursday the 20th May, in consequence of a demand for a war bonus which it was alleged had been given to some of the men. Some 800 to 900 workers have been affected.*

*Negotiations between employers and employees failed to bring about a settlement satisfactory to both sides and on Wednesday morning when the works were re-opened only about 50 workers entered the factory.*

*A strong picket of girls was then placed outside the works. At the invitation of Mr. T. Moss a meeting attended by upwards of 700 women and girls was held at the Picture Palace. Mr. O. Wells of Bletchley presided. The following resolution on the motion of Miss. Axby, seconded by Miss. Golby, was unanimously passed.*

The strike lasted for more than two weeks.

Five hundred of the women workers joined the Paper Workers Union. The women's action in support of their demand for both a war bonus and recognition of the Union, involved pickets, parades, collections and meetings.

The women eventually succeeded in securing a 7.5% increase in their weekly earnings as 'war wages'.



McCorquodales interior



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## World War One

### BUCKS WOMEN'S LAND ARMY.

The Bucks Women's Land Army rallied at Aylesbury last week, and the landswomen, numbering over 200, presented a smart and business-like appearance in their slouch hats, smocks and breeches. Newport Pagnell and Bletchley districts were well represented under Mrs. Wellesley Taylor (Sherington), Lady Leon and Mrs. Vaughan Harley, the district representatives. Good service badges were presented by Lady Susan Trueman to the following among others:—Mrs. Wellesley Taylor's District (Newport Pagnell)—D. Ball, E. Brooks, E. Catt, F. Chapman, J. Chapman, C. Cooper, M. Church, G. M. Evans, E. Parley, N. Hollis, W. Jones, L. Mooney, A. O'Donoghue, K. Payne, D. E. Sargent, L. Stowe, G. Warren, and S. West. Lady Leon's District (Bletchley)—E. Biswell, B. Coulton, P. Halsey, C. Holmes, (Mrs.) J. Morris, L. Wright, D. Monkton, and K. Wylatt. Mrs. Vaughan Harley's District—L. Mortlock, E. Stimpson, and N. Hickson.



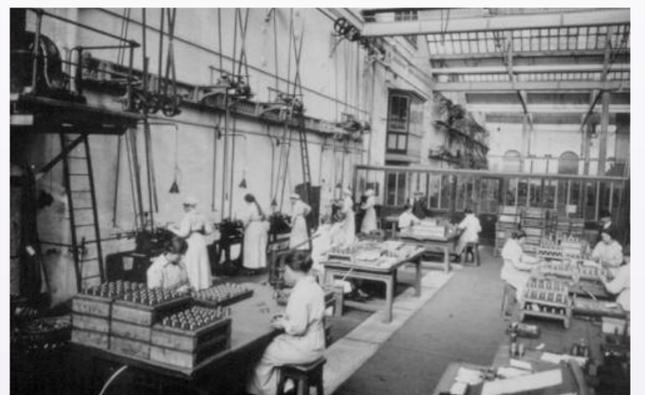
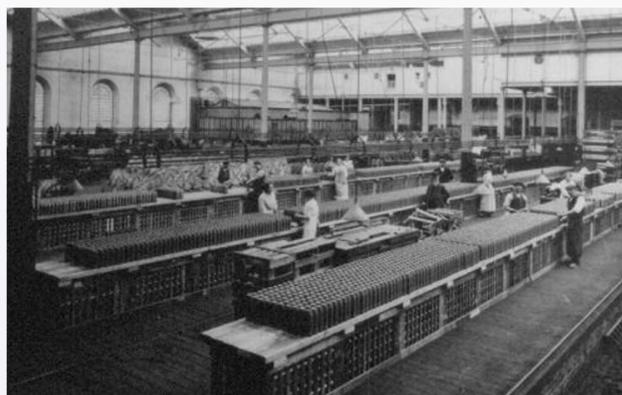
Women making shell cases at Wolverton Works



During World War One, women were recruited to take the jobs of men who had gone to fight in the war. These included jobs previously done by men, like railway guards, police, and farming, and new jobs created as part of the war effort. The high demand for weapons resulted in Wolverton Works beginning to manufacture munitions, as well as altering carriages to be used as ambulance trains. By 1918, munitions factories were the largest single employer of women. Women received lower wages than men for doing the same work, and so began to demand equal pay.

Resident of Wolverton, May Brooks, remembers the impact of World War One: *"We were excited. We'd no idea, of course, what the war would be like at that time. We thought it would only be a very short affair. In those days it was the woman's job to run the home, and of course, married women didn't go out to work. During the war women were called on to do jobs that previously had been simply a man's preserve in a good many respects. Women realised that they weren't the helpless creatures probably that men had previously thought they were. They could do a job and do it well and of course that was where we got the idea of suffrage for women. If they could do the job surely they were worthy of having a vote."*

Major Hammans, of the Bletchley recruiting depot, advises farmers who want the loan of soldiers for haymaking and harvest to write to Mr. Walter Long or Lord Selborne. The major also holds the opinion that North Bucks farmers should more readily avail themselves of women labour.



Women played a vital role in the manufacturing of munitions at Wolverton Works

### Newport Pagnell District War Agricultural Committee.

#### WOMEN LABOUR (Skilled).

THE attention of Farmers is particularly drawn to the fact that there are a number of Skilled Women Workers (Milkers and otherwise) who have completed their training and are now available for farm work.

The above Committee strongly urge farmers in this neighbourhood to take advantage of their services.

Applications should be made, at an early date, to:—MRS. WELLESLEY TAYLOR, Sherington Manor, Newport Pagnell.

C. H. GLANVILLE,  
Secretary to the Committee.

60, High-street, Newport Pagnell,  
7th March, 1918.



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## World War One

### Women and Field Work.

A very great difficulty in the country districts is the shortness of the labour supply. In one sense it is very satisfactory to find that the outbreak of war has not led to much unemployment, but, on the other hand, it is plain that steps must be taken to get the work done, and well done, if the crops are to be successfully cultivated and harvested during the course of the year. It is worth considering, says *Country Life*, whether women could not be more widely employed in field work.

The mowing machine is still at work in North Bucks. and South Northants., and a large number of women and girls have assumed a bronzed complexion through being in the hayfield under a burning sun.



Women helped out with the war effort at home and abroad. The women and girls of Wolverton used their knitting and sewing skills to help the war effort. Following an urgent appeal from the St. John Ambulance Association for garments for wounded soldiers and sailors, they formed a Red Cross Work Party. They decided to order 50 yards of flannelette from London and set about sewing items to send to the troops. A few months later they sent their first parcel, containing 45 items including 12 pillowcases, 7 flannel day shirts and 4 pairs of bed socks. Over the course of the war they sent a total of 24 parcels containing 1402 items.

### WOMEN FOR THE FARMS.

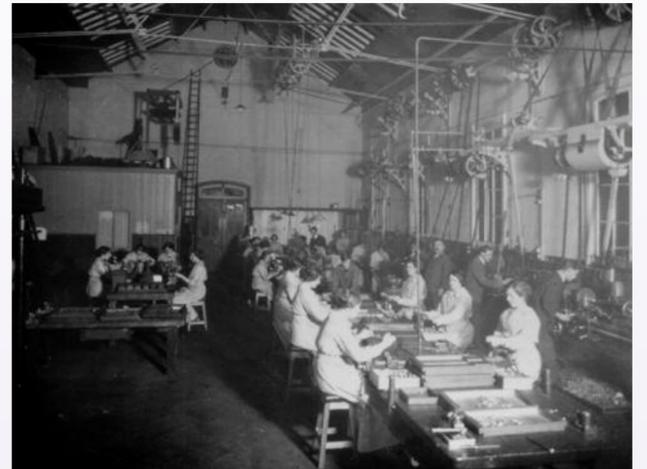
Although in many parts of the country numbers of women are "doing their bit" in the national effort by working on the land and doing general farm work, there is urgent and growing need for many more women workers. It is certain that as the weeks pass the problem of finding sufficient labour for the farms will become more and more difficult, and that a great increase in the number of women employed in agriculture is imperative if we are to increase the amount of our home-grown food supplies. With regard to some industries, it may not be easy at first to say whether they are essential or non-essential; but with regard to agriculture there can be no doubt. It is of the most vital importance, and the women who undertake work on the farms have the satisfaction of knowing that they are doing real war work. A special appeal is made to women living in rural districts to undertake agricultural work. Up to the present, though good numbers of town-dwellers have gone "back to the land," the response from the women on the spot has been disappointing. Every little helps, and those who are unable to devote their whole time to the work might be able to give a few hours daily.

Women in various districts are adapting themselves to work which, prior to the war, was undertaken by men. Mr. R. W. Dickens, builder and decorator, Hanslope, who has lost four of his employees through enlistment, is now assisted in his business by his daughter, Miss Gertrude Dickens, who is quite an expert at painting, paper-hanging, and the other duties connected with the decorative art.

Nellie Flavell, who probably worked as a cook at Salmons Motor Works, Newport Pagnell, went to the front in France to cook for the troops. In 1918, she wrote a letter which was published in the Bucks Standard: *"There is little of romance about the Army Service Corps, it is mostly work, and reminds me more of Salmons' shops than anything. The men fall in and march to and from work, and we have to feed them all at once. We are doing practically everything a man does in the Army out of the war zone, except learning to fight. We cook, paint, print, and all kinds of clerical work, drive cars and wash them. Where a number work together, they march to and fro, and we do drills occasionally. There are over 10,000 Women's Army Auxiliary Corps in France at the present time. We are divided into units and areas, and our officers are splendid."*



The Sewing Room



Young women working on munitions in the Test Room



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## The Suffragettes



Certificate thanking a suffragette's dedication to the cause, signed by Emmeline Pankhurst



When Prime Minister Herbert Asquith visited Bletchley in 1909, he may have been greeted by these two young protestors. Winifred and Cicely Barton were daughters of a plumber in Fenny Stratford. Despite the protests, Asquith remained staunchly against votes for women during his time as prime minister. The Representation of the People Act, giving some women the vote, wouldn't be passed for another 9 years.

A number of local women were involved with the Suffragette movement, including Marie Weller of Wolverton. In the 1911 Census, along with other members of the Women's Social and Political Union she entered her residence as **"wandering on the highway"**. They did this to try and avoid the census enumerator – **'if I don't count to vote, then you don't count me'**. She was later imprisoned in Holloway prison, and was awarded a certificate of thanks and a special badge by Emmeline Pankhurst. These objects were clearly very important to her, as she was buried with them when she died decades later in 1936.

In May 1914, the Wolverton Express reported an excellent attendance at the Women's Liberal Association meeting. Mrs J. Jackson of Northampton called on all women to join the cause. She said, **"The greatest stumbling block to the extension of the suffrage was the apathy which undoubtedly existed amongst a large class of women. It really came from a lack of imagination."**



Winifred and Cicely Barton, Bletchley, 1909

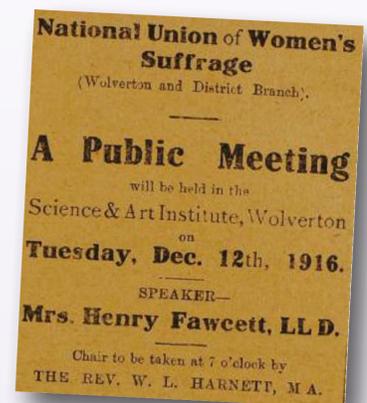


Photo: Museum of London

Designed by Sylvia Pankhurst, the brooch was awarded to women who had been imprisoned in Holloway Prison





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## Women at Bletchley Park



Photo: Bletchley Park Trust

In January 1945 nearly 9,000 employees worked at Bletchley Park...

Most were women – from universities, secretarial colleges, post offices, banking, and the services.

Paperwork had to be sorted, typed, indexed, catalogued, transcribed, translated, despatched and recorded. Equipment had to be dealt with – reproducers, multipliers, tabulators, printers, collators, 'autoheads', perforating machines – and 'bombes', the world's first computers.

*"Before I joined Bletchley Park, I completed a three year degree course at Aberdeen University. I was one of a number of female graduates recommended by William Hamilton Fyfe, Principal of the University, for interview in London at the Foreign Office. I didn't know that I was being interviewed for something specific. I recall at least 20 male interviewers around a long table, asking various questions relating to mathematics, crosswords, interests, languages, etc.*

*My work started straight away and I was based initially in Registration Room 1 (RR1). We worked on encrypted signals that had been brought in by motorcycle from places like Beaumanor and Chicksands. I think I worked in both RR1 and RR2, for at least a year altogether. In RR1, I simply worked by myself at first, there was so much to learn, as I'd never worked on codes before. I sorted the traffic, looked at the call signs to see if there were any repetitions or trends. I was doing a fair bit of analysis work and didn't have any managerial responsibility."*

Helene Aldwinckle, née Taylor. Bletchley Park 1942–1945. Civilian in Hut 6.



Photo: Bletchley Park Trust

Helene Aldwinckle, née Taylor

*"I cannot recall doing any training before I went to Bletchley Park and I hadn't been told that I would be doing intelligence work. I remember sitting at a machine, called a Typex, setting the codes for the day and then typing, so I called myself a typist. I was given groups of letters to type and I knew from the first letters that came out where the messages were coming from. I knew that the three letters at the front of the message referred to the originating station, and I know from what I've read since that the originating station sometimes made mistakes when they thought they could do something again, this is where the bright brains reading them would get a feel of what it was about.*

*I didn't try to organise the letters into words. If the code had been broken then the message could be read. I remember 'Lion', and somebody coming into the room and saying 'Lion is broken', so I would get the folder into which I put all the Lion messages. I may have known what the keys were and a lot more but I have forgotten now."*

Nanette Wise, née Gregg. Bletchley Park 1944–1945. Civilian in Block D(6), Registration Room 1. Interviewed July 2013.



Photo: Bletchley Park Trust

Nanette Wise, née Gregg





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## Olive Kemp – WPC1



*Cadets on parade – by the 1960s women were commonplace in the police force*

Olive Kemp started in the Bucks Constabulary in 1945 aged twenty-two. Originally in Slough and later based in Newport Pagnell, she was the first regular female police constable in Buckinghamshire, and as such, her badge number was WPC1.

There had been a Women's Auxiliary Police Force and women in the Police Reserve during the war, but by 1945, new recruits were needed. A great number of men had enlisted and some had been killed in action, whilst others were still overseas. The Police War Reserve was being released and men retired leaving the constabulary understaffed. Olive Kemp became one of the Constabulary's badly needed new recruits. She is reported as being five feet three inches in height and was said to have been the smallest serving police officer in the Bucks Constabulary.

In September 1976 she retired after 30 years in the force, during which time she received several commendations including the 'Alfred Rothschild Challenge Cup for 1955'. The cup was given for **"performing the most gallant and outstanding act of the county force in 1955"**. Brigadier J.N. Cheney, Chief Constable at the time, stated that Olive Kemp was the first woman to receive such an award in the history of the British Police.

Today, Thames Valley Police has 4534 police officers and of those 1460 are women. There are 1773 women police staff, 229 female PCSOs, 154 Special Constables are women and there are 239 female volunteers.

I wonder if the young, and ground breaking Olive, could have imagined such numbers when she joined the force as WPC1 in 1945?

Olive Kemp passed away on 2 October 2014.

*[Written by Lisa Edwards, Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies]*





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## Greenham Common



The Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp was established to protest against nuclear weapons being placed at RAF Greenham Common in Berkshire, England. The camp began in September 1981 after a Welsh group, Women for Life on Earth, arrived at Greenham to protest against the decision of the British government to allow cruise missiles to be stored there. After realising that the march alone was not going to get them the attention that they needed to have the missiles removed, women began to stay at Greenham to continue their protest. The first blockade of the base occurred in May 1982 with 250 women protesting, during which 34 arrests were made. The camp was active for 19 years and disbanded in 2000.

Women from Milton Keynes set up their own camp and made regular visits to Greenham Common.

*"We use to have a MK Women's magazine which used to let you know when the coach was booked to go to Greenham Common. The coach was always full. Three of us used to set up a big tent, with rugs on the ground, a living area with cushions, sleeping and cooking area.*

*I was arrested and taken to Newbury Race course where the police had set up a head quarters. I was charged, only to win my case.*

*There were always women's musicians and artists there performing."*

Tina Strutton



Tina Strutton, interviewed in 2018

*"I went there at this time to observe, to learn, and to protest. There were some very angry and powerful women there who certainly made the drive to dismantle the American nukes on British soil happen much sooner than if it had been a gender equal protest. It was real earth Mother, feminism at its most raw. I travelled there on my own from time to time. I must admit to having been intimidated and felt quite alien at times, but I did stay and was often accepted and given a chance to voice my male perspective. I even got the odd cuppa tea."*

Paul Price



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## Modern Women



In the seventies and eighties, as more people moved into Milton Keynes, many men found employment helping to build the new town. The story was different for women, and **Jenni Ferrans** set out to make a change:

*"A lot of women had come up thinking that Milton Keynes was a great place to start a family. But as they started to go back to work they found that most local jobs were traditionally men's work, their qualifications were out of date, they had no childcare, they had no transport. It was a nightmare.*

*I joined Women and Work group in 1983. Although men's unemployment was 5% at the time, women's unemployment or serious under-employment was 40%. It was just massive. We got funding, starting with 'back to work' courses in office work and in setting up your own business. A lot of the catering firms we've got today started off with those courses. And that gradually over time made quite a big difference. What we were doing literally put thousands of women into work over a period of about ten years."*

**Naseem Khan** was born in Kenya, and came to Milton Keynes in the year 2002. Trying to balance a family and career, she decided to open up her own restaurant in Wolverton:

*"When I opened the restaurant, I was running it on my own and I quickly realised I do need some people; and I have some friends who are housewives and one of the main concerns was, because of the culture I come from, they're not allowed to work and if they do work they can't work with men. And I thought, if I can provide the local community opportunity where a housewife, who's never had a job before – they can come and work in the kitchen, I can train them as well, so they can learn some skills, and assure them the safety that there wouldn't be any men involved. And I feel that, not only have I helped myself, I have fought a lot of the taboo that comes with the culture and a lot of the stigma that women have."*

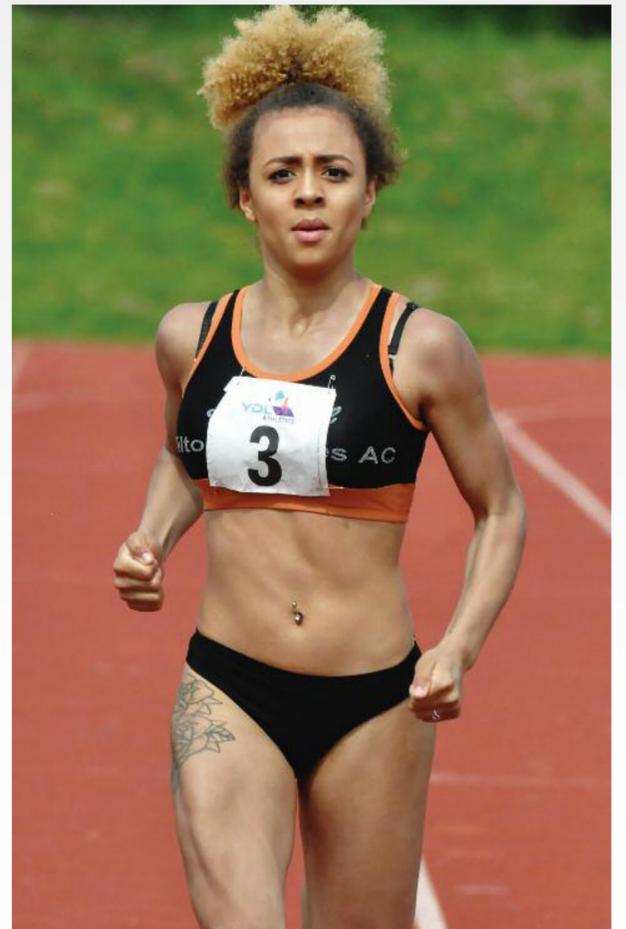
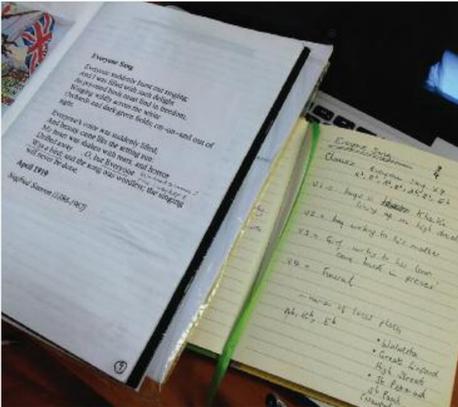




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## Modern Women



Looking back at hundred years of women making change in Milton Keynes, we wonder what the future might hold. **Anna Hester Skelton**, a singer and songwriter, and **Ebony Carr**, an athlete, are two driven and talented young women. They share their passion for Milton Keynes and their hopes for the future.



*"I've always loved music, as long as I can remember. I remember writing my first song when I was about nine. But I started writing seriously when I was about thirteen or fourteen. Milton Keynes has definitely inspired a song. I was asked to take part in a project which was part of 'Great War Remembered MK'. We listened back to archives of interviews that were done in the 1980s with people who remembered the First World War and from those interviews we chose our favourite stories and we wrote songs. My song was called 'Everyone Sang' and has references to Stony Stratford, to Great Linford and to specific people who lived in the area during the First World War. I would go as far as to say all my songs would have some link to Milton Keynes because this is my inheritance, this is where I grew up."*

Anna Hester Skelton

*"Growing up, people knew me as, 'that fast girl.' They didn't actually know my name at first but now they do. Representing Milton Keynes and Great Britain is an unbelievable achievement. I feel very honoured to. If it wasn't for the people in Milton Keynes I would not be where I am today so, even if I did move away, I would still represent Milton Keynes. I will be the first woman to break ten seconds. I can assure you that. I will also be in the 2020 Olympics."*

Ebony Carr

