

Women in Britain during World War I and the defeat of Germany

Women in Britain during World War I



British Red Cross volunteer nurses outside Bramhall and Cheadle Hulme Hospital, First World War, 1914-1918 (Credit: British Red Cross)

Women's role in the economy before World War I

Before World War I (before 1914), women's roles in society were limited and clearly defined by traditional gender expectations.

Most societies believed that a woman's primary duty was to look after the home and family, while men took part in politics, industry, and warfare.

Widows and women from poor homes became:

- domestic workers
- office staff,
- teachers
- clothing workers.

Women's roles during the war

With men fighting at the front:

Women filled jobs in factories and industries

- Making ammunition, weapons, and shells
- Working in steel factories
- Building machinery and vehicles

These women were known as "**munitionettes**" in Britain.

Although women were not allowed to fight as soldiers, they contributed directly to the war effort by:

- Serving as nurses near the front lines
- Working as ambulance drivers
- Acting as clerks, typists, cooks, and telephonists



Before the war, most British women stayed at home, did the cooking and cleaning and cared for the children. When their husbands came home from work, they prepared the family supper.



Female munitions workers guide 6-inch howitzer shells being lowered to the floor at the National Shell Filling Factory in Chilwell, Nottinghamshire in July 1917

Women's role after the war.

After the war, many women chose to go back to being housewives, while others chose to continue working. Being employed made a woman more independent

Before WWI, work opportunities were very limited. After WWI, women had more access to paid work, although still unequal to men.

Before WWI, women had no political voice. After WWI, women began to be recognised as citizens with rights.

Before WWI, women were viewed mainly as homemakers. After WWI, society began to challenge these stereotypes, although change was slow.

Educational opportunities expanded after WWI, allowing women more independence than before.

Aspect	Before WWI	After WWI
Employment	Mostly domestic / low-paid	More paid and skilled work
Political rights	No vote	Voting rights gained
Social status	Subordinate to men	Greater respect
Education	Limited	Increased opportunities

Emmeline Pankhurst and the campaign for the vote for women in Britain



Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928)

- Emmeline Pankhurst was a leading British activist and one of the most important figures in the women's suffrage movement.
- She is best known for founding and leading the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), which campaigned for women's right to vote using militant methods.
- Born: 15 July 1858, Manchester, England
- Raised in a politically active family that supported women's rights
- Married Richard Pankhurst, a lawyer who supported women's suffrage
- Became politically active through socialist and reform movements

Founder of the WSPU (1903)

- Founded the Women's Social and Political Union with the slogan "Deeds, not words."
- Believed peaceful protests had failed and stronger action was needed.
- Under Pankhurst's leadership, (The Suffragettes) members of the WSPU:
- Organised marches and demonstrations
- Disrupted political meetings
- Broke windows and damaged property
- Went on hunger strikes when imprisoned
- Suffragette –comes from the word suffrage, which means 'the right to vote'



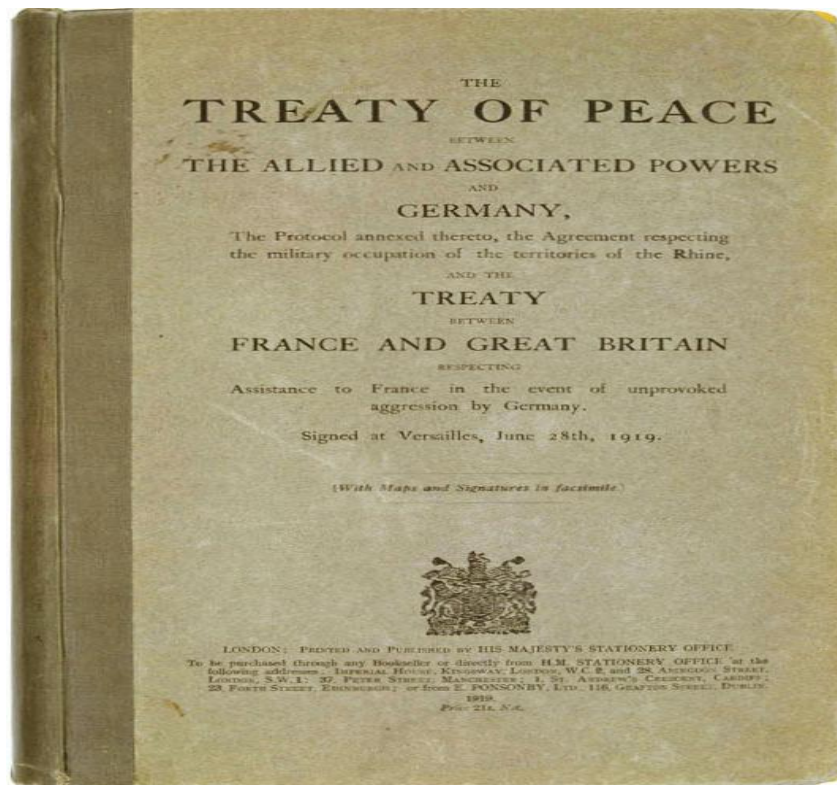
Achievements and Legacy1918:

- Women over 30 gained the vote in Britain1928:
- Women gained equal voting rights with men (same year Pankhurst died)

She is remembered as:

- A fearless leader
- A symbol of women's determination and sacrifice
- A key reason women gained political rights in Britain
- She transformed the women's suffrage movement
- Forced the issue of women's rights onto the national agenda
- Proved that women could organise, lead, and challenge authority

The defeat of Germany and the Treaty of Versailles



The war ended in 1918.



A new government had come to power in Germany called the Weimar Republic. The government of the Weimar Republic signed the armistice and agreed to stop fighting.

The Armistice:

Germany signed the ceasefire to stop fighting and begin negotiations, effectively halting combat on the Western Front.

The Cause:

The Allied "[100 Days Offensive]" from August 1918, which utilized new combined-arms strategies, pushed Germany back and broke their resistance.

Finality:

While fighting ceased in 1918, the war formally concluded with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919.

Impact:

The war resulted in the collapse of four major dynasties—the Habsburgs, Hohenzollerns, Ottoman, and Romanov empires—and fundamentally altered the map of Europe.

Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919.

The leaders of the USA, Great Britain and France met in Versailles to decide what should happen next.

Germany, Austria and Hungary were not invited.

The agreement was called the Treaty of Versailles.

Germany was shocked by it because:

- They had to accept total blame for starting the war.
- They could not join the new League of Nations, where countries worked together for peace.
- Some places Germany used to own, like Alsace-Lorraine, were taken from them.
- They were banned from having an army of more than 100,000 men and from having any submarines or an air force.

People in Germany were angry. The country had to pay 132 billion gold marks (their currency before the Euro) to repair the damages of war.

They became poor because of this.