



WOMEN IN TRANSPORT

A Brief Guide to Coventry Transport Museum

INTRODUCTION

Women played an important role in the history of transport, supporting their colleagues during times of peace and stepping up when they were most needed during both World Wars. Through stories told by the women who worked in Coventry's factories and our archival information, this guide unlocks their hidden histories.

This chronological guide can be used as part of your visit to explore the Coventry Transport Museum galleries and collection to find facts, quotes and images, to explore the untold history of the role women played in transport industry.

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A NEW MOTOR INDUSTRY 1910 - 1914

WOMEN AS A TARGET MARKET

The development of open top cars in the turn of the Twentieth Century meant passengers and drivers alike were at the mercy of the elements. This created an opportunity for clothing manufacturers to develop clothes, or over-clothes specifically for driving. However, people still wanted to look stylish and follow societal rules regarding dress.

Magazines such as 'The Car Illustrated' were aimed at the upper-classes and often featured a recognisable, well-dressed woman, from high society.

They would feature advertisements for appropriate driving attire alongside articles about motoring adventures undertaken by women which provided a source of inspiration for women of a new era.



Image right: Lady Wolverton on the cover of The Car Illustrated [1]

As the advertisements below show there was considerable emphasis placed on being correctly dressed when driving a car:

No. 29, DECEMBER 10, 1902.] 101

THE CAR.



PONY SKIN COAT.

**BASE'S
MOTOR CLOTHING**

FOR
Ladies or Gentlemen.

DRIVERS' SUITS and LIVERIES specially designed and made to Clients' own requirements. Everything in FUR, LEATHER &c., used for Motoring kept and made to order.

Please write for new large CATALOGUE showing all Latest Fashions (post free).

STAND 110, NATIONAL SHOW,
Crystal Palace, Nov. 21st to 29th.

Telephone 5340.
309 & 310, HIGH HOLBORN, W.C.
(Entrance in CHANCERY LANE.)
Please mention this Paper.

THE SACKVILLE CAP

THE IDEAL FOR
MOTOR WEAR.

Made in Blue Serge, Cashmere, Lambswool, Homespun and other Tweeds, Linens, &c.

CALF SKIN MOTOR COATS.

WATERPROOF TWEED GOWNS
For Motor and Country Wear.

MACDOUGALL'S
(OF INVERNESS),
**42, SACKVILLE STREET,
Piccadilly, W.**



WOODROW, 46, Piccadilly, W.



Selection
on
receipt
of
London
Trade
Reference.

Ladies' "Staff" or Motor Cap,
1902 make. In various Tweeds and
Fines Cloths. 12/6. With dust turban
for inside.



The "Tudor" Tweed Hat with
attached brim, in all the new materials,
with white, 18/6. "Just the hat for
the season."

THE "BASHELK"
Silk Motor Hood for Ladies.



Adapted for either Hat or Cap in any weather. In Hils of Neutral Shades. Lined with
Revolving Lenses. Useful and Pretty.
PRICE ONE GUINEA (Excludes in accompanying order).
Can be supplied from stock, or made to order in any shade. Write for Patterns or apply to—
"BASHELK," THE CAR OFFICE, 17, SHAFTESBURY AVENUE, W.

Above image: Adverts for the recommended attire for women travelling in a motor car. [2]

A regular feature 'Costumes and Chatter' gave advice about everything from clothing to skincare. One article suggested the 'application after the journey of Sulpholine' [1] (face cream) to one's face.

The magazine contained reviews of products, including vehicles, which were sometimes written by women. A review written by Mrs Edward Kennard, shows her passion for driving, as she states:

'I confess I was itching to sit at the wheel, if only for a few minutes.' [3].

FIRST WORLD WAR

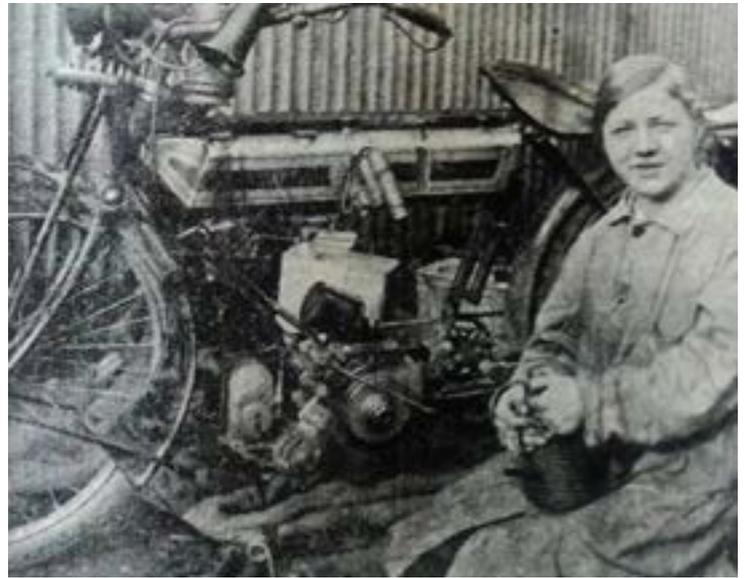
1914 - 1918

WOMEN IN THE FACTORIES

During the First World War, the number of women working in the transport industry grew enormously, as women were needed to take the place of male factory workers, who had been sent to war. This required women to develop new skills quickly and caused significant upheaval in the previous social and domestic order.

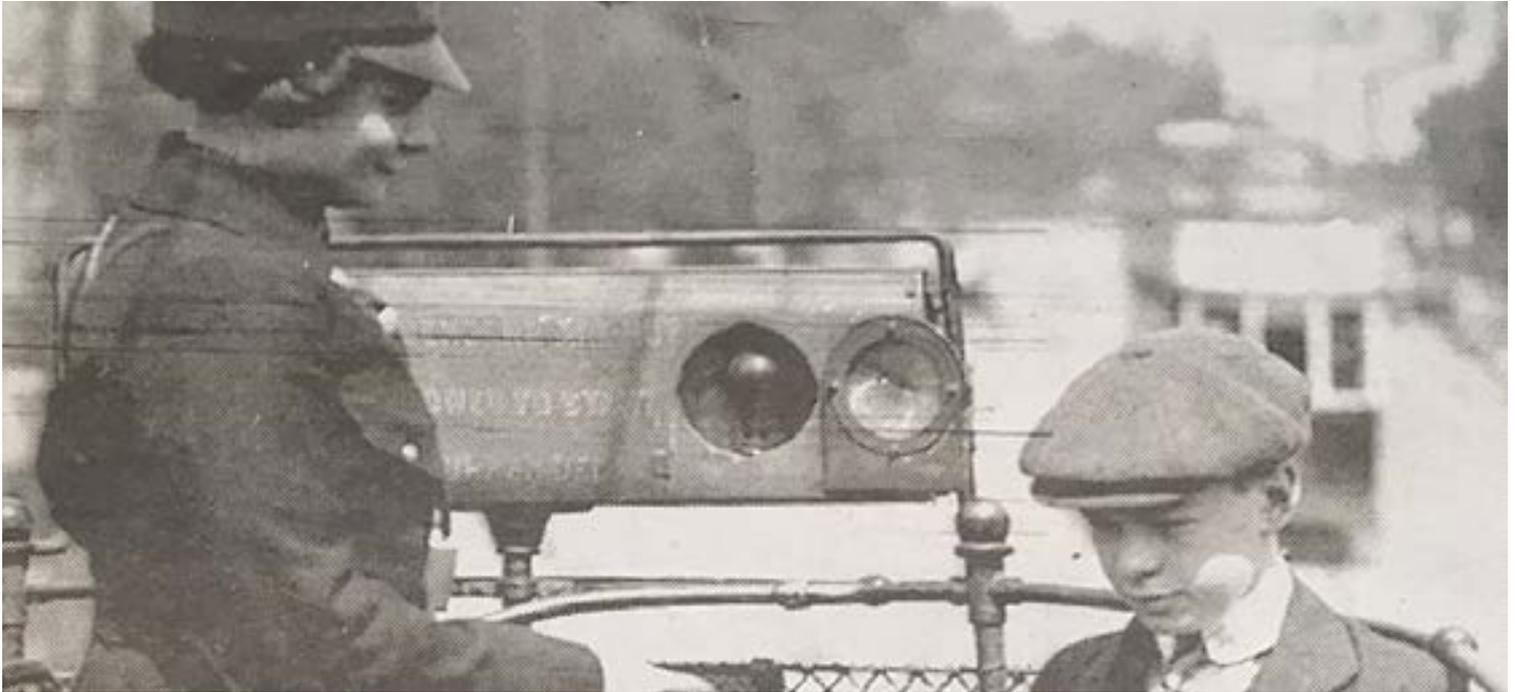
Image right: Miss Hilda Spurgeon replaced a skilled male mechanic during the First World War [5]

Image below: Women in the shell department at Standard Motor Works [4]

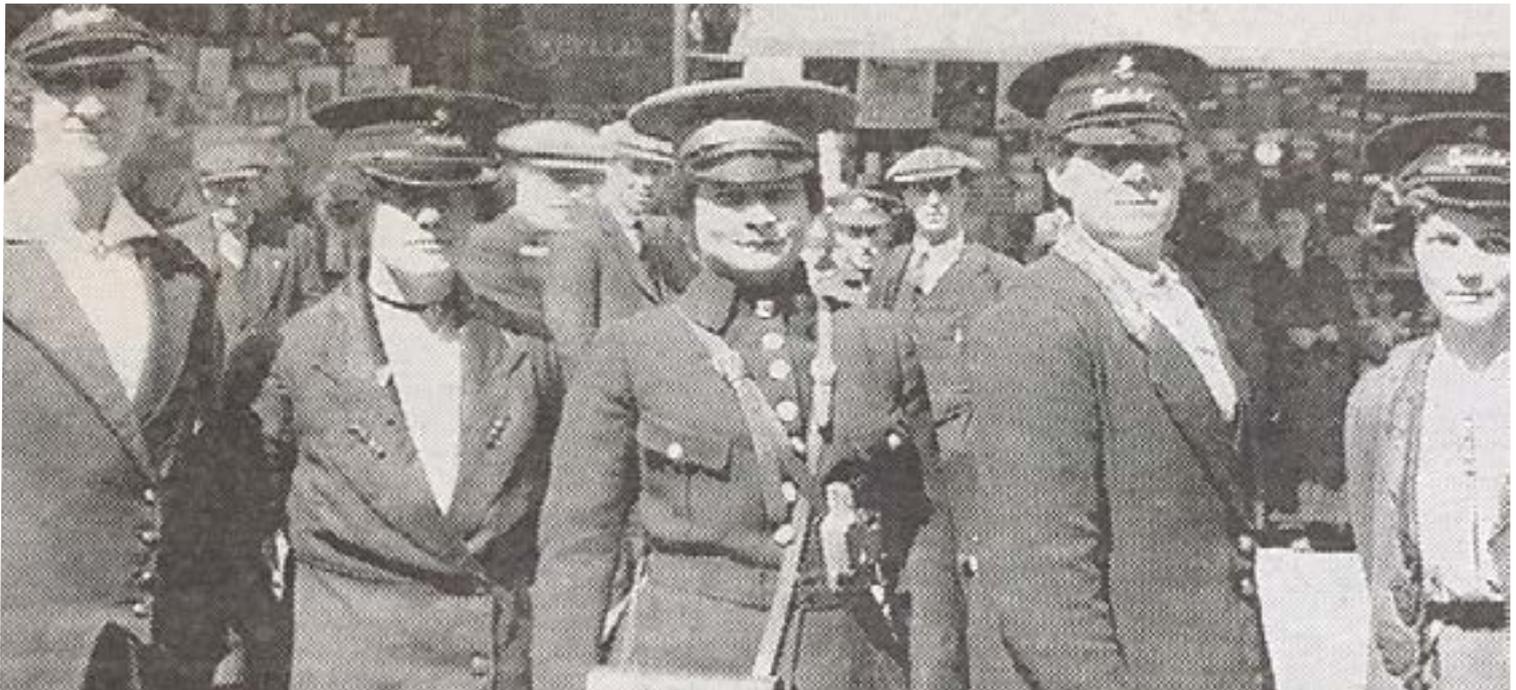


TRANSPORTATION DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The demand for female workers during the First World War also extended to other industries, such as public transport. Women responded to 'their country's call' [6] and worked as 'clippies' and office workers for Coventry's tram system.



The first woman tram conductor in Coventry [6]



Tramcar clippies dressed in several styles of uniform [6]



THE GROWTH OF THE MOTOR INDUSTRY 1918 - 1939

SOCIAL CLUBS THROUGH WORK

Many companies provided social clubs for their workers and sometimes had specific facilities for the clubs. Factory teams often competed in local leagues in sports such as football, badminton and bowls.

The Siddeley-Deasy company was keen on promoting the physical fitness, and wider skill-set of its workers offering a wide variety of activities from the Siddeley-Deasy Ladies Physical Culture Class [9] to the Women and Girl Employees Dressmaking Club [10]. The company provided equipment, tools and facilities to their workers [11], for a small membership fee. The clubs were very popular the Siddeley-Deasy swimming club had 580 [12] members in 1918.



Image left: Morton and Weaver. Office Workers [7]; Image right: Member of the Armstrong-Siddeley Aeronautical Society [14]



Image above: Magneto (ML) Syndicate Ltd, factory workers [8]



Image above: Members of the Armstrong- siddeley tennis club [13]

SECOND WORLD WAR

1919 - 1945

WORKING POLICY DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

During the Second World War, Coventry was a key manufacturing hub for the war effort. Once again this led to the increased demand for female employees, to fill the vacant roles. Women were working in traditionally male jobs such as capstan operator, miller, driller and grinder [15].

Over 30,000 [16] additional workers were needed in Coventry and people arrived from across the UK. Preparations for the war effort included accommodation for the increased population, ranging from new hostels [17] and homes being built [16], to 'official billeting of lodgers in homes around the region' [16].



Image above: Female capstan operators at Standard Motor Company [20]; Image left: Female assembly workers at Standard Motor Company [21]



Image above: Female comptometer operators at Rootes [21]

MOTOR CITY UK 1950 - 2015



TRADE UNIONS

For many years, women workers were largely unrepresented by trades unions and played little part in their activities. This might have partially been due to a lack of women in more senior roles. At the Humber factory, between 1955 and 1960, the number of female shop stewards went from two (out of 52 shop stewards) [22], to three (out of 36 shop stewards) [23].

When women first started working in the factories, they often faced “prejudice on the part the part of the employers” [24] which doubted womens’ ability. This resulted in less pay [24]. Unfortunately, this seemed to create a cycle where because “women were paid less than men, ... they were not looked upon as being as good as men” [24].

However, this gradually changed with the support of the unions. Kathleen Smith, a trade unionist in Coventry, supported workers through her entire career. In 1969, Kathleen Smith was presented with the TUC gold medal ‘for most outstanding record of service to the movement’ [25].



Image left: Jaguar, female track workers [27]; image centre: Alvis, mid-20th century: women, factory floor [26]; image right: Mrs Shields. first female commissioner at the Jaguar factory [28].



FURTHER INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

This project was undertaken as part of the 2014/15 redevelopment work at Coventry Transport Museum. As part of this process, a greater focus on underrepresented groups took place, which included women. This guide has been compiled as a summary of just some of the research which was undertaken, as there are many stories to be told.

VISIT US

If you would like to more information about the role women have played in the development of Coventry's industries, why not visit us?

Coventry Transport Museum tells the story of Coventry's transport history, and has the largest collection of road transport vehicles in public ownership in the world. For more details, such as opening hours, please visit the website: www.transport-museum.com

Much of the research for this project was undertaken at Coventry Archives & Research Centre (located in the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum). If you would like to find out more specific information, then please visit the website for details of when the centre is open to the public: www.theherbert.org/history_centre

FEEDBACK

If you would like to get in touch, please contact us on info@culturecoventry.com. For more details, please see our website.

REFERENCES

Much of the material for this guide has been collated from documentation from Coventry Archives & Research Centre, and includes: The Car Illustrated magazine, company journals, business records, photographs and press cuttings and the oral histories collections.

WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO

The Heritage Lottery Fund and our team of volunteers, without whom much of this history would have remained unheard.



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