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## Women in Rail: How WWI created rare career opportunities for women

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Within a month of declaring war, over 100,000 men working on railways had enlisted, leaving vital jobs that needed filling and therefore offering women professional opportunities unheard of at a time of male dominated markets. By 1918, women held almost every job in the railway industry, including ticket collectors, engine cleaners and train painters. Women helped to keep the wheels of Britain's industries and ensured the railways were fit to aid the war effort.

Above: Women locomotive cleaners grouped upon a 4-4-2 'High Flyer' Class locomotive, No 1406, at the Low Moor engine shed near Bradford, West Yorkshire, 23 March, 1917

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With the end of the war the figures didn't quite keep up and 100 years on the railway industry is still dominated by their male counterparts. Currently, only 20% of people working in rail are women, with a further statistic that only 4.4% of the engineering force is female.

Above: Women workers using an industrial vacuum cleaner to clean railway carriages at London Bridge Station on the South Eastern and Chatham Railway, 1918.

Picture: © National Railway Museum/Science & Society Picture Library

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Women in Rail, a group created in 2012, encourages more women to join at all levels, from engineers to CEOs, providing a support network for women in the industry and assisting future generations to consider it as a life-long career.

Above: Women cleaning the smoking compartment of a steam locomotive, c.1918

Picture: © National Railway Museum/Science & Society Picture Library



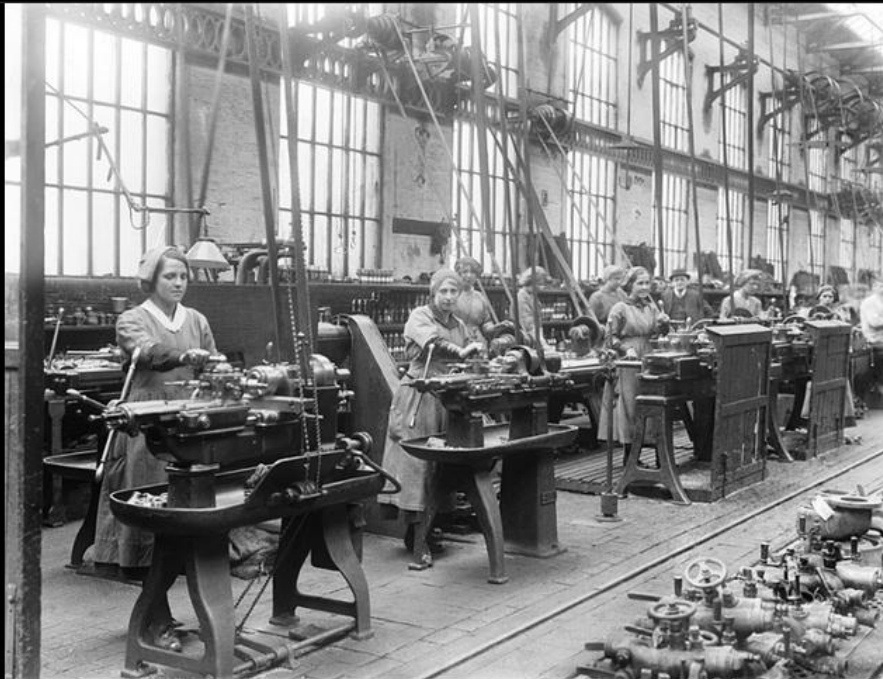
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Women workers manufacturing ammunition at Horwich works, 23 March 1917. During the First World War part of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway's works was given over to the manufacture of weapons, and from June 1915 onwards, around 2200 shells were made every week. These women are repairing cartridge cases in the works' boiler shop smithy. Women were widely employed in munitions factories in wartime when men served in the armed forces.

Picture: © National Railway Museum/Science & Society Picture Library

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Women carriage cleaners on the London and South Western Railway, c. 1916. Carriages got very dirty from all the smoke and ash produced by the locomotive fire.

Picture: © National Railway Museum/Science & Society Picture Library

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Women workers in the telegraph shop at Horwich works, May 1917. They appear to be manufacturing nose caps for artillery shells, using machinery made by Rhodes & Sons of Wakefield. A bowler-hatted foreman oversees their work through the windows of his office next door.  
Picture: © National Railway Museum/Science & Society Picture Library

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Women railway workers cleaning gas lamps at the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway's Horwich works, Greater Manchester  
 Picture: © National Railway Museum/Science & Society Picture Library

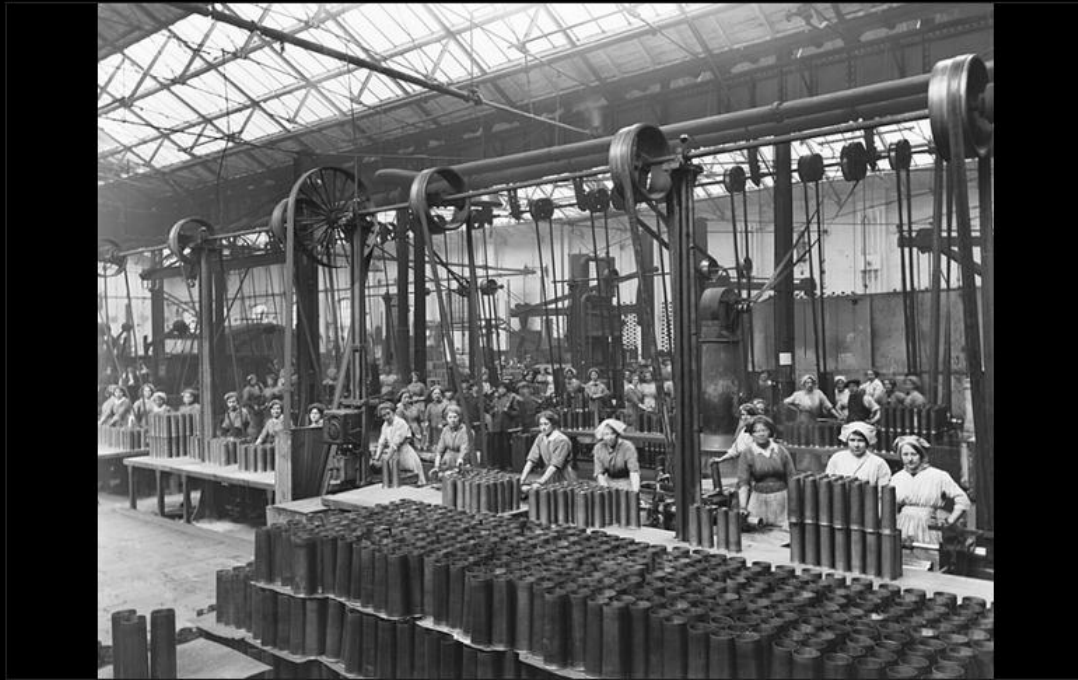


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Women workers manufacturing ammunition at Horwich works, 23 March 1917  
Picture: © National Railway Museum/Science & Society Picture Library

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Women volunteers running the free buffet at Paddington station. During the First World War soldiers' and Sailors' Free Buffets were established at major railway stations where large numbers of servicemen passed through. The buffets were run by women volunteers and the costs met through donations.

Picture: © National Railway Museum/Science & Society Picture Library

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Women workers using turret lathes at the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway's Horwich works, May 1917  
Picture: © National Railway Museum/Science & Society Picture Library

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