

Bradford's Women at War

Working Women

Women played an enormous part in the First World War. Women in Bradford became nurses, tram drivers and post women; they worked in factories and on the land. For some women, working was doing their bit to help the war effort, or it was a matter of necessity as it always had been; for others it was a chance to seize new opportunities and experiences. Many of these women were the mothers of those fighting; others of course were sisters, wives and girlfriends. The majority of women were touched in some way by the war.

War and Peace

Female opinions on the war varied greatly; even the Suffragette movement was divided between those who saw the war as being a patriotic struggle and justifiable and those who campaigned for peace and thought the suffering and loss of life were unacceptable. Both points of view were represented among Bradford's female population. In Bradford the voices of women and men campaigning for peace could be heard before, during and after the war. Some members of the Independent Labour Party, the Trades Council, Quakers and some Christians, spoke out for peace. When conscription was introduced in 1916, conscientious objectors, who were against the war for political or religious reasons, refused to enlist and fight. Bradford MP Fred Jowett was against the war in principle and spoke out in support of the City's conscientious objectors.

Bradford Women's Humanity League

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom was established in 1915 and met initially in The Hague. Their desire for peace did not meet with universal approval. The Bradford Women's Humanity League evolved from this movement. It was formed ten days after conscription was introduced in 1916 and held many anti-war meetings. In September 1917, 3,000 women took part in an anti-war demonstration, marching across the City from the Textile Hall on Westgate and ending near Bradford College. They were accompanied by a band and carried banners bearing slogans such as: "The Boys in the Trenches want Peace" and "I want my Daddy."



An advert for the anti-war demonstration in 1917. The Yorkshire Observer.



A female club carriage attendant of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway during the war. Image courtesy of Imperial War Museums.

Women and Remembrance

Women were at the forefront of attempts to make sure that those who died in the First World War were not forgotten. An international symbol, the red Remembrance Poppy was the result of the American Moina Mitchell's efforts to raise money for veterans. The idea was developed by Anna Guirin in France and eventually adopted by General Haig, to raise money for British veterans of the First World War and their families. In the centre of the Remembrance Poppy was the slogan 'The Haig Fund'. This was replaced in 1994 with the words "Poppy Appeal."



The Women's Co-Operative Guild campaigned for this to be replaced with the word 'Peace'. They were unsuccessful and so introduced their own white Peace Poppy in 1926. Red Remembrance Poppies were sold in Britain for the first time in 1921, the year in which the Memorial Bells first rang out across Bradford.



The Women's World War I Memorial Bells

In Bradford women were successfully involved in raising money for many memorials and this is evident from their efforts to raise money for the Cathedral's Memorial Bells. Lady Mary Elizabeth Godwin, widow of the first Lord Mayor of Bradford, Sir John Arthur Godwin, donated a bell; Elizabeth Mitchell, a local woman of independent financial means, gave money for a bell in memory of a relative, Edward Alexander Shepherd. Money was collected for a bell by the Cathedral's predominantly female Sunday school teachers and one bell was provided as a result of donations from the mothers of Bradford.

The Mitchell Memorial window on the South Ambulatory is dedicated to Elizabeth Mitchell. St. Hilda is shown in this detail of the window with an inscription to Elizabeth Mitchell in a scroll along the bottom.