

# COLLINGHAM IN THE GREAT WAR

## Munitions Workers

The First World War saw the transformation of warfare. As both sides tried to outdo each other with newer, more accurate and deadlier weapons, the need for shells, tanks, gas, barbed wire, guns and cannon dramatically increased.

Lincoln of course, was famous for being the birthplace of the [tank](#). Ruston Proctor & Co in Lincoln also built over 2,000 [aircraft](#) and 3,000 engines. Read Dr Katherine Storr's detailed analysis of munitions workers in Lincolnshire [here](#) .

Over in Chilwell, Nottingham, was [National Shell Filling Factory number 6](#), infamous for the explosion on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1918 that killed 134 and injured a further 250 workers. These were mostly women or 'Canary Girls' as they were called, because of the effect of the chemicals on their skin. It is said the factory supplied 50% of the total output of shells in the war.



*Women at the Chilwell factory making howitzer shells 1917*

In Newark, the Stanley Works of Ransome and Marles found itself in demand. Established in 1900 and famed for its rolling bearings needed in motor driven trucks, motor cycles, tanks and tractors, the War Office placed a huge order for ball bearings. The monthly output by 1917 was equal to a year's output in 1914. That they were able to achieve this was down to the employment of women

and girls. According to historian Ron Wood<sup>1</sup> 'after two months training they were turning out work gauged to within ten-thousandths of an inch (2.5 microns).'



Above: Female employees in one of the workshops. The girl at the front holds a notice reading 'Ransome Munion Workers' implying the picture was taken before January 1917 when the firm became Ransome and Marles. Collingham's Ethel Liley (born 1892) is standing first left on the second row from the back. The postcard is from one of several in the Liley Collection in Collingham History Society Archives. It is unknown how many women and girls from Collingham and district worked at the factory. Ref: EF/AA/LIL

Wood continues: 'At the time of the Armistice there were 536 men and 525 women in the company. About 300 of the women were machine operators. The employment of women during the war caused many problems when the soldiers wanted to return to work and it became a sensitive political issue with accusations of cheap labour. In support of Government directives, the company set about the re-employment of 450 ex-service personnel at the expense of the women workers. By 1920 there were 816 men, 200 boys and 360 women of whom only 60 were machine operators. In 1919 the hours for shop workers dropped from 54 to 50 hours a week.'



<sup>1</sup> Ron Wood's 'Ransome and Marles 100 Years' can be found in the Local Studies section at Newark Library