



## **The First World War 1914-1918**

Age- KS2/Secondary School/S1-3  
Topic- Gretna Girls



**A munitions worker unloading the nitrating pans at HM Factory Gretna. This mixture of 'Devil's Porridge' was highly explosive and very dangerous.**



**Munitions workers turned raw cotton into Cordite needed for bullets and shells. Munitions workers broke up bales of cotton, a key ingredient for making explosive cordite.**

At the outbreak of the war girls came from all over Britain and Ireland to work in the new munitions factory **HM Gretna**. Many arrived from Cumbria, the North East of England and the Scottish Borders.

In 1916, 11,000 women worked at the factory site, some were as young as 15 years old.

Munitions work was well paid. Prior to the war domestic servants and farm workers earned six shillings (30p) a week. By 1918 the female factory workers earned 33 shillings (£1.65) a week and gained financial freedom to enjoy leisure activities or to buy items for themselves or to send home to families. Women were empowered by war service and their contribution to the war effort, leading in 1918 to the vote for women over 30 years old.



# The First World War 1914-1918

Age- KS2/Secondary School/S1-3  
Topic- Gretna Girls



A worker's overalls

The **munitions workers** wore simple overalls and a cap. Their overalls covered their clothes and shoes. They were not allowed any metal buttons in case they caused a spark which could lead to an explosion. The sheds they worked in were bitterly cold, dark and lonely with rats running around the building. Trucks of materials were pushed by hand between the sheds, which could be over a mile away.

Making nitro cotton meant the munitions workers were exposed to dangerous fumes and their skin could turn bright yellow, giving them the nick-name 'Canary girls'.

The nitric acid fumes also affected their teeth and bones.



**Hostels** were built for the female munitions workers of HM Gretna. They were basic wooden huts with long dormitories. Each hostel had a Matron who would cook and look after the welfare of the young girls.

The munitions workers had room for few possessions but used their high wages to buy commodities or to travel to entertainment venues in Gretna and Carlisle. Although work was hard, pay was good and many women gained a sense of freedom and independence for the first time. Women had carried out their patriotic duty and helped Britain win the war.



## The First World War 1914-1918

Age- KS2/Secondary School/S1-3  
Topic- Gretna Girls

The **townships** of Gretna and Eastriggs were built to house the factory workers. Over 30,000 came from across The British Empire. Chemists, doctors, engineers and other specialists also came to work at the factory.



A wealth of leisure and amenity buildings were constructed in Gretna and Eastriggs by the 15,000 labourers. These included:

- Two Huge dance halls which could hold dances for up to 800 people - Border Hall in Gretna and Central Hall in Eastriggs.
- Two large cinemas to see the latest silent movies
- Reading rooms and Institute
- Shops and banks
- Gymnasiums and billiard halls
- Tennis courts and playing fields
- Primary Schools in Eastriggs and Gretna
- Bakeries, kitchens, power stations, Police stations with cells and a hospital