WHAT DID WORLD WAR ONE REALLY DO FOR WOMEN?

Video 2 transcript

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World War One proved that women could do the work of men – and do it just as well.

Millions challenged the prejudices and conventions of the age by going into heavy industry, into offices or into jobs in transport, often leaving domestic service.

But success was short-lived – and trumped by the needs of the returning troops at the war's end. Adventurous, independent-minded women found themselves at odds with the mood.

They found themselves thrown out of work and back into the kitchen almost overnight.

It took another war in 1939 for them to return to the work place in such great numbers.

In 1918, those women who managed to stay in their jobs were still being paid less for doing the same as men but it was a start.

A new law in 1918 granted the vote to women over thirty – a partial victory, for it excluded most of the working-class women who had laboured in the engineering and the munitions factories.

A handful of women were elected to parliament, more professions were opened up, and eventually the vote was granted to all in 1928.

And the war changed how women looked – trousers appeared for the first time, corsets declined in popularity – and the 'bob' saw short hair become the fashion. The traditionalists were outraged and disgusted, but times had changed radically, though not enough to let women continue in their wartime roles, seen as temporary, only for the duration. Their achievements were overshadowed by the grim cost of the war.

In reality, there was no going back. Women had proved what they could do; the war could not have been won without them. They told their daughters and their granddaughters; they were on their way from dependants to citizens.

And this is their legacy: future generations could learn of their achievements, their pioneering efforts. This legacy is the backbone of women's independence and citizenship today.