

GROUP SHEET 1:



Thomas Tilling

In your group you are to find out about the Thomas Tilling Company. Explain to the class what this company was, who worked for them, who were the first women to work for them and any other interesting facts or pictures.

These notes will help you:

The Thomas Tilling Company was to employ the first female bus conductor, a lady called Mrs. G. Duncan, who began work on 1 November 1915. In the same month, the London City Council trams began employing female conductors and in March 1916 the London General Omnibus Company followed suit. It is estimated that by December 1916, 20,000 women had applied to become bus conductors from whom a total of 2,000 were selected. By the end of the war, the LGOC had employed a total of 3,500 women.

By 1917, women were working on trains as 'gatemen'. This involved keeping track of other trains in relation to the one that they were assigned to and signalling to the driver how close the next train was. In foggy weather they used their lights to warn approaching trains of their location. The roles of drivers and guards remained strictly men only.

The transport companies also employed women to clean and maintain the vehicles. With long dresses unsuitable for such work, the female workers began wearing trousers, further challenging the traditional gender views of the pre-war years. Female conductors were still obliged to wear skirts, but shortened them from ankle to calf-length in a bid to make them more practical.

Applicants wishing to be bus conductors had to be a minimum of five feet tall and aged between twenty-one and thirty-five. They had to undergo a medical and take an arithmetic test to ensure they could calculate the fares and give the correct change. If successful, the applicants proceeded to a two-week training course. Training took place in both the classroom, where they would learn details of London's key points of interest, and on the street on learners' buses. There was also a purpose-built cinema that played safety instruction films and guidance on being a 'good conductor'. Training concluded with an oral and written examination.

The women found that, away from the classroom, they learned more about the practicalities on the job, when dealing with actual customers and adjusting to the ten hour shifts. The day was divided into three shift times, with the earliest starting at 6am.



GROUP SHEET 2:



How women were chosen to be conductors and the uniform they wore:

In your group you are going to find out what the requirements were for women to become conductors. Once they were employed what uniform did they wear?

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"A female London General Omnibus Company bus conductor aboard her vehicle, 1918. She is wearing the summer uniform of pale coat and hat, standing at the foot of the external staircase."

Imperial War Museum; photo: Q109768

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205193197>



GROUP SHEET 3:

Florence Cordell:

In your group read about this lady. Decide how you can tell her story to the rest of the class:



Florence Cordell was a Londoner, who'd left school at the age of fourteen to work in a lampshade factory. With the war leading to a down-turn in trade and work prospects, Florence began to look for war work instead.

Aged 21, Florence and her friend Esther applied to work on the Underground, but Florence was turned down for not being tall enough and Esther suffered from varicose veins. Instead they applied to be bus conductors with the London General Omnibus Company and were readily accepted.

To start with, Florence worked as a spare. It was essential that the buses left the depot on time and if someone didn't turn up, a spare had to be ready to take their place. The spares were paid a basic amount to be on stand-by for the first two hours of the shift, but they wouldn't receive any more unless they went out.

Once Florence was assigned a route, she received a regular income and was paid the same as the male conductors. It was only later on, when the bus company proposed paying the women five shillings a week less for the same work as the men, that the transport workers, both male and female, went on strike in 1918.

Asked about her male colleagues, Florence said that on the whole she got on well with them. Some of the drivers could be grumpy and the older men would mutter under their breath at the idea of women working alongside them. Florence recalls with good humour one driver who, whenever he found a small group of girls standing together, would go up to them and say 'Hello girls!'

The conductors had to take their money and receipts to the office at the end of every shift. The next day they had to check what was called the 'unders and overs' list. If you had banked too much you received the difference, but if the conductor was under, they had to pay the amount out of their own pocket.

Florence explained that the conductors quickly became wise to the customers' tricks. At night a black-out would be enforced and therefore there were no lights on the top of the open bus. A regular ploy was for the customer to give a low value coin such as a farthing, but ask for change from a sixpence (which was approximately the same size, but with a milled edge). The conductors quickly learnt how to run their thumb over the surface of the coin before accepting it. When Florence handed a rejected farthing back to the customer they would say 'Oh my! I didn't know I had a farthing!'

The uniform gave Florence a sense of pride and she enjoyed her time as a bus conductor and the financial independence that came with it, but she accepted that it had to come to an end in 1919. She had married during the war and reverted to the pre-war stance that a married woman did not work unless her husband was very poorly paid and she really had to.



GROUP SHEET 4:

Money and Strikes:

In your group find out how much women were paid to be bus conductors, and why they decided to go on strike? Do you think they were treated fairly?

Explain what you have found out to the rest of the class and ask their opinions on the way women were treated. There are three extracts to read:

1. Once Florence was assigned a route, she received a regular income and was paid the same as the male conductors. It was only later on, when the bus company proposed paying the women five shillings a week less for the same work as the men, that the transport workers, both male and female, went on strike in 1918.

2. In many cases women were paid less than men for doing the same jobs, which led to 14,000 London Transport workers, men and women, striking in 1918. The protest was successful and the women were awarded equal pay.

3. As World War I progressed, thousands of jobs normally done by men were taken over by women, and nowhere was this process more marked than in public transport.

By the end of the war, the London General Omnibus Company alone was employing over 3,500 women, and thousands more were employed by the other bus and tram operators in London as well as on the tubes.

Both management and the unions had consistently opposed conceding the principle of equal pay for what was obviously equal work. On August 16th, 1918, there was a meeting of women at Willesden bus garage which decided, without consulting or even informing either the management or the trade union leaders, to strike the following day. The next morning Willesden stopped work; they were immediately joined by women at Hackney, Holloway, Archway and Acton depots or garages, and thereafter the strike spread like wildfire. By the evening thousands of women had stopped work. The striking was initially for a 5s War bonus, a demand which was superseded as the struggle continued by the straight issue of equal pay, or as the strikers put it 'Same work - same money'.

The strike continued to spread. By August 23rd, women bus and tram workers at Hastings, Bath, Bristol, South Wales, Southend and Birmingham had joined in, about 18,000 women out of the 27,000 employed in the industry had stopped work, and in addition women working on the tubes - supported by some men - had stopped work on the same issue. The strikers had a series of mass meetings at the Ring, Blackfriars, where 4,000 women, many of them with children, well supplied with sandwiches and lemonade, made a day out of it. The strike was settled on August 25th after a tumultuous meeting at the Ring, and against very strong opposition, while the tube women remained out until the 28th. The women received the extra 5s War bonus, but the principle of equal pay was not conceded.

The details of organisation of this important struggle are obscure; indeed it is rather surprising that this strike, which must be one of the largest ever engaged in by women for their own demands, has not attracted more attention from historians of the labour movement.

Taken and slightly edited from Don't be a soldier! by Ken Weller.



GROUP SHEET 5:



Buses in 1914:

In your group you will find out what buses were like in 1914 . You will show and describe them to the rest of the class.

You will need to look for some information.

<https://www.ltmuseum.co.uk/collections/collections-online/information/item/2008-695>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/0/ww1/25237885>



GROUP SHEET 6:



After the War:

In your group you will find out what happened at the end of the war. What happened to the women working on the buses? Do you think this was fair?

After peace was declared in November 1918, women remained in their jobs in order that the transport services remained up and running. It would take time before the men who had joined up were demobilised and able to return to work. Instead, the female transport workers were gradually dismissed from their jobs during the course of 1919. The transport companies had only ever intended to employ them on a temporary basis, and it wouldn't be until 1939 at the outbreak of the Second World War that women would be employed in these roles once again.

Did women have a stronger place in society at the end of the war?

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z9bf9j6>

Did this help women to eventually be able to vote?

