

W.R.N.S.

1917 - 1919

PART 1 OF 2

The foundations of the Women's Royal Naval Service were laid during the First World War, due to the efforts of Dame Katharine Furse as Director, who championed the rights and welfare of the Wrens tirelessly, following the formation of the Service on 29th November 1917.

The purpose of the WRNS was to cover the shortages in manpower, as the recruiting of more women for shore jobs would lead to more men being released for sea duties.

The Wrens in this War, just as in the Second, would not always be welcomed with open arms. It took a short while before the Admiralty would agree to the inclusion of 'Royal' in its title, a term not afforded to the non-naval women's services.

Yet for all its great strides, the WRNS ceased to exist in October 1919, without the formation of a Reserve. Its usefulness had come to an end, at least for the time being and the members rewarded only by a certificate of service.

Dame Katharine was determined to maintain the spirit of the WRNS in some capacity and instigated the Association of Wrens in 1920 to represent the interests of its members.

At its height, the membership of the WRNS during the First World War had reached just over 5000 ratings and 400 officers.

The importance of the WRNS during the First World War had been more the fact of its existence and the institution of a set of rules and regulations, rather than any impact of numbers involved. It was also significant that even before the outbreak of the Second, it was recognised that women would be needed to assist the Navy immediately war began; it was merely in regard to the numbers required that there was any dissent.

From very humble beginnings, the WRNS would grow rapidly, despite having no uniform at first.



WOMEN'S ROYAL NAVAL SERVICE
APPLY TO THE NEAREST EMPLOYMENT EXCHANGE

Object description:

The image occupies the majority, held within a black border. The title is separate and positioned across the bottom edge, in blue outlined black, and in black. The text is separate and positioned across the bottom edge, in black. All set against a green background. image: a full-length depiction of a member of the Women's Royal Naval Service wearing a uniform with a long skirt and a hat. She stands at the top of chalk cliffs above the sea, her arms raised in an imploring attitude. White flowers grow in the foreground. In the background are four seagulls, a lighthouse and a steam ship on the horizon. text: WRNS JOYCE DENNYS WOMEN'S ROYAL NAVAL SERVICE APPLY TO THE NEAREST EMPLOYMENT EXCHANGE THE DANGERFIELD PRINTING CO. LTD. LONDON.

Wrens' uniform.
First World War.

The rating's dress is made of navy blue serge, with a small sailor collar and patch pockets. The buttons are made of black horn with the crown-and-anchor pattern used by all naval ratings. The pudding-basin hat is made of gabardine and has a brim stiffened with circles of stitching and a cotton cap cover worn in summer. All ranks wore black stockings and shoes with their uniforms.

****The Tally Ribbon has the Crown and Anchor in the centre.****







1917.
 Dame Katherine Furse was appointed
 'Director of the WRNS'
 equivalent to the rank of Rear Admiral.

With her secretary Miss M. Butcher.



Source: Imperial War Museum
 Photographer: George P. Lewis



IWM

New officer recruits to the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) officers, wearing a mix of civilian dress and uniform, undergo drill at Crystal Palace during the First World War

Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) officers march past Dame Katharine Furse and staff officers at Crystal Palace, London.



IWM

What did Great War Wrens do?

| Officers' Branches | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Accounts | Administration |
| Anti-Gas | Cypher |
| Fleet Mail | Intelligence |
| Quarters | Secretarial & Signaller |

| Ratings' Trades | |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Cook | Steward |
| Laundress | Book keeper |
| Clerk | Telegraphist |
| Telephonist | Wireless Operator |
| Motor Driver | Despatch Rider |
| Fitter | Gyroscope Adjuster |
| Mine Cleaner | Turner |
| Porter in Victualling Stores | Respirator Repairer |
| Sail Maker | Depth charge Primer |
| Searchlight Lamp Maintenance and Repair | |
| Anti-Submarine Wire Net Constructor | |
| Hydrophone Maintenance and Repair | |



A motor despatch rider of the WRNS.



Telephonists of the WRNS at the naval exchange, Ipswich.



Ratings of the WRNS wire together glass floats as part of their work as mine net workers.



Ratings of WRNS mine net workers wiring together glass floats.





A group of bakers of the WRNS,
Royal Naval barracks, Chatham.





Gardeners of the WRNS tending a garden outside the Officers' Mess, Osea Island, Essex.



Storewomen of the WRNS sorting signal flags. Lowestoft.



Storewomen of the WRNS sorting ships' lamps, Lowestoft.



WRNS working as ships' clerks on board HMS Essex,
Devonport.



WRNS Ratings serving in the grocery canteen,
Royal Marine barracks, Chatham.



WRNS officers and ratings going down the
gangway of the liberty boat, Devonport.

WRNS ratings in a dormitory of the WRNS base on Osea Island, Essex.



WRNS officers and ratings outside their quarters on Osea Island, Essex.



Interior of a WRNS ratings' mess room, Osea Island, Essex.



Cooks at work in the kitchen at the WRNS base on Osea Island, Essex.

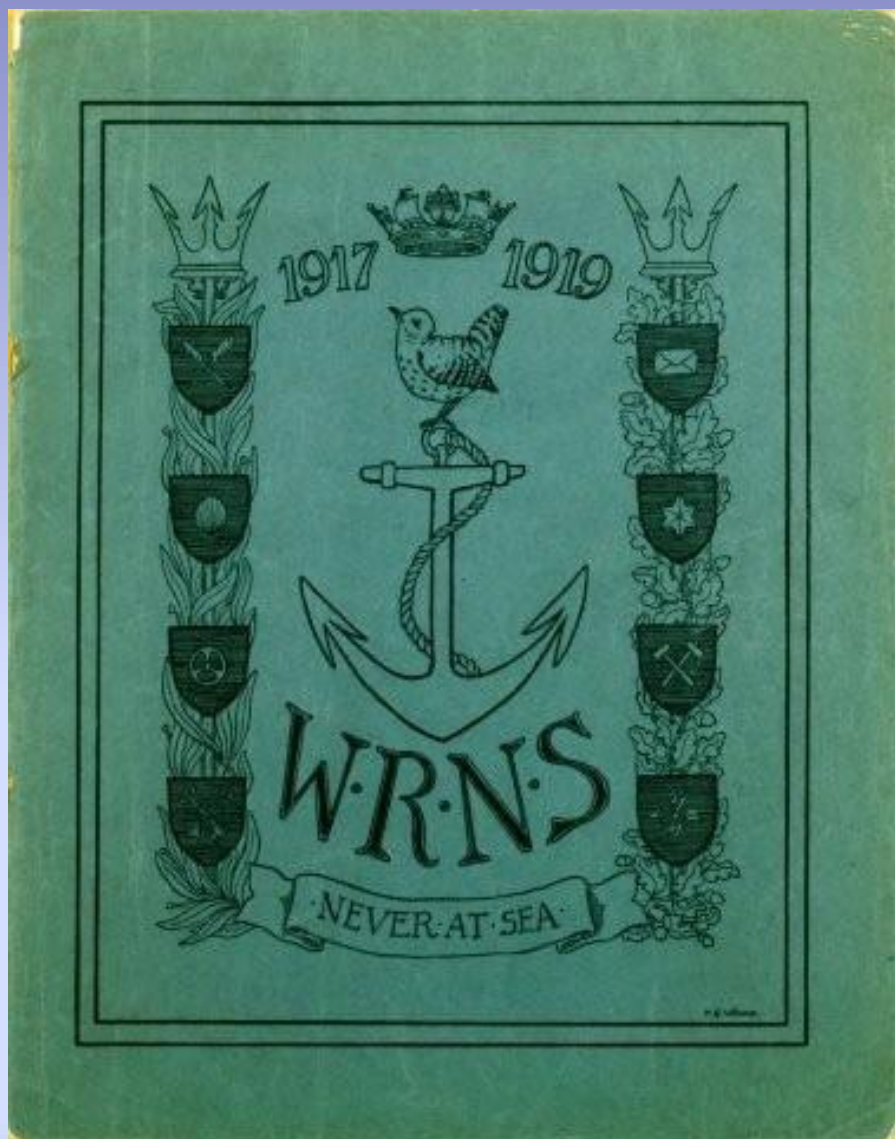


A. G. Thompson

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FOR
ENROLLED MEMBERS
OF THE
WOMEN'S ROYAL NAVAL SERVICE.

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Despite the praise they had earned the WRNS were disbanded on 1st October 1919.



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SOURCES:

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