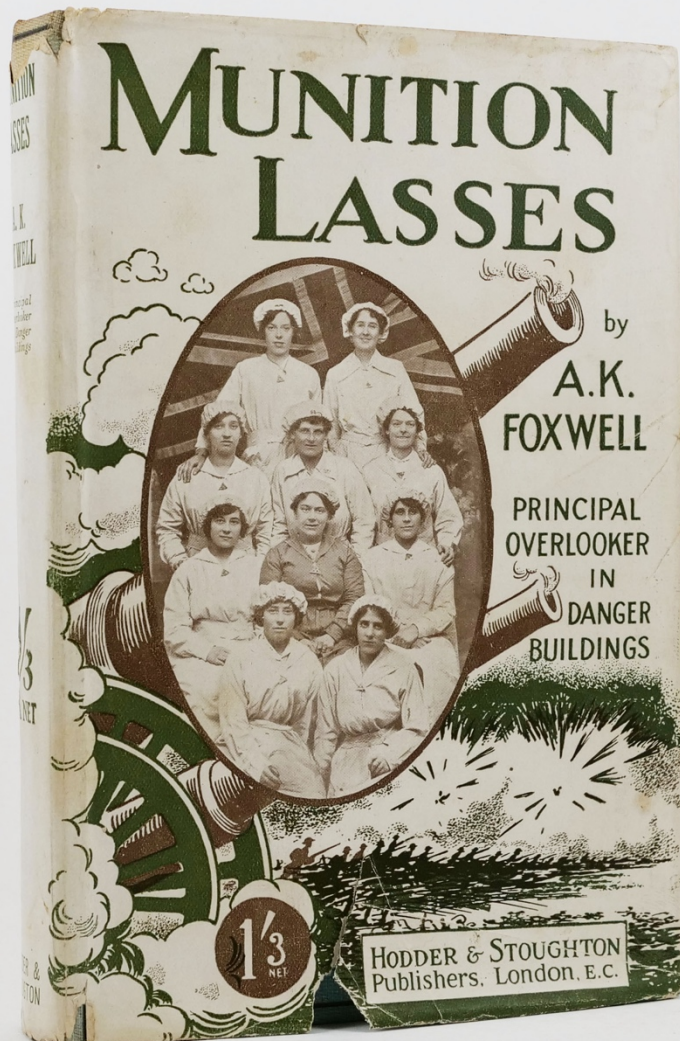


Alembic
RARE ☉ BOOKS

WOMEN MUNITION WORKERS OF THE
FIRST WORLD WAR



1. **Foxwell, A. K. Munition Lasses. Six Months as Principal Overlooker in Danger Buildings.** London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917.

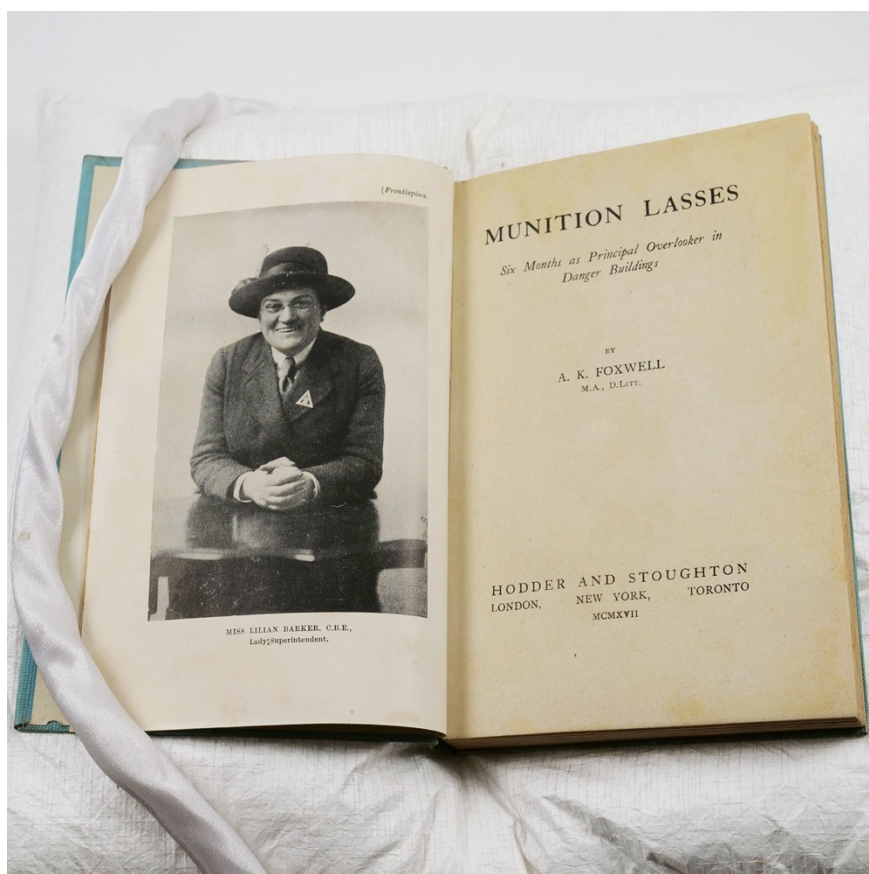
Octavo. Original light blue cloth, titles to spine and upper board in black. With the dust jacket. 2 double-sided plates from photographs. Spine rolled and faded with a mild crease, a little dulling and spotting of the cloth, contents toned with occasional spotting. Contemporary gift inscription to the front free endpaper. A very good copy in the rubbed and dulled jacket with three small chips to the spine panel and the lower edge of the upper panel, as well as a short closed tear and some nicks and creasing.

First edition, first impression of this account of women munition workers at the Woolwich Arsenal between July 1916 and January 1917. Uncommon, particularly in the dust jacket.

Author Agnes Kate Foxwell (1872-1957) was a graduate of University College London, a teacher at Cheltenham Ladies College, and active in the suffrage movement. In 1914 she joined the Voluntary Aid Detachment and worked as a Red Cross nurse in a number of military hospitals, primarily in London but also Rouen (<https://vad.redcross.org.uk/record?rowKey=78412>).

Shortly after women were first hired as employees of the Woolwich Arsenal in early 1916 she was recruited as Principal Overlooker in Danger Buildings, supervising employees in the most dangerous sections of the factory. The present volume describes her role and the perilous, exhausting, and low-paid work undertaken by women munition workers. It covers a wide variety of factory roles and also describes social life among the workers, but some technological details were omitted for national security reasons. The book is illustrated with four pages of photographs depicting the Woolwich employees, primarily in formal group shots, including several in costumes for a Joan of Arc pageant.

00807 £150





2. **Girvin, Brenda. *Munition Mary*. Illustrated by Gertrude Demain Hammond.**

London: Humphrey Milford, 1918.

Octavo. Original blue cloth, titles to spine and upper board gilt, elaborate illustrations to spine and upper board in black, yellow, and several shades of blue. Colour frontispiece and 3 plates. Sunday School prize bookplate awarded in 1927, the bookplate manufactured for Brown's Bookstore in Hull. Small manuscript note on 1996 purchase loosely inserted. Spine rolled, lightly rubbed at the extremities with just a little loss of size from the lower corners of the boards, endpapers partially toned. A very good copy.

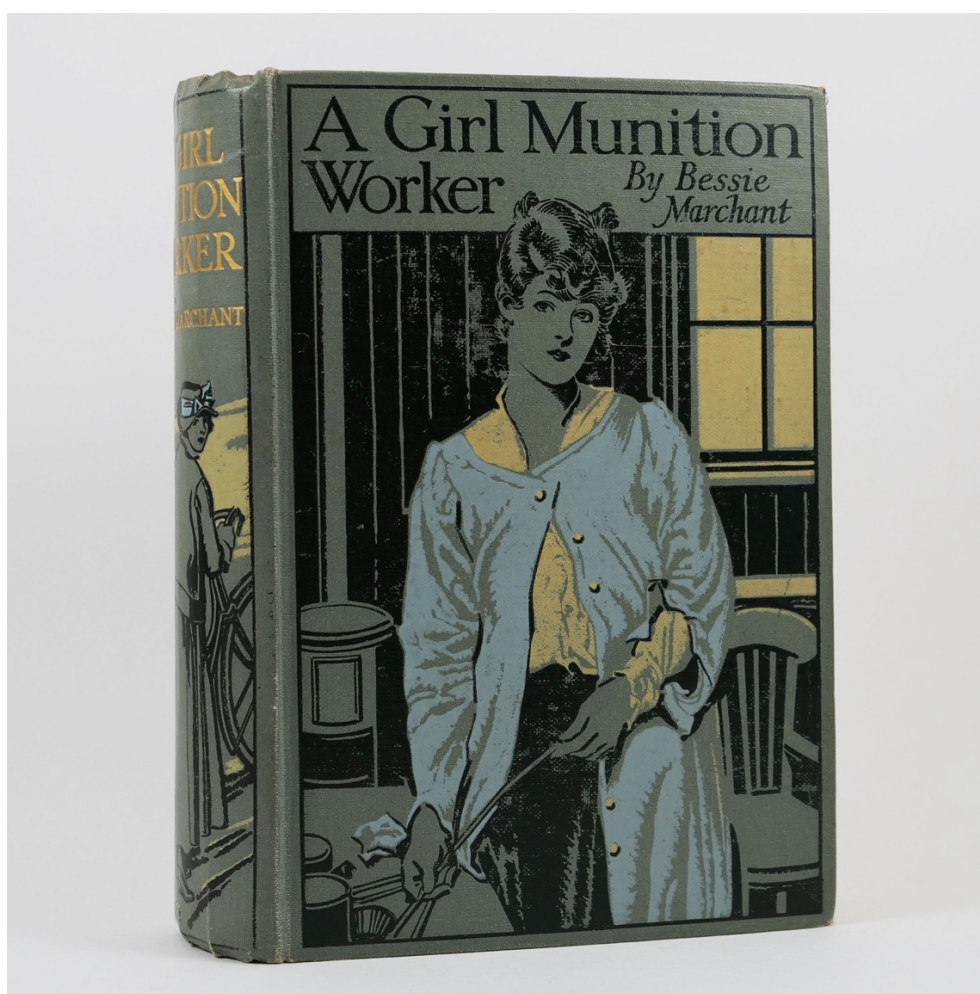
First edition, first impression of this important First World War adventure novel by the lesbian author Brenda Girvin (1884-1970). Uncommon with the decorative publisher's cloth in such nice condition.

During the First World War “female authors were quick to take advantage of the changing social climate in which women were taking up the opportunities of more and varied work outside the home and for the war effort. The heroines, albeit fewer in number than their male counterparts, worked on the land, in the factories, and as army and ambulance drivers. Brenda Girvin’s eponymous heroine in *Munition Mary* (1918) single-handedly foils a German spy-ring attempting to sabotage the newly employed female labor force in the munitions factory owned by the fierce Sir William. Sir William is so prejudiced against women working outside the home that he will apparently walk up several flights of stairs rather than get into a lift operated by a woman. Mary’s colleagues initially blame the sabotage on Sir William himself, but the loyal Mary fights to prove

his innocence and ultimately captures the Germans. Throughout however Girvin is at pains to let her readers know that Mary lost none of her 'womanliness' despite taking up men's work" (Kennedy, "The Children's War: British Children's Experience of the Great War", Goldsmith's College PhD thesis, p. 218).

Girvin and her partner Monica Cosens (1888-1973) both served in the Women's Royal Naval Service during the First World War, and Girvin dedicated this volume to her "munition friend" the artist Margaret Kemp-Welch (1874-1968), who presumably worked in one of the factories at the same time. Girvin and Cosens had extensive careers as children's authors, often working together on books and plays. Together they built the remarkable vernacular-style holiday cottage Cock Rock in North Devon, which was designed by the prominent architect and landscape designer Oliver Hill (1887-1968) (Kepp, "Gardens by Oliver Hill in North Devon", *Journal of the Devon Gardens Trust*, March 2020).

00808 £150



3. **Marchant, Bessie. A Girl Mmunition Worker. The Story of a Girl's Work during the Great War. Illustrated by J. E. Sutcliffe.** London: Blackie and Son Limited, [c. 1916].

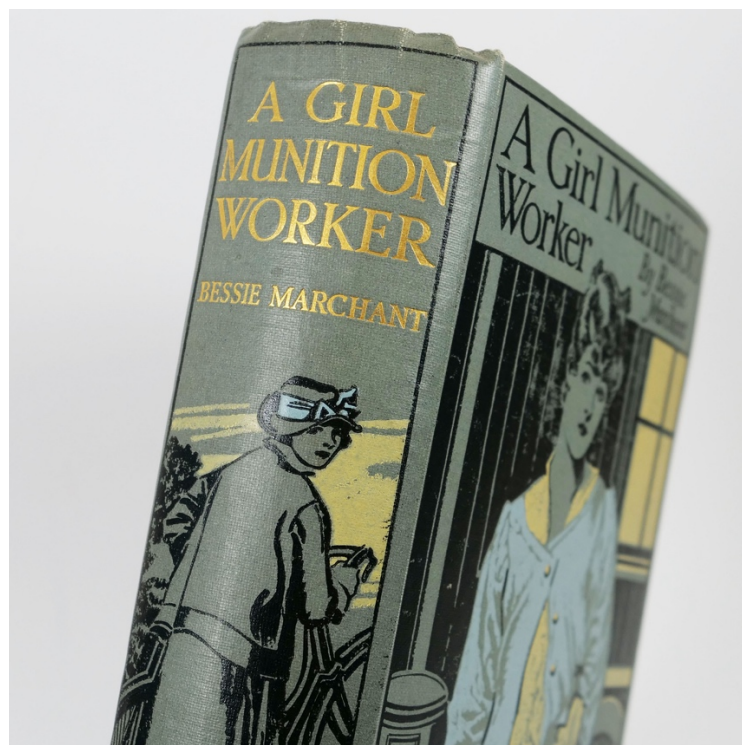
Octavo. Original grey cloth blocked in black, blue, and yellow, grey coated endpapers. Frontispiece and 5 plates. Bookseller's ticket of William Pile of Sutton and Wallington. Spine rolled, cloth rubbed with slight wear at the tips, spotting to the edges of the text block and title page and occasionally to the contents, small raised spot on the frontispiece. Very good condition.

First edition of this important First World War adventure novel by the prolific children's writer sometimes described as "the girls' G. A. Henty".

Bessie Marchant Comfort (1862-1941) spent her entire life in England, but wrote close to 150 novels set in locations around the world. Her protagonists are mainly young women who take on masculine-coded traits and roles, overcoming fear and uncertainty to save the day (and often male characters) through intelligence, courage, and self-control. In *A Girl Munition Worker* the heroine, Deborah, is employed in a munitions factory and becomes involved in the case of a German spy, heroically foiling a Zeppelin raid against the facility by shooting the agent guiding the airship from the ground.

"British and American wartime girls' books unabashedly celebrate opportunities for middle-class heroines to take on exciting new jobs outside the home: as munition factory workers in Brenda Girvin's *Munition Mary* (1918) and Bessie Marchant's *A Girl Munition Worker* (1916), or as farm laborers in Marchant's *A Transport Girl in France* (1919). Within these workplace settings, the protagonists perform additional heroic service by identifying and capturing German spies. As intrepid spy catchers, girl heroines are able to contribute to the war effort by engaging, like their soldier counterparts, with the enemy, but they make use of what are portrayed as some distinctly feminine weapons: curiosity and intuition. At the same time, by hunting down and confronting dangerous spies, the young female protagonists in these books demonstrate a level of bravery not typically associated with femininity at that time. Ironically, these moments of gender-bending are often followed by scenes in which the girls fall in a faint, clearly overcome by the magnitude of what they have done... The activities of these characters, both as working girls and as spy catchers, clearly challenge the notion that a girl's or woman's world must be limited to the domestic sphere. At the same time, the radicality of this message is tempered by frequent reminders of the heroine's femininity, beauty, and physical and emotional fragility" (Redmann, "Girls Reading the Great War", *Women Writing War*, 2018).

00806 £150





Gauging Shells

Volunteers making shells at a large munition works. They have been met with every c
of their hands in three war

4. **War Office. Women's War Work.** In Maintaining the Industries & Export Trade of the United Kingdom. Information Officially Compiled for the Use of Recruiting Officers, Military Representatives and Tribunals. Issued by the War Office, September 1916. London: Printed under the Authority of His Majesty's Stationery Office by the Chiswick Press, 1916.

Tall quarto. Original grey wrappers printed in black. 20 leaves of glossy paper with integral page numbering, 3 pages of which are text-only and one blank, the rest comprising 72 black and white photographs. War office Library ink stamps to the upper wrapper and title, small blue ink mark to the upper wrapper partially bracketing "War office" in the imprint, spot from sticker removal affecting the tail of the spine and edges of the wrappers. Loss from the spine, which has been strengthened with adhesive at some point in the past. A little light creasing and rubbing at the other edges of the wrappers. Contents clean. A very good copy.

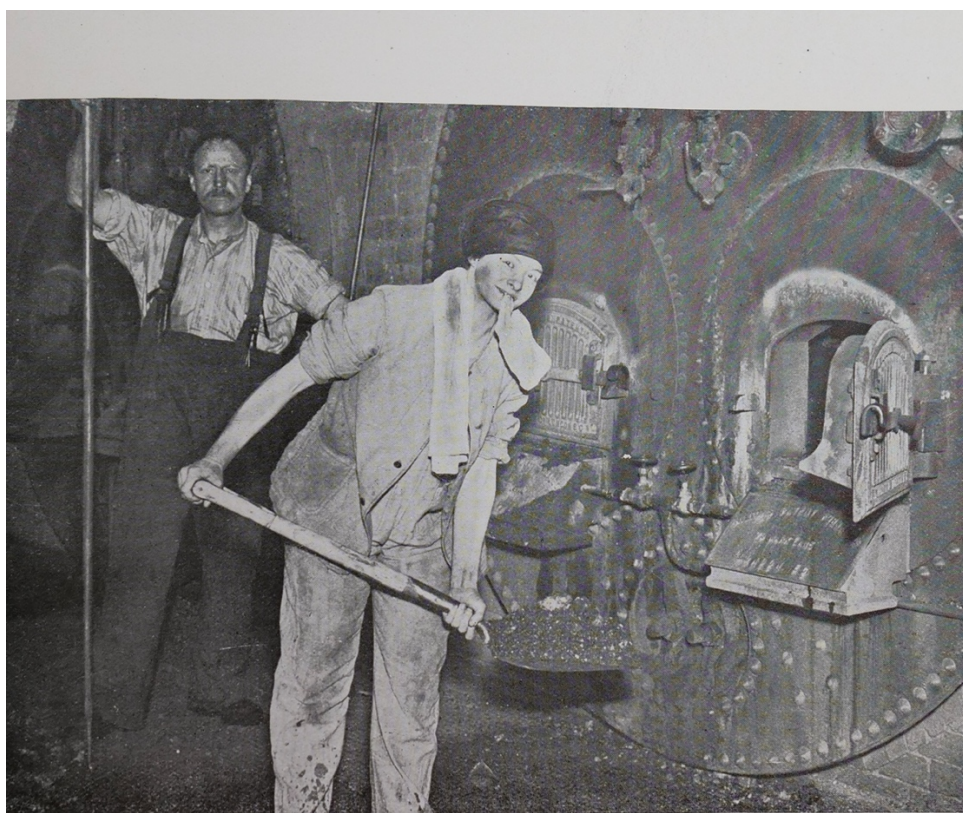
First and only edition of this uncommon and evocatively-illustrated publication on women's contributions on the British home front during the First World War. This copy from the War Office Library, with its ink stamp on the title and upper cover.

Very quickly after the outbreak of the war it became clear that the mobilisation of the male workforce would create shortages of munitions, equipment, and food, and that large numbers of women would need to move into jobs from which they were previously restricted. Despite the hesitance of some officials, factory managers, and trade unions, "reports were conducted early on as to the suitability of women to meet the demands of such work. As early as 1915 the Ministry of Munitions Supply Committee made recommendations on the employment and remuneration of women on munitions work. This helped contribute to agreed suitable

conditions by which a woman could be employed, and the War Office published several guides as to the employment of women” (“The Munitionettes and the Work of Women in the First World War”, National Records of Scotland).

Women's War Work was one of these publications, appearing in 1916 and providing a very detailed list of roles in which women had been “successfully in the temporary replacement of men”, not only in munitions, but also the production of everyday goods such as chemicals and fertiliser, soap, candles, clothing and textiles, food and drink, and paper goods, including printing and book binding. The lists are accompanied by contact details of officials who can assist in the recruitment of women, and by an exceptional 72 large photographs of women at work. One woman is pictured modelling artificial teeth in wax for dentistry; brewery employees roll barrels and clean out vats; wagon washers pose with buckets and brushes in the middle of their messy shift; a smiling woman “stokes the furnaces of a large factory in South London”; an agricultural worker with the Women’s Volunteer Reserve sharpens the blade of a sickle, pianos are tuned, and women are photographed serving as butchers, bakers, window washers, porters, drivers, and posties. Numerous roles within heavy industry are depicted, from the manufacture of ammunition to the production of glass, radiators, tanned leather, and motorcycles. This is a fantastic record of women as home front workers, with most of the images so far having seen little to no reproduction in popular culture.

00644 £375



[Photo Newspaper Photograph.c

A Woman Stoker working at the Furnaces of a large factory in South London