

The Role of Women in the Edwardian Era

All women in the Edwardian era were educated very little. Upper-class women learned geography, a language, a little maths, needlework, elocution (study of formal speaking) and comportment (behaviour –in a way). Although poorer children only learnt to cook, clean, read and maybe some sums and history, they did not have access to “higher” education like the upper-class women did. Working-class unmarried women searched for work in factories or services. If a servant met someone they would leave the service and become a wife and mother. Middle-class women could be a secretary, governess, clerk or bookkeeper. They could earn money for themselves until they were married. They would then quit their job to have a family. Because middle-class women enjoyed more freedom, they deeply supported the women’s rights movement.

The Attitude of Young Men towards the War

Young men had a very enthusiastic attitude towards the war and saw it as a very noble and brave ‘activity’. Everyone thought that the men would “be back by Christmas”, when in fact it was much later than that when not many of them returned. They had no knowledge of reality when it came to war. Young men saw it as masculine and a just cause – it was seen as an adventure. They thought it would be great getting paid to be with your friends and go on a thrilling adventure. However, many young men were pressured into volunteering because of peer pressure, impressing women and the respect that came from wearing a uniform and “doing your bit”. It was also widely promoted by the government which had a large impact on everyone. War propaganda was everywhere pressuring young men to sign up.

The Rise of the Union 1912

Between 1888 and 1918 unions grew at the fastest rate than any other time in history. This was because of many successes by different unions, especially unions to do with women’s rights. Membership figures were from 750,000 in 1888 to 6,500,000 by 1918. The success of the women match workers’ strike in 1888 and the Gasworkers’ and Dockers’ strikes in 1889 inspired trade unionism among unskilled, semi-skilled, white collar and professional workers to spread rapidly. The dockers’ strike lasted 5 weeks for demanding a minimum of 4 hours per day for a minimum wage of 6 pence an hour. They won their demands and their victory was ensured by the financial support received from other trade unionists, including a £30,000 donation from Australia.