



Prisoners of war near the Abbey

The memorials are for Wilfred Owen the great war poet. His parents lived close to the Abbey at the end of the war. In 1918 his mother, Susan Owen, was listening to the Abbey bells ringing out in celebration for the Armistice when she received the telegram that so many mothers dreaded, telling her that Wilfred had been killed just before the end of the war.

- 6** On the other side of the road is a car park. Go into this and look for an interpretation board on the right-hand side close to the toilets.

As you will see from the board this was a German prisoner of war camp housing more than 550 soldiers and seamen. The camp was the disused yards of a railway and carriage works and on one side houses with gardens backed onto the camp wire fence. In one of the houses lived Mrs Mary Hayes and her maid, Alice France. They used to wave to the prisoners and were told off for doing it on numerous occasions.

After a routine search of the camp a secret "post box" was found hidden in the wire at the back of Mary's garden. The guards mounted a watch on the box and saw Alice France visit it looking for letters from the prisoners. When the camp huts were searched incriminating letters were found and Mary and Alice were in serious trouble!

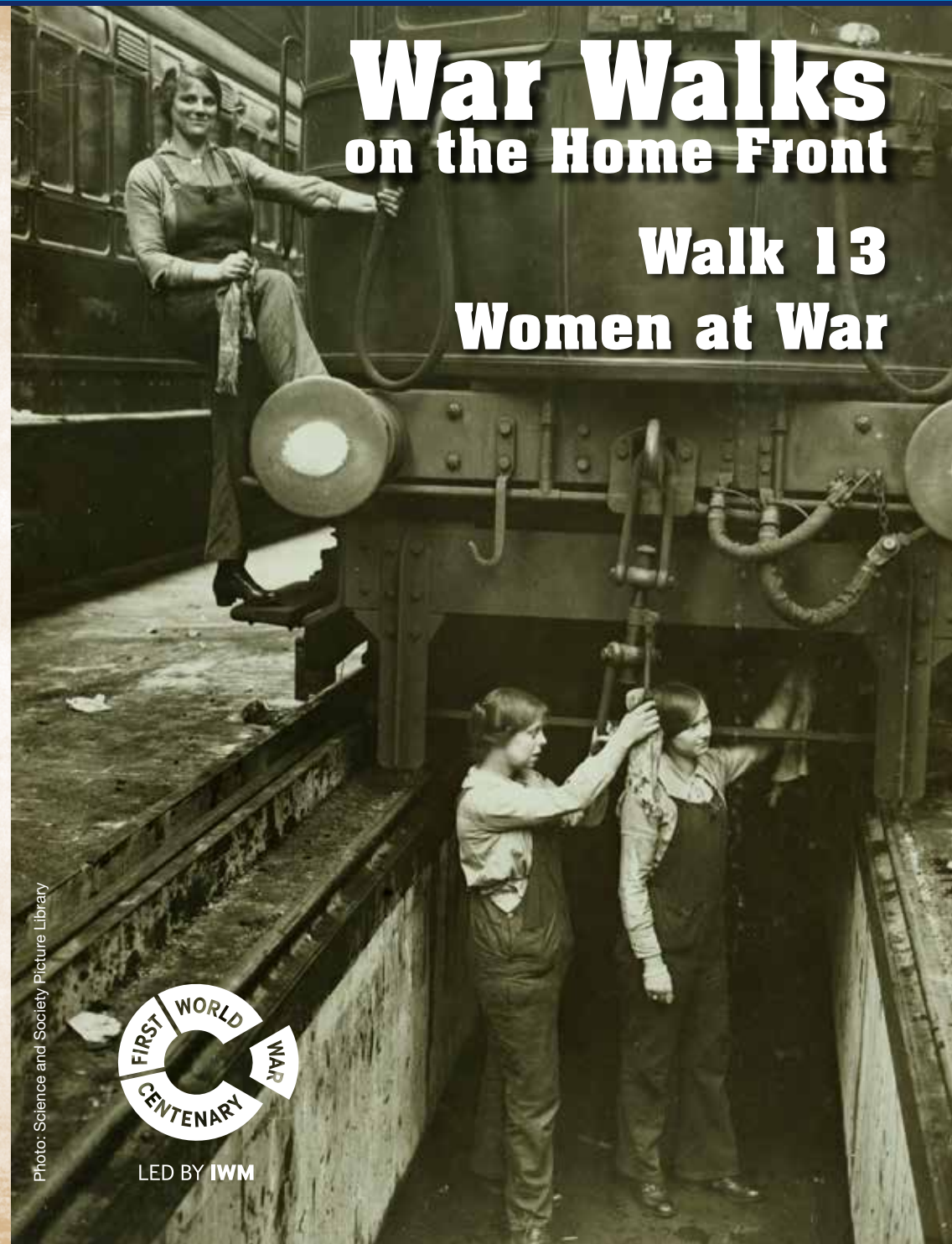
- 7** From the car park retrace your steps back over English Bridge. At the end of the bridge take the steps down to the riverside path. Walk along the path noting the wonderful views the recuperating soldiers in the infirmary would have had. After walking under the railway bridge look for the Dana steps leading up to the old prison. Take the footbridge over the railway which will lead you back to the railway station

At the beginning of the war life for British women was domestic working at home or in service.

During the war the thousands of "canaries", so called because the explosives turned their skin yellow, worked in the munitions factories: without them the guns would not have been firing.

By the end of the war more than 1.6 million had entered into almost every part of the workforce and Britain had changed for ever.

If you would like more information on the War, please visit the town museum. Discover more about World War 1 in Shropshire at: [www.shropshireremembers.org.uk](http://www.shropshireremembers.org.uk)



# War Walks on the Home Front

## Walk 13 Women at War



LED BY IWM

## Walk 13 – Women at War

**Distance:** 2.6 Kms

**Grade:** easy, pavements and some steep steps

From the station this walk leads you through Shrewsbury to the Abbey and the site of a WW1 prisoner of war camp.

On the way we will tell you the affect that the war had on women in general and five women in particular.

- 1 The walk begins from the station forecourt.

Before 1914 Over half a million worked on the railways but only 13,000 were women. Their roles were traditionally those of cooks, kitchen assistants, cleaners, laundry women and chambermaids both on the trains, in the stations and in the many railway hotels. During the war a third of all the railwaymen enlisted and somebody had to take on the work. Women were now recruited in every role except engine drivers and firemen where the training was considered too long. Now there were female engineers, trackmen, guards, level crossing guards and signalmen. Some of the work was too dangerous to do wearing a skirt so women wore overalls for the first time. For some people this was scandalous as women in trousers was thought to be unfeminine and immodest!

By the end of the war there were 180,000 women working on the railways.

- 2 Carefully cross the road and walk up to the front garden of the library.

Here you will find a bust of Mary Webb, the great writer of the early part of the 20th century. She had three brothers in the war and the effect it had on her is reflected in one of her poems

Where she compared the rocks of the stiperstones to

*'Tombstones with no name, no date, no word of hope, fit for the nameless, dateless dead, beasts and men who had gone into the silence of annihilation.'*

Opposite is the castle where countless men were recruited into the 12 battalions of the Shropshire Light Infantry.

- 3 Walk up Castle Street, cross at the traffic lights, turn left into Windsor Place and walk to the parade shopping centre.

This building, now flats and specialist shops, was built in 1830 and was the Royal Salop Infirmary. It saw much service in the war receiving wounded soldiers for convalescence. At the outbreak of the war a remarkable woman worked here. If you look at the small plaque on the left-hand side of the entrance you will see her name, Katherine Mary Harley. She was a nurse who, despite being 61 volunteered to serve in a hospital in France.

- 4 Turn around and walk to the front of St Mary's church facing you. Go inside and down to the end of the church on the right.

Look at the large imposing war memorial and you will see the names of local people killed in the war. Only one name is engraved in full, that of Katherine Harley. She had served in a hospital and had the idea of creating, and running, a "flying column" rescuing and evacuating allied soldiers. For this work, she was awarded the Croix de Guerre by the French. Later she worked with the Serbian Army and was tragically killed at Monastir in 1917 by an enemy shell as she was feeding starving Serbian civilians.

Engraved on her grave in the military cemetery in Salonika are the words:

*"On your tomb instead of flowers the gratitude of the Serbs shall blossom there for your wonderful acts. Your name shall be known from generation to generation"*

- 5 Leave the church and turn left along St Mary's Street, along Dogpole and then turn left at the traffic lights. Walk down Wyle Cop and cross the English Bridge over the River Severn. In front of you is Shrewsbury Abbey of Cadfael fame. If the Abbey is open go in and look at the war memorial to the left of the entrance, if closed walk to the rear of the graveyard for a low white memorial, next to the road is an interpretation board telling you all about it.



Mary Webb



St Mary's war memorial



Katherine Harley