

GLAMORGAN RECORD OFFICE/ARCHIFDY MORGANNWG

Reference code: GB 0214 D573

Title: Women's Royal Air Force Records

Dates : c. 1918

Level of description: Fonds

Extent and medium: 0.005 cubic metres (4 photographs)

Name of creator(s): Unknown

Administrative/biographical history

In April 1918 it was decided to form the Royal Air Force (RAF) by amalgamating the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) with the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). Also formed at this time was Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF). The main aim of the WRAF was "to train women to take over the work of the home based mechanics and so to free them for service in the combat areas". It was soon decided that this program of replacement needed to be carried out as swiftly as possible to free up the RAF mechanics. The numbers of recruits increased rapidly, as enthusiastic young women, eager to learn a new and previously inaccessible trade, joined up from both civilian life and a variety of other uniformed organisations, one of these being the Royal Air Force Nursing Service.

Initially civilian recruitment was to take place at local Labour Exchanges, and women were under civil contract, not enlisted. The Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) backed the contract but the RAF did not find this arrangement satisfactory. The term of duty each recruit signed up for was a total of one year or the term of the war which ever was the greater. A woman had to be eighteen before she could even be considered for enlistment. 'Mobile' recruits were liable for service anywhere in the UK and 'Immobile' could only serve in local units. This system divided the recruits into areas prior to them being allotted to stations or squadrons.

During the first few months of formation, the WRAF were issued with uniforms from the Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps, with the words Royal Flying Corps on the sleeves. By November 1918 new uniforms were being issued, based on a tunic style uniform similar to that of the RAF. In 1919, it was decided that these uniforms should be replaced only when worn out, not on a yearly basis as with other ranks in the RAF. The WRAF aircraft fitters used to wear skirts; it still had not been accepted for women to wear trousers.

In terms of sheer numbers alone, the WRAF and its fellow female service organisations were impressive. By the middle of 1918 the total number of recruits who belonged to the three voluntary organisations reached 25000. Haton Park was the principle training ground for the Royal Flying School and during 1919, 2000 women underwent training here. The WRAF employed women in some 43 different trades, these included armourers, radio operators, parachute packers, balloon operators, fabric workers, drivers, flight mechanic and instrument mechanic.

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When the Armistice was signed at the end of the First World War, both the WRAF and the RAF itself were actively recruiting women into the service. After the War's end, little recruiting took place for women as it was thought that once the men were all back safely, the WRAF would be disbanded. However in March 1919, 'mobiles' were sent abroad because of the rapidly thinning number of airmen as thousands left the services at the end of hostilities. The women were sent both to France and Cologne in Germany, during April and May.

Once back in England, however it was not long before the demob procedures were started and the WRAF finally disbanded on 1st April 1920, only two years after it had been formed.

Archival history

Discarded by the RAFA Club, Porthkerry Road, Barry.

Immediate source of acquisition

Retrieved from a skip by the depositor, July 2008.

Scope and content

Photographs (copies) of Women's Royal Air Force

Appraisal, destruction and scheduling information

All records which meet the collection policy of the Glamorgan Record Office have been retained.

Accruals

Accruals are not expected.

System of arrangement

Order at time of deposit retained.

Conditions governing access

No restrictions.

Conditions governing reproduction

Contact Glamorgan Record Office for details of the owner of copyright to this item.

Physical characteristics and technical requirements

Good condition

Finding aids

A detailed catalogue is not currently available.

Existence and location of originals

The location of the original of these images is unknown.

Existence and location of copies

Not applicable

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Related units of description

Not applicable

Publication note

Not applicable

Note

Not applicable

Archivist's note

Compiled by Geoff Edwards for the Glamorgan Record Office, with reference to "Royal Air Force History : The WRAF - Women in the Blue" (www.raf.mod.uk/history_old/wraf.html), viewed 25 Aug 2008.

Rules or conventions

This description follows Glamorgan Record Office guidelines based on ISAD(G) compatible cataloguing guidelines for fonds level descriptions used by the Archives Network Wales.

Date of description

27 Aug 2008

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Photographs

D573/1/1	Four WRAF mechanics working on bi-plane fuselage [1 photograph]	1918-1920
D573/1/2	Informal group photograph of WRAF members [1 photograph]	1918-1920
D573/1/3	Members of WRAF sitting on fallen tree [1 photograph]	1918-1920
D573/1/4	Members of WRAF at work in an office [1 photograph]	1918-1920