

## Women

# Gertrude Coggins - Ticket Collector



**Read this article to learn about Gertrude Coggins who worked as a ticket collector at Brighton Station.**

When men left Brighton and Hove to join the army and navy, many jobs and businesses became short staffed. As a result new job opportunities opened up for women. Gertrude was able to leave her work as a domestic servant and on 10th May 1915, she started work as a ticket collector at Brighton Station.

Her son, Gerald Wheatley, remembers her popularity with the station staff:

*'She knew a lot of the railway personnel, you see, because she was in this big station. When I was a kid in Newhaven, she'd go once a week either to Lewes or*



*Eastbourne or another place nearby by train and take me with her, and she'd always stop and talk to the ticket collectors ... they all knew each other.*

*She loved her job and I think she really didn't want to give it up, but she had to when the war ended.'*

The war left its mark on the family as Gertrude's brother, William, had been killed in action in 1916:

*'He was the only lad in a family of four sisters and he was killed on [the Somme](#) in July [1916]. I think the whole family was devastated. My grandmother would never talk about it and nor would any of the girls. I used to ask Mum about my uncle and she'd say, "He was a lovely chap." And they were all absolutely shattered.*

*So from the age of five my poppies have gone on his photograph and Remembrance Day really meant something, that's how it brought it home really.'*

During the war, Gertrude kept an autograph book. Through the entries in this book, we learn something of her life during the years of the First World War.

When war was declared on 4th August 1914, the entries in the autograph book show a change of mood. Some verses display the patriotism of the time, others make fun of the [German Kaiser](#), while many still refer to the everyday lives and loves of young people.

As Gertrude's soldier friends and relations left for war, some wrote verses for her. There is one entry by Gertrude's future husband, Joseph Wheatley:



*I want you just to cheer me  
when I'm in the fighting line  
That's why I write these few lines  
for the sake of "Auld Lang Syne"*

*Xmas 1914 J. Wheatley 47903 R.G.A.*

As the railwaymen returned home after the war, the women, who had kept the railway industry going during the war years, were also expected to return to their pre-war occupations and families. Gertrude's employment at Brighton Station came to an end on 5th December 1919, and the next year she married Joseph Wheatley. Together they ran the Ark Inn pub in Newhaven.

### Questions

- 1) What was Gertrude's job before the war?
- 2) Why did women like Gertrude need to work on the railways?
- 3) Why did Gertrude leave her job as a ticket collector?



## Images



Figure 1: Gertrude Coggins - Photograph by kind permission of Gerald Wheatley







Figure 2: Gertrude Coggins, ticket collector, Brighton Station 1915-1919 (centre, seated). Photographs by kind permission of Gerald Wheatley





Figure 3: Images from Gertrude's autograph book reproduced by kind permission of Gerald Wheatley





Figure 4: Images from Gertrude's autograph book reproduced by kind permission of Gerald Wheatley

