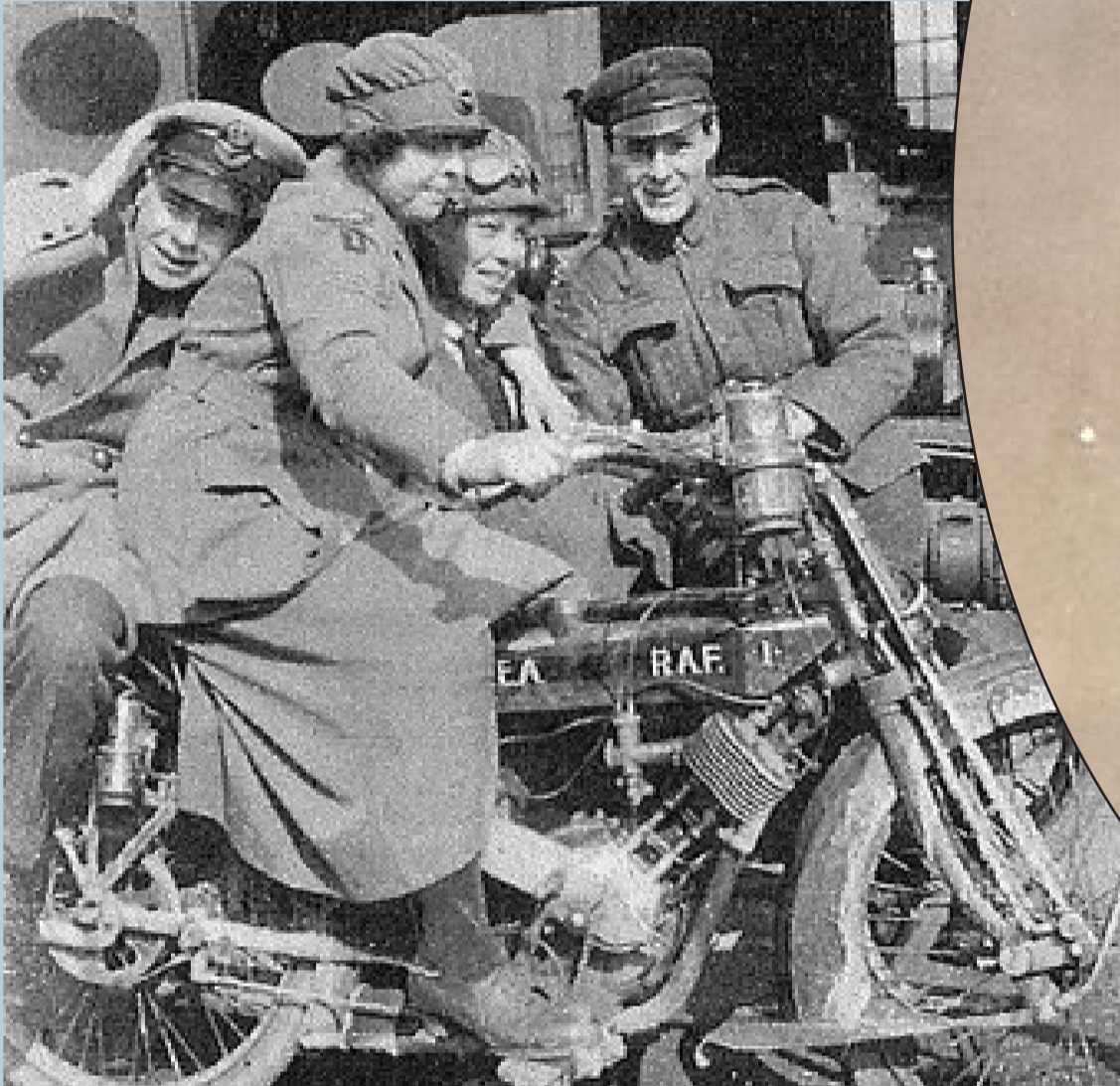


# BIRTH OF THE WRAF

How Eastchurch helped set women on a path to the skies



**J**ust as Eastchurch was a cradle of aviation, so too was it at the forefront of women joining Britain's flying forces.

Women were serving at its airfield when it was under the command of the Royal Naval Air Service in the early years of the First World War.

They filled positions such as clerks, drivers and mechanics to free men for frontline service. There is also evidence of women serving at Eastchurch in the Voluntary Aid Detachment, a civilian organisation that provided nursing care for military personnel in Britain and, later in the war, on the frontline.

When the decision was taken to merge the RNAS with the Royal Flying Corps to form the Royal Air Force, concerns were raised about the loss of their



*These pictures show women serving with the RAF at Eastchurch in 1919. The personnel included May Newman, main picture*

specialised female workforce. This need for a separate women's service led to the formation of the WRAF on April 1, 1918.

It lasted little more than year, although when the order came to close down contingents in 1919, RAF sections were unwilling to lose their airwomen and

delayed the disbandment as long as possible. It was another 30 years before the WRAF was reborn, offering women a full career in the air force for the first time.

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