

ADA SMART

1894 - 1976

Lived at 9 Norfolk St, Bristol
Married to Arthur Herbert Smart, 1925

Ada Smart was born in Birmingham on 11th October 1894, the daughter of John Henry Smith and his wife Ada Smith.

She moved to Bristol and by 1911 was living with her sister Elizabeth Hartley in St Pauls, working as a shirt maker at Peter's the Drapers.

In March 1915 the UK Board of Trade launched a campaign to encourage women to register for war service. Around 124,000 signed up. Employers were generally enthusiastic about female recruitment during the war because women usually accepted lower wages than their male counterparts. Ada became a



Photography Source: Aerospace Bristol Archives

munitions worker in Filton during WW1, gluing the wings of aircraft.

In the summer of 1925, Ada married Arthur Herbert Smart (21 years her senior) who was an 'inspector to the motor trade', and together they had a son, Donald.

By 1939 she was living at 20 Rugby Road, Bristol with Donald (by that time working for GWR) and Arthur. She is listed as doing 'unpaid domestic duties' (1939 England and Wales Register).

The women were mainly offered unskilled positions at aircraft factories as part of the process of breaking down previously complex, skilled work into its basic constituent parts to increase production. One of the jobs they took on was stringing, making wood and wire

frames over which canvas was stretched as tightly as possible and then stitched by hand to form the structure of the wings and fuselage. They then applied a substance called dope to the fabric to tighten it further on the frame and make a smooth surface. The dope also acted as a form of varnish. It was highly toxic. Non-poisonous dope was not available in the UK (though it was in use elsewhere) and the women were given milk to counter the effects of giddiness, headaches and fatigue.

At Filton in July 1916 a new, separate canteen and restroom were built for women joining the company. This was part of the war-time expansion programme. The War Office also contributed £30,000 towards the cost of erecting a new assembly hall with fabric and dope shops where many women were employed.

Ada died on 22nd January 1976, aged 81.

