

Florence Moorcroft née Lovibond

Factory Inspector

Florence Lovibond was born in 1879 in London where her father, Valentine Lovibond, was a partner at the Cannon Brewery in Fulham.

Florence (family nickname “Tod”) attended Kensington High School for Girls and grew up in a lively household with liberal views and with a mother, Frederica, who attended suffrage meetings and supported the promotion of better health conditions for mothers and children. Frederica also studied to become a qualified brewer and was the first woman in the country to do this. This meant that, when Valentine died in 1895, she could pick up the reins and continue running the brewery.

The family moved to Blackheath in south London and Florence’s sister Beatrice qualified as a doctor. She cared for patients in south east London and her knowledge and dedication led to her caring for some important people.

Florence attended Bedford College to study Science, specialising in Hygiene. This led her to a job in 1901 with the Inspectorate of Factories. Here she would supervise premises where women were employed and check ventilation and washing facilities.

Florence worked as the first woman sanitary inspector both in Rochdale and then again in Holborn in London. In 1906 she qualified as an Inspector of Factories, employed by the Government and earning around £200 a year. This appointment required her to work in any part of the British Isles.



Florence recorded the sequence of events that typified her work. In addition to some preparatory work to identify the profile of the workforce and the presence of any new workshops on the site, the factory inspection would follow the same process:

“The inspector first asks to see the acting manager, explains her business and probably, if it is a first visit, shows a signed authority of entry.

Then in rapid succession the condition as to the lighting, heating and means of ventilation are jotted down with the condition and cleanliness of walls and ceilings

When going through the workrooms, the first point noted is how warm or close, cold or draughty, as the case may be the room feels on entering from the outside air.”



Dressed for work with thermometer attached to her waistband

By 1910, Florence was working away from home most of the time. In addition to the factory inspections, during epidemics of disease, she visited schools to offer advice to head teachers and mothers.

In 1912 she was employed to inspect around 250 pottery factories in Stoke on Trent, where she would become known as “the Angel of the Potteries”. She also joined the campaign started by Millicent, Duchess of Sutherland, to remove the lead from paint being used in factories.

The Annual Report of the Chief of Inspector of Factories in 1912 includes the investigation of industrial poisoning affecting women. It states *“There were thirty cases in the china and earthenware trade of which one was fatal and four were classed as severe. Most of these cases were investigated by Miss Lovibond, thirteen arising in earthenware, five each in china and tile manufacture, one in sanitary ware.”*

While working in Stoke on Trent, Florence rented a room at the Trentham Hotel and it was there that her life would change, when she met a local man — William Moorcroft.

