

*Women's History*

# MAGAZINE



*Issue 59*  
*Autumn/Winter*  
*2008*  
*Issn 1476-6760*

*Erin Bell on*  
*Women and History on TV*

*Caroline Kanerick on*  
*Novelist Florence L. Barclay*

*Jane Potter on*  
*Daughters of Educated Men*

*Anne Lykke Poulson on*  
*Women's Gymnastics and*  
*Citizenship in Denmark*

*Plus*  
*Eight book reviews*  
*Call for Reviewers*  
*Prizes*  
*WHN Conference Reports*  
*Committee News*  
*Reader Offers*

women's  
HISTORY  
NETWORK



[www.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.womenshistorynetwork.org)

# Women's History Network

18th Annual Conference 2009

## Women, Gender and Political Spaces:



**St Hilda's College**  
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

women's  
HISTORY  
NETWORK



## Historical Perspectives

**St. Hilda's College, Oxford, 11-13 September 2009**

*Invited keynote speakers include*

Vera Baird, QC, MP

Olwen Hufton (Oxford)

Linda Kerber (University of Iowa)

*Themes to include:*

- Gender and institutional politics
- Women's movements and identity politics
- Negotiation of power and authority within the family
- Community and neighbourhood empowerment
- Politics of the workplace
- Gender and cultural production



For general enquiries, please contact Aurelia Annat:  
**[whnconference2009@history.ox.ac.uk](mailto:whnconference2009@history.ox.ac.uk)**

For enquiries relating to papers to be presented at  
the conference, please contact Eve Colpus:  
**[whnconferencepapers@history.ox.ac.uk](mailto:whnconferencepapers@history.ox.ac.uk)**

Further information and a conference call will be posted on the WHN website

**[www.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.womenshistorynetwork.org)**

# Editorial

Welcome to the Autumn/Winter edition of *Women's History Magazine*. Two of our articles in this issue have a distinct literary theme, although we begin and conclude with authors who focus on other areas, namely women and history on TV and gymnastics and women's citizenship. Thus we offer an altogether thought-provoking collection of articles which will provide, we hope, something of special interest to all our readers.

'No one wants to be lectured at by a woman'; this remark, which headlines our first piece, was addressed to a well-known female historian and TV presenter, at the start of her career. Erin Bell, in a meticulously-argued article, unpacks the assumptions and gender discourses that surround the history programmes that make it to our screens. Just who, asks Bell, is allowed to act as an authority on history, or as a mediator between the past and a TV audience? Bell's research presented here forms part of the AHRC-funded 'Televising history 1995-2010' project based at the University of Lincoln.

Our literary trope is led by Caroline Kanerick's study of the popular, early twentieth-century romantic novelist, Florence L. Barclay. Due to its emphasis on domesticity and 'wholesome' religious and moral values, Barclay's work is most often understood as providing an alternative to the sensationalism of contemporaries such as Marie Corelli and so paving the way for the more realistic treatments of later popular romantic fiction. Kanerick makes an alternate interrogation of Barclay however, attributing her success as a 'best-selling author' in part to the ways in which she infused her writing with strong Protestant evangelicalism and adapted her style to the demands of a 'modern' readership.

Jane Potter became acquainted with May Wedderburn Cannan and Carola Oman via their poetry, published around the time of the Great War, and soon became intrigued with the parallels apparent in their intertwining lives. Her empathetic study of these two writers and friends—daughters of educated men—explores how, after growing up with loving fathers in the intellectual milieu of an Edwardian Oxford which they both idealised, they moved on from identifying scholarship as intrinsically masculine to find their own literary self-identities as women.

Our concluding article takes us to Denmark in the first decades of the twentieth century where women's gymnastics clubs, self-consciously and deliberately, used their sport as a means to make women ready for citizenship and to enhance their performance in that role once full rights were granted. Anne Lykke Poulsen offers theoretical insights into the concepts of 'citizenship' and 'feminism' but also roots her conclusions firmly in detailed case studies which illustrate how bodily practise and the milieu of the club came together to teach democratic skills to women.

We trust those of you who attended the annual conference in Glasgow are now back home, suitably enthused and refreshed! Again we have to thank the

organisers for such an enjoyable and highly successful event. There is not much more to be said here as the reports carried in this issue do the Glasgow conference the justice it deserves. However do remember to make a date in your diary *now* for next year's gathering in Oxford on 11-13 September 2009. St Hilda's College is a resonant venue for anyone interested in women's history and education, and our theme (see the adjacent conference notice) promises a diverse and interesting range of papers. Confirmed speakers at the time of going to press include Olwen Hufton, Vera Baird and Linda Kerber.

Lastly, we need to inform you of some changes to the magazine team. Claire Jones is stepping down after this issue and we are happy to welcome a new member to the team, Susan Hawkins. Sue completed her PhD on nursing in nineteenth-century London and is now a researcher at the Centre for Local History Studies at Kingston University where she pursues wideranging interests including women's work in nineteenth century England.

## The *Women's History Magazine* Editorial Team:

Susan Hawkins, Gerry Holloway, Claire Jones, Jane Potter and Deborah Simonton.

## Contents

'No one wants to be lectured at by a woman': Women and History on TV .....	4
Passion and Pilgrimage: Florence L. Barclay and the Romance of Protestant Evangelicalism.....	13
'Daughters of Educated Men': May Wedderburn Cannan and Carola Oman .....	21
Women's Gymnastics and Citizenship in Denmark in the Early Twentieth Century .....	26
Book Reviews.....	36
Prizes and Awards .....	44
Conference Reports .....	46
<i>Women's History Magazine</i> Reader Offers .....	48
Steering Committee Report 2007-8 .....	49



Cover:

Detail of early  
dust jacket of  
*The Rosary* by  
Florence L. Barclay



# 'No one wants to be lectured at by a woman': Women and history on TV

Erin Bell

*University of Lincoln*

Although in some cases history on television has represented women's lives in the past, this remains an exception rather than a rule. Whilst the overall volume of programming has grown dramatically since the mid-1990s, with the launch of the History Channel and UKTV History, it is apparent that not only in terms of the individuals and events considered, but also in terms of those allowed to act as mediators between the past and the TV audience, there are marked gender differences. In the mid-2000s the vast majority of historians representing their profession on TV, especially as presenter-historians, are men. Although the majority of historians teaching in higher education are male, this imbalance is exaggerated further on screen. This article considers, then, the related issues of authority and appearance, visual material, perceptions of audience diversity and, briefly, women as television professionals, whilst giving an overview of the work being carried out on TV history programming.<sup>1</sup>

The research discussed here forms part of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded 'Televising History 1995-2010' project based at the University of Lincoln and directed by Prof. Ann Gray.<sup>2</sup> This interdisciplinary project, running from 2004 and funded by the AHRC from 2006 to 2010, asks how we get the kinds of television histories we do, and why. Starting with the relationship between the academy and media professionals, through commissioning and programme making, it explores the—often competing—professional discourses about how to 'do' history. Focussing on 'non-fiction' programming it examines the different genres employed by producers and tracks their commissioning, production, marketing and distribution histories. Through a number of case studies, including interviews with academic and media professionals involved in history programming, Ann Gray and Erin Bell are analysing the role of the 'professional' historian and producer/directors as mediators of historical material and interpretations. In earlier publications some of the themes and issues raised in interviews have been considered. This article seeks to consider in greater depth the particular experiences of women and women's history.<sup>3</sup>

Although our research does not consider fictional representations of the past, there is still a remarkably wide range of genres which may be classed as TV history: these include documentaries, including commemorative 'event-television' such as *Auschwitz: the Nazis and the 'Final Solution'* (BBC2 11 January 2005) which marks specific anniversaries; drama-documentaries such as *The Relief of Belsen* (Channel 4 15 October 2007) and *Dunkirk* (BBC2 February 2004) which dramatize real events; 'reality history' series such as *Edwardian Country House* (Channel 4 April-May 2002), *The Trench* (BBC2 March 2002) and *Coal House* (BBC1 Wales and BBC October-November 2007); historical travelogues such as Michael Wood's *The*

*Story of India* (BBC2 August-September 2007); presenter-led series such as David Starkey's *Monarchy* (Channel 4 2004-7), Simon Schama's *A History of Britain* (BBC2, then moved to BBC1 2000-2002) or Bettany Hughes' *The Spartans* (Channel 4 November-December 2003), and the hugely successful celebrity genealogy series, *Who Do You Think You Are?* (BBC 2004-present).<sup>4</sup>

A great deal of the information collected in the course of this research comes from interview material: to date, twenty historians involved in history programming have been interviewed, including seven women. This represents a deliberate attempt to talk to female historians, whose experiences are of especial interest to the project. In doing so, we seek to discover how university scholars contributing to TV history interpret their experiences. Several interviewees are active in other areas of 'public history' such as museology, which has brought additional depth to their contributions. Thus the interviews are not only oral history, but also oral historiography.

The quotation used in the title of this article is from a published interview with Bettany Hughes, a British historian who has presented several programmes in the past five years. However, when she initially approached a TV executive with programme ideas in the early 1990s, his response was dismissive, and he assured her that 'no one wants to be lectured at by a woman'.<sup>5</sup> Demonstrating the misogynistic opinions of one television professional, this response may also have stemmed in part from the origins of history programming in the UK. The first TV presenter-historian, A. J. P. Taylor, based several of his series, broadcast on the BBC and ITV from the 1950s to the 1980s, on his university lectures. A charismatic figure, he is named as a role model by many modern TV historians, including Controller of BBC4 Janice Hadlow and Simon Schama, the latter with the caveat of the limitations of basing series on lectures. But his role as presenter-historian seems to have been problematic for some TV executives considering female scholars.<sup>6</sup>

Arguably, the use of male voices in television perpetuates what the film historian Bill Nichols describes as 'a culturally constructed assumption that it is men who speak of the world and that they can do so in an authoritative manner'.<sup>7</sup> As one female historian commented of her own experiences of presenting a history series, 'I also think that these were issues about authority because I was a woman, and again I expect these are unacknowledged issues, about who can be an authoritative voice'.<sup>8</sup> This may also reflect John Fiske and John Hartley's idea of 'bardic television' which suggests that TV fulfils the role of soothsayer and priest in modern society, communicating to viewers 'a confirming, reinforcing version of themselves' and articulating 'the main lines of the established cultural consensus about the nature of reality'.<sup>9</sup> Certainly, in *A History of Britain* the use of sweeping shots of the British

landscape and ethereal music underscore the sacred nature of the series and indeed of a specific version of national identity.<sup>10</sup> However, to place a woman as an authority figure in this role may, by inference, undermine rather than reinforce viewers' perceptions of historical reality, at least in the opinion of TV executives such as the man described by Hughes. Furthermore, as television scholar John Corner has suggested, although TV has 'extended the pleasures which gaining knowledge involves', the type and range of knowledge is limited. This may, he suggests, be related to bureaucratic control, or a consequence of the commodification of TV.<sup>11</sup> The outcome, though, is often reliance upon tried and tested types of programming led by male presenters: content, form and authority confirm the political, including gender and racial status quo. This is suggested, but not made explicit, in Roger Smither's comments on commissioning editors' motivations, discussed shortly.<sup>12</sup>

Although one female interviewee described her hope of seeing more women historians on TV, despite what she described as the 'deeply seated, innate sexism' of the industry, whilst others commented on the gendered nature of history on TV, few male interviewees commented on this. This seems to reflect an essentialising of white, male experience identified by feminist scholars. Tristram Hunt's brief reference to a lack of female presenters and of women's history on TV is one of the few published comments about this. However, his suggestion that social historians focus on 'accessible' aspects of the past infers a direct access to TV producers which many historians do not have, for the reasons discussed shortly.<sup>13</sup>

That is not to suggest that all female interviewees believed that television alone was responsible for the under-representation of women. An art historian interviewed recently described herself as belonging to an 'academic demimonde' because of gender bias in her discipline, meaning she could only find part-time employment.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, the same interviewee stressed the benefits of television in this respect, suggesting that for both female scholars and male students, who may have faced criticism when they chose to study art history, a tutor appearing on screen grants authority to both the discipline and the individual. The position of female art historians parallels Barbara Crowther's analysis of women working in natural history; she identifies the 'scarcity and marginalisation of women' in both the discipline of natural history, and on TV.<sup>15</sup>

However, marginalisation may only be avoided if those making programmes allow it. Reflecting one of the forms of control of knowledge identified by Corner, women appearing on TV are often represented in ways that limit their authority. Jeanie Attie's review of Ken Burns' 1992 PBS series *The Civil War* similarly refers to the limitations placed upon the historian Barbara Fields whose interview is edited in such a way that at times she is cut off in mid-sentence, unlike her male counterpart who is granted far more time to discuss topics raised.<sup>16</sup> In another case, a series attempting to redress the apparent Anglocentrism of the epic millennial history series *A History of Britain*, which was fronted by the British-born, Columbia University Professor of History, Simon Schama, placed a female

historian in a less authoritative role than that enjoyed by presenter-historians such as Schama.<sup>17</sup> Dr Fiona Watson, then Senior Lecturer in Environmental History at Stirling University, who continues to present *History File* on Radio Scotland, fronted BBC2 Scotland's ten-week history series *In Search of Scotland* (BBC2 Scotland February-April 2001). In an interview published in a Scottish newspaper shortly afterwards, she asserted that Schama's series had failed to consider recent debates about British identity.<sup>18</sup> However, although her series aimed, in contrast, to explore the nuanced nature of Scottish identity, it arguably also perpetuated gendered stereotypes which position Watson, a professional historian, in the role of interviewer eliciting information from, predominantly, male experts, rather than as an authority figure in her own right. Whilst this may have stemmed from a desire not to replicate the format of *A History of Britain*, it had the result of limiting her authority.

The series began, in February 2002, with Watson's assertion to camera and then over footage of Scottish landscape, cityscape and crowds in a city, that 'History is about where we come from. It's about who we are. It's not about heroes and villains, not even much about kings and queens and states.'<sup>19</sup> This declaration, that the series seeks to go beyond elites, seems a clear statement that it will not replicate Schama's *History*, the first part of which had been broadcast the previous year. Indeed, the statement continued: 'But history is really about people like us who lived and loved, worked and died, mostly leaving no record at all...but none of them died without contributing something.' This is indeed borne out when in the first thirty-minute episode she visited the Neolithic settlement of Skara Brae in the Orkney Islands, paralleling Schama's *History*. *In Search of Scotland*, though, emphasised community and human relationships, rather than archaeological finds of jewellery and other artefacts, the focus of much of the first episode of Schama's *History*. In Watson's series millennial concerns were also acknowledged, alongside 'new hopes' relating to the Scottish parliament. It would seem, then, that this was a particularly good opportunity to include women's history. However, although Watson was named in the title credits of each episode, the programme's format arguably diluted her authority as a historian. Her introduction to each episode was markedly shorter than, for example, Schama's, at only ten to twenty seconds in length, giving her the air of presenter rather than university scholar.

Furthermore, through the use of 'worthy interviews intercut with location filming', which coincidentally was the original planned format of *A History of Britain*, male figures rivalled Watson's authority.<sup>20</sup> Most of the historians, archaeologists and linguists interviewed were, unsurprisingly, based at Scottish universities (Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrews) or Scottish institutions of public history and heritage (Historic Scotland, the Scottish Trust for Underwater Archaeology and the National Museum of Scotland), but only around one in seven were women. Those appearing often discussed elements of women's history: Katherine Forsyth of the University of Glasgow on Pictish stone carving including its depiction of women; Jenny Wormald of the University of Oxford on Mary Queen

of Scots; broadcaster Lesley Riddoch on economic and political representations of women in contemporary Scotland.<sup>21</sup> Apart from these rare examples, and faced with white and middle-aged men, the camera often focused more on their responses to Watson's questions than on Watson herself, who also fulfilled the role of narrator in the series; unseen and uncelebrated. As another female historian noted of her own experiences as a presenter-historian faced with predominantly male interviewees:

on the one hand they seemed to want someone who was an expert to present it, but then they wanted you to present yourself as a non-expert. You were going on a voyage of discovery ... I would be going to interview somebody who knew far less than I did about something, and doing it ... in the manner of a ... breathless ingénue.<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, it seems almost ironic that the introduction to the final episode of *In Search of Scotland*, which considered the twentieth century, included references to the changing role of women. When considering suffragettes in Scotland and efforts to provide maternity care, Watson stated that 'women have always worked but their contribution has usually been undervalued and underpaid.'<sup>23</sup> Whilst Lesley Riddoch, currently pursuing her aim for 'big women of Scottish history' to be celebrated, was granted the opportunity to comment upon the representation of women in the Scottish parliament and reflect on the continuing tendency to deride or undervalue women's economic



Fiona Watson  
Photo courtesy of the BBC

activity, this was one of very few examples in the series.<sup>24</sup>

This also relates to the issue of appearance. Male historians' concerns over appearance were largely limited to a desire not to look too 'formal' or a humorous comment about having a 'face for radio'. However, this touches upon a more serious issue: given recent debates over the retirement of BBC news reader Moira Stuart, possibly on the grounds of age, the appearance of female historians clearly affects the nature of their TV work. As a female interviewee commented, 'You can be a young woman, you can be an old crotchety David Starkey, you know, opinionated and ugly, but you can only be Bettany Hughes.'<sup>25</sup> Although she did not seek to denigrate Hughes' achievements, it is certainly the case that the media prefer younger female presenters, but describe them in ways that do little to acknowledge their authority or historical knowledge. A. A. Gill's *Sunday Times* review of her series *Athens* (Channel 4 July 2007) reflected largely on Hughes' dress and figure: 'You do have a bum that makes the Gordian knot look like a telephone-wire tangle. But, don't worry ... We're really interested in what you have to say about the single transferable vote and committee decisions in 3rd-century-BC Greece.'<sup>26</sup>

It is extremely difficult to imagine a male historian being described in such terms. Hughes has more formal qualifications than Simon Schama, with a postgraduate degree in her field. Although Schama and David Starkey have both been satirised in the UK comedy series *Dead Ringers* (BBC2 2000-date), this focused upon their style of presenting; it did not discuss their appearance in explicitly sexualised terms. Another female historian, who appeared in several series in the early 2000s, revealed that although her manager was originally contacted by the production team, she instead secured the role of 'resident historian' in one series after TV researchers found her picture on her university's website, underlining the importance of appearance. A second, who presented and appeared in several series in the same period, commented specifically that 'dress was a big issue. I got a lot of flack' because, due to the way in which the series was edited together, she was perceived to have 'a different outfit in every shot'. She concluded that 'if I ever did it again it had better be a jeans and jumper job' because the combination of a young female presenter stylishly dressed had proved a source of great comment, to the extent that 'a lot of the reviews mentioned the clothes, rather than the argument.'<sup>27</sup>

The cultural historian Michelle Arrow has commented on the disproportionately high number of male, often middle-aged, presenter-historians, both in the UK and her native Australia.<sup>28</sup> However, Arrow is sanguine when considering her own position as presenter-historian in the Australian history series *Rewind* (ABC 2004). She comments that whilst riding a replica of Australian inventor Lawrence Hargrave's kite, which predated the Orwell brothers efforts by a decade, left her little room for gravitas, and that it was unlikely that an older man would have been asked to do the same, 'maybe the kite wouldn't have lifted an older man into the air, either.' However, she does consider it unlikely that the authoritative role of presenter-historian in a series such as *A History of Britain* would have been granted to a younger woman. It is my contention,



though, that for older women too, there is little chance to demonstrate gravitas on screen. Although, for example, the Cambridge classicist and self-declared 'media junkie' Mary Beard, celebrated for her controversial and 'wickedly subversive' comments, and Queen Mary's Renaissance scholar Lisa Jardine, write in broadsheet newspapers and appear on Radio 4, women of their generation are rarely granted sustained appearances in TV history.<sup>29</sup>

A striking example of this imbalance in representation of women as professional historians is also apparent in a recent programme broadcast as part of the autumn 2007 BBC4 season on the eighteenth century. *The Age of Excess: When Britain went too far* (BBC4 24 October 2007), presented by broadcaster and literary scholar Matthew Sweet, was one of several in the series which also included *The Black Eighteenth Century* and a dramatisation of John Cleland's novel *Fanny Hill*.<sup>30</sup> Unsurprisingly, given its subject matter, *The Age of Excess* aimed to titillate. Introduced by Sweet with the statement 'History is a bit of a tart' and can be manipulated into doing what we want it to do, even the past was feminised and made passive. This assertion was accompanied by images of the naked body of a woman, on which film footage and print were projected, reminiscent of the opening sequence of a *James Bond* film. However, despite the obvious focus of the programme on heterosexual sex, there were no naked male bodies other than those depicted in eighteenth-century engravings, which raises important questions about the degree to which the naked female body has been normalised in the twentieth century, whilst the male has not, and which go unquestioned in the programme.

Furthermore, whilst the history of eighteenth-century prostitution was represented as a humorous affair, largely devoid of abuse or violence, the staging of interviews with historians was also significant. Literary scholar John Mullan appeared in an eighteenth-century style drawing room; historian Vic Gatrell in a dining room of the same period; Peter Ackroyd by a window. Matthew Sweet himself addressed the audience from a bed in the London streets, but in contrast, the rather younger historian Julie Peakman (identified, inexplicably, as 'author of *Lascivious Bodies*' rather than as an historian) was placed on a bed in a domestic setting; historian Jenny Skipp on a chair in a darkened room; and historian Hallie Rubenhold on a bed or *chaise longue*. Although it is difficult to determine the extent to which each scholar was aware of how their peers were filmed, in order to make an informed decision about how they were being depicted themselves, the selection of eroticised and eroticising sets for female but not male scholars is troubling. This limits the degree to which women can be taken seriously as historians, especially by an audience who in the main are not, as Jerry Kuehl famously asserted, history undergraduates, and at the very least are unlikely to have studied women's and gender history.<sup>31</sup>

Related to this is the use of visual material such as paintings or archive footage. They are key to history programming: as one interviewee commented, 'television is a visual medium, and you have to have a visual image behind you.'<sup>32</sup> But even women's history dating from the

era of film may not be shown. When Imperial War Museum archivist Roger Smither attempted recently to answer the question 'Why is so much television history about war?' he identified the desire of TV producers to make the types of programming that have already been successful. Thus, he suggests that the 1964 BBC series *The Great War* (BBC2 May-October 1964) and the 1973 Thames series *The World at War* (ITV October 1973 - May 1974) led to a growing number of series based around similar footage. It remains a popular source of visual material, cheap in comparison to computer-generated imagery, and sometimes recycled by the same production company in later projects. This commercial imperative also has implications for the type of programmes made. As well as favouring those that consider the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the type of footage preserved in archives, Smither suggests, tends to reflect, even to over-represent, the high level of conflict in the past century. That is not by any means to suggest that all newsreel footage dating from the early twentieth century deals with warfare, but the material may be more easily formed into major series on conflict.<sup>33</sup> As independent production companies are increasingly forced to take economic factors into account, many use footage already freely or cheaply available.

In addition, trends in programme-making affect the type of series produced. Whilst the BBC may continue to make well-funded commemorative documentaries such as *Auschwitz*, for a significant period in the early 2000s oral history series were less popular with commissioning editors than drama-documentaries, although there has been a slight upsurge very recently in the commissioning of oral history series.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, during the 1960s oral history exemplified the significant historiographical and methodological changes in representation of the past on TV. These were closely related to developments within the academic discipline of history, although some scholars, including A.J.P. Taylor, dismissed the method as 'old men drooling about their youth.'<sup>35</sup> However, many of those involved in oral history work in the 1970s have gone on to form their own production companies, such as Steve Humphries' 'Testimony Films'. That is not to suggest that oral history programmes do not manipulate the way the past is represented, as Myra MacDonald and others have identified. But such programmes do allow women a voice and to assert that they are entitled 'to speak for that past in the present.'<sup>36</sup> A minority, including 'Testimony Films', which seeks 'to be the first to reveal stories, to explode myths and to inspire change', continue this work. Humphries has been recognised for his groundbreaking work: in 2005 *Sex in a Cold Climate*, made for Channel 4 and broadcast in 1998, was voted eighth in *Broadcast Magazine's* top ten programmes of all time that have changed the world, for its account of the abuse of young women in Irish institutions for unmarried mothers.<sup>37</sup> However, this work is exceptional.

The limitations imposed by the factors described are reflected in a lack of well-researched women's history programming, with a few exceptions. That is not to suggest that historians involved in TV are unaware of this; far from it. One interviewee met a production company's interviewer, using her own money and in her own time, to make sure

their material was as thorough as possible. Another said that she did not mention payment when working with independent companies; she would rather they came to her, as an expert in the field, than make a programme without her help.<sup>38</sup> However, the BBC does not necessarily make more representative history programming, either in the sense of reflecting breadth of scholarship, or diversity of audience. Although the BBC's Council seek to assess 'the extent to which the BBC's network output and other activities reflect the diversity of the UK', arguably this is not achieved in history programming. Indeed, several recent series, including some of those mentioned already, have sought to construct a national identity around a selective, often male-centred, interpretation of British history.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, although many commentators, including Simon Schama, suggest that TV history is predominantly watched by white middle-aged men, despite some successes in attracting a wider audience, Tony Bennett's analysis of audiences suggests those watching 'high legitimacy' programmes which reflect the audience's cultural capital, such as drama, documentary, news and arts, are balanced in terms of gender. This is broadly confirmed by Angela Piccini and Karol Kulik's recent analysis of heritage and archaeology programmes. Age does not seem to be a significant factor in determining history and natural history viewers, although Bennett's analysis does suggest that men are slightly more likely to prefer such programming.<sup>40</sup> However, despite considering the factors affecting individuals participating in cultural pursuits, the research outlined in Bennett's article does not consider the representation of gender (for example) and of female professionals, and how this may relate to the audience. Although Michael McKinnie has noted that a 'sentimental economy' for the arts has revived an eighteenth-century conception of art as a means to promote 'social sympathy', and to 'spread sympathetic social relationships', the inclusion of programming on women's history, for example, seem at odds with other pressures on broadcasters.<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps because the history documentary audience is perceived by many programme makers to be male, rendering female audience members invisible, whilst broadcasters' focus groups may 'lead' members to expected, gendered responses, the BBC has attempted to make women conspicuous in drama series such as the co-produced *Rome* (BBC, HBO and RAI 2005 and 2007). According to an interviewee involved in the series, it had inherited a largely male audience from a previous programme shown in the same timeslot, so 'they were trying not to make it man's stuff'.<sup>42</sup> In her opinion, though, attempts at diversity did not benefit programme quality; as she stated, 'them trying not to make it man's stuff were the bits that I thought were really naff.' However, that is not to say that the efforts were not welcome; as a self-identified public and university historian, she concluded that the BBC's desire to broaden audience reach was laudable.

Other genres, such as reality programming, do attract female viewers.<sup>43</sup> Although, like the natural history genre described by Crowther, history documentaries are of high status and seem as a genre to be 'critically immune', series on the edges of the corpus are less safe.

Interestingly, they are also more likely to acknowledge women as audiences, presenters and subjects. Michelle Hilmes has identified similar criticism of pre-war radio soap operas as 'vulgar' or 'feminised' and it also seems significant that Germaine Greer described the reality series *Big Brother* as 'soap opera come to life'.<sup>44</sup> 'Reality history' series such as *Edwardian Country House*, which significantly was commissioned and broadcast not by the BBC but by Channel 4, have met with a great deal of criticism and were described collectively by Tristram Hunt as a 'bastard genre' marking the demise of social history on television, as much for emphasising the material nature of life in the past, chamber pots and corsets, as for the men and women dressing up as their forebears. It certainly seems that the book accompanying the series aims largely at a female readership, offering evocative nostalgia and crafts relating to the period such as jelly making (pineapple and mint), homemade sweets, beauty remedies and evening bags.<sup>45</sup> Juliet Gardiner has, though, convincingly defended the series and its usefulness as a historical and historiographical experiment.<sup>46</sup>

Further, unlike the majority of historical re-enactment, which both Hunt and Jerome de Groot identify as prefiguring reality history on TV, series such as *Edwardian Country House* give a large proportion of time to women, their lives and experiences, and offer re-enactors, often women, the opportunity to offer insights alongside the oral testimony and assistance of those who lived through the eras depicted: for those in *The 1940s House*, Marguerite Patten, a celebrated wartime cook; in *Edwardian Country House*, Mrs Whinney, a former housemaid, who visited the young women re-enacting her former role.<sup>47</sup> This particularly underscored generational differences; her account of physical and sexual abuse with no hope of redress prompted some female re-enactors to contrast women's experiences in previous centuries with their relative freedom in the twenty-first century. For some women, such as Lyn Hymers of *The 1940s House*, this meant deconstructing, in her words, the 'idealized Hollywood version of the 1940s housewife' that she and, notably, her husband had partially accepted before their involvement.<sup>48</sup>

De Groot welcomes this 'enfranchising agenda'; as he suggests, 'for all Schama's celebration of the popularising potential of television for history, he still wants to be the man in charge of telling us how things were'. David Scott Diffrient too highlights the importance of gender in his analysis of *The 1940s House* which considers its reflection of changes in women's and men's roles since the Second World War and also the ways that ideals of beauty, both in the 1940s and the twenty-first century, reveal reality TV history's equation of 'lack of glamour with a truly "authentic" re-enactment of the past' in much the same way that the artifice of *Big Brother* contestants is linked to their 'perfect, young faces and bodies'.<sup>49</sup> Yet at the same time, he suggests, *The 1940s House* offered 'a critique of historically contextualized codes of beauty and duty' which allowed reflection upon the present. Analysis of *Frontier House* (PBS 2002) similarly suggests that female re-enactors' experiences affected their behaviour in their modern lives.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, of historians interviewed,



women were far more likely to be positive about such series' potential to demonstrate, in the words of one respondent, 'the way class relations have changed ... gender relations have changed, in a way that probably is much more powerful, I think, for non-professional, non-academic kind of people, than they would get from reading a book.'<sup>51</sup> Significantly, of the five female historians who talked specifically about the various *House* series, four were positive about its potential to represent social and/or gender history to a mass audience. In contrast, of the six male historians who commented, only two were positive, and another responded, tellingly, that 'I don't watch them. I don't watch them but my wife does. She loves them, and she's a historian. She's a history graduate as well. She loves them, but she's very interested in family history anyway, and, um, I'm not particularly.'<sup>52</sup> Although this interviewee is keen to assert his wife's status as a fellow historian, his statement also underscores the way that certain types of history programming have been 'gendered', if not downgraded to genealogy, by male historians.

However, re-enactment is hardly new in historiographical terms: Oxford philosopher of history R. G. Collingwood asserted in the 1930s that to understand historical experience the historian should conceive of the past as 'a living past... which... can be re-enacted in the present, and that re-enactment known as past' and warned of the perils of accepting testimony at face value.<sup>53</sup> Many scholars writing on re-enactment refer to Collingwood's work, at least in passing, and certainly for Alexander Cook, one of the historians involved in the BBC2 series which re-enacted Captain Cook's voyages, *The Ship* (BBC2 August-September 2002), the experience was a re-enactment in the present, although he warned that the benefits of the experience had not necessarily been successfully communicated to the programme's audience.<sup>54</sup> In addition, Stephen Gapps' analysis of the Australian re-enactment series *The Colony* (SBS 2005) strongly suggests that the degree to which individual re-enactors developed historical understanding depended very much on their existing historical knowledge.<sup>55</sup> Another Australian series, the eight-part *Outback House* (ABC June-July 2005) made, like *Edwardian Country House*, by Wall to Wall, did not represent all aspects of the past to the audience. Catriona Elder's research into representations of colonial history has highlighted that although two re-enactors in the series were native Australians, members of the Wiradjuri tribe, the experience was unrepresentative. Debate raged around whether, for example, Danielle Schaefer, one of the maids, should eat scraps outside the house as her foremothers would have been expected to do. Although her mother acted as an adviser to the series and urged that this should be shown, this aspect of Aboriginal history and experience of colonialism was omitted from the broadcast material.<sup>56</sup> Anja Schwarz suggests that such responses reflect 'a desire for the past to have happened differently'<sup>57</sup>, and arguably they reveal as much about the present as they do about the past and may obfuscate events unacceptable in the present.

Despite this, the celebrity-led series *Who do you think you are?*, broadcast on the BBC since 2004, has proved in some ways to be the most surprising source



*Bettany Hughes*

*Photo: Mark Passmoore*

of women's, and also Black and working-class history, on primetime BBC, although Tristram Hunt condemned the series as an 'amateur hobby... transposed to history in its entirety.'<sup>58</sup> The episode on Moira Stuart, the first black newsreader on British TV, for example, engaged with the subject of slavery, one of the key themes arising from investigation into her ancestors.<sup>59</sup> Achieving an audience of 5.35 million on a Tuesday night in November 2004, the largest for any programme on BBC2 that week, the series uses, even manipulates, the emotional responses of the celebrities in a way which some TV scholars have likened to other traditionally female programming such as reality TV and lifestyle programmes.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, the series as a whole has allowed coverage, albeit brief and selective, of women's lives in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries and its coverage, albeit brief, of the enslavement of millions was far from Hunt's 'comforting warm soak'. Indeed, based on her appearance, Stuart was chosen to present BBC2's *In Search of Wilberforce* (BBC2 16 March 2007), part of a season marking the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade. She combined celebrity with the 'authenticity' of her family background, now well known to many viewers. The programme itself included interviews with several experts, including the Caribbean historian of slavery Verene Shepherd of the University of the West Indies. Significantly, though, the programme was not the creation of the BBC's History department, but of Religion and Ethics, leading us to question the extent to which the History department fulfils the BBC's remit to represent diversity.

Women in television history are not limited to historians appearing on screen or women whose lives are the focus of programming. Although this has been the case since at least the 1960s, Mary Irwin's research into the history of BBC documentary making in that decade suggests that women working on documentary making

were often as well qualified as their male counterparts, although they received less encouragement to progress to directorial or production roles and were often recalled in 'official' histories, by male colleagues, as primarily administrative or secretarial figures.<sup>61</sup> However, Janice Hadlow has been a significant figure in TV history production since the 1990s. Behind *A History of Britain*, Niall Ferguson's *Empire: How Britain made the Modern World* (Channel 4 January-February 2003) and *Edwardian Country House*, Hadlow is Controller of BBC4 and was Head of History at both the BBC and Channel 4. She is a relative rarity; the current Head of History at Channel 5 is Alex Sutherland, and there are a few women in senior positions in independent production companies such as Silver River, headed by former BBC Arts Producer Daisy Goodwin, which made, amongst other productions, *Edwardian Supersize Me* (BBC4 16 April 2007), part of the 'The Edwardians: The Birth of Now' season, under Hadlow's leadership.<sup>62</sup>

Motivated by a desire to broadcast commercially successful series at Channel 4, and to bring 'big, ambitious, authoritative' series to BBC4, including the *Protestant Revolution* series (September-October 2007) presented by Tristram Hunt, it remains to be seen if BBC4 will regularly broadcast history of, or by, women.<sup>63</sup> The BBC claimed that *Protestant Revolution* would include an episode about the role of Protestantism in transforming 'experiences of sex, love, family life and the relationship between men and women.' However, this was also a Whiggist account which sought to uncover, the BBC claimed, 'how straight-laced Victorian mothers became the sexually liberated women of today.'<sup>64</sup> The episode itself little recognised the role of the Reformation in limiting, for example, women's access to education, as some feminist scholars suggest, in favour of a progressive account.<sup>65</sup> The Reformation 'brought the family a long way' between 1500 and 1650, we are told by Hunt as he drives through the English countryside, giving a similar sense of speed and destination.<sup>66</sup> More recently the six-part series *In Search of Medieval Britain* (April-May 2008), part of BBC4's Medieval Season, allowed historian Alixe Bovey to recreate journeys through Britain as it was in the Middle Ages, but like Fiona Watson she spent a large proportion of time discussing key points with male experts. *The Independent's* Hermione Eyre described the season as 'smart...but predictable' before predictably referring to Bovey's appearance.<sup>67</sup> Granting a female historian this opportunity was laudable, but her positioning as presenter rather than as an authority in her own right contrasted with Robert Bartlett's four-part series *Inside the Medieval Mind* (April-May 2008), in which, excepting very occasional discussions with other historians, he was the sole historical authority on screen. Professor Bartlett's series was certainly significant in granting a voice to medieval women through the sources selected, but it may also be argued that, in contrast to his appearance, Dr Bovey's authority was limited by her portrayal as a presenter rather than an authority.<sup>68</sup> In the same season, Michael Wood's *Christina: A Medieval life* (May 2008) considered Christina Cok, a fourteenth-century woman from Hertfordshire, and using the quest model common to his other series, pursued her life through extant archival references. Although *The*

*Guardian's* Sam Wollaston asserted that '[t]he Christina device doesn't really work, because there simply isn't enough about her in the court book', the sparse references highlighted the limitations imposed upon historians of the Middle Ages, especially of non-elite groups.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, *Christina* explicitly aimed to grant a voice to women, 'the forgotten half of our ancestors', as Wood describes them. Unlike *The Protestant Revolution* it was not a narrative of progress; it sought to identify the traces of the medieval past in the 'thought and speech' of the present, with social and economic changes beneficial to the peasantry ascribed more to the ravages of pestilence upon the nation than to human intervention.

In many ways *The Protestant Revolution* is similar to another series commissioned by Hadlow, Niall Ferguson's *Empire*; both seek proof of progress, based around religious or national traits, which are also almost exclusively white and male in outlook. Whilst that is not to suggest that either series should have had a specific episode to consider women's experiences, this is symptomatic of the wider desire of programme makers to offer closed narratives, often those of progress.<sup>70</sup> Arguably, aspects of women's history that do not fit into this straightforward story of advancement are often ignored: the experiences of English and Welsh women in the early nineteenth century, explicitly excepted from political representation by the 1832 Reform Act's designation that it should apply only to 'male persons', have been considered by scholars but rarely appear in televised histories, particularly those with a Whiggist sense of historical progression.<sup>71</sup> Almost a century after Virginia Woolf's comments, in 1928, on the lack of historical research into women's lives, especially those lived before the eighteenth century, with a few notable exceptions I find myself looking about the TV listings for programmes that are not there.

In conclusion, as one interviewee suggested, 'There is something here about gender that is important, and more complicated issues than saying 'add some women in'. As another added, 'there is a downgrading of female authority', even of female historians with tenured posts in prestigious universities, for whom appearance and dress is likely to be commented on at greater length than the substance of the programme. Although television is a visual medium, it is perhaps significant that much of this is led not by audiences distressed by the sound and sight of a female authority on ancient Sparta or early modern India, but by TV reviewers, often male, protecting TV's bardic role in reinforcing cultural consensus, whose first response to a history series fronted by a woman may be to objectify her. As one feminist scholar noted of reality TV's reproduction of dominant ideology, 'the effect is especially dangerous for women.'<sup>72</sup> 'Televising History 1995-2010' aims, then, to continue to unpick and identify some of these issues because, unlike much TV history, we believe the experiences and opinions of women as professional historians, media professionals, and as historical actors to be crucial.

This research is supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, through the grant awarded to the 'Televising History 1995-2010' project.



## Notes

1. Information on the Institute of Historical Research website suggests that around a third of university history teachers are women, although this does not include the 'academic demimonde' of short-term workers, postgraduate students and research staff who also teach. A sample of 200 individuals from the IHR's 2007 list of teaching staff ([www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Resources/Teachers](http://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Resources/Teachers)) suggests c.14% of Professors of History are women: roughly the same percentage as the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) suggested for all disciplines in 2006/7: see Anthea Lipsett, 'More female academics working in universities', *Education Guardian*, February 28 2008.

2. See [www.tvhistory.lincoln.ac.uk](http://www.tvhistory.lincoln.ac.uk) for further details.

3. See Erin Bell and Ann Gray 'History on television: charisma, narrative and knowledge', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10.1 (2007), 113-33 and Erin Bell and Ann Gray 'History on television: charisma, narrative and knowledge', in *Re-viewing Television History*, ed. Helen Wheatley (London, I B. Tauris, 2007) for development of other aspects of gender and television history.

4. For 'event-television' see Tobias Ebbrecht 'Docudramatizing history on TV: German and British docudrama and historical event television in the memorial year 2005', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 10.1 (2007), 35-53, for use of this term by German media professional and historian Guido Knopp.

5. Bettany Hughes, a member of the project panel, has verified this: see David Meadows, 'Rogue Classicism': [www.atrium-media.com/roguelclassicism/Posts/00003154.html](http://www.atrium-media.com/roguelclassicism/Posts/00003154.html) (2006).

6. See Paul Addison, 'Troublemaker: The Life and History of A.J.P. Taylor' (review article): [www.history.ac.uk/reviews/paper/addisonPaul.html](http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/paper/addisonPaul.html) (2001); Janice Hadlow cited in Tristram Hunt, 'The Time Bandits', *The Guardian*, September 10 2007; Simon Schama, 'You ask the questions: Simon Schama', *The Independent* June 6 2002.

7. Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2001), 55.

8. Interview W.

9. John Fiske and John Hartley, *Reading Television* (London, Routledge, 2003 [1978]), 65-6; see ch. 6 'Bardic television' *passim*.

10. See Bell and Gray, 'History on television' *passim* for further comments on the use of music in the series.

11. John Corner, *Critical ideas in Television Studies* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1999), 96-7.

12. See Roger Smither, 'Why is so much television history about war?' in *History and the Media*, ed. David Cannadine (London, Palgrave, 2004), 51.

13. Ann Gray, 'Learning from experience' in *Cultural Methodologies* ed. Jim McGuigan (London, Sage, 1997); Tristram Hunt, 'Reality, identity and empathy', *Journal of Social History* 39.3 (2006).

14. See Paul Laity, 'The dangerous don' *The Guardian* November 10 2007 for a parallel example: Mary Beard's comments on her male peers' surprise when she received a first-class degree in Classics from Cambridge in the 1970s.

15. Barbara Crowther, 'Viewing what comes naturally: a feminist approach to television natural history', *Women's Studies International Forum* 20.2 (1997), 289.

16. Jeanie Attie, 'Illusions of history', *Radical History Review* 52 (1992), 98.

17. My thanks to Silke Strickrodt of Humboldt University, Berlin, for her suggestions.

18. Stephen Naysmith, 'Schama: "my Scots critics are whingers"', *The Sunday Herald* November 17 2002.

19. *In Search of Scotland* Episode 1 (19 February 2002)

20. Ian Bremner, 'History without archives: Simon Schama's *A History of Britain*' in *The Historian, Television and Television History*, ed. Graham Roberts and Philip M. Taylor (Luton: University of Luton Press, 2001), 64, 70.

21. Based on a sample of episodes 1, 2 and 5, two of fourteen individuals interviewed were women.

22. Interview W.

23. *In Search of Scotland* Episode 10 (23 April 2002)

24. See [www.lesleyriddoch.com](http://www.lesleyriddoch.com) for details.

25. Interview A; Interview E; Interview T.

26. A. A. Gill, 'Does my brain look big in this?', *Sunday Times* July 22 2007.

27. Fieldnotes A; Interview W.

28. Michelle Arrow, "'I want to be a TV historian when I grow up!" On being a *Rewind* historian', *Public History Review* 12 (2006), 86.

29. Laity, 'The Dangerous Don'; for a summary of Jardine's work see [www.open2.net/worldinabox/presenter\\_profile.htm](http://www.open2.net/worldinabox/presenter_profile.htm) and Beard's *Times* blog, 'A Don's Life': [www.timesonline.typepad.com/dons\\_life](http://www.timesonline.typepad.com/dons_life)

30. The season ran September-October 2007; some programmes were repeated later in the year.

31. Jerry Kuehl, 'History on the public screen II' in *New Challenges for Documentary second edition*, ed. John Corner and Alan Rosenthal (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2005).

32. Interview K.

33. Smither, 'Why is so much television history about war?', 59.

34. Helen Weinstein, 'Narrative strategies and emotional engagement: how genre and format deliver audience in UK history TV products 2000-2007' lecture at 'Televising History' conference, University of Lincoln, June 15 2007; Steve Humphries, 'Sex, love and the British' paper given at the 'Televising History' symposium, University of Lincoln, UK 29 February 2008.

35. See Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past* (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press 1992 [1978]), 70.

36. Myra MacDonald, 'Performing memory on television: documentary in the 1960s', *Screen* 47.3 (2006); see also Soo-Young Nam 'Recounting "history": documentary as women's cinema' *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 7.1 (2001); Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, *Contested Pasts* (London, Routledge, 2003), 1.

37. See [www.testimonyfilms.com/index.htm](http://www.testimonyfilms.com/index.htm) and [www.testimonyfilms.com/our-pedigree.html](http://www.testimonyfilms.com/our-pedigree.html)

38. Interview M; Interview L.

39. [www.bbc.co.uk/foi/docs/bbc\\_trust/audience\\_councils/audience\\_council\\_for\\_wales/ACW\\_Roles\\_Responsibilities.htm](http://www.bbc.co.uk/foi/docs/bbc_trust/audience_councils/audience_council_for_wales/ACW_Roles_Responsibilities.htm) (2004-7); see Bell and Gray 'History on Television'.

40. Simon Schama, 'Fine-cutting Clio', *Public Historian*



- 25.3 (2003); Angela Piccini and Karol Kulik, 'Who watches archaeology on TV?', *British Archaeology* 94 (2007); Tony Bennett, 'Distinction on the box', *Cultural Trends* 15.2 (2006), 203.
41. Tony Bennett and Elizabeth B. Silva, 'Introduction: cultural capital and inequality: policy issues and context', *Cultural Trends* 15.2 (2006), 95.
42. Interview T.
43. Anna Everett, 'Trading private and public spaces', *Journal of Visual Culture* 3.2 (2004).
44. Michele Hilmes, 'Front line family: 'Women's culture' comes to the BBC' *Media, Culture & Society* 29.1 (2007), 5; Greer quoted in Richard Kilborn, *Staging the Real: Factual TV Programming in the Age of Big Brother* (Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2003), 82.
45. Hunt, 'Reality, identity and empathy', pp 852, 856; Juliet Gardiner, *The Edwardian Country House* (London, Macmillan, 2002), *passim*.
46. Juliet Gardiner, 'The Edwardian Country House', *History Today* July (2002), 20.
47. Jerome de Groot, 'Empathy and enfranchisement', *Rethinking History* 10.3 (2006), 396.
48. David Scott Diffrient, 'History as mystery and beauty as duty in *The 1940s House*' *Film & History* 37.1 (2007), 47-50; Julie Anne Taddeo and Ken Dvorak, 'The PBS historical house series: where historical reality succumbs to reel reality', *Film & History* 37.1 (2007), 20. That is not, though, to suggest that all women were glad to return to the 21<sup>st</sup> century; Anna Olliff-Cooper, lady of the *Edwardian Country House*, changed, in Taddeo and Dvorak's description, from 'a woman very much the product of 20<sup>th</sup> century feminism' to be disenchanted with the responsibilities of equality.
49. de Groot, 'Empathy and enfranchisement', 399; Julie Anne Taddeo and Ken Dvorak, 'Introduction: reality television as film and history', *Film & History* 37.1 (2007), 16.
50. Diffrient, 'History as mystery', p.51. Elizabeth Johnston has similarly sought to compare reality TV with 18<sup>th</sup> century fiction: E. Johnston, 'How women really are: Disturbing parallels between reality television and 18<sup>th</sup> century fiction' in *How real is reality TV? Essays on Representation and Truth*, ed. David S. Escoffery (NC and London, McFarland and Co., 2006), 115; Leigh H. Edwards, 'The endless end of frontier mythology: PBS's *Frontier House* 2002', *Film & History* 37.1 (2007), 31.
51. Interview W.
52. Interview U.
53. R[obin] G[eorge] Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 [1946]), 158, 256. Further, 'history is nothing but the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's mind'. (228).
54. Alexander Cook, 'The Use and Abuse of Historical Reenactment: Thoughts on Recent Trends in Public History', *Criticism* 46.3 (2004), 487.
55. See Stephen Gapps, 'Adventures in *The Colony: Big Brother* meets *Survivor* in period costume', *Film & History* 37.1 (2007), 69 on the different levels of knowledge, with the Aboriginal family showing 'a deep contextual understanding' of the early nineteenth-century events depicted, in contrast to the European or Australian families.
56. See Catriona Elder, 'Settling the colonizer: narratives of national belonging and re-enactment television' paper given at 'Narrating the Nation' conference, Reus, Spain 4-5 October 2007.
57. Anja Schwarz, '"Not this year!" re-enacting contested pasts aboard *The Ship*', *Rethinking History* 11.3 (2007), 428; Michelle Arrow too comments on related issues: see "That history should not have ever been how it was": *The Colony, Outback House, and Australian History*, *Film & History* 37.1 (2007), 61. Gapps, 'Adventures in *The Colony*' p.71, considers the tensions that arose in Australia in 1988 over reenactments commemorating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of British colonisers.
58. Hunt, 'The Time Bandits'.
59. 16 November 2004, BBC2.
60. For audience figures see [www.barb.co.uk](http://www.barb.co.uk) week ending 21/11/04. James Bennett and Amy Holdsworth 'Performing personality as emotion and authenticity in *Who do you think you are?*': [www.criticalstudiesintelelevision.com/tvshorts/bennet\\_whodoyouthink.shtml](http://www.criticalstudiesintelelevision.com/tvshorts/bennet_whodoyouthink.shtml) (2006).
61. See Mary Irwin, 'BBC Television Documentary 1960-70: A History' PhD thesis, Glasgow Caledonian University (forthcoming)
62. [www.silverriver.tv](http://www.silverriver.tv). See [www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/edwardians/highlights.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/edwardians/highlights.shtml) for details.
63. Jason Deans, 'New BBC4 boss reveals big ambition', *Media Guardian* June 15 2004.
64. See the BBC's Press Office release on the series, including a synopsis: [www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2007/08\\_august/21/protestant\\_episode.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2007/08_august/21/protestant_episode.shtml)
65. Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness* (New York and London, Oxford University Press 1993), 33
66. *The Protestant Revolution* Episode 2 (12 September 2007)
67. Hermione Eyre, 'TV and Radio Reviews', *The Independent* 20 April 2008.
68. See [www.open2.net/medievalmind/audio.html](http://www.open2.net/medievalmind/audio.html) for his discussion of aspects of the series.
69. Sam Wollaston, 'Christina on BBC4', *The Guardian* May 6 2008.
70. See Bell and Gray, 'History on television', *passim*.
71. See e.g. Catherine Hall, *White, Male, and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (London, Routledge, 1992), 152; and Philip Harling, 'Reading the fine print of reform: Review of Philip Salmon, *Electoral Reform at Work: Local Politics and National Parties, 1832-1841*', H-Albion, H-Net Reviews, June: [www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=299891095252420](http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=299891095252420) (2004). Work such as that of Testimony Films does, of course, offer some alternatives.
72. Interview T; Interview W; Johnston, 'How women really are', 122.

# Passion and Pilgrimage: Florence L. Barclay and the Romance of Protestant Evangelicalism

Caroline Kanerick

*Oxford Brookes University*

In the small amount of critical attention she has so far attracted, Florence L. Barclay (1862-1921) has been seen as a transitional figure in the development of the popular romantic novel in the first decades of the twentieth century. Regarded as a natural successor to the hugely popular Marie Corelli in terms of commercial success, her emphasis on traditional religious and moral values expressed within the narrative format of the domestic romance modified the overt sensationalism and aggressive engagement with contentious social issues which had marked Corelli's work and paved the way for the more realistic approach of later popular romantic fiction.<sup>1</sup> The seemingly non-confrontational and consolatory stance of Barclay's greatest bestseller, *The Rosary* (1909), embodied the precepts of publishers concerned with promoting a 'wholesome' way of life and reinforcing conventional views of morality for those readers whose tastes were not being met by the writers of sensational 'yellow' fiction or by the experimental literature of the modernists.<sup>2</sup> In the early years of the twentieth century, the Anglo-American Manuscript Service had enjoined aspiring writers of popular fiction to:

Avoid *morbidity*. [Readers] don't want *gloom*, but something that will brighten life. The sun must always be shining. Treat sex reverently, and avoid its unsavoury aspects. Don't be *vulgar* ... Don't discuss *religious* questions in a manner that would offend national sentiment ... *Religion* that brings out its boons and blessings to long-suffering humanity is deemed praiseworthy. Leave *social* and *political* problems to take care of themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Critical attention to Barclay to date has tended not to look far beyond her apparent adherence to such anodyne precepts. Jane Potter has typified her novels as tracts which 'contain explicit lessons about the role of women and appropriate feminine behaviour' and Mary Hammond suggests that *The Rosary*, Barclay's 'morally blameless, evangelical popular novel', played a significant role in challenging the 'doubtful' fiction, characterised as 'both mollifying and creating social and sexual tension', which was flooding those well-springs of cheap literature at the period – the railway bookstalls.<sup>4</sup> More recently, Philip Waller has described 'the best-selling formula, as developed by Mrs Barclay' as owing its success to 'three chief ingredients: a plot that gripped, romance and religion'.<sup>5</sup> From these comments, it seems that Barclay's significance lies chiefly in the way she foreshadowed the development of the formulaic romantic fiction which was soon to become the mainstay of publishers Mills & Boon.<sup>6</sup>

However, at the time of the publication of *The Rosary*, the genre of the overtly religious novel, so long an indispensable element of the respectable middle-class Victorian parlour, had more or less fallen out of favour, giving way to the romances of such popular writers as Elinor Glyn and Ethel M. Dell, whose emancipated heroines and racy narratives appealed to the more secular tastes of a modern twentieth-century readership. The question therefore arises of how this arguably trite romantic novel, with its strong religious overtones and conservative moral subtext, was able to exercise its vast appeal across boundaries of gender, class and nationality to become such a phenomenal best-seller at the time. Within nine months of its first appearance it had sold 150,000 copies; it was translated into eight languages, and by the time of Barclay's death in 1921 had sold over a million copies.<sup>7</sup> Where previous explanations for such success have relied variously on arguments of increasingly sophisticated marketing techniques, the burgeoning cult of the celebrity writer at the period, hard-headed ambition on the part of novelists who were setting out more or less cynically to fulfil the demands of various niche markets, and a host of other considerations, I interrogate Barclay's popularity from the perspective of her location at the heart of Protestant evangelicalism. By foregrounding the often conflicting and contentious elements of philanthropy, earnestness and high drama which characterised the various 'revivalist' tendencies throughout the nineteenth century and impinged directly on Barclay's life, I question how these may have been working to contribute to the popularity of the best-seller domestic romance of the first half of the twentieth century. By looking first at the events surrounding the production of Barclay's first full-length novel, *Guy Mervyn*, I explore how her affiliations within evangelical Anglican traditions of zealous philanthropy might have underpinned a persuasive narrative style; secondly, with reference to *The Rosary*, I indicate the ways in which she was able to develop and modify that style to take account of the changes in social and political circumstances affecting readership at the period. Lastly, I return to the heavily edited posthumous reissue of *Guy Mervyn* (1932) by way of further illuminating the unique and elusive qualities of Barclay the popular best-seller.

Florence Louisa Charlesworth was born in December 1862, the daughter of an Anglican clergyman, Samuel Charlesworth, and his wife Amelia. The first eight years of her life were passed in a small country parish in Surrey, a seemingly peaceful and idyllic childhood which was to be rudely interrupted by her father's decision to move his ministry to the deprived inner-city parish of St Anne's, Limehouse, in the East End of London in 1870. Encouraged from a tender age to participate fully in the proselytising philanthropy of her evangelical parents,

she was soon familiar with the deprivations of life in the squalid streets beyond the high walls of her father's rectory. Undertaking parish work with her mother, she was raised with a strong sense of her duty to help alleviate the hardships of those less fortunate than herself, learning to offer both practical and spiritual support in a way which later found expression in the potent admixture of spirituality and worldly pragmatism which might be said to characterise her fiction.

In 1881, at the age of eighteen, she married her father's curate, Charles Wright Barclay, and settled in the living of Little Amwell, Hertford Heath, where she and her husband were to remain for the next forty years. She gave birth to three daughters and two sons during the first six years of her marriage, finally completing her family in 1900 after the birth of three more daughters. It was at this point that she resumed her writing in earnest. Between 1908 and 1921 she published nine full-length novels and several shorter works, the last appearing shortly after her death at the age of fifty-eight in 1921.

The alliance between the evangelical Charlesworths and the prosperous Barclays, whose Quaker roots had by the early part of the nineteenth century been translated into a more socially advantageous Anglicanism, brought together two families within whom religious and commercial interests, and traditions of philanthropy and social reform, were intertwined. Florence's paternal grandfather had joined the Clapham Sect, whose members included William Wilberforce and whose philanthropic ideals encompassed not only the abolition of slavery but, particularly under the later influence of Ashley Cooper, seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, a programme of social reform which was to touch the furthest reaches of Victorian society. Charles Barclay was a younger son of the prosperous banking and brewing dynasty whose Quaker origins and ethos of activism and philanthropic endeavour facilitated their absorption into, and shaping of, the influential middle classes of nineteenth-century Britain. The practice of intermarriage and close familial ties common to both Quakers and evangelical Christians which contributed to their power and influence throughout contemporary English society can be seen in microcosm in the genealogy of both Charles Barclay and Florence Charlesworth. Whilst he as a younger son and country clergyman might at first seem a shadowy figure of little account in his wife's meteoric rise to celebrity authorship, it is nevertheless likely that his family's considerable wealth was a significant factor in providing the material conditions in which she was eventually able to develop her influential career.

I believe a more fundamental effect on Barclay's future success as best-selling author, however, can be traced to the more immediate influence of her mother, who was much in demand for her oratorical gifts at the religious meetings to which she often took her children. In addition, it seems that Florence was frequently sent away from the 'wretched tenements and grimy streets' of Limehouse to stay in the Surrey countryside with her father's sister, Maria Louisa Charlesworth, the celebrated author of sentimental religious tales for children.<sup>8</sup> She, in common with many Victorian novelists at the period,

can be characterised as a producer of 'homilies working from the paradigm of the Bible and the evangelical pulpit'.<sup>9</sup> What Philip Waller has referred to as 'the splendid zealotry about Mrs Barclay's use of biblical reference and metaphor in the service of romantic passion' might well be traced directly to such antecedents.<sup>10</sup> In answer to those critics who might see commercial ambitions as a driving force behind the popularity of these writers, I would argue that despite the material gains that accrued to them, they were as much affected by the evangelicalism of the period as their readers, and should not be accused of merely pandering to the tastes of those who might afford them a living. This factor has direct bearing on the quality of 'sincerity' so carefully nurtured by Barclay as key to her unusual success as a novelist, and which, furthermore, was widely acknowledged by her critics.

Evangelical 'revivals' which prominently featured rousing hymn-singing and extempore oratory were drawing vast audiences by the mid-nineteenth century. The young Florence's extrovert character and taste for drama meant she needed little encouragement to lead the singing or accompany the hymns on the piano; a daughter notes how 'her complete lack of self-consciousness, a naive confidence in her own powers, a generous affection for all the world, removed far from her the least symptom of shyness'.<sup>11</sup> In addition, 'General' William Booth's Salvation Army, though seen as a 'religious pantomime' of dubious probity by many critics, including Florence's father, Samuel Charlesworth, was at the time exerting a tremendous influence not only on a significant section of the general population, but on Florence's own family. Her younger sister, Maud, having been introduced to the Booths by her mother, would later, contentiously, marry Booth's second son, Ballington, carrying the Army's message to the United States and becoming a notable preacher and social reformer herself. This rarefied environment where women, often characterised as morally superior to men, might lead and inspire, and where vast crowds gathered to hear the outpourings of the likes of William and Catherine Booth, American evangelists Moody and Sankey, and other great showman preachers, provided the seed-bed which nurtured the writer's talent for combining moral uplift with popular entertainment.<sup>12</sup> When she later referred to her readers as 'friends', Barclay was generally locating herself within a community produced through shared exposure to a religious discourse made familiar to thousands by public spectacle, at a time before its ubiquity was eclipsed by the more secular challenges of the wireless age.

Barclay became a prolific and popular public speaker herself, routinely addressing audiences of many hundreds in the popular Bible study groups she held in East London, and on occasion touring with her sister Maud on the Chautauqua circuit in the United States where attendance at meetings could run into several thousands. *The Life* attests to her possession of 'the gift of speaking, the power of holding her audience in absorbed attention, of swaying it as she would, to tears or laughter or high resolve ... she ... seemed to be speaking with an ease of eloquence, a fund of power that carried all hearts with her into a genuine interest in her subject'.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the emotional appeal of her oratory can be seen paralleled



in the emphasis laid on the inspirational suddenness and speed with which her stories would come to her, and the fluency with which she was able to write them down, whether seated in the corner of a third-class railway carriage, or half way up a Swiss mountain side. This image of inspired amateurism, distanced from the exigencies of commercialism, though not from the professional attitude she saw as concomitant with a direct and sincere approach to those who took her books seriously, may be seen at the heart of the writer's stated aim to foster a close bond of sympathy and understanding with her public. She wished to be a friend to 'ordinary' readers, and 'to supply them with what they wanted; to fulfil their expectations, to vindicate their trust'.<sup>14</sup>

As Kate Flint has observed, 'a taste for moral certitude' is a significant characteristic of much Victorian—and I would argue, Edwardian and beyond—popular fiction.<sup>15</sup> But Barclay was clearly able to provide an extra ingredient which lifted her novel beyond the merely popular into the realms of the runaway bestseller. An obituary notice published on Barclay's death in March 1921 gives an idea of what this might have been:

... Mrs Barclay was essentially a home novelist. She had the home point of view and made the very most of it. This is not to say she was dull. It was one of the secrets of her success that she managed to be entirely sincere and yet to infuse into any atmosphere which many people regard as narrow a kind of repressed excitement. When reading her books, indeed, one realised the sensational possibilities of repression. For she succeeded in keeping the surface of the lake unruffled, while beneath the surface strong, rather ill-defined currents were whirling about in all directions. There is reason to think that Mrs Barclay understood the tendency of her age better than many contemporary novelists whose technical skill exceeded her own.<sup>16</sup>

The emphasis here on 'repressed excitement' and 'strong ... ill-defined currents' should be seen as key. Barclay's overriding talent for combining 'sincerity' and 'excitement', qualities which might not necessarily be thought of as compatible, was noted with both exasperation and envy by critics seeking to explain her appeal. But evangelicalism has generally been seen as a 'vital religion', characterised as emotional and experiential with a strong measure of anti-intellectualism; Barclay's broad popularity probably arose from her ability to appeal both to those for whom conventional religion had been superseded by morality and duty as a way of combating the spectre of Nietzschean chaos, as well as to those for whom 'simple' religion was upheld.<sup>17</sup>

Callum Brown has postulated the existence of an 'evangelical code' at the heart of much late-nineteenth and early twentieth century popular literature. This, he argues, constituted the literary narrative as a series of oppositions structured in such a way as to breed familiarity with the reader. As such, it established the appetite for the literary boom of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries,



*Dust Jacket 1910*

'providing Britons with the primary format in which they learned, explored and negotiated their own individual life destinies'.<sup>18</sup> This is persuasive as far as it goes, but in order to try to understand Barclay's exceptional popularity, I believe we should also take into account the way in which evangelical religion imbued women and men with a sense of spiritual equality, and accordingly afforded opportunities for public speaking not generally available to women in the nineteenth century. How might participation in the theatricality of, for example, revivalist religious meetings have contributed to the development of a narrative style characterised by 'repressed excitement'? What was the secret of the 'sincerity' and 'vitality' acknowledged by readers and critics alike which pervaded her fiction? A possible explanation is in part forthcoming from W.S. Scott's description of the effects of the 'extravagant "picture thinking" ' of, for example, Moody and Sankey's evangelicalism which, 'before the advent of radio, attracted and moved greater multitudes than ever before in the world's history...'.<sup>19</sup>

By all accounts, the young Florence Barclay was strong-minded, imaginative and volatile. The hagiographic *Life* portrays her as something of a polymath—capable of performing to a high level of competency in any field she chose. Though we may take this portrayal as indicative more of filial affection than as a matter of indisputable fact, it seems likely that many elements in her early life combined to produce a personality with pronounced confidence in her own abilities. Since both her mother and her elder sister suffered chronic bouts of ill-health, and her distant, often reclusive father seems to have played a marginal part in family life, Florence shouldered many household, pastoral and social responsibilities from a tender age. Although portrayed as a fanciful and energetic child whose pleasure at gaining the approval of others was fully exploited, one

might nevertheless imagine the hard struggle undergone by one for whom the more natural pursuits of childhood were often sacrificed to the strict tenets of her parents' religion and the sense of duty they required.

Likewise, we can speculate on the psychological and physical constraints undergone by a young woman who married at eighteen years and whose acknowledged artistic tendencies were reined in not only by the conventions attendant upon a clergyman's wife, but by the almost continuous state of pregnancy she endured, giving birth to her first five children within six years of marriage. Whilst there are no grounds for suggesting she suffered regret in her choice, it is clear from evidence offered by *The Life* that a heavy burden of parish work, family tensions and the physical strain of repeated childbirth, led to some form of breakdown in her late twenties. That this episode seems to have coincided with the publication of *Guy Mervyn* in the early 1890s raises several intriguing questions.

*Guy Mervyn* was published under a pen-name, Brandon Roy, and appeared only briefly in three-decker form before sinking almost without trace shortly afterwards. Explained as a casualty of the collapse of its publisher, Spencer Blackett, its existence was largely expunged from subsequent accounts of Barclay's life and work. It is a flawed literary specimen, overlong, earnest and wearily repetitive, but remarkable for the ways in which its sensational content diverges from Barclay's later stated aims:

... never to write a line which could introduce the taint of sin, or the shadow of shame into any home. Never to draw a character which should tend to lower the ideals of those who, by means of my pen, make intimate acquaintance with a man or a woman of my own creating.

There is enough sin in the world without an author's powers of imagination being used in order to add even fictitious sin to the amount. Too many bad, mean, morbid characters already, alas! walk this earth. Why should writers add to their number, and risk introducing them into beautiful homes where such people in actual life would never, for one moment, be tolerated?<sup>20</sup>

The plot revolves around a theme which was to recur throughout her later novels – that of a young man in love with an older woman. However, where in her later work Barclay employs the device to explore notions of feminine moral superiority, marriage and motherhood, and to comment on contemporary constructions of masculinity within an outwardly sober discourse of spiritual and psychological growth, this early work exploits its more sensational possibilities. Most notably, the heroine, Lady Elaine, is an unhappily married woman. Protagonists who seem significantly to depart from her later 'aim' to exclude 'bad, mean, morbid characters' are introduced in the shape of Elaine's drunken, depraved husband, James Monk, and a thwarted lover, the adulterous Errol Montague. Barclay's decision to associate herself at the period with



*Florence L. Barclay in 1905*

the fictional output of those contemporary New Woman writers who were drawing considerable social and critical opprobrium by using sensational methods to express their dissatisfaction with society's constraints on women seems worthy of investigation. The strong religious element and conventional morality of *Guy Mervyn's* closure cannot fully mask the novel's passionate sub-text of societal and personal anxiety.

Tensions within the Charlesworth family were high during the period leading up to publication. Barclay's younger sister, Maud, to whom she was very close, had recently married Ballington Booth in defiance of her father's wishes (he consequently not only refused to attend the wedding, but disinherited her) and sailed for America. Discussions which most likely preceded the decision to submit the novel for publication at the time can only be guessed at. But it is perhaps an indication of Barclay's strength of will and powers of persuasion—as well as a hint as to the nature of the 'strong ... ill-defined currents' seen as intrinsic to her work—that she was able to override what might have amounted to serious misgivings amongst those closest to her. A central theme of the novel is the powerlessness of women sold into marriage for the purposes of dynastic continuance, and there are overt references to the unpreparedness for the physical and sexual demands of marriage and motherhood of young women brought up to embody virginal purity. In addition, although the importance of spirituality to a fulfilling and enduring partnership between men and women is emphasised within the strong religious framework of the novel, conventional clerical practice is critiqued with a surprising irreverence and in a way which might be read as indicating authorial frustrations at the time.

The exact nature of Barclay's indisposition during the period remains unclear. Its duration, however, seems

to have been prolonged. First struck down in late 1891 or early 1892, she endured what her biographer refers to as 'a painful and dangerous illness, which ... turned her into an invalid for nearly a year'. Described almost certainly inaccurately as a 'form of peritonitis' which caused her at one stage to lie for seven weeks 'between life and death', the true nature of the illness becomes increasingly baffling when we discover that by the autumn of 1893 her strength had almost returned, and in November of that year her fourth daughter was born.<sup>21</sup> Whilst there is no reason to doubt the severity of this episode as portrayed in *The Life*, it seems plausible that its origins may have been, at least in part, psychological. This argument gains support from the fact of the pregnancy which must have been conceived at the height of the 'illness', and from the strength and vitality apparent in Barclay's obvious fecundity at a period when high infant and maternal mortality was prevalent in all strata of society. That her health hitherto had been robust is also confirmed by her apparent love of strenuous physical exercise. She was a keen rider, oarswoman, cyclist and swimmer, and there are accounts of her tireless participation in mountaineering expeditions and energetic winter sports. Whatever the true nature of this event in Barclay's life, she can almost certainly be numbered among those many women of the period whose desire for self-expression was being hamstrung by social conventions and domestic expectations to the detriment of their mental and physical health.

That she was at times overwhelmed by the constraints placed on her, contrary to the impression of relentlessly joyful self-sacrifice given in the *Life*, is further suggested in a semi-fictional account of life in the Barclay household in the last decades of the nineteenth century by one of her elder daughters. Jane Paradine's novel, *Red Like Crimson* (1931), vividly portrays Barclay in a different light. Seen as mercurial, hot-tempered and manipulative, her household is shown in thrall to her uncertain temper:

She was little and dark and beautiful, and no one ever dared answer back or disobey her; and she was never in the wrong. Sometimes she would be angry with one child for days together, and that child would be utterly wretched ... We feared and adored her. When she left home for a visit a spirit of joyful irresponsibility would come to us all. We would play wild, noisy games, passionately carefree and happy.<sup>22</sup>

Instances of prudery, hypocrisy and rigid Puritanism stalk the pages of this account, but are blended with a sense of excitement and vitality. Whippings and other forms of physical chastisement seem to have been endured by the children on a regular basis, and even the pleasure of a game in which their mother joined could be mixed with a certain terror. The image persists of a domestic scene which might shelter and protect from the rigours of the public world, but could also represent a form of imprisonment, beleaguered by those forces it sought to exclude. Frustrations surface within an emotionally overheated atmosphere at every turn for children and adults alike. Tempers are frequently lost, passionate friendships made and broken, emotional

outbursts and raised voices accompany furious argument and punctuate daily life. Children weep tears of frustration behind locked doors as their mother sweeps out of the house; their father retreats to the haven of his study, and servants maintain a stony silence. Even allowing for novelistic licence, this portrayal of life in a nineteenth-century country rectory might be seen running counter to conventional expectations of the period. It certainly diverges markedly from the impression generally given by *The Life*.

But such expectations do not necessarily take account of the dramatic fervour which, as has been noted earlier, was part and parcel of evangelical religious practice and which might realistically be expected to have spilled over into the daily lives of its adherents. That the movement could utilise dramatic spectacle to prosecute its teachings whilst simultaneously condemning the theatre as a form of entertainment constitutes an irony not often remarked upon. Paradine vividly describes Barclay's hypocritical stance on the matter of theatre-going in a way which might be read as indicating the writer's appreciation of this paradox:

We all knew that sometimes my mother went to the theatre, but it was never talked of publicly. It was one of those occasions when my mother was superior to the law. Theatres were hell's ante-room. No-one who was consecrated to God's service could go to a theatre. But if my mother decided in her wisdom to do it, for that one time it became right. Just as Jesus could break the Sabbath and remain sinless.<sup>23</sup>

When seeking explanations for Barclay's appeal it is perhaps the mixture of fear and adoration she was capable of inspiring in her family that gives a further clue to her power. What appears as arrogance and hypocrisy in Paradine's observations that 'she was never in the wrong' and could, on occasions, be 'superior to the law', might also be read as evidence of a powerful self-belief backed by unshakeable religious conviction which could transmit reassurance to an audience unsettled by social change.

The 'sincerity' claimed by Barclay and noted by so many critics as key to the production of the best-seller has often been coupled with another important trait – that of 'vitality' or 'gusto'. Ian Bradley has noted how the success of evangelicalism might be explained by the drive and determination of its adherents who were impelled by an intense sense of mission, attacking influences they believed to be evil and consciously living out their own lives as examples to be followed. As such they believed they might answer the fears and aspirations of the age.<sup>24</sup> Writing nearly two decades after Barclay's death, Virginia Woolf summed up the compelling nature of these qualities:

The lives of those glorious geese, Florence Barclay and Ella Wilcox Wheeler can be read without a blush for them or for ourselves. They were performers too – conjurors who tumbled banknotes, billiard balls, fluttering pigeons out of very seedy hats. But they lived, and they lived with such gusto that no-



one can fail to share it.<sup>25</sup>

What Woolf identified as irresistible 'gusto' can be seen operating within the narrative excesses of *Guy Mervyn*, and, together with the characteristic twin imperatives of 'repressed excitement' and zeal which mark this work, clearly continued to influence the later novels. However, a combination of commercial expediency and Barclay's own stylistic development was to see its modification for the purposes of highlighting the framework of moral authority within which she chose to locate her popular entertainment. Her enduring desire to engage with contentious issues of female sexuality and emancipation and the nature of modern marriage was to find new expression in a narrative style in which the skilful fusion of religiosity and covert eroticism was to prove an unbeatable recipe for popular success.<sup>26</sup> The management of Barclay's public image during the early months of *The Rosary's* popularity gives some idea of how the author strove to disseminate both moral authority and sincerity whilst satisfying the demands of an increasingly commercialised marketplace.

Where the production of *Guy Mervyn* had preceded a prolonged bout of ill-health, *The Rosary* came about in part as the consequence of another period of enforced bed-rest, this time the result of 'heart-strain' allegedly brought on by cycling from Hertford Heath to Cromer on the Norfolk coast, a distance of about a hundred and fifty miles. The writer was by now in her mid-forties and it might be deduced from the pictorial publicity surrounding her at the time of publication that she was anxious to erase any lingering memory of raciness attaching to the ill-fated *Guy Mervyn*. Publicity photographs show a plain woman of military bearing with a taste for clothes of a masculine cut, wing collars, hats of a severely practical nature and an unadorned hairstyle. The impression given is one of earnest dependability and seriousness and the writer appears in stark contrast to many of her female contemporaries in the field who often chose to be photographed attired in the elaborate fashions of the day. More than a decade later, the plate chosen for the frontispiece of *The Life* was an autographed photograph showing Barclay dressed in clerical style, shorn of any attempt at feminine allure. Posed in profile, ramrod straight and unsmiling, the way in which she grasps the lapel of her severely cut coat with one hand seems unequivocally manly. It is necessary to emphasise this image for the contrast it offers not only with many contemporary women writers, but with photographs taken prior to her public success as the author of *The Rosary* when, although modestly attired, she nevertheless presented a distinctly feminine figure.

The contrast suggests a self-conscious decision to portray herself as a credible, and marketable, writer of moral fiction sufficiently distanced from any negative qualities associated with feminised popular culture. She may have been reminded of the advice given by such publications as the *Free Church Magazine* some decades previously:

Zeal and activity are, in their own places, excellent and essential qualities; but Christian women require to be very cautious lest, even in the midst of praiseworthy exertions, they

sacrifice those meek and lowly tempers which are so calculated to adorn and promote the cause they love and advocate. Female influence should shed its rays on every circle, but these ought to be felt, rather in their softening effects, than seen by their brilliancy. There are certain duties which sometimes call Christian women out of their quiet domestic circle, where both taste and feeling conspire to make them love to linger; such duties will, we humbly think, be best performed by those who enter this enlarged field, not from any desire of a more public sphere, but because, in obedience to the precepts of their divine Lord, the hungry are to be fed, the sick comforted, the prisoners visited.<sup>27</sup>

Barclay's marginalisation of her femininity and emphasis on religious affiliation through dress, suggests a recognition of the need to avoid charges of unwonted 'brilliancy', or lack of 'meek and lowly temper', qualities which might easily attach to the celebrity woman writer at the period, and promotes instead those qualities of aesthetic modesty and sincerity which she believed would enhance her appeal.

Further evidence of the careful management of Barclay's celebrity persona following the publication of *The Rosary* can be found in two notices which appeared in the *Leytonstone and District Times* in December 1909. The first is a reminder to its readers that 'Mrs Charles W. Barclay will deliver her keenly anticipated lecture on "Prison Life and Work in America" this evening ...', pointing out that, owing to Mrs Barclay's popularity as a well-known speaker, seats should be booked early 'to avoid disappointment'. The notice further advises readers that although the newspaper has received an early copy of the newly-published novel, 'it is opposed to our practice to speak without careful consideration, and therefore we withhold any further reference to the work until next week's issue'. Having signalled the significance of the novel for its readers, the following week's issue provides a glowing review of its 'thirty-eight chapters' which are 'permeated by the very highest moral tone and religious feeling – the spontaneous religion which belongs to a healthy heart and mind, and finds expression in action even more obviously than in words'. Barclay thus appears as a skilful blend of moral authority, sincerity and popularity whose religious credentials are typified as 'spontaneous' and conveyed through laudable actions rather than off-putting sermons.

The positive effects of practical religion might be present within a story, but didacticism must be disguised. As her biographer puts it, Barclay 'hated the idea of a didactic novel; but she had no objection to her characters being a demonstrative lesson in how to live'.<sup>28</sup> She wished only to 'supply her fellow men with joy, refreshment, inspiration' and to cater for readers who required to be 'pleased, rested, interested, amused, inspired to a more living faith in the beauty of human affection and the goodness of God'.<sup>29</sup> Barclay herself declared that the inspiration for her writing came from St Paul, who 'laid ... down as an inspired rule for the human mind: "Whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are

of good report, think on these things". She believed that: In according so generous a reception to 'The Rosary', and to other books of the same tone and calibre, the public has frankly given its verdict in favour of writers who are humbly, yet earnestly, endeavouring to make it their rule and guide, and who may, therefore, with glad assurance take courage and go forward.<sup>30</sup>

The Biblical cadences of Barclay's language are exhortative, and the 'generosity' and 'frankness' of her 'public' is conflated with the 'humility' and 'earnestness' of the writer to signal a community whose shared moral purpose is, by implication, aligned against what Barclay described as books of 'remorseless realism'. These might be 'interesting' or even 'stimulating', 'but people do not want to possess books of that sort ... they do not care to have them as part of the permanent furniture of their homes'.<sup>31</sup> A review of *The Rosary* in the *Literary Monthly* captures the essence of Barclay's target audience when it states that '*The Rosary* is a book to be recommended to the tired student of human nature as confidently as to the girl who has to make for herself the difficult choice of what to read, and what not to read'.<sup>32</sup>

On the face of it, *The Rosary* falls into the category of the Edwardian 'country house' or 'silver fork' novel. The setting within which the main protagonists play out their romantic drama is firmly upper-class. Spacious country seats and titled characters with private incomes provide plenty of half-crowns to bestow graciously upon the marginalised but deserving lower orders. The story of Jane Champion, a large, plain woman of thirty, and society portrait painter and aesthete, Garth Dalmain, is contained within a narrative structure common to the popular romantic novel. Love springs up between the pair, following Jane's moving rendition of the eponymous song at a country house party, and Garth proposes marriage. Jane regretfully declines his proposal on the grounds that eventually his artistic temperament and love of beauty will cause him to tire of her lack of physical charms. Her inability to credit Garth's assurances that her singing has allowed him to see beyond her materiality to the soul within causes them to part, and Jane leaves to travel the world alone. Eventually, a chance sighting of an article in an English newspaper alerts her to a shooting accident in which Garth has been blinded and she immediately returns home. Realising that in the circumstances, proclaiming her undimmed love will be interpreted as mere pity, a stratagem is devised whereby she assumes a false identity and poses as Garth's nurse. Garth's blindness, and much stretching of credulity on the part of the reader, facilitates the eventual rehabilitation of the true, deeply spiritual relationship between the two lovers and the novel closes predictably with their eventual marriage.

At the time of writing, British fears of racial decline and degeneration, and threats to the advancing front of the Empire had been exacerbated by the Boer War of 1899-1902. The effect of such anxieties was to add impetus to ongoing debates surrounding issues of gender and sexuality, particularly with regard to motherhood

and constructions of masculinity. Analysis of *The Rosary* reveals unusual treatment of, and contribution to, such contemporary issues. Barclay's concern to add her voice to such debates might be seen as a natural extension of her evangelical and philanthropic ideals and practices, but the ways in which she chose to do this are significant for the way in which they subverted conventional expectations of the romantic novel. Not only are the traditional physical attributes of romantic hero and heroine partially reversed in the characters of the 'manly' Jane and the aesthetic, feminised Garth, but their roles within the narrative structure at times also run counter to general expectations of the genre. Janice Radway has observed how readers of popular romantic fiction often require a hero who displays both 'spectacularly masculine phallic power' and 'a capacity for tenderness and attentive concern'.<sup>33</sup> This goes some way to elucidating the appeal of the androgynously constructed Garth, but when viewed in conjunction with the heavy emphasis on the masculine traits of the heroine, Jane, a more complex commentary—and one in which the biography of the writer herself is implicated—begins to take shape.

The novel foregrounds the desirability of those 'manly' qualities in a woman which do not compromise her essential womanliness, and are figured in terms of athleticism, common sense and a general lack of interest in feminine frivolity. Duncan Crow's description of the Edwardian fictional girlfriend who was 'usually an upper-class tomboy' or a 'good sort' might strike a chord when applied to Jane, although at thirty years old, and weighing twelve stone, she hardly fits this stereotypical image.<sup>34</sup> This is a woman defined by her unfeminine attire and mannerisms, her golfing expertise and preference for 'rowing stroke'. But the boyish Garth, a consummate aesthete with a penchant for lavender shirts, red silk socks and co-ordinating button-holes, is shown in most respects as significantly lacking the conventional attributes of the popular Edwardian hero: 'quietly handsome, almost middle-aged, unobtrusively athletic ... moving with the ultimate of *sangfroid* through the hazards of wide open spaces, be they snow-covered or thinly forested grass country'.<sup>35</sup> Garth is more likely to be found 'lying back in the golden sunlight' of an English country garden as he stretches his 'slim figure in the slanting sun-rays' under the admiring gaze of the 'manly' Jane.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, it is Jane who typically inhabits 'the wide open spaces' leading a peripatetic and unchaperoned existence and apparently comfortable setting off alone to travel the world.

It might be argued that Barclay's unusual treatment of gender identification through appearance and clothing represents an attempt to marginalise an undesirable objectification of femininity; the 'prettiness' and 'grace' of minor female characters in the novel is frequently juxtaposed with descriptions of Jane's forthright manner and 'tweedy' apparel in a way which appears to privilege the desirable moral connotations of the latter. But this does not fully explain why the writer chooses repeatedly to emphasise Jane's lack of conventional feminine appeal. Is it merely to draw attention to the folly of a culture increasingly attracted by the superficialities of consumerism and materiality at the expense of spiritual experience, or is it

an attempt to invert the familiar basis of sexual difference in order to reflect a broader societal anxiety about gender representation? Her methods would seem to put her at risk of falling into the trap she seeks to avoid, since Jane is ultimately objectified in a way hardly distinguishable from the sexualised heroines of the conventional popular romance. A more convincing explanation might be found within the traditions in which Barclay herself was brought up. The evangelical practice of not only tolerating, but actively encouraging the participation of women in public speaking, was to a great extent rooted in mid-Victorian ideas regarding the moral superiority of women, including their role in combating sexual double standards. Just as the writer herself wished to disseminate the image of a public persona which marginalised connotations of 'feminised' frivolity signalled by clothing which might be seen as counterproductive to moral reform and (masculine) seriousness, so Jane's spiritual beauty—and by implication her feminine superiority—can only be privileged within the text by marginalising the distractions of overt feminine sexuality.

Barclay's text, therefore, constitutes an exploration of how the ideology of purity, self-sacrifice and duty as exemplified by the ideal of the Victorian 'Angel' within the evangelical tradition might be reconciled with changes in social conditions affecting both men and women. She draws on contemporary dialectics of gender performance to highlight how the masculine traits of the emancipated woman need not compromise, and indeed may enhance, her capabilities as strong moral mother and wife. Similarly, the boyish hero's aestheticism draws attention to the double discourse of feminine sensibility as a necessary adjunct to a fuller understanding of the needs of the New Woman, as well as a lack of mature masculinity which can be remedied by her essentially womanly—and by extension, maternal—instincts.

In 1932, eleven years after her death, a new edition of *Guy Mervyn* was brought out by Barclay's publishers, G.P. Putnams. Revised by the daughter responsible for *The Life*, it represents a yardstick by which we can assess not only the practical measures taken by Barclay to tailor her literary style in her later novels, but also the seminal importance of Barclay's own personality to the success she enjoyed in her lifetime. The revision appears as an uneasy hybrid, shorn of the turbulent late-Victorian sensationalist fervour which gave it colour, and enfeebled by efforts to update an outmoded genre. We can reasonably assume that it owed its appearance mainly to an attempt to revive flagging interest in a writer whose day was to all intents and purposes done. Although *The Rosary* continued to appear in various formats for some years to come, popular interest in its author had more or less evaporated by the mid-1930s. A publisher's note to the revised edition observes that the task of re-writing *Guy Mervyn* was not difficult, 'It merely required developing in accordance with [Barclay's] later method; and the omission of certain signs of youth and inexperience in the writer'.<sup>37</sup> Most of the revisions consist of cutting out many narrative *longeurs*, chiefly of a religious, sermonising nature, and slight attempts at updating certain archaisms. But it is in the toning down of the hyperbolic language and overtly

physical and passionate love-scenes, together with the subsequent privileging of the spiritual and psychological aspects of the relationship between the main protagonists, in which the author's attempts to emulate Barclay's 'later method' are most clearly demonstrated. The result is the loss of those qualities which gave the novels their elusive, best-seller appeal. The 'sincerity' and 'vitality', or, to use Woolf's expression, the 'gusto' which had suffused all Barclay's works and proved so successful at plumbing a collective sub-consciousness, is signally absent from this revision. It is a lack which might be seen as emblematic of the evanescence of the appeal of the popular best-seller, and its dependence on the writer's unique ability to utilise the common currency of an idiom which could express the shared concerns of its era.

## Notes

1. Joseph McAleer, *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain 1914-1950*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992) 41.
2. Refers to the yellow wrappers given to French novels often seen as representative of cultural decadence at the period.
3. Cited in Q.D Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1932), 26.
4. Jane Potter, *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print: Women's Literary Responses to the Great War 1914-1918* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2005), 103; Mary Hammond, *Reading, Publishing and the Formation of Literary Taste in England, 1880-1914* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2006), 83.
5. Philip Waller, *Writers, Readers and Reputations: Literary Life in Britain 1870-1918* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), 720.
6. Mills and Boon was founded in 1908 by two ex-employees of Methuen, best known at the period for publishing Marie Corelli. Joseph McAleer typifies the Mills and Boon romance as 'a complicated combination of escapism and realism' op. cit., 112. Of particular relevance here is Callum Brown's observation that Mills and Boon's publications were following the traditions of the evangelical narrative in which the male public sphere is mixed with the female private sphere. Such conflation might 'reaffirm the heroine's world – her values and expectations, her needs and ways of life'. Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000* (London, Routledge, 2001) 82.
7. Clive Bloom, *Bestsellers: Popular Fiction Since 1900* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 110.
8. Maria Louisa Charlesworth (1819-1880) wrote mainly popular works for children, including *Ministering Children* (1854) which went into many editions and had sold 170,000 copies in England alone by 1881.
9. D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, Unwin Hyman, 1989), n.p.
10. Philip Waller, op. cit., 723.
11. *The Life of Florence Barclay by One of Her Daughters* (London, G.P. Putnams, 1921), 25. (Hereafter referred to as *The Life*).
12. For a discussion of how many women, brought up



within an Evangelical clerical household to offer selfless devotion to God's work, were overcoming its limitations by learning to use a religious rhetoric 'to legitimate an expansion of their sphere of action, transgressing the spatial demarcation of public and private' see Midori Yamaguchi, 'The Religious Rebellion of a Clergyman's Daughter' in *Women's History Review*, 16. 5 (2007), 641-660. Yamaguchi focuses on the experience of Maud Charlesworth, younger sister of Florence Barclay.

13. *The Life*, 170.

14. *Ibid.*, 242.

15. Kate Flint, 'The Victorian Novel and its Readers' in Deirdre David (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001), 30.

16. *Hertfordshire Mercury*, Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> March, 1921, 10.

17. In the late eighteenth century, social reformer and popular writer Hannah More had recognised the value of couching moral teachings within a populist narrative. Similarly, decades later, writers such as Marie Corelli and Ethel M. Dell understood that by titillating their readers with descriptions of things that were taboo large sales could be secured.

18. Callum G. Brown, op. cit., 72

19. W.S. Scott, *Marie Corelli: The Story of a Friendship* (London, Hutchinson, 1955) 42-3. American evangelicals Ira D. Sankey (1840-1908) and Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899) toured Britain on several occasions between 1867 and 1884, drawing huge crowds with their inspirational preaching and rousing music.

20. Cited in *The Life*, 240

21. *Ibid.*, 106.

22. Jane Paradine, *Red Like Crimson* (London, Putnam,

1931), 25. The title of the book is taken from the nickname given by the children to the red screen erected at Barclay's insistence for the purpose of segregating the boys from the girls at bath-time. Seen by the author as an unwarranted intrusion at the time, it comes to symbolise for her the repressive and hypocritical elements of life in a religious household.

23. *Ibid.*, 268.

24. Ian Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1976), 32-3.

25. Virginia Woolf, 'The Dream' (*The Listener*, 15 Feb. 1940) in *Collected Essays Vol. IV* (London, Hogarth Press, 1967), 97.

26. David Trotter has noted that following the publication of Elinor Glyn's sensational novel, *Three Weeks*, in 1907 'thereafter, absolute sex sold more books than absolute divinity, though few things could beat a skilful combination of the two'. *The English Novel in History 1895-1920* (London, Routledge, 1993), 182.

27. *Free Church Magazine*, 1844, Vol. 6, 171.

28. *The Life*, 245.

29. *Ibid.*, 241-2.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*, 242-3.

32. *Literary Monthly*, April 1911, n.p.

33. Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance* (London, Verso, 1984), 13.

34. Duncan Crow, *The Edwardian Woman* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1978), 27

35. *Ibid.*

36. Florence L. Barclay, *The Rosary* (London, Putnam, Complete Edition, repr. 1937) 41

37. Florence L. Barclay, *Guy Mervyn* (London, Putnam, Popular Edition, 1934), v

## 'Daughters of Educated Men': May Wedderburn Cannan and Carola Oman, an Analytic Profile of Two Thinking Women

Jane Potter,

*Oxford Brookes University*

In *Three Guineas* (1938) Virginia Woolf sought to explain

that amazing outburst in August 1914, when the daughters of educated men... rushed into hospitals ... and used all their immense stores of charm, of sympathy, to persuade young men that the fight was heroic, and that the wounded in battle deserved all her care and all her praise ...

Woolf argued that it was the 'profound ... unconscious loathing for the education of the private house' that drove these women to desire 'our splendid war'.<sup>1</sup> May Cannan and Carola Oman were indeed 'daughters of educated men' and their experiences of and reactions to the Great War as gleaned from their autobiographies, fit the image

that Woolf paints. The resonance with Woolf extends to their relationships with their fathers and, as 'thinking women' in their own right, their post-1918 lives exemplify the domestic and social influences on female creativity and expression. My speciality is the literature of 1914-1918, in particular women's non-canonical and popular writing, rather than the history of women's education, and I came to Cannan and Oman through their poetry published during and just after the Great War. Yet I have been increasingly intrigued by how their lives intertwined, by their similar upbringing, family relationships—particularly with their fathers—their education and friendship. This article will examine the convergences and divergences in the lives of Cannan and Oman, friends who were brought up in the intellectual world of Edwardian Oxford.

May Wedderburn Cannan (1893-1973) was born

on 14 October 1893. Her father, Charles Cannan, was a classical scholar who went on to become Secretary to the Delegates of Oxford University Press. Carola Oman (1897-1978) who was born on 11 May 1897, was the daughter of the Conservative historian Sir Charles Oman, affectionately known as 'Prof'. Both 'educated men' were members of the first generation of Oxford dons to marry, Cannan in 1891 to Mary Wedderburn and Oman in 1892 to Mary Mabel MacLagan.

Their daughters attended the Wychwood School in the Banbury Road, run by Miss Batty and Miss Lee. Together with Joanna Cannan, May's sister, Carola edited the unofficial school magazine *Inter Multos* and was also extremely active in writing and performing her own plays. Of one such production, 'The Tragedy of James I', which was performed in the Library of All Souls, May Cannan wrote 'I shall always have a memory of her dark grace, playing the King in sapphire blue velvet against that sombre background—it was one of the lovely things among other lovely things of those last summers before the war.'<sup>2</sup>

The Cannan girls had their own family magazine, written in penny exercise books every morning and then read aloud to their cousin. In 1907 their anthology *The Triple Crown* was published: 'My father started it,' Cannan asserted, 'On our complaining that there was no Anthology with all the things we wanted in it he said "do one yourselves", so we did.'<sup>3</sup> Oman recalled that at school,

the news spread like wildfire. "The Cannans have written a book." It was not quite that. Their father was Secretary to the Delegates of the University Press, as we were often told, and this august body had published an anthology of favourite poems chosen by the three Cannans for readers six to sixteen. *The Triple [sic] Crown*. It had a professional Preface signed for them all with their initials, thanking Mr Kipling and Mr Newbolt, and also many publishers for permissions to quote. Mr Quiller-Couch and the Vice-Chancellor had written introductory verses. Someone must have helped me to buy a copy, for I should never have been able to afford the attractive little volume bound in real soft red leather with gilt-edged pages. There was almost nothing new to me in it, but I loved it dearly.<sup>4</sup>

Such a precocious accomplishment was made possible by having grown up in 'an extraordinarily stimulating intellectual milieu'.<sup>5</sup> Like Beatrice Webb (née Potter), Nora Balfour and Naomi Mitchison (née Haldane), Cannan and Oman were beneficiaries of families that 'entertained successions of distinguished visitors' and they 'gained immeasurably, when young, from ... contacts with great minds'—male minds primarily.<sup>6</sup>

Fathers' studies or libraries, the private embodiments of the world of learning, were imbued with the 'dignity and the separateness of the male world [and] [t]here was often a clear assumption that father's activities—from reading the newspaper during and after breakfast to struggling

with the intricacies of family finance—were sacrosanct'.<sup>7</sup> It was in her father's study that Oman learned—unwillingly—these 'intricacies of family finance':

I never went to Prof except, since the death of Bamama, to learn to keep accounts. I dreaded these sessions. They started with Prof., with sparkling irascible eyes crossing out my tipsy figures. This utterly distracted me. He had a violent dislike of the word "Millinery" and entered it contemptuously against every bill from every possible source.<sup>8</sup>

But Cannan's recollection of this inner sanctum is cherished: 'The room I loved best was my Father's library... At four I could read and had found my world.'<sup>9</sup>

The love of learning and books is reiterated time and again by both women. Oman recalled her seventh birthday when she visited the Bodleian Library with her mother and saw:

Shakespeare's first folio and his signature, not legible, and the very book that Shelley had been reading when his boat capsized. I had seen the memorial to him in University College from which he had been down for an atheistical pamphlet. My parents said he looked like a fish lying on a slab, but I worshipped his poems. My father disapproved of Shelley and all his works because of his poor record as a husband and father ... I could never get my father to share my enjoyment in them ... I was much impressed by the statement that Duke Humphrey's famous foundation, together with six other libraries, had a right of copy of every book published in Great Britain. For my next birthday I asked my father for a bookcase.<sup>10</sup>

The encouragement to be autodidacts, which Woolf gained from Leslie Stephen, is also part of Cannan's experience. She recalled that 'We never asked questions very much. If you asked Father something he handed you a book, and all my life most of the information I have acquired has come from books'.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, she asserted that 'my father never explained what you did or how you did it. He simply indicated the work, or indeed just left you to find it and cope with it as best you could'.<sup>12</sup> This seems to have been a strategy to support rather than thwart his offspring, and May insists that it made her self-reliant, a thinking woman. It is not surprising that she came to venerate Oxford University Press, and describes it in masculine as well as martial terms resonant of the war rhetoric with which her generation was so familiar:

I knew I was happy. It was a great and learned Press and I was a very small cog in one part of it, but I believed in learning though I had but little of it; in it, for me, lay wisdom and the storied centuries and they, for me, were the guardians of the past and the sword and the shield of the future: and the Press was learning.<sup>13</sup>

Fathers, as Carolyn Heilburn has noted, are 'the pivot on which turns the life of the daughter seeking a destiny beyond her mother's or that "normally" ascribed to women ... Few women born before the second half of [the twentieth] century have found a woman mentor, mother or not, and have been professionally mentored, where they have been mentored at all, wholly by men: fathers or father surrogates'.<sup>14</sup> There are numerous analyses of famous literary father-daughter relationships including Leslie Stephen and Virginia Woolf; William Makepeace Thackeray and Anne Thackeray Ritchie; Richard Lovell Edgeworth and Maria Edgeworth; William Godwin and Mary Shelley. Katherine Hill-Miller has argued that such women had a 'bifocal vision that shaped [their] particular talents and the trajectory of [their] writing career.' They saw themselves both as their father's son and their father's daughter, a relationship peculiar to daughters of eminent men that 'grows from a recurrent set of family circumstances, takes root in a daughter's strong attachment to her father, and is cultivated by a father's two-fold—and often contradictory—expectations for his daughter.'<sup>15</sup> Hill-Miller focuses on Anne Thackeray Ritchie as presenting 'a curious dilemma: a woman with the makings of her own distinctive genius, she is remembered today primarily as her father's daughter and biographer'.<sup>16</sup> Virginia Woolf ruminated continually over her relationship with Leslie Stephen, veering between 'extremes of love and hatred toward her father all her life'.<sup>17</sup> Whilst Stephen was at times perceived by his daughters as a tyrant, a looming, brooding figure given to rages, Woolf also recognised that 'he was determined that she should become his literary and intellectual heir, and he trained her extensively in history and biography to give her the background fundamental to this achievement'.<sup>18</sup> As Nancy Chodorow and others have shown, the father is the crucial figure in developing the daughter's work identity: he affirms and prepares his daughter for the world of work and 'serve[s] as [a] beloved role model'.<sup>19</sup>

'Beloved role model' is perhaps an apt description of Oman's and Cannan's perceptions of their fathers. Since, as Dyhouse has pointed out, 'the most obvious source of evidence available for the exploration of family backgrounds comes from autobiographical and biographical accounts', which necessarily involve 'interpretation of experience', we admittedly must be attuned to the bias inherent in these two women's memoirs, especially concerning their seeming desire to paint rosy pictures of idyllic childhoods/young womanhoods in a magical Oxford.<sup>20</sup> Yet despite this, neither Charles Oman nor Charles Cannan seem to have left the emotional scars we so associate with other notable women writers and there does not appear to have been any domineering attempts 'to stifle [their daughters'] personal and professional autonomy'.<sup>21</sup> However Carola Oman, who had wanted to attend boarding school but could not persuade her parents, 'always resented the limitations imposed on her formal education ... underlying her subsequent literary career was a powerful incentive to prove herself'.<sup>22</sup>

Charles Cannan may have been more enlightened in this respect. He insisted on May taking the Higher

Certificate at Downe School, even in the face of one of her teachers having written to him to say May was stupid. Cannan wrote 'I wished I had seen [father's] letter. No one had taken a Public Examination from Downe before so I imagine it must have caused some trouble'.<sup>23</sup> He also listened to his daughter's pleas to leave the boarding school and come home to Oxford.

Like many young women of their class and generation, Cannan and Oman took first-aid and home nursing classes in the years immediately preceding the Great War and, in August 1914, were part of 'that amazing outburst' of patriotism and desire for active service. Cannan was asked by the War Office to set up a hospital with staff and she procured Magdalen College for this purpose, but it was later decided that the military would take charge and so Cannan and her volunteers were dismissed. She and her sisters thereafter undertook voluntary war work at the Clarendon Press which produced pamphlets and books for the government's propaganda bureau; Cannan was responsible for putting together Oxford University Press's general catalogue. She finally fulfilled her desire for active service when she spent four weeks as a canteen worker in France in 1915. This brief but significant experience forms the basis of one of her finest poems, 'Rouen'. Recording a day in the life of the busy military port, Cannan packs the poem with concrete images of 'the little piles of Woodbines', 'the long sun-blistered coaches of the khaki Red Cross train', 'the Drafts just out from England', and 'the distant call of bugles', the building up of these images heightened by the insistent use of 'And'. At school, however, 'in Eng. Lit., I got into trouble for starting sentences with "and" and when told not to, said the Bible did it, which was unwise'.<sup>24</sup> But the disapproval of her teacher was not shared by future poets and editors. Philip Larkin included 'Rouen' in his *Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse* (1973) and Jon Stallworthy selected it for his editions of the *Norton Anthology of Poetry* and *The Oxford Book of War Poetry*. Her first volume of poetry, *In War Time*, was published in 1917. She went back to France in 1918 to work for MI5 in Paris and she was here when the Armistice was declared.

Carola Oman was serving as a probationary VAD at the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford when war broke out; she went on to serve in Dorset and London before being posted to France, working at rest stations in Boulogne and Wimereux. *The Menin Road and Other Poems* (1919) is based on her war experiences, with 'Night-Duty in the Station' and 'Unloading Ambulance Train' among the most poignant poems on the Great War from a woman's perspective. It was her childhood friend that saw to it that the volume was published:

May Cannan took me to London for a personal interview with a publisher. After an entirely frustrating morning, for no publisher, it appeared, was ever in his office, or even expected, we halted with my book at Amen Corner and May boldly sent in a message that Miss Cannan from Oxford wanted to see Mr Humphry Milford. He sent us on to Sir Ernest Hodder Williams just round the





May Wedderburn Cannan

corner, with a letter.<sup>25</sup>

Cannan recalls the same incident:

We went, "Babes in the Wood", to London and as I remember to Sidgwick and Jackson who were putting out a lot of verse then, but couldn't see either of the partners (What *did* we expect?), and, refusing to leave the precious MS, walked out. I think we tried others and then I said we must go to Amen Corner for advice, and having but a few pence between us started to walk there. I knew it was near St Paul's and once there could find the way but we walked and walked and for all my protestations St. Paul's would not "loom". In the end I asked and a much-amused passer-by said "look up" and there was the great dome over our heads.

Mr Milford was in. There was tea. Hodder published the book that October; it was well reviewed and C.A.M.O. never looked back and became a distinguished writer and historian.<sup>26</sup>

Cannan was one of the four women to whom the volume was dedicated. In 1922 Oman married Gerald Foy Ray Lenanton. Although she favoured poetry in her youth, she did not write much verse after *The Menin Road*, and focussed from 1924 on historical novels and biographies. Her subjects ranged from Matilda, consort of a Holy Roman Emperor, to David Garrick and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. She also wrote books for children. Yet it is her *Nelson* (1947) that is perhaps her most admired work, and it has been reissued numerous times, most recently in 1994. It is 'the book on which her reputation as a writer rests, and which still stands as the benchmark against which modern biographies of Nelson may be judged.'<sup>27</sup> This biography led to her being offered a Trusteeship of the

National Maritime Museum. She faced a long widowhood after Gerald Lenanton died in 1952, time which she filled with more successful writing projects and prominent social activities. Her 1953 biography of *Sir John Moore* (1761–1809) won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize and having resumed her Red Cross work in 1938, on the eve of another world war, she went on to serve as county president of the Hertfordshire branch from 1947 to 1958. Appointed CBE in 1957, Oman was also a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, of the Royal Society of Literature and of the Royal Historical Society, in addition to being a Trustee of the National Portrait Gallery. She published her memoir *An Oxford Childhood* in 1976.

May Cannan's post-war life was very different. She was engaged to her childhood friend, Major Bevil Quiller-Couch, son of Arthur Quiller-Couch ("Q"), editor of *The Oxford Book of English Verse* and Professor of English Literature at Cambridge, and in many ways a second father to Cannan. Her happiness was short-lived, for although Bevil survived the war, he died in the influenza pandemic in 1919. Her grief inspired some of the most poignant poems of the war, including 'When the Vision Dies'. She published two more collections, *The Splendid Days* (1919) and *The House of Hope* (1923) and later, like Vera Brittain, married an admirer of her work, Percival James Slater. Although they had met only five times, and Cannan knew she did not love him, still pining as she was for Bevil Quiller-Couch, 'she told herself love is good, and that to give love, to assuage a sorrow to fill a need, could not be wrong.'<sup>28</sup> They had one son and were married for over 40 years. *The Lonely Generation*, her fictionalized memoir, appeared in 1934. She gave up writing, partly owing to her husband's reaction to the book:

I had married a man who had sought and found me across time and space because he loved the things I wrote, but when my book was published I found he could not bear to look at it, far less to read it, and obviously hated to hear it mentioned. Long years after, he told me he was sorry he had had a 'thing about it' and about my writing—he could not tell why—and I said it did not matter, which had become nearly true.<sup>29</sup>

Like 'G' for whom the ghostly presence of Roland Leighton seems always to have intruded in his life with Vera Brittain, 'PJ' may have been haunted by the spectre of Bevil Quiller-Couch. Being unable to write, Cannan committed herself to the animals and land that went with the Staffordshire farmhouse in which she and PJ lived. Slater served in the Second World War as commander of anti-aircraft brigades and was ADC to King George VI and later to Queen Elizabeth. He died in 1967. Cannan survived him and died at age 80 in 1973. Her autobiography *Grey Ghosts and Voices*, left on her death in manuscript form, was published posthumously in 1976, the same year as Oman's memoir, and is an evocative portrait of her Oxford childhood as well as a moving account of her experience of war and its aftermath. She wrote:

I suppose most of us have the desire to leave something behind us when we go into

whatever there is (or is not) beyond the void. I don't think I ever treasured any extravagant hope of leaving anything that would be remembered, but as the years have gone by and times changed I have been glad to think that at least I wrote a salute to my generation.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike Vera Brittain, May Cannan did not ascribe to the idea that the Great War was a futile waste of a generation. She said in *Grey Ghosts and Voices*, 'I had admired much of Sassoon's verse but I was not coming home with him. Someone must go on writing for those who were still convinced of the right of the cause for which they had taken up arms'.<sup>31</sup> *The Tears of War*, edited by Charlotte Fyfe, which brings together May Cannan's poetry and her correspondence with Bevil Quiller-Couch, was published in 2000.

Gerald Lenanton, unlike May Cannan's husband James Slater, seems to have had no qualms about Oman's writing, although this could be because she wrote about other people's lives. Perhaps, too, her writing and his acceptance of it was easier as they had no children. About her work, the author of her *Times* obituary wrote:

In a laudable wish to infuse her work with colour, she was sometimes tempted to over-write, but she seldom failed to infect her readers with her enthusiasm, whatever subject she took up, and she could even make her references exciting. As a rule, she preferred to refrain from hindsight, which mar many works of a similar kind. She respected fact. She was sparing in commentary when it involved questions outside the matter immediately in hand.<sup>32</sup>

Oman also lectured frequently, 'authoritatively and with persuasion'. It was remarked that 'Her somewhat formidable dignity unnerved only the superficial, for she had innate kindness.' A description very much like those accorded to her father.

Jeremy Lewis, reviewing Oman's memoir, wrote that 'it's generally a pleasure to learn about the confident eccentric world of Edwardian Oxford and Cambridge ... but [Oman's book] is, alas, a disappointment ... the book never really gets off the ground, and far too much space is devoted to such matters as amateur theatricals'.<sup>33</sup>

In her memoir, May Cannan attests to the centrality of her friendship with Carola Oman, especially in the aftermath of war and Bevil's death. It was

what meant most to me and what did most for me at that time ... [She was] home after nursing in France, and like me writing again. Patiently, asking nothing, she appeared on Saturday afternoons armed with sandwiches and dressed for country walking, sat in the Lodge, until sometime after one I would come down those stone stairs wondering what to do with myself for the rest of the long day, and take me for walks around Oxford. Boars' Hill, Arnold's Tree, Cumnor, Bagley

Wood, Elsfield; and then back to tea in her quiet room in Frewin Hall where we read and discussed poetry, other people's and our own.<sup>34</sup>

These women's paths diverged dramatically after the early 1920s, yet their early lives were remarkably similar, and each was profoundly influenced by their father, both educated men who inspired them, directly and indirectly, to be thinking women. Although less publicly esteemed in her own lifetime than her childhood friend Carola Oman, May Cannan is today firmly established in the canon of Great War literature. When this analysis was first presented as a paper at the 2006 Women's History Network Conference, neither woman was included in her own right in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, but they now take their place alongside their fathers. Mark Bostridge, biographer of Vera Brittain and Florence Nightingale, has contributed the entry on Carola Oman which appeared in 2007, and my entry on May Cannan was published as part of the release to mark the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armistice in November 2008.

## Notes

1. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 207-8.
2. May Wedderburn Cannan, *Grey Ghosts and Voices* (Kington: Roundwood Press, 1976), 51.
3. Cannan, 34.
4. Carola Oman, *An Oxford Childhood* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1976), 114.
5. Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 46.
6. Dyhouse, 46.
7. Dyhouse, 8.
8. Oman, 113.
9. Cannan, 5 & 6.
10. Oman, 86.
11. Cannan, 13.
12. Cannan, 82.
13. Cannan, 84.
14. Carolyn G. Heilbrun, Afterword to Lynda E. Boose & Betty S. Flowers, eds. *Daughters & Fathers* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 419 & 422.
15. Katherine C. Hill-Miller, "'The Skies and Trees of the Past': Anne Thackeray Ritchie and William Makepeace Thackeray", in Lynda E. Boose & Betty S. Flowers, eds. *Daughters & Fathers* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 361.
16. Hill-Miller, 362.
17. Katherine C. Hill, 'Virginia Woolf and Leslie Stephen: History and Literary Revolution', *PMLA* (Modern Language Association) 96 . 3 (May, 1981), 351-362, 351.
18. Hill, 351.
19. Hill-Miller, 362.
20. Carol Dyhouse, *Feminism and the Family in England, 1880-1939* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 12.
21. Hill-Miller, 372.

# Women's Gymnastics and Citizenship in Denmark in the Early Twentieth Century

Anne Lykke Poulsen

*University of Copenhagen*

When the Copenhagen Female Gymnastics Club celebrated its 25-year jubilee in 1911, the anniversary publication gave this humorous account of the development of the club's general assemblies:

Here members for the first time were introduced to the difficult art of public negotiation. And we sure needed this training! We were seated in a circle in the gym on the small stools used for exercising and at first, of course, everybody was talking at the same time. A chairperson was then solemnly chosen, and she saw her task in a somewhat radical way. She managed to get all of the assembly to be absolutely silent, but unfortunately this didn't last to the end. But, come again today and witness a general assembly, and you will see a correct and secure performance! Women *can* also learn this art—in 25 years.<sup>1</sup>

This opening quotation illustrates a club mentality and self understanding of gymnastics as a means to attain and enhance women's competence and identity as citizens. In 1911 Danish women were still not full citizens with franchise and eligibility; however, the struggles for women's enfranchisement were becoming ever more intense and in 1915 Danish women did attain political citizenship.

The purpose of this article is to argue for a relationship between women's gymnastics and citizenship in Denmark and to make visible that women's gymnastics was significant in the process of women becoming citizens. Thus, the article illuminates how the process of women becoming performers of citizenship was reflected in women's involvement in the modern sport of gymnastics.

Primary questions are: How did women's gymnastics take part in the year-long process of women becoming citizens, and to what extent did agents of women's gymnastics support the struggles of the women's movement for civil, social and political citizenship?

In order to interpret women's gymnastics from a citizenship perspective, precise definitions of citizenship and feminism are required. This will be provided by an introduction to the theoretical framework, followed by short contextualisations of sport, women's gymnastics and physical education (PE) in Denmark. Within this context, the activities of three female sports clubs in Copenhagen will be analysed in relation to the idea of women's gymnastics as a bodily practise and the clubs as places for acquiring democratic skills. Additionally, initiatives towards establishing separate female organisations on a national level will be analysed with reference to citizenship issues.

## Conceptual framework

Being a citizen is more than having a passport and naturalisation papers; neither should it solely determine citizens who have political rights to vote. Based on a legal and social relation between individuals and the state involving both rights and obligations, citizenship is both a state of affairs and a praxis; this means it is something the citizen does or has to do as a member of the society.<sup>2</sup>

Scholars of citizenship are often inspired by the sociologist T. H. Marshall who in the years after the Second World War constructed a tripartite differentiation of the development of citizenship in the western world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to Marshall, the development towards full citizenship started with the introduction of civil rights (individual freedom and freedom

---

*Notes, continued from page 25.*

22. Mark Bostridge, 'Oman, Carola Mary Anima [married name Carola Mary Anima Lenanton, Lady Lenanton] (1897–1978)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn, Oxford University Press, Oct 2007 [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/71516, accessed 11 Sept 2008]

23. Cannan, 44.

24. Cannan, 43.

25. Oman, 115.

26. Cannan, 156.

27. Bostridge.

28. May Wedderburn Cannan & Bevil Quiller-Couch, *Tears of War: The Love Story of a Young Poet and a War Hero*,

ed. Charlotte Fyfe (Cavalier Paperbacks, 2000), 169.

29. quoted in Fyfe, 174.

30. Cannan, 152.

31. Cannan, 113.

32. 'Miss Carola Oman', obituary, *The Times* (June 12, 1978).

33. Jeremy Lewis, 'Memoirs: all the better to know you with', *The Times* (Nov. 18, 1976).

34. Cannan, 151.



of speech), later followed by political rights (right to vote and eligibility) and, lastly, the welfare state securing social and economical rights.<sup>3</sup> Among the criticisms of Marshall's model is that the historic development of the different rights are seen as successive, even though analyses show that they in some cases developed simultaneously or even followed other patterns. Another criticism is that Marshall ignored that his model was closely connected to Western societies and especially England. Recently, scholars have pointed out that historical analyses of citizenship must take into consideration that citizenship is developed differently in different societies and that it is not neutral in relation to gender, class and ethnicity.<sup>4</sup> In general, women's way towards citizenship has been different, slower and more troublesome than men's, due to women's later access to education, employment, trade unions and elected positions. For example, in the first constitution in Denmark in 1849 franchise was confined to men owning property and, in Danish language, the rest of the population was referred to as "the five Fs": '*fjølser*' (fools), '*fruentimmere*' (females), '*forbrydere*' (criminals), '*fattige*' (poor) and '*folkehold*' (servants). In 1915, an amendment to the constitution conferred the franchise to women and the rest of the population, but still women did not have the same rights in relation to education and work as men.<sup>5</sup>

Historically, citizenship has been and still is an identity building and normative element that is ruled politically and has ideological and disciplinary effects. This means that those who have citizenship can define the content of the concept and in this way include people with rights—and exclude those without. In different periods and cultures citizenship can have different meanings and content. Thus the nature and boundaries of citizenship are not static but a part of an ongoing process characterized by power struggles and negotiations between state and citizens and between groups of citizens. Through history the concept of citizenship has been used for emancipation purposes by excluded social groups; but also groups of formal citizens have struggled to expand the boundaries for the content of the citizenship.<sup>6</sup>

To capture the nuances of gender within the development of citizenship, the sociologist Ruth Lister has suggested the use of a broad notion of politics, where all actions towards the public space are considered as political.<sup>7</sup> Using this definition of politics and citizenship, the actions of women at work, in organisations, in cultural settings and in other non-political institutions, become political if they strive to change the public. In this way, women's political citizenship can be captured and made visible, even though women were still excluded from the traditional public space and public institutions. Thus, in Swedish empirical studies of women's collective actions towards improvement of their conditions, this definition of politics has facilitated interpretations of these actions as negotiations about the nature and boundaries of women's citizenship.<sup>8</sup>

The development of women's gymnastics was part of women's general social struggle at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, an interpretation of

women's gymnastics as a part of the general women's movement at that time requires a specific definition of feminism. Advocates for narrow definitions of feminism have had gender equality claims, or gender equality legislation, as points of departure; but the disadvantage of such narrow definitions is that they exclude many themes that have been associated with women historically and therefore omit committed female activists. The Norwegian historian Elisabeth Lønne argues for a broader definition of feminism to include initiatives and actions promoting women's interests, even if they are not directly aiming at gender equality. On the other hand, this definition excludes initiatives and organisations with negative attitudes towards women's rights. Inspired by the American historian Nancy Cott, Lønne suggests that feminism implies resistance towards hegemonic gender hierarchies; presupposes that the living conditions of women are socially constructed and not natural or God given; and implies an attitude that human living conditions are gendered and involve an identification with one or more groups of women.<sup>9</sup> All three conditions were true in relation to the agents in Danish women's gymnastics and this definition has proved fruitful for the analysis of a group of women that strived to change women's conditions even though they were not explicitly motivated by a feminist ideology.

## The modern breakthrough

The breakthrough of the modern sports movement in Denmark in the 1880s occurred at the same time as fundamental changes in Danish society including industrialisation, urbanisation, secularisation and an increasing power of modern science. These changes were of particular significance to the social role and conditions of women. Over the years, the status of women changed from that of minors to formal citizens.

Industrialisation led to an increasing specialization of labour, which on the one hand created new jobs at low wages for working-class women, whilst on the other gave the middle-class women affluence but robbed them of economic usefulness. Simultaneously, the population of Europe developed a surplus of women leading to many women being denied the chance of being traditionally supported by getting married. These factors led to a growing number of middle-class women needing employment. Legally and socially, women obtained increased opportunities for professional training and employment, not only as a route to financial independence, but increasingly as a means of achieving some degree of personal fulfilment.<sup>10</sup> Among the first occupations accepted for women were teaching and nursing where care and nurture were of major importance. Supposedly, women could transfer traditional female nurturing values to these occupations and still retain their femininity.<sup>11</sup>

## Modern sport

Sport in Denmark is characterised by two historically different sporting organisations built upon contrasting cultures and ideologies. The Danish Rifle Club Association,

founded in 1861 (since 1992 the Danish Gymnastics and Sports Association) aimed and still aims at promoting enlightenment and democracy (and today also health) through physical and cultural activities. Historically, gymnastics had a primary position closely related to the ideology of the organisation. In the countryside and especially at the so-called 'folk' high schools, the Swedish gymnastics system invented by P. H. Ling was established as a 'bodily collective mentality' closely related to the ideology of the Danish Rifle Club Association.<sup>12</sup> The other organisation, Sports Confederation of Denmark founded in 1896, is an amalgamation of different Danish sports federations with gymnastics included on an equal basis with other sports disciplines. The Sports Confederation of Denmark aimed/aims at promoting and popularising both elite sport and sport for all in society. Within the history of Danish sport, this organisational division has been explained as an ideological conflict between gymnastics and sport.<sup>13</sup> As pointed out by other sport historians and later in this article, this conflict can also be identified in women's gymnastics and in its organisation.<sup>14</sup>

Women took part in sport from the beginnings of the modern sports movement.<sup>15</sup> However, they were a minority and their way to equality as club members/leaders was to prove age-long.<sup>16</sup> According to the English sport sociologist Jennifer Hargreaves, the reason is that 'the body is the fundamental symbol of power relations between men and women in sports and, since the nineteenth century, the female body has been a locus of struggle to control and resist dominant images of sports and femininity'.<sup>17</sup> Disciplines like gymnastics, dance and ice skating were early seen as acceptable disciplines for women while strength and endurance sports like track and field, and also many ball games, were seen to be inappropriate for women and in conflict with dominant ideas of femininity.

The genesis of specific women's professions and educational institutions gave young women an opportunity to choose an economically independent life outside the private sphere; modern sport, as well as the school, offered women an opportunity to make a living as physical education teachers in schools and as gymnastics teachers in the sport clubs (hereafter named PE teachers). Thus, by doing gymnastics and other sports women, particularly from the middle-classes, could leave the domestic sphere and experience a totally new bodily emancipation in contrast to the traditional, bodily inactive life.<sup>18</sup>

This development was not a unique Danish phenomenon. With different national variations the European daughters of the bourgeoisie could be trained in PE and, in this development, Swedish Ling gymnastics achieved major importance. Ling gymnastics was exported to the other Nordic countries, England and North America, very often by female teachers from the Royal Central Institute in Stockholm.<sup>19</sup> In England, by comparison with everything else in the history of women's education, gymnastics was notably, if not uniquely, promoted, institutionalised and authorised by women in a purely female tradition.<sup>20</sup> Until the Second World War, women in their own institutions could develop a new profession with an unusual degree of autonomy, since they did not have

to compete with or relate to either men, men's games nor the ordinary educational system. The English female PE teacher did not threaten an established male domain.<sup>21</sup> The Swedish PE teacher Madame Bergman-Österberg was the most influential pioneer of girls PE and women PE teacher training in England. Trained at the Royal Central Institute in Stockholm, she founded a college in London in 1885 for training PE teachers for the new high schools for middle-class girls. Her ideology was that separate development was necessary and she used a medical, scientific discourse to describe female physiology and initiated a new profession for middle-class women.<sup>22</sup>

In Denmark, many female agents of women's gymnastics promoted the same strategy of separate female development. But as we shall see, their field was characterised by many internal and external conflicts of interests which lead to a development quite different from the female tradition in England. Either the first few sporting women were active in clubs for both sexes or they established clubs solely for women. The separation strategy was especially followed in the capital and the larger cities. Here, the focus will be on Copenhagen and on three specific female sports clubs established in the years before and after 1900.

### **Danish Women's Gymnastics Club<sup>23</sup>**

This club was established in 1888 as a rallying point for female PE teachers examined at the private women's gymnastics institute run by the gymnastics pioneer Paul Petersen (1845-1906). Paul Petersen constructed what he called 'Danish women's gymnastics'. He found the Swedish system inflexible and restraining, and developed a gymnastics inspired by different systems and with a versatile approach to (competitive) sports. Thus, Paul Petersen organised public swimming competitions for women at the early time of 1900; in order not to provoke the audience by showing women dressed in full body covering swimsuits, the swimmers entered the harbour pool from the water side, and returned the same way after the competition, meaning that the audience saw no more of the swimmers than their large swim caps.<sup>24</sup>

After his death, Paul Petersen's two daughters continued this philosophy, both in the Club and at the gymnastics Institute, by developing gymnastics with inspiration from modern dance and other movement cultures, and by developing strong, competitive swimming with several international elite swimmers winning world records and world championships between 1920 and 1950. The sisters Magdalene (1873-1936)<sup>25</sup> and Ingeborg (1876-1952) Paul-Petersen<sup>26</sup> were trained at their father's institute as dance, PE and swimming teachers. Like the majority of female PE teachers, the sisters remained unmarried. Besides being leaders of the Institute, they were leaders and teachers in the Danish Women's Gymnastics Club; Magdalene, who primarily engaged in developing women's gymnastics, served as chairman 1909-36, and Ingeborg, a successful swimming coach, held the position 1936-51. Magdalene especially was engaged in the women's question and was a member of the Danish

Women's Society ('*Dansk Kvindesamfund*', established 1871). She was among the first women in Denmark to hold a top position in the Danish sport organisations; a member of the governing board in the Danish Gymnastics Federation (established in 1899) from 1912-36 and a member of the board of the umbrella organisation Sports Confederation of Denmark. Additionally, she was employed as a PE teacher at various public schools in Copenhagen 1895-1936.

On an organisational level, the positive relation of the Danish Women's Gymnastics Club to competitive sport can also be seen in the fact that it was one of the first members of the Danish Gymnastics Federation; one of the federations within Sports Confederation of Denmark.<sup>27</sup>

### **Copenhagen Female Gymnastics Club<sup>28</sup>**

The first female club was established by sixteen woman PE teachers in 1886 and it aimed at promoting Swedish gymnastics.<sup>29</sup> From the start the club was exclusively for trained PE teachers, even though only short-term unexamined courses existed at this time. In the 1890s the club was opened for skilled gymnasts without professional training, and from 1897 the club also included women without previous gymnastic skills. After the turn of the century other sport disciplines came on the programme, but gymnastics continued to be the core discipline in the club.<sup>30</sup>

On an organisational level, Copenhagen Female Gymnastics Club distanced itself from the competitive sports movement by becoming a member of The Danish Rifle Club Association in 1907. Gymnastics in the Club was highly influenced by the Finnish-Swedish physical education teacher Elli Björkstén (1870-1946). In opposition to the relatively gender neutral Swedish gymnastics, Björkstén taught that women's exercises should be distinctively different from men's in order to be truly 'feminine'. On the basis of exercises and techniques in the Swedish gymnastics, Björkstén constructed a 'rhythmic movement gymnastics' in accordance with a scientifically legitimated notion of essential femininity. The core virtues of this gymnastics were health, harmony, softness, grace and beauty. More than being an end in itself, this women's gymnastics, with a pedagogic and educational approach, aimed at supporting the woman's life mission in the home but also in society.<sup>31</sup> Thus, gymnastics should educate women to be citizens.

In 1906 Elli Björkstén ran a course for teachers at the Copenhagen Female Gymnastics Club. The occasion for the course was a conflict in the club taking place between 1902 and 1905; the core of the conflict surrounded a new team of specially-selected and skilled gymnasts, with a male teacher, Aage Budtz-Jørgensen. Within the skilled team, the gymnasts exercised with more strength and power than the club board could accept and in 1902 the chairman left her position in discontent with the situation.<sup>32</sup> She and other members of the board found that the gymnastics on the selected team was too vigorous and 'mannish'.<sup>33</sup> The skilled team continued for a few years until a drama took place at the Club's general assembly

in May 1905. An election settled that the gymnasts at the skilled team could no longer choose their own teacher, which effectively meant the exclusion of the male teacher. The gymnasts were furious after the election process because their opponents had collected votes from non-present members in order to win the election. In protest, they left the general assembly and Copenhagen Female Gymnastics Club and established a new club, the Female Sports Club, while harmony was re-established in the mother club.<sup>34</sup>

One of the leading persons in Copenhagen Female Gymnastics Club, and in the field of women's gymnastics in general, was Else Thomsen (1879-1951);<sup>35</sup> she was a teacher there from 1906, on the board from 1914-51, and chairman 1920-24. She was examined both as a general and a PE teacher (at the State Gymnastics Institute) and worked as a teacher in Copenhagen from 1903. In 1908 she was appointed part-time assistant at the State Inspection of PE. Thomsen was a very skilled PE teacher and taught on short further education courses all over Denmark; from 1916-19 she worked full time as assistant in the State Inspection of PE but left after negotiations about assuming a new female position as Inspector of PE which, she found, would not have given her enough authority. Instead she was appointed as Inspector of girls PE in the municipality of Copenhagen and held this position from 1919-1946 on fully equal terms with her male colleague. From 1913 she was fascinated by the gymnastics of Elli Björkstén with whom she also had a close personal and professional relationship; Else Thomsen dedicated her professional work to promoting Björkstén gymnastics in Denmark by teaching and publishing books and articles. Besides this practical work, she was also active at a political and ideological level; she was on the governing board of the Sports Confederation of Denmark (1928), on the board of the association working for better hygienic standards in the schools (1924-42), chairman of a playground association in Copenhagen (1926-46) and a year-long member of the Danish Women's Society, and of Danish Women's Civil Emergency Preparedness during the Second World War. Privately, Else Thomsen lived together with another female PE teacher in a house they shared with two other female PE teachers.

### **Female Sports Club<sup>36</sup>**

As stated above, the Female Sports Club was established in 1906 in opposition to the Copenhagen Female Gymnastics Club; it continued to promote the Swedish gymnastics system but it also included sports on equal terms.<sup>37</sup> Over the years, the Female Sports Club elaborated a powerful gymnastics that accentuated qualities like strength, courage and ingenuity and, in this sense, it was more closely related to the ethos of the competitive sports movement. This was also realised on an organisational level; since 1907 the Female Sports Club was a member of the Danish Gymnastics Federation under the Sports Confederation of Denmark. Thus, the club played an important role in the development and sportification of women's handball in the 1920s and 1930s,





*Gym club picnic*

developing special tournaments and rules for women.<sup>38</sup>

For many years the different approaches towards women's gymnastics remained important issues in the relationship between the female clubs and their striving for legitimacy. After having seen a gymnastic display by Female Sport Club, Else Thomsen complained about the teacher in a letter to Elli Björkstén:

Mrs. LN [Lønborg Nielsen] has much routine: her teaching technique is fine. But there is no thought behind her selection of exercises. Herself, she has expressed that she has left the strong women's gymnastics she learnt from Budtz-Jørgensen; but it didn't seem so... But how can we move forward when we, who see that it's wrong, lack the ability to realise the new and right way!<sup>39</sup>

The criticised PE teacher, Nanna Lønborg Nielsen (1881-1971), was also an important agent in the field of women's gymnastics. One of the only PE teachers to be married and have children, she was employed as PE teacher at the State Gymnastics Institute (1898-1944), author of a gymnastics instruction book, member of a state commission on girls' PE (1908-14) and a long-standing teacher and leader in the Female Sports Club (chairman 1920-23). Lønborg-Nielsen held an opposing view of Björkstén gymnastics, although this was seldom expressed in public. At a meeting for PE teachers in 1917 she gave a critical speech about Björkstén gymnastics which she found too spiritual. One of the major newspapers reported from the meeting:

Since 1914, the debate concerning women's gymnastics is more excited than ever. And it was the system of Björkstén that Mrs. Lønborg attacked [...] "Let us", Mrs. Lønborg said, "seek to heighten our body with gymnastics, but let the soul be heightened by other and higher values."<sup>40</sup>

### **Female sports clubs in Copenhagen: Towards an essential women's gymnastics**

Female sports clubs co-operated on occasions where they found common ground, but as exemplified above, they were also rivals with different ideas about

gymnastics and femininity. In conformity with femininity norms of the time, the general belief was that an essential 'feminine' gymnastics would properly strengthen women's femininity, while a 'too strong' gymnastics would have the opposite effect. But the female sport clubs disagreed about the exact definition of a proper strength, a 'too strong' gymnastics and a suitable 'strong' gymnastics. Thus, a gender difference discourse aiming at realising an essential feminine women's gymnastics was at play in all of the three female Copenhagen sports clubs. Just like in religion, education, legislation, science and other fields, normative conceptions of femininity and masculinity appear as binary contrasts in relation to sports. As the American historian Joan Scott points out, the normative notions of femininity and masculinity are constructed in struggles and negotiations where other possibilities are denied or suppressed.<sup>41</sup>

Over the years these three female sports clubs in Copenhagen developed a rich social life for thousands of members in a wide variety of physical activities such as gymnastics, handball, folk dance and swimming, as well as cultural activities. They bought summer houses in the countryside where members could be together during holidays and weekends; Female Sports Club even managed to build a private harbour pool. The mentality of the clubs was strengthened and expressed in jubilee publications celebrating the lifespan of ten, twenty-five, fifty and even one hundred years.

Thus, the Copenhagen sport clubs offered new opportunities to women in terms of both bodily emancipation and social networking. By participating in sports women were offered totally new bodily and social experiences in the public space—in the gym—in contrast to the traditional physically inactive life in the domestic sphere. In this way their participation in the clubs can be seen as a means towards women being active, rather than passive, agents and even citizens in the public space.

### **Citizenship education**

Another dimension of club life was their provision of training in democratic skills long before Danish women attained political citizenship in 1915. Organisational skills useful for active citizenship were instilled at meetings and in activities like writing meeting protocols, negotiating with authorities and planning physical and cultural activities for club members. Also, the internal conflicts within the Female Sports Club and the discussions and struggles with external partners can be seen as important experiences for female club leaders who learned to navigate as active citizens. The opening quotation in this article about the general assemblies of Copenhagen Female Gymnastics Club illustrates that at least the author of the jubilee publication in 1911 was aware of this dimension of club life.

One could argue that this citizenship dimension was the same for both men and women, and that women could learn democratic skills in clubs for both sexes. However, as stated by Else Thomsen in 1922 when she defended the establishing of a new women's association, the Nordic

Association for Women's Gymnastics, many women found it impossible to learn these skills in the existing organisations:

Most women, even though skilled in practical work are lacking courage and think that they don't have the ability to take part in public oral or written negotiations. Of course, the reason for this is that the women haven't been trained in this, also because they were not used for this in earlier times [...] If this happens it will also be a benefit for the joint organisations. Therefore, it is incomprehensible that the men now will try to hinder the independent work among the women.<sup>42</sup>

Citizenship training in the female sports clubs also was realised by establishing relations with the social and political women's movement. In Denmark, the struggle for women's political citizenship intensified in the years after 1900; several women's associations besides the '*Dansk Kvindesamfund*' (Danish Women's Society) were established aiming at the introduction of women's suffrage. By joining and supporting one of these associations in 1905, the Copenhagen Female Gymnastics Club became an active agent in the struggle. When women were given political rights in 1915, the Danish Women's Society organised a celebration procession through the streets of Copenhagen. To ensure order and precision, leaders and gymnasts from the three female sports clubs were appointed as 'Marshals' leading the procession which numbered thousands of women.

The ties between women's gymnastics and the women's movement can also be seen in the fact that several of the club leaders were individual members of the Danish Women's Society.<sup>43</sup> Also, the female sports clubs interacted with well-known suffragettes by inviting them as speakers at cultural events for members. One of the speakers was Elisabeth Grundtvig (1856-1945), granddaughter of the well-known Danish thinker and priest N.F.S. Grundtvig. In her speech at the consecration of the colours of the club, she emphasised a gender political perspective for women's gymnastics:

A troop of women around colours—it is as if we see the future take shape before our astonished eyes: A new generation of women, strong and clever, wise and warm, no longer in the role of forever an audience for men's dealings, but themselves in the middle of dealings..<sup>44</sup>

As mentioned previously, citizenship involves rights as well as obligations. In relation to the female sport clubs, it is relevant to examine whether they initiated activities that can be interpreted as expressions of citizenship obligation. The 'cheap evening gymnastics' being realised in all three clubs since the end of the nineteenth century can be seen from this perspective. Since 1897, Copenhagen Female Gymnastics Club offered gymnastics in the evenings at a very low price, especially for working-class women; after three years 217 women attended

these sessions. The numbers increased to 346 in 1925 and 1284 in 1935. In comparison, numbers of gymnasts in ordinary member teams were 117 in 1900, 248 in 1925 and 562 in 1935. While teachers for the ordinary member teams were paid a low salary, teachers involved in 'cheap evening gymnastics' received no salary during the first ten years. This charitable initiative in favour of working-class women was also established in the Female Sports Club and in the Danish Women's Gymnastics Club, however in the latter it existed for only a short period and without much success.<sup>45</sup> To ensure the initiative 'was only to the benefit of truly necessitous women' Female Sports Club lent gymnastics suits to participants who could not afford to buy one themselves. Thus, before the start of the first season the club raised money from private donations, some members sewed some sixty gymnastics suits, and sixteen - eighteen members advertised the cheap evenings gymnastics by distributing 'thousands' of programmes in the local neighbourhood.<sup>46</sup>

But how can we be sure that it really was working class women who attended the cheap teams? In 1900, Copenhagen Female Gymnastics Club examined the participants in the club in relation to age, occupation and working hours.<sup>47</sup> At this time more than 400 women attended the club as members or non-members. The analysis showed that the share of both members and 'cheap evening gymnastics' who worked outside the home was quite high. Most of the participants attending the 'cheap evening gymnastics' were young women working as servants or at factories. In contrast, the club members most often had specific skills (i.e. as photographers, hairdressers or bookbinders) or had an education. Typically, they were occupied as teachers or clerks. Thus, the differentiation between member teams and cheap teams also illustrates a social distinction within the club, with middle-class women as members and in the centre of the club, and with the working class women at the periphery. The barriers for the inclusion of working class women in the club can be explained by a lack of both economic and social capital. The 'cheap evening gymnastics' involved only a minimum fee, while a regular membership required both a higher fee and a prescribed gymnastics suit. Due to the social conditions of working class women, they possibly neither had the money nor time to be a part of club life. And they were not explicitly invited to join the club as regular members.

Thus, an analysis of participants in Copenhagen Female Gymnastics Club shows that the club established a fellowship among women, but it was a fellowship of socially equal middle-class women only, while working-class women were to some degree excluded. As non-members they were excluded from the many cultural and social activities as well as from the democratic processes in the female clubs. However, the high number of 'cheap evening gymnastics' participants clearly illustrates the existence of motivation and a sense of obligation and responsibility in the female clubs towards fellow women citizens with less cultural, social and economic capital.

The practice and discourses of the female sports clubs shows that they were concerned about women's

roles in society at large and in this way were places for learning democratic skills. The female leaders and teachers in the clubs saw it as a citizenship obligation to give women with less social and cultural capital access to the liberating potential of gymnastics. These actions can be interpreted as public and political actions aiming at enhancing women's citizenship.

### **Separate female organisation as a way to enhance women's citizenship?**

We have already heard PE teacher Else Thomsen argue for a separate sports organisation for women in order to train them in democratic skills. A few years before in 1919, she had expressed this separation strategy in a letter to Elli Björkstén: 'Thus, it is about time that we in Denmark think of a detachment from men's gymnastics, in order to avoid... mannishness'.<sup>48</sup> Still the aim was to secure the development of an essential feminine gymnastics. However, now the perspective had changed from club level to an organisational level. A few examples can illustrate how this separation strategy was realised both on a national and a Nordic level.

Elli Björkstén supported the separation strategy based on gendered ideological arguments. She stated that the ideal of an essential feminine gymnastics could only be realised if the women themselves taught and organised gymnastics. Promoting the establishment of the Nordic Association for Women's Gymnastics in 1922, she argued that due to a natural ability and citizenship obligation, only women ought to train women in gymnastics:

The necessity that women themselves take responsibility for their gymnastics is evident today. On the basis of the new valuable advice from physiologists and scientists in relation to gymnastics, we women must continue the work in order to adapt our subject in harmony with our essence [...] Due to a congenital pedagogical eye, women are the nearest and most competent in organising physical education.<sup>49</sup>

In spite of resistance from some male teachers, the Nordic Association for Women's Gymnastics was established in 1922 with Elli Björkstén as president. In Denmark, all female agents in the gymnastics field, in spite of differing attitudes to women's gymnastics, agreed to support the establishment of the Association. Every year, the Association organised a two - three week summer course in one of the Nordic countries when more than 100 female PE teachers participated and enjoyed the teaching of Elli Björkstén and others, as well as a rich programme of social events.

The chairman (1922-47) of the Danish section of the association was Sigrid Nutzhorn (1876-1959), also a very influential PE teacher.<sup>50</sup> After qualifying from the Central Gymnastics Institute in Stockholm in 1899, she held a position as PE teacher at the prestigious private 'Nathalie Zahle's school and teacher training college for girls and women'<sup>51</sup> for more than four decades. Sigrid

Nutzhorn worked together with Else Thomsen from 1908 as one of the female assistants at the State Gymnastics Inspection; she published several books on gymnastics and music, was a member of the state commission on girls PE (1908-14) and became president of the Nordic Association for Women's Gymnastics (1947-59). With her strong personality and, for a woman, unusually large network in both political circles and the folk high schools, she became a key strategist in the promotion of Björkstén's gymnastics in Denmark. On a personal level, she was unmarried and close friends with both Else Thomsen and Elli Björkstén.

Sigrid Nutzhorn legitimated establishing the Nordic Women's Gymnastics Association by referring to women's difficult access to positions in the governing bodies of the nationwide sports organisations. In a letter to Elli Björkstén she wrote:

Both in the Danish Gymnastics and Rifle Association and the Danish Gymnastics Federation the men have resisted the presence of women on the executive boards; only recently we have succeeded to have a single woman elected. But you will see that now they'll reproach us for establishing our own association, and they'll say that it is us who are not willing to co-operate with the men. What a wonderful logic! [...] The men have no right to restrict our field of activity. And honestly you can say that they have tried to do so by keeping women out of the executive committees here in Denmark.<sup>52</sup>

This quotation must be seen from the perspective of the two nationwide organisations, the Sports Confederation of Denmark and the Danish Gymnastics and Rifle Association, where female leaders struggled to gain influence and governing positions during the 1920s and 1930s. The struggles were directed towards women's representation in the governing bodies of the organisations and towards gender equality in terms of a fair distribution of economic resources and consideration of woman-specific interests and values. In discussions the women found that men in the sports organisations neither shared nor worshipped their gender difference ideology and, as a result of these experiences, the female leaders in both organisations ended up using a separate female organisation as a threatening strategy, as evidenced by the following examples.

In the Danish Gymnastics and Rifle Association a discussion took place in the organisation magazine 'Ungdom og Idræt' (Youth and Sport) in 1923. The discussion was raised by the newly appointed first female co-editor, the PE teacher Jørgine Abildgaard (1893-1962).<sup>53</sup> She was trained as a PE teacher at the State Gymnastics Institute and had made a career in the Danish folk high schools. In 1925, together with her partner PE teacher Anna Krogh, she established and managed a gymnastics folk high school for women, where thousands of young women were trained until the school closed in 1958. Jørgine Abildgaard and Anna Krogh were influenced



by the ideas of Elli Björkstén, even though they did not have a personal relationship with her. In 'Ungdom og Idræt' Jørgine Abildgaard supported the idea of a Nordic association and she continued with a more national perspective:

The establishment of this association [Nordic Association for Women's Gymnastics] might possibly give rise to concern for our present co-operation with men. But it should not cause any weakening – on the contrary. The men will understand that we are seeking clarification in women's gymnastics [...] and here they can easily leave the future of women's gymnastics to the women, just like the women find it obvious that men will take care of men's gymnastics.<sup>54</sup>

In the magazine discussion the women were accused of damaging the traditional co-operation between men and women in the organisation. Another of the first female leaders in the Danish Gymnastics and Rifle Association, PE teacher Anne Marie Børup (1888-1980)<sup>55</sup> refuted the accusation and explained the separation tendencies as due to women's experiences of marginalisation:

You think there are separation tendencies in our modern women's gymnastics movement. You know as well as I that this is not the intention; but these kind of tendencies can be a result when men like you are reluctant, uncomprehending and, with a sarcastic remark, hold up to ridicule something that to others is an important matter.<sup>56</sup>

At this time women were not represented in the governing body of the Danish Gymnastics and Rifle Association and, as part of the discussion, the female leaders put forward a claim for election of one or two women for the board. As arguments they put forward the high number of female gymnasts in the organisation where approximately one quarter of the members were women.<sup>57</sup> But it was also mentioned as a matter of 'the right to self-determination' as well as a guarantee for 'maintenance of femininity' for the female gymnasts.<sup>58</sup> Anne Marie Børup was the first woman actually elected to the governing body of the Danish Gymnastics and Rifle Association in 1923; she was elected with the highest number of votes. But just before the election took place the delegates were warned by one of the female leaders: 'If the honoured assembly can't consider our modest claim we fear *that it will affect the good co-operation with the men in the future* – and this would be very unfortunate'.<sup>59</sup> The threat to break off co-operation with the men is evidence that the female leaders were marked by an increased self-confidence not least stemming from their newly attained political citizenship in 1915.

In the Sports Confederation of Denmark, the way to influence for women was only slightly different. In order to include women as leaders, the executive committee in 1920 was increased by four more members. In this way women could be included without really challenging the



*Open air exercise class*

gendered power structures. The first four female committee members were not very active; they seldom spoke at meetings and they did not have any specific responsibilities. With three of them coming from two of the Copenhagen female sports clubs they were strangers to the dominant culture in the organisation. Only once, in the 1930s, did the female committee members try to gain influence on their own conditions. Again, it was omnipresent Else Thomsen who raised a discussion. Since 1928, she was a committee member in the Confederation. At a committee meeting in October 1932 she left her position in protest. She was dissatisfied with the fact that the Confederation was unwilling to restrict the growing women's track and field events as she found this sport inappropriate and 'degenerating' for women. Also, in relation to women's handball, she and another female committee member were dissatisfied; they found the play 'too rough and unfeminine' and tried to convince the Confederation to take care that women's handball tournaments were played with the moderated rules used in Female Sports Club. The two women demanded authority: 'We wish that DIF [the confederation] gives the women the right to set up a committee with authority. If not we must leave'. Four times during the meeting the Confederation chairman asked the question 'What do the women actually want?' and thus failed to appreciate the problem. And Else Thomsen gave up saying 'It is useless to negotiate when the men do not understand what we are aiming at'.<sup>60</sup>

These struggles in the Danish sports organisations can be interpreted as political actions towards enhancing citizenship. The discussions and negotiations about women's influence, leadership and authority show that even though women had attained political rights in terms of franchise and eligibility for parliament, it was still a long time until equal opportunities were carried out in the sports organisations. Still today, women are under-represented in leading positions in the world of sport. In Denmark, a study from 2003 showed that while the proportion of female members in the sporting organisations was 41%, only 31% of the voluntary leaders in honorary positions were women. The study further showed that the proportion of female leaders becomes smaller the further up you go in

the organisations, with most of the strategically important chairmanships and high positions occupied by men.<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusion

The conceptual framework for this article has been women's citizenship defined as an area for women's public, and thus political, actions towards improved conditions and rights for women. It has been shown that in several ways this area overlapped with women's gymnastics at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The female members, leaders or teachers in the female clubs of the expanding sports movement were helping, both practically and ideologically, to enhance the integration of women's citizenship. Doing gymnastics and sports, women could experience more bodily liberation than before. In the clubs, women had the chance to learn and practice important democratic skills as citizens with rights and responsibilities. As demonstrated, female leaders in the clubs saw it as their responsibility as women to make gymnastics and physical activity accessible for all women, including those with less social and economic capital. On the organisational level a separation strategy was carried out—or sometimes promoted as a threatening weapon—in order to secure the development of an essential, feminine women's gymnastics.

On the ideological level the relationship between women's citizenship and women's gymnastics has been illustrated by the objective relations between them: the female gymnastics clubs supported the women's movement in the struggles for social and political citizenship. On the other hand, the women's movement supported female club leaders in their strategies towards feminisation and autonomy.

It can be questioned whether the female club leaders can be said to be feminists because they never explicitly declared themselves as such. The purpose of their activities was closely connected to the sports activity and to the club community. However, even though they were not connected to an explicit feminist aim or ideology, the examples in this article indicate that the agents in women's gymnastics—this means both organisations, clubs and individuals—contributed to a strengthening of women's position in society. The point is that their efforts to extend the limits of women's citizenship and thus to change public life, by struggling for autonomy to develop a specific and eventually separate organised women's gymnastics, was, indeed, highly gendered and political; in this way they can be interpreted as actions of feminism.

## Notes

1. *Københavns Kvindelige Gymnastikforening 1886-1911, 1912*. The article draws upon the dissertation "*Den kvindelige kvinde*". *Kampe om kvindelighed, medborgerskab og professionalisering i dansk kvindegymnastik 1886-1940*/"The Feminine Woman". Struggles on Femininity, Citizenship and Professionalization in the Field of Women's Gymnastics in Denmark 1886-1940 (Copenhagen,

Department of Exercise and Sport Sciences, University of Copenhagen, 2005).

2. Christina Florin & Lars Kvarnström, 'Kvinnor på gränsen till medborgerskap', in ed. Christina Florin & Lars Kvarnström *Genus, medborgarskap och offentlig politik, 1848-1998. Svenska samhället i omvandling* (Stockholm, Atlas, 2001), 13-40.

3. Thomas Humphrey Marshall, *Medborgerskab og social klasse*, (Copenhagen, Hans Reitzel 2003 (1950)).

4. Mads Meier Jæger, 'Marshall og det moderne medborgerskab' *Tidsskrift for velferdsforskning*, 3. 4, (2000), 219-33.

5. For more information on women's history in Denmark, see [www.kvinfo.dk/side/680](http://www.kvinfo.dk/side/680)

6. Marshal, *Medborgerskab...* (2003).

7. Ruth Lister, *Citizenship. Feminist Perspectives* (London, Macmillan:Basingstoke, 1997).

8. Florin & Kvarnström, 'Kvinnor...' (2001).

9. Elisabeth Lønnå, 'Waves in the History of Feminism', in *Crossing Borders: re-mapping women's movements at the turn of the 21st century*, ed. Hilda Rømer Christensen et. al. (Odense, University Press of Southern Denmark, 2004), 41-58.

10. Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females. Critical issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sport* (London, Routledge, 1994), 51.

11. Bente Rosenbeck, *Kroppens politik. Om køn, kultur og videnskab*. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 1996), 48.

12. Niels Kayser Nielsen, *Krop og oplysning. Om kropskultur i Danmark 1780-1900*, (Odense, University Press of Southern Denmark, 1993), 106-107.

13. Ove Korsgaard, *Kampen om kroppen*, (København, Gyldendal, 1982); Niels Kayser Nielsen, *Krop og oplysning...* (1993); Per Jørgensen, *Ro, renlighed, regelmæssighed. Dansk Idræts-Forbund og sportens gennembrud ca. 1896-1918*, (Odense, University Press of Southern Denmark, 1997).

14. Else Trangbæk, 'Gender in Modern Society: Femininity, Gymnastics and Sport', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 14 (1997) 146ff.

15. Else Trangbæk, 'Discipline and Emancipation through Sport. The Pioneers of Women's Sport in Denmark', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 21 (1996).

16. Anne Lykke Poulsen & Ole Skjerk, *Hvad vil Damerne egentlig? Kvindeatletikdiskussionen i Danmark 1932-34* [*What Do the Ladies want? The Discussion on Women's Track and Field in Denmark 1932-34*], Masters thesis (Copenhagen, Center for Sport Research, University of Copenhagen, 1997).

17. Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females...* (1994), 44.

18. Else Trangbæk, 'Gender in Modern Society...' (1997), 146ff.

19. On the export of the Swedish system to Denmark and England, see Else Trangbæk, 'One System, Several Cultures: A Comparative Study of Swedish Gymnastics for Women', *International Sports Studies*, 22. 2 (2000), 42-57.

20. Sheila Fletcher, *Women First. The Female Tradition*

in *English Physical Education 1880-1980* (London, The Athlone Press, 1984), 4-5.

21. Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Women...* (1994), 82-83.

22. Richard Holt, *Sport and the British. A Modern History* (Oxford 1989), 119.

23. In Danish: *Dansk Kvinde Gymnastikforening*.

24. Else Trangbæk, *Kvindernes idræt. Fra rødder til top* (Copenhagen, Gyldendal, 2005), 70, 126.

25. 'Magdalene Paul-Petersen' in *Dansk Kvindebiografisk Leksikon* (Biographical Encyclopedia of Danish Women), (Rosinante, 2000-2001, see [www.kvinfo.dk/side/597/bio/919/origin/170](http://www.kvinfo.dk/side/597/bio/919/origin/170))

26. 'Ingeborg Paul-Petersen' in *Dansk Kvindebiografisk Leksikon* (Biographical Encyclopedia of Danish Women), (Rosinante, 2000-2001, see [www.kvinfo.dk/side/597/bio/918/origin/170/query/ingeborg%20paul](http://www.kvinfo.dk/side/597/bio/918/origin/170/query/ingeborg%20paul))

27. Else Trangbæk, 'Discipline & Emancipation through Sport: Pioneers of Women's Sport in Denmark', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, nr. 2 1996.

28. In Danish: *Københavns Kvindelige Gymnastikforening*.

29. *Love for Københavns kvindelige Gymnastikforening*, 1886.

30. Royal Library (RL), Copenhagen, Coll. of Pamphlets and Corporate Publications, *Annual reports and programmes from Københavns Kvindelige Gymnastikforening, 1898-1945*.

31. Leena Laine, 'In search of a physical culture for women - Elli Björkstén & women's gymnastics', *Scandinavian Journal of Sports Sciences*, 1989, nr 1, 15-20.

32. The conflict can be followed in the annual reports from the club. See (RL), Coll. of Pamphlets and Corporate Publications, *Annual reports and programmes from Københavns Kvindelige Gymnastikforening, 1898-1945*.

33. Else Thomsen, 'K.S.A. Præstgaard', *Tidens Kvinder*, nr. 35, 1919.

34. *Kvindelig Idrætsforening 1906-1916* (Copenhagen, 1916).

35. 'Else Thomsen' in *Dansk Kvindebiografisk Leksikon* (Biographical Encyclopedia of Danish Women), (Rosinante, 2000-2001, see [www.kvinfo.dk/side/597/bio/1222/origin/170](http://www.kvinfo.dk/side/597/bio/1222/origin/170))

36. In Danish: *Kvindelig Idrætsforening*.

37. *Kvindelig Idrætsforening 1906-1916* (Copenhagen, 1916).

38. Ole Skjerk, *Dameudvalgets inderlige Overflødighed. Kvindehåndbold i Danmark 1900-1950* (Copenhagen, Institute of Exercise and Sport Sciences, Copenhagen University, 2001).

39. Åbo Archive and Library, Finland (ÅAL), Archive of Elli Björkstén, volume 10, Else Thomsen to Elli Björkstén, 20 March 1915.

40. 'Gymnastisk Selskab afholdt møde', *Berlingske Tidende*, 23 March 1917.

41. Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1988).

42. Else Thomsen, 'Nordisk Kvindegymnastik-Forbund', *Gymnastisk Tidsskrift* nr. 2, 1922.

43. Statsbiblioteket, Kvindehistorisk Samling, Archive of Danish Women's Society, register of members in the Copenhagen section of the Society.

44. *Københavns Kvindelige Gymnastikforening 1886-1911*, 1912.

45. *Dansk Kvinde Gymnastikforening 1888-1913* (Copenhagen, 1913).

46. *Kvindelig Idrætsforening 1906-1916* (Copenhagen, 1916), 7-8.

47. *Annual report and programme from Københavns Kvindelige Gymnastikforening 1900-1901*.

48. ÅAL, Archive of Elli Björkstén, volume 10, Else Thomsen to Elli Björkstén, 15 Jan. 1919.

49. The quote was part of an appeal for Nordic cooperation in a Nordic organisation for women's gymnastics. Written by Elli Björkstén in the journal *Gymnastisk Tidsskrift* nr. 9, 1921.

50. Sigrd Nutzhorn in *Dansk Kvindebiografisk Leksikon* (Biographical Encyclopedia of Danish Women), (Rosinante, 2000-2001), see [www.kvinfo.dk/side/597/bio/1132/origin/170/query/sigrd%20nutzhorn](http://www.kvinfo.dk/side/597/bio/1132/origin/170/query/sigrd%20nutzhorn)

51. Birgitte Possing, *Awakening the Promising Soul: Zahle* (Gyldendal, Copenhagen 2002).

52. ÅAL, Archive of Elli Björkstén, volume 5, Sigrd Nutzhorn to Elli Björkstén, 5 Jan. 1922.

53. 'Jørgine Abildgaard' in *Dansk Kvindebiografisk Leksikon* (Biographical Encyclopedia of Danish Women), (Rosinante, 2000-2001), see [www.kvinfo.dk/side/597/bio/266/origin/170/query/abildgaard](http://www.kvinfo.dk/side/597/bio/266/origin/170/query/abildgaard)

54. Jørgine Abildgaard, 'Nordisk Forbund for Kvindegymnastik', *Ungdom og Idræt* nr. 46, 1922.

55. 'Anne Marie Børup' in *Dansk Kvindebiografisk Leksikon* (Biographical Encyclopedia of Danish Women), (Rosinante, 2000-2001, see [www.kvinfo.dk/side/597/bio/298/origin/170/query/b%F8rup](http://www.kvinfo.dk/side/597/bio/298/origin/170/query/b%F8rup))

56. Anne Marie Børup, 'Et åbent Brev til Kr. Kristensen Killemosen', *Ungdom og Idræt* nr. 7, 1923.

57. Ole Skjerk, *Dameudvalgets...*, (2001), 265.

58. Jørgine Abildgaard, 'Et Ord før Mødet', *Ungdom og Idræt*, nr. 14. 1923.

59. Faurby Stengaard, 'Skytte- og Gymnastikforeningernes repræsentantmøde', *Ungdom og Idræt*, nr. 16, 1923.

60. National Archives, archive of Sport Confederation of Denmark, parcel 4, council meeting protocol 1917-33, meeting 10 Nov. 1932.

61. Ulla Habermann, Laila Ottesen & Berit Skirstad, 'It will solve itself (?) - On the attitudes of Scandinavian sports managers towards equal opportunities'. In Annette R. Hofmann & Else Trangbæk (eds.), *International Perspectives on Sporting Women in Past and Present*, (Institute of Exercise and Sport Sciences, University of Copenhagen, 2005), 189-213.



## Book Reviews

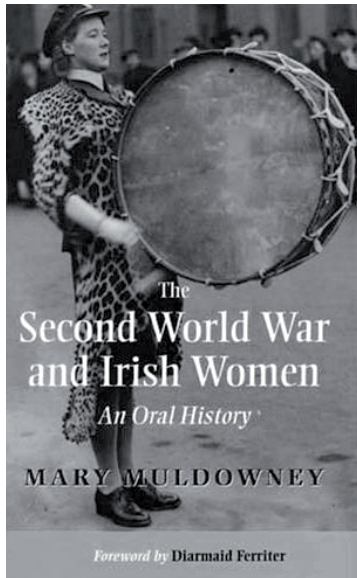
### Mary Muldowney, *The Second World War and Irish Women: An Oral History*

Dublin and Portland, Oregon: Irish Academic Press, 2007. €27, ISBN 978 0 7165 2887 6

(paperback), pp. vii + 238.

Reviewed by Carol Acton

*St Jerome's, University of Waterloo, Canada*



Focusing on Irish women's experience in Northern Ireland and in Eire, this book is not only a useful addition to the work that has been done on the wartime experience of women in Britain, but it also makes a very important contribution to the growing research on Ireland and the two world wars. As Muldowney notes in her introduction, women have been particularly neglected in this emerging area of Irish history. Reflecting the approach by British

historians working in the areas of women's and oral histories, a particular strength of this book is the bringing together of the socio-economic history of the period with the subjective, lived experience of twenty-seven women who represent a range of social classes and urban and rural backgrounds.

Organising her chapter topics around the concerns of her interviewees and examining these concerns in the larger context of the period, Muldowney provides a detailed description and analysis of the Irish situation, including both neutral Eire and belligerent Northern Ireland. Chapters cover specific topics, 'Women at Work', 'War Work in Britain', 'Joining Up', 'The Home Front', and 'Health in Wartime', set in the more general context of wartime Britain and Ireland by two introductory chapters, and supplemented with useful appendices. Throughout the book, Muldowney reinforces her claim near the beginning that 'just as the impact of war is not confined to combatants, disturbance of the *status quo ante* is not restricted to belligerent states.' Thus individual women's memories provide the lived experience behind the myriad statistics on issues such as rationing, wages, disease and housing, a constant reminder of the degree to which the war infiltrated every aspect of daily life even in a neutral country.

In addition to this very specific analysis, setting the Irish women's situation in the context of British women's experience, and exploring Irish women's accounts of doing war work as civilians in Britain and in the British armed forces, as well as in Ireland, also raises two more generally important issues. First, these

personal accounts draw attention to the interdependence of the Irish experience with that of Britain: in collectively becoming a singular 'oral history' they construct a larger historical narrative wherein Ireland's position in the war is viewed in the context of connection with Britain rather than separation, especially in relation to neutral Eire. This is an important broadening of the discussion in this field on the relationship between Ireland and Britain which has tended to emphasise Eire's political autonomy rather than the more informal connections that arose when large numbers of Irish men and women participated in the war through work and armed service in Britain and, less obviously, through experiencing wartime privations and rationing and even bombing. It also reminds us that Northern Ireland, as part of Britain, was fully participant in the war effort, with a civilian population subject to aerial bombing and displacement. Second, emerging from the oral history approach is the investigation of a range of women's experiences throughout this period, considered in relation to the larger cultural constructions of appropriate roles for women. While the war offered positive opportunities for broadening life and work experience, especially for those women who went to work in Britain during the war, Muldowney reminds us that, in Britain and Ireland, women were still constrained within a dominant narrative which positioned them in the home.

The book depends for its content on the issues discussed in the interviews, and Muldowney acknowledges the women's reluctance to discuss highly personal issues. This results in the omission of any detailed analysis of the emotional history of the war, even though the interviews at times reveal the stress women lived under and many of the women recount wartime deaths of siblings through illness, witnessing bombing and knowing men who were killed in the armed forces. The Irish experience of evacuation and displacement, areas of concern in women's wartime history, also seems to be outside the scope of these oral narratives. However, such omissions primarily serve to illustrate the need for more work to be done in this area, rather than detract from the book. In offering a long overdue and engaging analysis of Irish women's wartime experiences, this book is an important contribution to the field of women's war history in general and especially in its filling of a large gap in understanding the Irish woman's experience of the Second World War.

### Catherine Hindson, *Female Performance Practice on the Fin-de-Siècle Popular Stages of London and Paris*

Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007. £50,

ISBN 0 7190 7485 1 (hardback), pp. x + 227.

Reviewed by Alexandra Wilson

*Oxford Brookes University*

Although you may not realise it, you're probably already familiar with several of the cast members of Catherine

## Books Received and Call for Reviewers

If you would like to review any of the titles listed below, please email Jane Potter:

**bookreviews@womenshistorynetwork.org**

Shirley Aucott, *Women of Courage, Vision and Talent: Lives in Leicester 1780-1925* (Shirley Aucott)

Margaretta D'Arcy, *Loose Theatre: Memoirs of a Guerilla Theatre Activist* (Trafford)

Gregory Durstan, *Victims and Viragos: Metropolitan Women, Crime and the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Justice System* (Anima Publishing)

Erin Gaffney, ed. *Henrietta Maria: Piety, Politics and Patronage* (Ashgate)

Sam George, *Botany, Sexuality and Women's Writing 1760-1830* (Manchester University Press)

Carrie Hamilton, *Women in ETA: The Gender Politics of Radical Basque Nationalism* (Manchester University Press)

Janice Helland, *British & Irish Home Arts and Industries, 1880-1914: Marketing Craft, Making Fashion* (Irish Academic Press)

Margaretta Jolly, *In Love and Struggle: Letters in Contemporary Feminism* (Columbia University Press)

Máire Kealy, *Dominican Education in Ireland 1820-1930* (Irish Academic Press)

Ann Kramer, *The Land Girls and Their Impact* (Pen & Sword)

Lesley Lawson, *Out of the Shadows: The Life of Lucy, Countess of Bedford* (Continuum)

Carmen Mangion, *Contested Identities: Catholic Women Religious in 19<sup>th</sup> Century England and Wales*

(Manchester University Press)

Julia Marciari Alexander & Catherine MacLeod, eds. *Politics, Transgression and Representation in the Court of Charles II* (Yale University Press)

Massimo Mazzotti, *The World of Maria Gaetana Agnesi, Mathematician of God* (Johns Hopkins)

Elizabeth Nussbaum, *Dear Miss Baird: A Portrait of a 19<sup>th</sup> Century Family* (Longstone Books)

Rosemary O'Day, ed., *Cassandra Brydes, Duchess of Chandos, 167-1735: Life and Letters* (Boydell Press)

Lynda Payne, *With Words and Knives: Learning and Medical Dispassion in Early Modern England* (Ashgate)

Rosemary Raughter, *The Journal of Elizabeth Bennis: 1749-1779* (Columbia Press)

Glyn Redworth, *The She-Apostle: The Extraordinary Life and Death of Luisa de Carvajal* (Oxford University Press)

Kirsty Reid, *Gender, Crime and Empire: Convicts, Settlers and the State in Early Colonial Australia* (Manchester University Press)

Harold L. Smith, *The British Women's Suffrage Campaign 1866-1928* (Pearson Education)

James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Manchester University Press)

Maryann Gialanella Viliulis, *Gender and Power in Irish History* (Irish Academic Press)

Jean Williams, *A Beautiful Game: International Perspectives on Women's Football* (Berg)

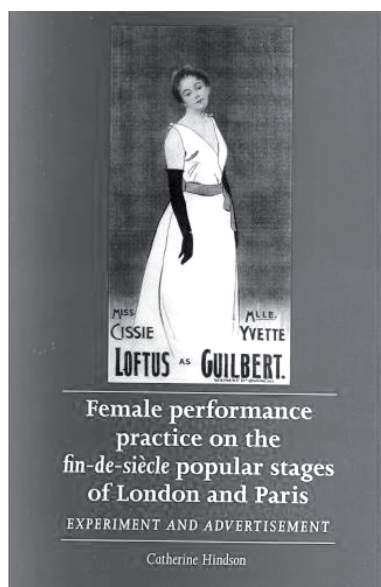
Charles Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft: Print and Visual Culture in 16<sup>th</sup> Century Europe* (Routledge)

Hindson's absorbing study of turn-of-the-century female performance practice – they may even have graced your bedroom wall. Her protagonists were the poster girls of the *fin de siècle*, immortalised by Henri de Toulouse Lautrec and his like and still making good money for owners of Montmartre and Covent Garden souvenir shops today. This book focuses upon seven Paris and London-based

female performers – Maud Allan, Jane Avril, Loïe Fuller, Sylvia Grey, Yvette Guilbert, Letty Lind and Cissie Loftus – whose careers spanned the period between the mid 1880s and 1910, and what intriguing careers they were. Hindson consciously uses the term 'popular performers' for these women because their activities defy neat categorisation. Most were first and foremost dancers, but they also branched out, variously,

into choreography, singing, burlesque, impersonation and cabaret, not to mention lending their image to all manner of merchandise, marketing and self-promotion. Loïe Fuller mesmerised audiences with her innovative style of dance, creating spectacular illusions through a play of coloured lights, swirling drapes and veils. Like Maud Allan, she was particularly celebrated for her artistic representations of that icon of the *fin de siècle*, Salome, performances to which Hindson devotes a whole chapter. 'Gaiety Girl' Letty Lind's trademark, meanwhile, was the intriguing 'skirt dance'. Jane Avril was arguably the most colourful of all, working as bareback rider in a circus before being hired by the Moulin Rouge and devising a style of dance influenced by the hysterics at the famous Salpêtrière psychiatric hospital, where she had been a patient as a young woman. Such was the fame and popularity of these female performers that another, Cissie Loftus, enjoyed a five decade, transatlantic career impersonating them.

Hindson states categorically that her aim has not been simply to recount the lives of her selected performers (indeed, several will already be very familiar to theatre and dance historians of this period), but to analyse their celebrity through a range of interdisciplinary lenses. She relates the performers to their 'geographical and ideological environments' and situates them within debates about 'gender and corporeality' (p. 4), demonstrating herself to



be well versed in urban studies, economics and theories of the body as well as citing the work of theatre and art historians and musicologists. In this context it is productive to bring together ideas and approaches from such varied disciplines and Hindson has particularly interesting things to say about the iconography and representation of female performers and about autobiography itself as an act of performance. However, at times in this book one feels that breadth and theoretical gloss have perhaps come at the expense of depth. Hindson has made life difficult for herself not only with her large troupe of principals but with her dual geographic focus. Her decision to make this a tale of two cities has been guided by the fact that several of her performers worked in both, and by the cross-current of cultural ideas and fashions that were exchanged between Paris and London at the turn of the century. Moreover, Hindson seeks to construct the two capitals as centres that both linked together entertainment and commodity culture in a particularly distinctive manner. The parallels she draws between theatrical culture in the two cities are undoubtedly fascinating, but the material at her fingertips is perhaps rather too rich for what, at just over two hundred pages, is a relatively slim volume. As the author hopped back and forth across the English Channel, I found myself wishing, on occasion, that she had limited her focus to one city or the other and addressed it more thoroughly, delving into some more detailed primary research, perhaps. Yet, simultaneously, Hindson's comparative approach promoted me to wonder whether similar phenomena might have been observable in other cities that historians have, by their reluctance to venture beyond north-western Europe and familiar languages, constructed as culturally peripheral. Were the well-trodden terrains of Montmartre and London's West End really the only 'city environments ... preoccupied with spectacle and display' or with female corporeality at the *fin de siècle* (p. 206)? Of course, one author cannot hope to do justice to such a broad-ranging question on her own, and Hindson herself acknowledges that she regards this book as part of a wider work in progress. Nevertheless, it is disappointing and somewhat surprising that she should use this as a pretext upon which to announce her decision 'not to conclude' her book (p. 207). This apparent eleventh-hour loss of nerve makes her interesting and thoughtful study feel more like a collection of discrete articles than a homogeneous thesis and left this reader, for one, feeling a little short changed.

**Moira von Knorring, *Women of Ice and Fire***

Darlington: Serendipity, 2006. £9.95,  
ISBN 978 1 84394 209 7 (paperback), pp. 157.  
Anu Lahtinen PhD, European Doctorate  
*Department of History, University of Turku, Finland*

In recent decades, many inspiring studies about medieval and early modern Nordic women have been written. However, it is often a matter of chance whether the best of these studies are made available for Anglophone readers and whether the best editing practices are applied to those that are eventually published.

These problems are manifest in the case of *Woman of Ice and Fire* by Moira von Knorring, a book presenting the life stories of three famous Nordic women worthies: Queen Margareta of the Kalmar Union, St. Birgitta of Sweden and Queen Christina of Sweden. The book has been published by a so-called vanity publisher that takes money for printing the book. As often seems to be the case with this kind of publishing, it appears that the publisher has been more interested in taking the money of the author than editing or even marketing the book.

Judging from the information given on the back cover, Moira von Knorring is a pensioner, interested in women's history. Indeed, the three paragraphs of the back cover are the only introduction to the aims of the book that the reader gets. The text immediately plunges into Queen Margareta's story, with a miscellaneous sample of the history of Denmark. An introduction and a bibliography, however short, would have immediately given the book more value, and a responsible publisher should have demanded these to be included.

In the late 14th century, Queen Margareta – preferably and more often spelled *Margrete*, due to her Danish base – became the regent of the so-called Kalmar Union consisting of all Nordic Kingdoms: Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Saint Birgitta, a Swedish 14th-century noblewoman, became famous for her visions and for her religious order, the Birgittines. While Margareta and Birgitta lived in the medieval times, Queen Christina was a child of reformation and counter-reformation. Well educated, with passion for arts and sciences, she eventually gave up the throne, converted to Catholicism and moved to Rome.

The stories of these women who not only shaped their own lives but the lives of their fellowmen deserve to be told by historians and by friends of history. As a historian, however, I cannot recommend von Knorring's book without reservation as it is so neglectful of the recent research and discussion on women's history or gender history.

Use of old-fashioned research is implied by, for example, out-of-date characterizations, such as notions of a royal person as 'the hope of the *nation*' or the collective abhorrence of Norwegians to a German regent. Comments like this savour old-fashioned ideas of national history. The only scholar I saw mentioned in the book (p. 17) was Henry Hallam (1777-1859) – that, as well, a rather out-of-date reference to my mind.

There are also descriptions of feelings and characters that, to my knowledge, can hardly have been documented in any of the formal contemporary sources, such as the convent being the place where Queen Margareta was enjoying the company of nuns in a happy and unconstrained atmosphere. I strongly suspect that this kind of romantic characterization is also derived from nineteenth-century history books.

Nevertheless, *Women of Ice and Fire* may serve as an essayistic starter for Anglophone readers interested in influential Nordic women of the past. I was myself intrigued by some of the stories, like the influence of Margrete in the canonisation of St. Birgitta of Sweden, and decided to take a closer look at some of the sources in the near



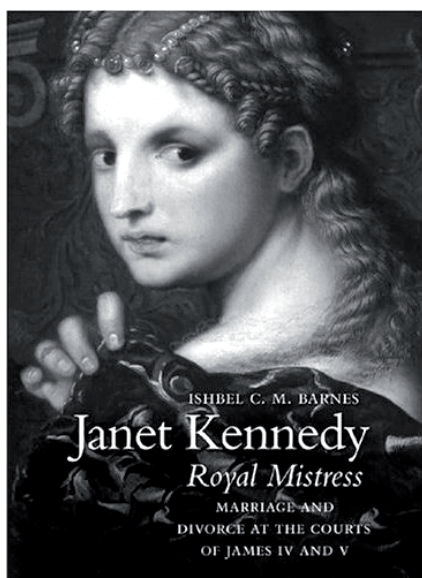
future. If readers are inspired by von Knorring's book and, consequently, want to know more about Nordic women's history, so much the better.

Because von Knorring does not give any advice as to where to find further (and better documented) information, I take the liberty of suggesting such titles as *Queen Margrete I* by Vivian Etting, *St. Birgitta of Sweden* by Bridget Morris and *Christina, Queen of Sweden* by Veronica Buckley. The friends of Saint Birgitta can also look forward to reading the forthcoming results of the project *Power and Authority: Birgitta of Sweden and her Revelations* by the Finnish historian Päivi Salmesvuori.

**Ishbel C.M. Barnes, *Janet Kennedy: Royal Mistress, Marriage and Divorce at the Courts of James IV and V***

John Donald Publishers Ltd: Edinburgh, 2007.  
£14.99, ISBN 978 0 85976 678 4 (hardback),  
pp. 116.

Reviewed by Alison T. McCall  
*Women's History Scotland*



This is a scholarly book, never over-dramatised, though the facts of Janet Kennedy's life need no dramatisation. Married around the age of twelve to Alexander Gordon, by whom she had a daughter, Janet, she became the mistress of Archibald Douglas and then the mistress of King James IV, by whom she had a son, James, and two unnamed daughters. Finally, she married

Sir John Ramsay. At around the age of thirty-three she was widowed, and apparently remained single throughout her long widowhood. She was known to be alive in 1543, aged about sixty-three, but her date of death is unknown. Janet Kennedy left no writing – in all probability she could not write – and there are no surviving images of her. Her life is full of unknowns, including her year of birth, her year of death, and the names of two of her daughters. Ishbel Barnes has fully acknowledged the gaps, but has taken a variety of sources, and carefully pieced together a life.

Barnes has used sources such as Treasurers Accounts, which include entries for sewing silks, items of clothing, and the expenses surrounding the births of her children and the death of one daughter. Other sources include land grants, protocol books, and the poems of William Dunbar and Gavin Douglas, both of whom Janet Kennedy would have known. Barnes' thorough knowledge has enabled her to put the smallest fact into historical

context and build up a convincing life story. However, this book is more than a biography, as Barnes uses the life of Janet Kennedy to examine the life of women at the Scottish court generally.

The sub-heading 'Marriage and Divorce at the Courts of James IV and V' gives the background theme. There is a helpful appendix and chart explaining consanguinity, the forbidden degrees of marriage and papal dispensations. As Barnes explains 'in practice in a small country like Scotland ... virtually everyone was related to everyone else within the forbidden degrees and therefore technically could not marry' (p. 7). The various strategies employed to work within this religious framework created a fluidity of relationships within the Scottish court. Janet Kennedy's four relationships show that in practice marriage need not mean a lifetime partnership.

This book also illustrates the catastrophe that was Flodden. Janet Kennedy lost her husband, a brother, a brother-in-law, and James IV, the father of her son. Appendix Two lists some of the women who were widowed at Flodden. This further brings out the nature of the intermarried and close Scottish court.

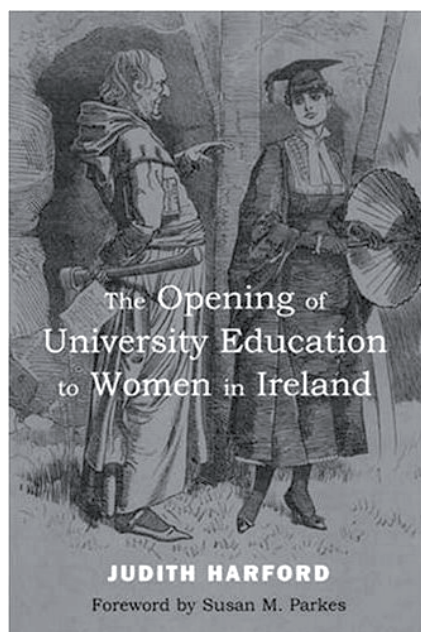
Barnes points out that 'we know a lot about what men thought of women in the sixteenth-century but virtually nothing about what women thought of men' (p. 85). It is possible to know how much embroidery silk a woman had, but not possible to know what women thought, or discussed, as they sewed. It is possible to trace several of Janet Kennedy's journeys throughout Scotland, a pilgrimage to Whithorn in the summer of 1501, a visit to the shrine of St Duthac in Tain in Nov 1501, but not possible to know her views on religion. At various times Kennedy was in Stirling, Darnaway, Edinburgh, Arbroath, and she knew all the principal players in the Scottish court, but we have no idea what her opinions were on the places, people and events of her life. Barnes has used her painstaking account of Kennedy's life (the first biography of a Scottish woman who was neither a queen nor a saint) to demonstrate both how much can be achieved by careful use of archives and also the gap in our knowledge of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries created by the absence of the female perspective.

**Judith Harford, *The Opening of University Education to Women in Ireland***

Irish Academic Press: Dublin, 2008. £19.95,  
ISBN 0-7165-2855-5 (paperback),  
pp. xiv + 194.

Reviewed by Jane McDermid  
*University of Southampton*

Judith Harford charts the struggle for the entry of women into higher education in Ireland, which has many parallels with the campaign in other countries and indeed mirrored the English in important respects, such as lobbying parliament, publishing arguments for and responses to opponents, and establishing colleges for women. The Irish situation, however, had an important difference in the overlap between the questions of higher education and religion, with struggles for denominational control of



the administration of the universities. Historians generally have focused on the Protestant women reformers and neglected the role of Catholic women religious, which the author now illuminates. She argues persuasively for the contribution of the latter, notably the Dominicans, the Loreto Sisters and the Ursulines, who established a network of Catholic women's colleges from the 1880s. They had

to work within a male-dominated institution in which the hierarchy was for the most part opposed to women's entry into higher education. In contrast to the public campaigns of the Protestant women, the teaching orders pursued behind-the-scenes tactics involving compromises with the male authorities. Such manoeuvring, coupled with the realisation that Catholic women were prepared to attend Protestant institutions to achieve a university education, pressured the male hierarchy into making concessions. Even into the twentieth century, the Catholic hierarchy insisted that women were intellectually inferior to men and that it was inappropriate for the sexes to have the same education. One argument which helped overcome that opposition was the insistence that a university education would produce better mothers. Indeed, those who campaigned for women's right to higher education had to engage with the generally held belief in the separate spheres for the sexes, and while they challenged the view that a university education was inappropriate for women, they manipulated the arguments about women's domestic role in support of their cause. Even those who sought an equal education with men accepted the need for women to conform to the prevailing standards of femininity.

Certainly, pioneering Protestant middle-class women, notably Isabella Tod of Belfast, Margaret Byers (founder of Victoria College, Belfast in 1859) and Anne Jellicoe (founder of Alexandra College, Dublin in 1866) laid the basis for improvements in girls' secondary schooling and women's entry into higher education. Legislation also played a part. The Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act of 1878 set up a public examination system, which enabled girls to study the same academic curriculum as boys and compete in the same examinations. A year later, the Royal University of Ireland Act established a non-denominational examining and degree-awarding (but non-teaching) body which accepted women, and in turn put pressure on the existing universities to make concessions to female students.

Once women were allowed entry to the universities (Trinity College Dublin in 1904, Queen's University Belfast,

1908) on the same basis as men, the women's colleges were refused affiliation. The Protestant colleges focused now on secondary schooling and teacher-training, and the Catholic ones became hostels for university women. Those who had campaigned for women's entry into higher education had been divided on the merits of single-sex and co-education, while the latter was also a divisive issue in the struggle for religious control of the universities. Nevertheless, co-education prevailed, and the women's colleges came to symbolise the exclusion of women. As Susan M. Parkes, herself a pioneer of the history of female education in Ireland, points out in a succinct foreword to Harford's study, women's successful entry into the universities entailed their marginalisation as both students and staff in male-dominated institutions. Harford concludes that women students and academics had to struggle to obtain equal status in the universities, which for the latter in particular is still ongoing.

### **Alison Oram, *Her Husband was a Woman: Women's Gender-Crossing in Modern British Popular Culture***

Routledge: London and New York, 2007.

£18.09, ISBN 978-0-415-40007-7 (paperback), pp. xi + 192 + 10 illustrations.

Reviewed by Thomas Brorsen Smidt  
*University of Southern Denmark*

HER HUSBAND WAS A WOMAN!  
Women's gender-crossing in modern  
British popular culture  
Alison Oram



There are perhaps, I believe, two equally important reasons why the research for this book was supported by grants from both the British Academy and the AHRC. Firstly, the extensive research that this project must have required could by no means have been carried out without financial support. Secondly, the release of a work such as this is long overdue in the field of gender and sexuality in British history.

Alison Oram breaks with traditional scholarly treatment of women's gender-crossing, which has so far relied mostly on selected case studies alone and, taking the actual comprehensiveness of the topic into account, this approach has been somewhat deficient. Thus women's gender-crossing has often been seen merely in relation to a broader context of gender studies. But Oram uncompromisingly puts the subject of cross-gendered women in British popular culture front and centre in order to show how this was a much more widespread phenomenon than the previous research has led us to believe. Among



her many objectives is to represent women's gender-crossing across the social spectrum rather than to focus solely on elite culture, which has more or less been the popular tradition so far. Also, Oram's research and subsequent discussion is placed assertively within the framework of budding new technology and modernity of the twentieth century. But mainly, as she puts it herself, her effort to produce this study 'was fuelled by ... frustration with the lack of scholarly attention paid to changing ideas and knowledge about women's same-sex love or female-to-male gender-crossing at the level of British popular culture' (p. 2).

This book does not just rely on select cases, but makes use of over 200 separate mass-circulated newspaper articles from 1900-1960, which not only cite instances of women's gender-crossing, but every 'sex change', suspicion of female homosexuality, and last but not least, male impersonation in British popular entertainment. The latter especially makes *Her Husband was a Woman* a fascinating read, one very different from what the genre is usually capable of providing. It makes an ongoing comparison between theatrical male impersonation on the British variety stage and real life female-to-male cross-dressing, and presents some extremely interesting discussions about whether or not male impersonation in popular entertainment had any effect on real-life public perception of the gender-crossing female as represented in the popular press at a time when 'gender identity was deemed to be fixed by nature' (p.13).

The book is divided into three main sections covering the periods 1900-1920s, the 1930s and the 1940s onwards; each section deals with the topics at hand in the specific historical context of each chapter. Furthermore, these three fairly large sections have been split into smaller and more manageable parts, which make the book a much more digestible read. It is nicely compact, yet very comprehensive. If we combine this with the book's uncompromising focus on its subject, *Her Husband was a Woman* emerges as a brilliantly crafted, well-researched, and very important contribution to the field of the history of women's sexuality in twentieth-century Britain. No doubt that this work has laid the foundation for new studies within the realm of female sexuality in popular culture.

**Lorna Gibson, *Beyond Jerusalem: Music in the Women's Institute, 1919-1969***

Hampshire, UK and Vermont, USA: Ashgate, 2008, £45, ISBN 978-0-7546-6349-2 (hardback), pp.200.

Reviewed by Rachel Ritchie  
University of Manchester

In recent years, women's organisations such as the National Federation of Women's Institute (NFWI) have been subject to an increasing amount of research. Work by Maggie Andrews and Caitriona Beaumont has been particularly influential, challenging popular representations of these groups via their engagement with concepts such as feminism and citizenship. This growing historiography

is drawn upon and added to by Lorna Gibson's *Beyond Jerusalem: Music in the Women's Institute, 1919-1969*.

As well as reflecting on important debates in this area, such as the meaning of the term feminism, Gibson's study is interesting due to the detailed discussion of the song 'Jerusalem', which has become an iconic part of the NFWI's image. As the book's title suggests, though, Gibson also firmly demonstrates the wider role that music has played within the organisation – an aspect which has largely been neglected, with the focus often on handicrafts or AGM resolutions.

In keeping with other literature on the NFWI, Gibson eschews a singular interpretation, highlighting instead the multiple meanings surrounding both the musical activities undertaken, such as conducting, and the actual music played and sung, such as folk songs. *Beyond Jerusalem* also goes further than just providing a more nuanced account of the organisation. The NFWI is not presented in isolation, but as part of the wider music scene in twentieth-century Britain. This reflects the focus and aims of the book; from the opening paragraph, Gibson positions herself within the field of musicology. This is a major strength of *Beyond Jerusalem*, as Gibson is adept at showing the complex interplay and interactions between the NFWI and the musical world on many levels: individual, organisational and in terms of broad trends. As a result, a large number of people, committees and associations – along with their corresponding acronyms – feature throughout, which can lead to confusion, especially if unfamiliar with the subject. There are, however, detailed appendices and personalia which are useful for clarity in this respect.

The appendices demonstrate the thorough research undertaken, which is visible throughout *Beyond Jerusalem* too. The level of analysis varies as the amount and range of evidence presented provides so much to discuss; in addition to widespread material from the NFWI, Gibson uses other archives, including the BBC and the Royal Academy of Music. This cross-referencing and comparison is a great asset, especially in locating the NFWI in the broader music scene. Gibson is also skillful in positioning her arguments; while emphasising wider connections and significance, she does not overstate the external impact that the organisation had.

The time frame covered by *Beyond Jerusalem* is well-handled. Gibson charts the continuities and developments across the period without providing an overly chronological account. For example, the chapter on folk songs covers the 1920s to the 1960s, the latter of which also features in later chapters. The largely thematic emphasis means too much overlap or disjunction



**Beyond Jerusalem:**  
Music in the Women's  
Institute, 1919-1969



Lorna Gibson



is avoided, although the use of 'discussed in...' and parantheses in early chapters does interrupt the flow when reading.

The foreword to *Beyond Jerusalem* is provided by a former Chair of the NFWI, suggesting that it will be of interest to Institute members, as well as those interested in women's organisations and various aspects of musicology, including women and conducting and amateur music-making. The book's tight focus, understandable given its aims and interdisciplinary position, is not contextualised within the social, cultural and economic climate of twentieth-century Britain and this perhaps somewhat limits *Beyond Jerusalem's* appeal to a broader readership. For example, the changes that took place between the first and second NFWI music festivals (in 1950 and 1969) are relegated to one small footnote (p.92). Although again this is partly understandable due to the book's size and scope, there are instances when a broader outlook would strengthen the arguments made; in particular, the NFWI's non-sectarian ruling, referred to on several occasions, would benefit from being understood and explained more explicitly in relation to the status of Christianity in Britain during the period.

Overall, *Beyond Jerusalem* is an extremely well-researched book whose strength lies in its detailed presentation of the changing face of music in the NFWI and the position of the organisation in the wider music scene. It is an especially valuable contribution to research on women's groups due to its engagement with a key aspect of the organisation's popular image and identity, while also fulfilling the remit suggested in its title: showing that music in the NFWI went beyond 'Jerusalem'.

**Fiona Downie, *She is But a Woman: Queenship in Scotland 1424-1463***

John Donald: Edinburgh, 2006. £25, ISBN: 0 85976 656 X (paperback), pp. xi + 228.

Reviewed by Margaret Connolly  
*University of St Andrews*

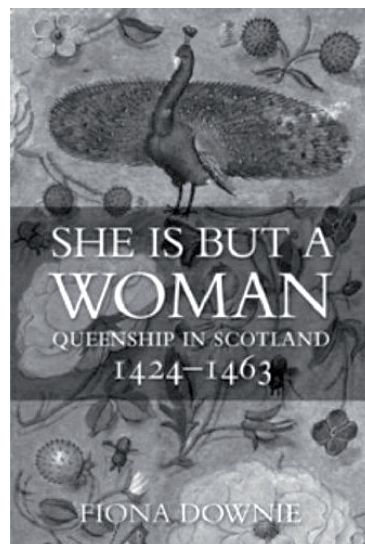
Fiona Downie's thematic study of medieval Scottish queenship is tightly focussed on a forty-year period in the mid-fifteenth century, covering the reigns of two foreign-born queens, Joan Beaufort, queen to James I (1424-36), and Mary of Guelders, queen to James II (1437-60). This first welcome assessment of queenship in medieval Scotland complements a great deal of recent work on the Stewart kings and on Scottish medieval political history in general. A brief introduction outlines the book's scope as an exploration of 'the tensions between the invisibility of the queen and the potential of her role' (p. 2), and chapter one offers a survey of contemporary attitudes to women and power, beginning by rehearsing the polarisation of Mary and Eve which was the favourite theme of medieval anti-feminist satire. Downie gleans information about the duties of medieval princesses, and the limits of the power they might exercise, from the works of Christine de Pizan, especially *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*. Evidence of women's representation by Scottish writers is sought in

the works of Bower, Hay, and Fordun, who unsurprisingly construe women's power as distinctly inferior and lacking in authority; St Margaret is offered as the ideal model and suitable roles are those of hostess, peacemaker, and moral guide.

Thereafter the organisation of the book is broadly chronological. In chapter two Downie focuses on the adult rule of James I following his release from English captivity in 1424. On the basis of the *Kingis Quair* much has been made of the romance of James' marriage to Joan, but Downie stresses how fundamentally political this alliance was, especially from an English perspective. It forged a means of continuing the goodwill and communication fostered during James's imprisonment, and was designed to thwart any reestablishment of the auld alliance between Scotland and France, though in fact James managed to juggle competing offers of marriage and alliance with both France and England for eight years on behalf of his daughter, Margaret. The importance of continental connections is demonstrated in the following chapter which traces the fortunes of Margaret's five younger sisters in the European marriage market. Again, political objectives are emphasised: Isabella, Eleanor, Mary, Annabella, and Joanna, were sent abroad partly to make marriages that would be diplomatically useful, and partly to prevent factional liaisons being formed in Scotland. Some glimpses of personal feelings peep through: Downie speculates that James may have wished to delay sending Margaret to France through paternal fondness (betrothed in 1428, aged four, she did not travel until 1436), but leaves us in no doubt that his primary motivation was political. In chapter four the focus switches from the marriages of James's daughters to that of his son, James II, whose bride, Mary of Guelders, had been brought up at the court of Burgundy where noblewomen were educated and trained to exercise their power.

After two discursive chapters which consider the public face of queenship as expressed through the coronation ceremony, acts of intercession, oaths of allegiance, and even the style of the queen's seal, Downie returns to the more intimate matters of birth and motherhood in chapter seven. Joan Beaufort had eleven children and Mary of Guelders had eight, including those who died in

infancy. Medieval medical lore, which regarded the father as the life-giver and the mother as merely the vessel, influenced royal ceremonies surrounding maternity, and only in the service for churching did the queen enjoy the starring role. Downie notes the rather surprising fact that after the provision of an heir subsequent births received scant attention; as a result records may be inaccurate or incomplete even in the



case of royal children. Chapters eight and nine contrast the experiences of the two queens after the deaths of their husbands. Neither Joan nor Mary was appointed regent, and neither exercised power or authority in her own right. Joan Beaufort's role in particular diminished once she was a widow, as did her income, and Downie interprets her decision to remarry in 1439 as a desperate move to gain protection and support. Mary of Guelders on the other hand maintained a leading role in a stable government during the minority of her son.

The final chapter draws attention to the invisibility of women's historical experience in the written record, and underlines the role of female family networks. Whilst arguing for the importance of verbal communication between women, Downie also considers questions of female education and literacy. In Brittany Isabella Stewart possessed four books of hours, but from medieval Scotland there is a paucity of information about book ownership, and no books associated with Joan Beaufort survive. Downie nevertheless makes some reasonable assumptions about Joan's access to reading and the kind of literary influences which may have surrounded her. Although there is no evidence that Pizan's work was known in fifteenth-century Scotland Downie plausibly suggests that Joan would have known of this book from her English upbringing, and her daughters would have encountered it on the continent. Stressing that Joan maintained contact with her English family, she singles out her aunt, also named Joan Beaufort, as a noted patron of literature whose literary interests might influenced her niece. This point might be pressed harder, and other invisible connections teased out: Joan's brother, Edmund, Duke of Somerset, visited Scotland in 1433, and it seems very likely that his wife, Eleanor Beauchamp, a member of a prominent English family with literary interests, would have been amongst Joan's network of women friends. Tracing and extending such connections further would develop Downie's point that royal marriages were the foundation of a complex and active network of family relationships. Indeed, this book is as much a study of the politics and significance of medieval aristocratic marriage as it is of queenship, and despite its ostensible focus on Scotland it also has much to say about the lives and expectations of noblewomen in the wider context of medieval Europe.

## Women's History Magazine Back issues

Back issues of *Women's History Magazine* are available to buy for

£4.00 inc postage (UK)  
£4.50 inc. postage (Overseas)

Most issues are available, from Spring 2002 to the present. To discover the contents of each issue please visit [www.magazine.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.magazine.womenshistorynetwork.org)

To order your copies please email [magazine@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:magazine@womenshistorynetwork.org)

## Getting to Know Each Other



**Name:** David Doughan

**How long have you been a WHN member?**

From the start (that was 1991 – ed.)

**What inspired your enthusiasm for women's history?**

Quite unoriginally, I think it was the suffrage stories. I don't have any family memories, but I found the stories fascinating and moving; one early influence was Howard Spring's *Fame is the Spur!*

**What are your special interests?**

In recent years I've been concerned with women's ways of organising, especially in clubs and associations. However, I think I've said all I have to say on this, at least for the present, and currently I'm looking at odd things I've dabbled with in the past. Perhaps something to do with Dorothy L. Sayers?

**Who is your heroine from history and why?**

I haven't got one particular heroine - there are so many heroic women! Let's see. I do have a long-standing interest in Frances Swiney, but on reflection I think the woman I most consistently admire is Helena Swanwick, influenced more than a little by her magnificently-written autobiography.

*Women's History Magazine is keen to carry profiles that celebrate the diversity of WHN membership. If you would like to complete a Getting to Know Each Other questionnaire, or you would like to nominate someone else to, please email [magazine@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:magazine@womenshistorynetwork.org)*





## Carol Adams Prize Awarded

The Women's History Network has awarded a £100 prize to Cara Brennan (pictured left), of Harrogate Grammar School, for the best essay on women's history. The award was set up in honour of the late Carol Adams (first Chief Executive of the General Teaching Council) who helped pioneer women's history in schools. The prize is aimed at students studying for their AS/A2 levels or their Higher Nationals.

Cara's essay was 'To what extent were the natures of the suffragists and the suffragettes different in the years 1903 to 1914?' Cara studied for History, Politics and English Literature at 'A' level and received a Grade A in each of her subjects. She is now studying English Literature at the University of Newcastle. Cara was awarded the prize because her essay was well structured, analytic and historiographically aware. Her essay was a lucid exploration of the main differences—and some of the similarities—between the two major organisations. The judges were impressed with Cara's knowledge of the subject and her historical flair.

## WHN Book Prize Awarded

This year, ten books were submitted for the £500 Women's History Network (UK) Book Prize and the field was particularly strong. The winner, announced at the annual conference in Glasgow, is Lucy Delap for her book *The Feminist Avant-Garde: Transatlantic Encounters of the Early Twentieth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2007). The judges were particularly impressed with the high level of scholarship of this book which nonetheless, remains accessible to the non-specialist. The book focuses on one branch of feminism in the early twentieth century, epitomised in the journal *The Freewoman*, edited by Dora Marsden. In particular, Delap explores the political ideas of the avant garde within the wider preoccupations of the period, while emphasising transatlantic influences and exchanges. Overall, it was felt that *The Feminist Avant-Garde* disrupts traditional narratives about early twentieth-century feminism, raising many intriguing questions for future debate and analysis.



Lucy Delap (right) receives her prize from Gerry Holloway



Laura Schwarz (right) receiving her prize from Gerry Holloway

## Clare Evans Essay Prize Awarded

This year the Clare Evans prize was awarded to Laura Schwarz, a research student at the University of East London, for her essay 'Secularism and Sexual Freedom? Freethinking Feminist Attitudes to Marriage, Birth Control and Sexual Morality in England c.1850-1877'. Schwarz's essay is based on the work she is undertaking for her PhD on 'Infidel Feminism: Secularism, Religion and Women's Rights in England. c. 1830-1889'. Laura has been invited to submit her essay to *Women's History Review* so you should be able to read it in due course.



## Carol Adams Prize

*An annual £100 prize for the best AS, A2 or Scottish Highers or Advanced Highers essay on women's history*

The Women's History Network will award a £100 prize for the best AS, A2 or Scottish Highers or Advanced Highers essay on women's history. This award was set up in honour of the late Carol Adams (first Chief Executive of the GTC) who helped pioneer women's history in schools.

### Essays

- can focus on any aspect of women's history
- should be no longer than 1,000 words
- should include a bibliography
- be word processed
- the front page should include your name, the name of your school and the title of the essay

If you require any further information please contact Dr Paula Bartley at [jandpdudley@t-online.hu](mailto:jandpdudley@t-online.hu). Essays should be sent to this email address.

**Deadline:** The deadline for submission is 31 May 2009. The Prize will be awarded in September 2009.



## WHN Book Prize

*An annual £500 prize for a first book in women's or gender history*

The Women's History Network (UK) Book Prize is awarded for an author's first book which makes a significant contribution to women's history or gender history and is written in an accessible style that is rewarding to the general reader of history. The book must be written in English and be published the year prior to the award being made.

Entries (books published during 2008) should be submitted by 15 March 2009. Current members of the WHN Steering Committee are not eligible to enter the competition.

For further information please contact Kathryn Gleadle, chair of the panel of judges, email: [bookprize@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:bookprize@womenshistorynetwork.org)  
Dr Kathryn J. Gleadle, Tutor and Fellow in History, Mansfield College, University of Oxford, Oxford OX1 3TF.

## Clare Evans Prize

*An annual £500 prize for a new essay in the field of*

### GENDER AND HISTORY

In memory of Dr Clare Evans, a national prize worth £500 is offered annually for an original essay in the field of women's history or gender and history. Essays are considered by a panel of judges set up by the *Women's History Network* and the Trustees of the *Clare Evans Memorial Fund*. Subject to the normal refereeing criteria, the winning essay is published in *Women's History Review*.

Clare Evans was an outstanding woman who died tragically of cervical cancer on 30 November 1997, aged just 37. Born in Bath, she read history at the University of Manchester, graduating in 1982. She continued her studies, registering for a PhD at the University whilst preparing and delivering seminars on feminist history, creating the first feminist historiography course in collaboration with Kersten England and Ann Hughes. Clare would have approved of an award which helped women to publish for the first time, giving them the confidence to further develop their ideas.

To be eligible for the award, the candidate must be a) a woman who has not yet had a publication in a major academic journal, b) not in a permanent academic position, and c) normally resident in the UK.

The article should be in English and of 6,000 to 8,000 words in length including footnotes. We welcome submissions from any area of women's history or gender and history.

Please send completed essays to Ann Hughes by 31 May 2009. Please also include brief biographical details (education, current job or other circumstances) and include a cover sheet with title only (not name) to facilitate anonymous judging.

Those wishing to apply for the prize should first email or write for further details to:

Ann Hughes, Department of History and Classics, University of Keele, Keele, Staffs, ST5 5BG. Email: [hia21@keele.ac.uk](mailto:hia21@keele.ac.uk)



## Conference Report

The seventeenth Annual Conference of the  
Women's History Network

*Gender and Generations: Women and Life Cycles*  
University of Glasgow, September 5-7 2008.

The University of Glasgow was a splendid venue set as it is on the edge of a park not too far from the centre of Glasgow; the team of conference organisers were very welcoming and the weekend was filled with a wonderful array of papers and plenaries. There were sixty eight papers offered in five strands over five sessions which, of course, meant that difficult choices had to be made and delegates could be seen hovering outside seminar rooms as sessions began, still unable to choose which one to attend.

I chaired the first session of the 'Generations of Women' strand; papers focused on oral history accounts of women living in an Irish Protestant rural community in the mid-twentieth century (Catherine O'Connor), the family histories of three generations of Glasgow women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Jane McDermid) and gender and class mobility within a Jewish family in Scotland in the same period (Fiona Frank). These papers demonstrated the rich material that can be found in researching the lives of individuals and by the end of the discussion we were all well into conference mood.

At the first plenary we were welcomed to Glasgow by the Principal Sir Muir Russell and Eleanor Gordon, one of the key organisers of the Conference. We were informed that the annual WHN conference is the biggest international

annual women's history conference and this was indeed reflected in the wide range of countries represented in the programme. The first plenary speaker was Mary Beth Norton from Cornell University who charted the changing relationship of women and the state in England and America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This was followed by a drinks reception sponsored by the University and a first opportunity to meet old friends and make new ones too.

On Saturday there was an early start as the programme was full. I was pleased that the organisers had arranged strands so that one heard papers from different periods and across borders. In the second session I attended Collette Bowie's paper on naming patterns within Angevin families in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries sat alongside Patricia Cattelley's work on the role of aunts in families in the twentieth century and Carol Anne Selway's paper on seventeenth century women's memoirs. At first glance it was hard to see the links but the discussion centred on sources and how they are used and then the connections became obvious. Similarly in the third session papers on women's work covered early modern Southern Netherlands (Laura Van Aert), female career mobility in Antwerp in the late nineteenth century (S. Moreels) and young women's career aspirations in the late twentieth century (Michelle Brady). These, too, made apparent continuity and change in women's working lives. After lunch we were again treated to a wonderful choice of papers. In the strand I attended 'memory' provided the focus: Teresa Cairns explored memory in life history accounts of education in the mid-twentieth century, Penny Tinkler focused on women's photograph collections of friends and families in the 1950s and 1960s, and Bronach Kane discussed how autobiography can be used to

recover counter memories in late medieval England.

Towards the end of the afternoon the second plenary by Lynda Coon took us back to Medieval Germany and to the ways in which the sacred space of an abbey can tell us about gender in that period. I was fascinated by how much she was able to read into the way buildings were organised and how a small piece of graffiti was so revealing of the hierarchy of the church.

After the AGM there was a small concert (One Blazing Glance). Unfortunately Committee business prevented me from attending but people afterwards were praising the work of Beth Denisch. This was followed by a drinks reception sponsored by Routledge and Wiley

# HerStoria

magazine

**A new magazine  
bringing women's history  
to a non-specialist audience**

Articles, reviews,  
interviews, news  
events listings

Four issues per year

**First issue  
February 2009**

To subscribe, contribute or advertise  
visit [www.HerStoria.com](http://www.HerStoria.com)  
email [editor@herstoria.com](mailto:editor@herstoria.com) or call 0151 324 3150

HerStoria magazine  
Spring 2009

On your bike!  
Women and the  
bicycle 1890-1960

History that puts women in her place  
[www.HerStoria.com](http://www.HerStoria.com)

HerStoria is published by Jones & Publishing Limited  
2nd Floor, 145-147 St John Street, London EC1V 4PY

Blackwell, and the WHN Book and Clare Evans prizes were awarded (see separate reports). The day finished with the conference dinner with after dinner remarks by Nicola Sturgeon, MSP, who is the Deputy First Minister of the Scottish Parliament.

On Sunday we had one final session of papers and I attended the strand where three Danish students presented their work on Emilie du Châtelet (Emilie Korsgaard), women and reputation in Aberdeen (Theresa Jepsen) and gender and leisure in eighteenth century Britain (Maja Øbom Christensen). I always admire students who are brave enough to present their work at conferences, and to do so competently in a foreign language is challenging to say the least. All three students achieved this and the discussion of their findings was lively and productive. The final plenary was given by Michael Roper; it focused on maternal love as exhibited in the letters that young soldiers wrote home to their mothers during the First World War and what these tell us about Edwardian mother/son relationships. These letters brought home the terrible conditions that young men endured and several members of the audience were brought close to tears when they recalled similar correspondence in their own families. For those delegates with some energy left and no train or plane to catch, the Conference ended with a Women's History walk around Glasgow's West End. Unfortunately I had a train to catch so missed this.

The Conference was a great experience. So many papers on such wide subject areas were woven together in the most interesting way. Every year the annual Conference re-energises me at the beginning of the academic year. As two regulars from the States said at the AGM, the Women's History Network Conference is the best and the one that shouldn't be missed. Many thanks to everyone involved in organising this year's event, it was first class.

**Gerry Holloway**

## Bursary Holders' Conference Reports

### WHN Conference Revisited

I had been looking forward all summer to the Women's History Network Conference in Glasgow. I had attended the Conference for the first time last year in Winchester and it was a great experience, so my expectations were high. I was to travel with a new group (although we knew each other from university), the conference was being held in a new town and those attending would probably not all be those who I knew from last year. I knew that these circumstances weren't necessarily bad news, but the butterflies in my stomach would not rest.

We arrived from Denmark on Thursday so that we would have time to see some of Glasgow before the Conference. We had doubts if we would have time to see the centre of the city as the Conference would take place some distance away and we would probably spend a lot of time mingling and listening to all the papers. I

was to give my paper on Sunday, so I had plenty of time to attend strands on Friday and Saturday, and plenty of time to be nervous. Was my paper really finished? Was it good enough? Would my postgraduate second language vocabulary shrink to a minimum? So it was a bit reassuring to see a little nervousness among all the scholars and PhD students and some stumbling over words, while they still presented inspiring work. As last year, it was all about having a good time and absorbing all the stories and experiences. It was also fun to recognise people from last year and see some of them recognise me.

Unfortunately, the accommodation was situated some distance from the Centre where the conference was held and since dinners were to be found individually, there would be less mingling, so I looked forward to the Conference dinner Saturday night. And, apart from my stockings laddering on my way out of the door, I was not disappointed. It was a great evening in a beautiful room with very good food (and I'm a vegetarian); the speech by Scotland's deputy Prime Minister was a pleasant surprise. So it was with some hesitation and a little vexation that we left early, so that we would be ready and rested for Sunday. All our presentations on Sunday went really well and the response and perspectives people offered on our papers are deeply appreciated. I will do my best to return next year in Oxford!

**Emelie Korsgaard, University of Southern Denmark University**



*From left, bursary holders Theresa Jepsen, Maja Øbom Christensen, Emelie Korsgaard and Rita Lima Fernandes with Deborah Simonton and Nicola Phillips.*

### A Weekend to Remember

Attending the Women's History network conference in Glasgow was a significant step in my journey towards becoming an historian. I had never been to a conference and I did not know what to expect, although you can imagine my excitement.

Upon our arrival we found our accommodation without much ado. Then we ventured down to Glasgow University to get registered. This proved a bit trickier. Coming from a rather small university myself, I was confused by the size of the campus. But once we found the building, we were quickly sorted and our nametags were handed to us. It is curious how something as simple as a name tag made me immediately feel that I was now in a conference!



As an undergraduate student preparing to write my BA dissertation on Infanticide, I found that some of the strands were essential for me to attend. The first strand I went to was at the cinema and was about mothering discourses. Despite the cold, time flew by and after the presentation of the papers, questions followed. As the theme of the strand was so closely related to my own work-in-progress, I simply had to ask a question. And so I did. I'm not particularly shy when it comes to asking questions when something is happening that I don't understand, but due to the fact that I'm just an undergrad in the middle of all those PhDs, I even surprised myself. I was really learning something. After the session, and on my way to the get a cup of coffee, I was still thinking about why it was so easy to ask my question. After some consideration, I realised that it was due to the informal environment among these 'scholars'. Like that first talk, many other interesting ones followed. The main problem was to choose among all those fascinating topics.



*Rita meets some local colour...*

Another aspect of the Conference that deserves a special mention was the Conference dinner. I would like to start by talking about the setting. To hold the Conference dinner in such a great building paved the way to a memorable evening. The dinner was delicious and the service faultless. But without a doubt, to me, the highlight of the day was Nicola Sturgeon's speech. Her spontaneity, tone and humour grabbed the audience from her very first words. She told us how, when she was a student at university herself, women already outnumbered men. Despite that, many years later, the number of women in leading positions is still significantly fewer than men. Her comments only reinforced my own ideas that every woman has to fight her way through a system ruled by men. It is revolting that in this day and age, women are still paid less than men for performing the same job. There is no doubt that it was a night that I will remember for many years to come.

The last day of the Conference left me a bit nostalgic. It was time to go home, just when I was so comfortable. And so it was. The three days had passed without me realising it, but the impact they had will long be noted. All the things that I learned will not be forgotten. What I learned at the Conference was more than simply academic. I realised that historians are people just like me, and even though I'm just an undergraduate, I did not feel judged or pushed to the background. Everyone that I talked to was open and kind, and when I talked about my BA, I received loads of valuable tips. I would like to thank the Women's History Network for the bursary. Thanks to it, I was able to have a fantastic weekend which contributed to reaffirm my interest in gender history.

**Rita Lima Fernandes, University of Southern Denmark**

## *Brilliant Women*

The National Portrait Gallery recently ran an exhibition called *Brilliant Women: 18th Century Bluestocking* which looked at the remarkable group of women who formed the Bluestocking Salon. To tie in with this exhibition, they have produced a hardback book of the same name.

This book introduces us to the 'Bluestocking' salon, where like-minded men and women met from the 1750s onwards to debate contemporary ideas and promote the life of the mind. Including the literary critic Elizabeth Montagu (1718–1800), classicist Elizabeth Carter (1717–1806), novelist Fanny Burney (1752–1840) and artist Angelica Kauffman, these creative women formed an important network of intellectuals who were involved in a range of cultural activities from writing novels and poetry to Shakespearean criticism and portrait painting.

## **Women's History Magazine Reader Offer**

*Brilliant Women*  
*18th Century Bluestockings*  
By Elizabeth Eger and Lucy Peltz,  
National Portrait Gallery (2008)



available for £13.99  
(rrp £18.99) plus  
free p&p  
To order, tel  
020 7312 6624

Please quote  
'Women's History  
Magazine Offer'

# Steering Committee Report 2007-8

*This is an edited version of the convener's speech given at the AGM at the 2008 annual conference in Glasgow*

## Committee Structures

One important issue we revisited during the year was the structure and service conditions of the Steering Committee and sub-committees. Sub-committees are the Book Prize committee, the Clare Evans Prize committee, the Magazine committee and the Finance committee.

It was agreed that in order that we have a mixture of experienced and new people on the Steering Committee, we should continue with the current arrangement where members are elected for two years and can be re-elected for a further two years. Members can stand for a second four-year term on the Committee, but there must be a gap of at least two years before they can stand again. We also decided that all members of the Steering Committee should have a recognisable role or area of responsibility in order to spread the load of work more fairly. These roles will be allocated at the first meeting in November.

All Steering Committee members must be resident in the UK. Sub-committees can include non-UK residents provided business is transacted by email, online or by telephone.

Members of the sub-committees are also subject to the four year rule although, we have ensured that not all members stand down in the same year to allow for continuity. The sub-committees are responsible for recruiting new members subject to the agreement of the Steering Committee. One member of each of the sub-committees will attend at least one Steering Committee meeting a year. This year, June Purvis is standing down as chair of the Book Prize committee and a new panel has been recruited chaired by Kathryn Gleadle who will be co-opted onto the new committee.

The Finance sub-committee is a new committee formed this year to support the treasurer and help with planning budgets.

## Trustees

We decided to expand the number and clarify the position of the trustees who are responsible for the over-all financial management of the charity. Trustees will always be members of the Steering Committee and will cease to be trustees as soon as they leave. Steering Committee members who take on the position of trustees are the convener, the treasurer and the gift aid co-ordinator.

## Women's History Month

Finally, an idea that we would like to propose is that the network should co-ordinate a women's history month which we thought should be held in March every year to

## WOMEN'S HISTORY REVIEW

Discounted Personal Rate for Women's  
History Network Members.

Visit:

[www.informaworld.com/whr](http://www.informaworld.com/whr)  
and click on 'News & Offers'.



Editor: June Purvis, University of Portsmouth, UK

*Women's History Review* is a major international journal whose aim is to provide a forum for the publication of new scholarly articles in the field of women's history. The time span covered by the journal includes the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries as well as earlier times. The journal seeks to publish contributions from a range of disciplines (for example, women's studies, history, sociology, cultural studies, literature, political science, anthropology, philosophy and media studies) that further feminist knowledge and debate about women and/or gender relations in history.

Recent special issues of *Women's History Review* include:

*Transnational Biblewomen: Asian and African Women in Christian Mission*  
Guest Editors: **Deborah Giatskell** and **Wendy Urban-Mead**

*Winners and Losers? Single Women in History 1000-2000*  
Guest Editors: **Katherine Holden**, **Amy Froide** and **June Hannam**

[www.informaworld.com/whr](http://www.informaworld.com/whr)



**Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group

coincide with international women's day. So I would like to encourage all members of regional networks to organise some kind of event in March 2009 and let us know the dates as soon as you can so that we can publicise it. Or if this is too short notice please consider doing something in March 2010.

*Katherine Holden, Steering Committee Convener*

## Steering Committee Membership changes

Thanks to the following who have stepped down: Elizabeth Foyster, Gerry Holloway, Zoe Law, Alyson McCall and Stephanie Spencer. A warm welcome to new members Henrice Altink, Kathryn Gleadle, Susan Hawkins, Ann Kettle, Anne Logan, Helen Meller and Rachel Newnes.

### Next Meeting of the Steering Committee

All members of the WHN are welcome to attend meetings of the Steering Committee as observers. The next meeting is at 11.30 on Saturday 22 November at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU. For further details please email [convener@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:convener@womenshistorynetwork.org)

Conferences, Calls for Papers, Events,  
Prizes, News, Notices, Publishing  
Opportunities...

All of the above now have a new home in the  
WHN electronic

## Newsletter

The WHN *Newsletter*, which will be emailed to members 4 times a year, will enable us to keep you better up-to-date with news, conferences and other events concerning women's history.

The *Newsletter* will also provide a more frequent forum for publicising your events and informing members about other activities and projects.

To advertise in the WHN *Newsletter*, please email its editor, Jean Spence, at:

[newsletter@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:newsletter@womenshistorynetwork.org)

To download current and back issues visit the  
Newsletter pages at

[www.magazine.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.magazine.womenshistorynetwork.org)

## Publishing in *Women's History Magazine*

*Women's History Magazine* welcomes contributions from experienced scholars and those at an earlier stage in their research careers. We aim to be inclusive and fully recognise that women's history is not only lodged in the academy. All submissions are subject to the usual peer review process.

Articles should be 3000-8000 words in length. Contributors are requested to submit articles in final form, carefully following the style guidelines available at:

[www.magazine.womenshistorynetwork.org](http://www.magazine.womenshistorynetwork.org)

Please email your submission, as a word attachment, to the editors at

[editor@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:editor@womenshistorynetwork.org)





# What is the Women's History Network?

The WHN was founded in July 1991. It is a national charity concerned with promoting women's history and encouraging women interested in history. WHN business is carried out by the National Steering Committee, which is elected by the membership and meets regularly several times each year. It organises the annual conference, manages the finance and membership, and co-ordinates activities in pursuit of the aims of the WHN.

## Aims of the WHN

1. To encourage contact between all people interested in women's history — in education, the media or in private research
2. To collect and publish information relating to women's history
3. To identify and comment upon all issues relating to women's history
4. To promote research into all areas of women's history

## What does the WHN do?

### Annual Conference

Each year the WHN holds a national conference for WHN members and others. The conference provides everyone interested in women's history with a chance to meet and it has become an exciting forum where new research can be aired and recent developments in the field can be shared. The Annual General Meeting of the Network takes place at the conference. The AGM discusses issues of policy and elects the National Steering Committee.

### WHN Publications

WHN members receive three copies per year of the Women's History Magazine, which contains: articles discussing research, sources and applications of women's history; reviews of books, conferences, meetings and exhibitions; and information on calls for papers, prizes and competitions, and publication opportunities.

## Joining the WHN

### Annual Membership Rates

Student/unwaged	£15*	Overseas minimum	£40
Low income (*under £20,000 pa)	£25*	UK Institutions	£45
High income	£40*	Institutions overseas	£55
Life Membership	£350		

\*£5 reduction when paying by standing order.

Charity Number: 1118201. Membership application/renewal, Gift Aid Declaration and Banker's Order forms are available on the back cover.

# Women's History Network Contacts:

### Steering Committee officers:

Membership, subscriptions, Dr Louise Wannell:  
**membership@womenshistorynetwork.org**  
or write to WHN Membership Secretary, c/o Dr. Jane McDermid, School of Humanities, Avenue Campus (Building 65), University of Southampton, Southampton, SO17 1BJ.

Finance, bursaries, Dr Helen Meller:  
**treasurer@womenshistorynetwork.org**

Committee Convener, Dr Katherine Holden:  
**convener@womenshistorynetwork.org**

Web Officer, Jessica Holloway Swift:  
**webadmin@womenshistorynetwork.org**

WHN Book Prize, Chair, Dr Kathryn Gleadle:  
**bookprize@womenshistorynetwork.org**

UK Representative for International Federation for Research into Women's History, Prof June Purvis:  
**ifrwh@womenshistorynetwork.org**

Charity Representative, Dr Sue Morgan:  
**charityrep@womenshistorynetwork.org**

Newletter Editor, Jean Spence:  
**newsletter@womenshistorynetwork.org**

### Magazine Team:

Editors, submissions: Dr Debbi Simonton, Dr Jane Potter, Dr Sue Hawkins:  
**editor@womenshistorynetwork.org**

Book Reviews, Dr Jane Potter:  
**bookreviews@womenshistorynetwork.org**  
or send books to her at Oxford International Centre for Publishing Studies, Oxford Brookes University, The Buckley Building, Gipsy Lane Campus, Headington, Oxford OX3 0BP.

Advertising, Dr Gerry Holloway:  
**advertising@womenshistorynetwork.org**

### WHN Administrator

All other queries, including back issues of magazine, please email:  
**admin@womenshistorynetwork.org**

## Membership Application

I would like to \*join / renew my subscription to the Women's History Network. I \*/ enclose a cheque payable to Women's History Network / have filled out & returned to my bank the Banker's Order Form / for £ \_\_\_\_\_. (\* delete as applicable)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel (work): \_\_\_\_\_

Tick this box if you DO NOT want your name made available to publishers/conference organisers for publicity:

Detach and return this form with, if applicable, your cheque to Dr Louise Wannell, WHN Membership Secretary, c/o Jane McDermid, School of Humanities, Avenue Campus (Building 65), University of Southampton, Southampton, SO17 1BJ. Email: [membership@womenshistorynetwork.org](mailto:membership@womenshistorynetwork.org)

### ----- Gift aid declaration

Name of Charity: Women's History Network

Name : .....

Address: .....

..... Post Code: .....

I am a UK taxpayer and I want the charity to treat all donations (including membership subscriptions) I have made since 6 April 2000, and all donations I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise, as Gift Aid donations.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date ...../...../.....

### Notes

1. If your declaration covers donations you may make in the future:
  - Please notify the charity if you change your name or address while the declaration is still in force
  - You can cancel the declaration at any time by notifying the charity – it will then not apply to donations you make on or after the date of cancellation or such later date as you specify.
2. You must pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax that the charity reclaims on your donations in the tax year (currently 28p for each £1 you give).
3. If in the future your circumstances change and you no longer pay tax on your income and capital gains equal to the tax that the charity reclaims, you can cancel your declaration (see note 1).
4. If you pay tax at the higher rate you can claim further tax relief in your Self Assessment tax return. If you are unsure whether your donations qualify for Gift Aid tax relief, ask the charity. Or you can ask your local tax office for leaflet IR113 Gift Aid.

### ----- Banker's Order

To (bank) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Account no.: \_\_\_\_\_

Pay to the account of the Women's History Network, Account No. 91325692 at the National Westminster Bank, Stuckeys Branch, Bath (sort code 60-02-05), on \_\_\_\_\_ 200\_, and annually thereafter, on 1 September, the sum of

(in figures) £ \_\_\_\_\_ (in words) \_\_\_\_\_.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_