

Women's History **MAGAZINE**

MILITARY WOMEN SPECIAL ISSUE



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Wendy Toon *on Women and the military*

Lucy Noakes *on Women in the British army in the post-war years*

Corinna Peniston-Bird *on British auxiliaries and their weapons in the Second World War*

Kate Vigurs *on Preparing women for work behind the lines in Occupied France*

Christopher Smith *on Military women and the intelligence production line*

Plus

Seven book reviews

Getting to know each other

Conference reports

Prize winners

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Women's History Network Annual Conference, 2015

Female agency, activism and organisation

4-6th September 2015, University of Kent (Canterbury)

Call for Papers

We invite established scholars, postgraduate researchers, independent scholars, museum curators and media practitioners from a wide range of disciplines working in any geographical context and period to contribute to a dynamic discussion about female agency, activism and organisation. The conference theme, inspired by the 2015 centenary of the Women's Institute, is to be interpreted broadly. It embraces all kinds of female organisation and agency from the local to the global; the individual to the collective. We are interested in how women have navigated, fought against, and sometimes upheld structures of patriarchy, power and privilege through time. We welcome papers that speak to one of these themes as well as those which connect across all three. We are looking to compile a conference programme that covers a broad temporal, methodological and geographical perspective.

- **Agency:** This strand will be particularly interested in the interplay between agency and power – how have women interacted with systems of power from which they have traditionally been excluded, and how did women promote their own (individual and/or collective) interests within those broader structures? We are particularly interested in methodological issues here, and how we, as scholars of women in history, can leave space for female agency while recognising the structures of power within which the individual moves. As such, some themes that could be of interest include:
 - Freedom, negotiation, autonomy
 - Body, family, marriage
 - Power, society, professionalism
 - Agency and power in writing women's history
- **Activism:** As modern feminism heads increasingly towards the internet we are interested in looking at the history of female activism – at local, national and international levels. In what ways have female activists organised themselves, and around what issues? Is there such a thing as 'women's issues'? How has women's activism been perceived and responded to? Some broad thematic areas for consideration include:
 - War, politics, economics
 - Culture, society, community
 - Rights, bodies, reproduction
 - Activism, organisation, cooperation
- **Organisation:** Meanwhile, women have organised themselves variously through time – from churches, interest groups and philanthropic societies to broader organisations such as the women's missionary movement, the suffragettes and indeed, the WI. How have women organised themselves and to what ends in history? Has the organisation of women significantly changed over time? Why have women felt the need to organise themselves independently of men? As such, some themes that could be of interest include:
 - Household, church, society
 - Interest groups, philanthropy and activism
 - Education, medicine, pedagogy
 - Individuals and collectives

Abstracts of c400 words to be submitted to womenshistorynetwork@kent.ac.uk by **28 January 2015**

Conference organised by Anne Logan, Emily Manktelow and Juliette Pattinson

As we commemorate the one-hundred year anniversary of World War One, historians have once more turned their sights on the history of war, the military and their foreign and domestic impacts. Our annual conference, held in September, was themed on the 'Home Front', that location of the everyday at once part of, but separate from, spaces of formal military conflict. For historians of women, the home front has been an important heuristic device, providing space to explore the labour that is required at home to maintain armies on the field, as well as the widespread consequences of military conflict at home, whether that is rationing and resource restriction, the emotional impact of separated families, or the need for those at home to move into the roles of the departed in a number of contexts. Far from providing the comforts and security embedded within the concept of 'home', the home front destabilises such notions, reminding us that 'homes' are also spaces of conflict and, far from private havens, deeply implicated in public power and global ambitions. As the conference issue, this Autumn *Magazine* provides you with reports from that conference, including highlights of some of the interesting new research in this area, news from the AGM, and reports on our annual prize winners. This year, that includes the inauguration of the Community History Prize, recognising it as a central home front for women's history, enabling much of the research that is ongoing in the battleground of academia.

The significance of the home front to women's historians has in part been driven by the combat taboo in modern western society that has suggested that to find the history of women and war, we needed to look beyond the immediate warzone. Yet, as this special issue on Military Women illustrates, the history of women in arms is a much more complex story than such prescriptions suggest. Compiled by our guest editor, Wendy Toon, this special issue incorporates a scholarly introduction on the current research on women and the military, followed by four excellent articles that explore women's relationship to formal military conflicts and particularly the bearing of arms. Toon introduces us to these articles over the page, and together they provide a useful reminder of the complex relationship women have had with arms-bearing at both a cultural and personal level.

Whilst the *Magazine* has run a number of special issues over the years, Toon is our first guest editor in what is looking to be an auspicious series. This and our forthcoming special issues hope to provide a central body of new research on emerging areas of interest in women's history, providing readers immediate access to the latest thinking on particular themes in the field. Combining long and short articles, such special issues allow historians at different stages in their research development to contribute to current debates and, of course, allows our readers to benefit! If you are interested in editing a special issue for us, please get in touch with our Lead Editor, Katie Barclay, at editor@womenshistorynetwork.org.

As usual, the *Magazine* also contains a variety of book reviews, introduces us to one of our longstanding members, Charmian Cannon, and provides the latest WHN news. Remember, this magazine is your space as Women's History Network members, and we welcome suggestions for how it could be improved or extended. Finally, we welcome articles, both long and short, that help us to explore women's history.

Editorial Team: Katie Barclay, Lucy Bland, Anne Logan, Kate Murphy, Rachel Rich and Emma Robertson.

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Cover: 'Looking down into a gun pit showing the muzzles of the twin 0.303 inch Lewis anti-aircraft guns manned by Wrens at Felixstowe'.

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Women and the military: who will answer the call?

Wendy Toon

University of Worcester

The University of Worcester has hosted and organised the Women's History Network Midlands Region conference for over a decade. The events have considered a wide variety of themes, including twentieth-century women, women and crime, women and medicine, women and work, women, sport and leisure, women and war, the diversity of women's history and women and science.¹ In recent years the conference has attracted high profile keynote speakers: these have included Dr Lesley Hall (Wellcome Library), Prof Carol Dyhouse (University of Sussex) and Emeritus Prof Ruth Watts (University of Birmingham), as well as other speakers from around the UK. This November's conference, 'The First World War: Culture and Society', will feature international speakers from Canada and Serbia, plus keynote addresses by Prof Barbara Kelly (Keele University) and Prof Claire Cochrane (University of Worcester). Thus, the continuing regional, national and global interest in women's history is evident.

This special issue of *Women's History Magazine* is a result of our 2013 conference entitled 'Military Women'. When choosing the theme of the conference and reflecting on previous conferences' discussions of war, what had been missing was focussed discussions of the relationship between women and the military and particularly work concentrating on women who kill. This seemed to be an important gap and upon further thought and reflection exposed an under-developed area in women's history more generally. Although research is being done, obviously by the contributors here and elsewhere, there is much more scope for consideration of the complicated relationship between women and the military. This relationship raises a host of interesting and important questions about gender roles, femininity, morale and morality. This is an area that contributes to historical understandings of gender relations in past conflicts but perhaps could, and should, inform contemporary discussions of women and combat.

Considering the possibilities for further research, there are various topics that seem rather under-explored. What follows are some ideas regarding potential future work, grouped into three broad (and inevitably connected) themes. The first of these themes is the various roles played by women in combat situations. Although research exists that considers the wartime contribution of female agents, there is scope to study the role of 'covert women' more fully, especially outside of World War One and Two. More could also be done to assess the significance of 'enemy women'. This could include explorations not only of women who were on the enemy side but also women who were considered dangerous and the 'enemy' of military efficiency. This might, perhaps, interrogate the notion of women as 'Booby traps',² women's association with sexually-transmitted disease or the idea expressed in the iconic British World War Two poster 'Keep Mum She's Not

So Dumb!' (1942), where the female, internal (although probably foreign) enemy, hides in plain sight under the guise of the dumb blonde.

Other areas to explore within this theme are the activities of paramilitary women or women in non-conventional military roles. This may reveal significant contrasts or even similarities to the more regular military roles of women. This could lead to further discussion of the relationship between women and combat, and perhaps say something important and interesting regarding internal hierarchies and appropriate female roles. Further attention might be given to women's function in R&R,³ and could contain an expansion of research regarding military prostitution to include not just 'Hookers' but 'camp followers' and 'Comfort Women'.

The second broad theme that demands further investigation is the representation of women in war. One area to address is the portrayal of fighting women before and after the film *Private Benjamin* (1980). This could add to interesting discussions of visions and versions of war in film. The use of women in military recruitment (and anti-recruitment) might also be examined further. This would draw on images of females in recruitment media, of course; but it could also include phenomena such as 'date strikes' and the white feather campaign which indicate interesting suppositions about women's relationship to war, combat and militarism.

The third theme to explore is the politics of women in war. The relationship between femininity and feminism in the military seems ripe for further investigation. The stereotype of 'G.I. Jane' is a potent image that conjures ideas related to career military women, combat and killing. Additionally, more could be understood about women as military leaders, particularly female politicians and advisers. So who will answer this call for further research in these areas?

As testament to the work that is being done, we attracted a wide variety of papers under the banner of 'Military Women', most of which are included here. The first article of this special issue is based on the keynote address delivered by Lucy Noakes entitled: "'Gentle in manner, resolute in deed": women in the British army in the post-war years'. Lucy's argument prioritises the continuity between wartime considerations of gender roles in the armed services and those of the post-war period. Then, Corinna Peniston-Bird focuses on the complex official and, significantly, personal responses to the combat taboo in the auxiliary services during World War Two in her article 'Of hockey sticks and Sten guns: British auxiliaries and their weapons in the Second World War'. The third article continues discussion of the thorny issue of female combat training but in Kate Vigurs' article her focus is on the surprising equality in preparation for the clandestine activities of the Britain's Special Operations Executive's F [French] section under the title 'Handbags to hand grenades: preparing women

for work behind the lines in Occupied France'. The final article by Chris Smith, 'Operating secret machines: military women and the intelligence production line, 1939-1945', draws attention to the particular approach to female military employment adopted by the British Government Code and Cypher School, famously sited at Bletchley Park and its 'out stations'.

I would like to extend my thanks to the contributors, the peer-reviewers who freely gave their time and expertise, and the longstanding supporters of the Women's History Network Midlands Region conference without whom this Issue and the continuation of the WHN conference at the University of Worcester would not be possible.

Notes

1. Credit must be given to Sue Johnson, University of Worcester (retired) for her leadership of the regional conference from 2002-2010.
2. This phrase is taken from the title of an American filmic short, *Booby Traps* (1944). As part of the Private SNAFU series the perils of feminine allure are all too clear as the hapless SNAFU meets his demise as a result of a booby trap hidden in the brassiere of a busty, scantily-clad mannequin.
3. US military slang for Rest and Relaxation.

'Gentle in manner, resolute in deed': women in the British army in the post-war years

Lucy Noakes

University of Brighton

In November 1944, a period when, following the D-Day landings of June and preceding the stalemate of the Battle of the Bulge of December 1944-January 1945, there was widespread anticipation that the war would be over by Christmas, *Woman's Magazine* published an article by Ella Thompson, a member of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force [WAAF], the women's section of the Royal Air Force [RAF]. Thompson wrote about her desire for 'a sane and sweet normality' after the war, and her wish to combine marriage, as 'marriage is the aim, confessed or unconfessed, of the healthy, normal girl', with a 'small niche somewhere in business as a part-time typist, teleprinter or secretary'. This 'small niche' was not imagined by Thompson as a route to self-fulfilment, but rather as means of contributing to the companionate marriage that she dreamt of – making her 'a more interesting wife and a mother of broader understanding'.¹ Thompson's wartime role, as a useful member of a workforce whose contribution to the war effort was vital to the victory that seemed so close, was thus to be subjugated to a post-war life of domesticity, marriage and motherhood.

In many ways, Thompson's imagined post-war life seemed to prefigure the post-war settlement of the mid-to late 1940s, which, with its roots in the shifting politics of the war years, has often been seen as a victory for a class and economically understood egalitarianism, but a defeat for a gendered politics of equality. While the movement of women into wider areas of employment, including the armed forces, and the partial conscription of women for labour during the war years indicated a state and a society shifting towards an acknowledgement, albeit often tentative, grudging and partial, of the value of women's labour, and wider contribution to social and cultural life, outside of the home, the post-war settlement appeared to resituate women firmly back in this home. There was certainly an anxiety about the reconstruction

of domestic life in the mid-1940s: speaking to a conference of the Association of Municipal Corporations in July 1945, Mrs G. A. Kemball, a Councillor from Eccles, claimed 'family life is so dislocated now it is almost a menace', while the *News of the World* carried numerous stories that same year of demobilised soldiers murdering wives who had been unfaithful in their absence.² Pat Thane has written about the importance of re-creating family life in Britain after the disruption of the war years, which often, of course, involved the physical dislocation of families through conscription and evacuation, and the 'putting on hold' of normal life, ambitions and desires. What though, was this normality? Birth rates were falling and divorce rates rising, leading Thane to suggest that: 'The "normal" family life to which many people in Britain aspired after the war and which was promoted through a range of communications media was ... a new rather than a traditional model of the family, though it quickly came to be represented as traditional and desirable'.³

This new normality had marriage and children, with a home-based wife and mother, at its heart. As Claire Langhamer has pointed out, more people born in the immediate post-war period were likely to marry, and to marry younger, than at any other time in modern British history, leading to a sense that this period was a 'golden age' of marriage in which marriage and motherhood were increasingly perceived as the primary career for women.⁴ The Welfare State became a means of achieving and managing this new normality, defining wives as dependents with a separate married woman's National Insurance contribution rate, and a lower state pension entitlement. The 'marriage bar', which disqualified women from employment on marriage, was reintroduced by many employers, having been dropped as a result of labour shortages during the war, and the long period of full employment for male workers meant that wages and living standards grew rapidly, perhaps diminishing the

economic need for married women to work part-time.

However, it would be a mistake to see the early period of the post-war settlement, roughly 1945-1951, as a straightforward and absolute return to domesticity for women and to the gendered roles of the interwar period. Returning to the article by Ella Thompson it is noteworthy that Thompson's vision includes a public role for herself, albeit one that is subordinate to her domestic role it is nonetheless there and imagined as important outside of its potential for economic contribution to the family budget. The reinstatement of gender roles was not straightforward, was negotiated and contested, for both women and men, as Alan Allport's study of returning ex-Servicemen has shown.⁵ This article considers the formation of the Women's Royal Army Corps [WRAC] as a means of assessing the wider shifts in gender roles and relationships in the immediate post-war period. It will argue for the importance of continuity, rather than the often assumed break, between the war and the post-war in British society. Before addressing the policy decisions that informed the continuation of the Auxiliary Territorial Service [ATS] for three years after the war's end and the creation of the Women's Royal Army Corps in 1948, it is important to deal with women who had undertaken wartime military service towards the end of the war.

What do women want? Addressing the servicewoman at the end of the war

According to the majority of published sources, women who had served with the three women's auxiliary services during the war wanted much the same as Ella Thompson: marriage, a home life, perhaps a part time job. In this, their femininity was understood to triumph over their military identity. Throughout the war years, femininity and militarism had sat uncomfortably together; while women's military labour had been widely recognised as a necessity by 1941, when under the National Service Act partial conscription was introduced, this military role had always been hedged about with existing ideas about acceptable models of femininity. Women in the Auxiliary Territorial Service for example, were given advice on how to wear their uniforms to best advantage their figures, on what hairstyle went best with a military cap, and what shade of lipstick would go with the difficult-to-wear khaki of the army uniform. (Tangee, a new lipstick shade, had been introduced specifically to be worn with khaki). The work that women had undertaken in the ATS was gendered, with dilution being used, as in industry, to replace male with female labour and a range of occupations, most obviously those related to combat, being closed to women. There was also a problem matching what was seen as an inherently feminine individualism with the conformity

necessitated by military service. If some of the things men were told they were fighting for were the home and family, and the distinctive nature of British nationhood (often opposed to the perceived rigid conformity of Nazi Germany), then the existence of massed ranks of conscripted women in khaki was problematic.

Among women who had worked in new areas of employment during the war, servicewomen were a group with a specific, and particularly unstable, post-war identity. While many of them were keen to leave the auxiliary services and 'return to normality', others were uncertain what the future held for them, and were unwilling to relinquish some of the changes and opportunities that the war had bought their way. This could, of course, be true for women from every walk of life (as could the far more common desire to 'get back to normal', expressed again and again in Mass Observation surveys, directive replies and diaries) but it had particular and specific meanings for at least some servicewomen. Servicewomen were the group who came the closest to the high status male role of combat, most obviously when serving on the Anti-Aircraft defences, and were the only group, other than



Two WRAC waitresses pick flowers in the grounds of the Army School of Education, Beaconsfield, 1959'.

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military nurses, who were able to travel overseas during the war, gaining a degree of autonomy unheard of for all but a few privileged upper and middle-class women before the war. The author and feminist Monica Dickens recognised this in March 1944, when she wrote an article for *Woman's Journal* suggesting that servicewomen's wartime experiences would equip them for 'a peacetime job that requires organising ability'.⁶ Dickens however was a lone voice; for most the end of the war would mean the return of the servicewoman to the home. Indeed, this became codified in the eventual demobilisation scheme. The Ministry of Labour demobilisation booklet issued to service personnel in November 1945 stated that: 'married women have the right to claim priority of release over all other women'.⁷ Post-war reconstruction was thus gendered, with the reconstruction of the home taking precedence over economic reconstruction for women.

Women in the armed services were trained in the rebuilding of this peacetime home. Marian Mills, who had served on Anti-Aircraft sites during the war, one of the most dangerous and concomitantly highest status roles open to women, recalled a lecture in some detail. A visiting lecturer on 'homecraft' told the women: 'The good homemaker will rise as early as possible ... In winter the fireplaces that are used the day before should be cleaned and the fires relaid before breakfast. The room in which this meal is to be served should first be swept and dusted'. The horrified Mills argued that: 'what we really needed were pep talks about all the wonderful opportunities that might be open to us in the brief periods when we were not shopping, dusting, nursing and mangling'.⁸ In many ways however, lectures such as the one described by Mills were nothing new. The Army Education Programme run by the Army Bureau of Current Affairs [ABCA], and often seen as a bastion of progressive ideas, had been highly gendered since its inception in 1941. Writing the official history of the organisation in 1946, N.S. Wilson described how this gendered approach could work: 'A lecturer spoke to an ATS audience on "Prospects for Poland" and failed miserably. On the next occasion an enterprising officer at a similar unit had the talk billed under the heading "Would you marry a Pole?" As some of the girls had, the discussion was lively in the extreme'.⁹ In general, it was assumed that while men would be interested in abstract discussions of war aims, citizenship and reconstruction, women would only engage with these issues if they were framed within a discussion of individual lives and personal preference. For example, W.E. Williams, ABCA's Director, wrote:

On many ABCA topics, e.g. Housing, Health, Schooling, the woman's view is vital to the debate. Where the men tended to think only in terms of arterial roads and underground garages, the women wanted to argue about the best height for the kitchen sink, or the necessity for running hot water.¹⁰

The views of the ATS on the 'big' topics of reconstruction: distribution of wealth, the health service, the welfare state and political and legislative reform were not canvassed. Despite their very public role in the war effort, their concerns with the post-war world were

assumed to centre on the domestic, the private and the personal. Pre-war perceptions of women's lives, and female responsibilities, thus continued during the war years, perhaps acting to reassure many that the major changes of the war years, such as the conscription of women into the military, could be undone at the war's end.

The Manpower Debate on Demobilisation that took place in the House of Commons in November 1944 gives a picture of the ways that women's post-war life was being imagined in dominant discourse. While the debate, understandably, largely conceptualised the returning soldier as male, there was *some* discussion of servicewomen. With only two exceptions, politicians who included women in their discussion of demobilisation saw them returning to the home after the war's end. The centrality of this home to the imagined post-war world can be seen in the opening remarks of Lieutenant Captain John Profumo, who stated that: 'The nucleus around which we shall build all our future hopes and plans for a happy nation must be the home, and the sooner we can unite those whose intentions were thwarted by the outbreak of war, the better'. In the debate women were primarily imagined as situated in the home, waiting for the men to return. When female military service was apparent, it was differentiated from male military service; represented both as a shadow of this service and as a greater sacrifice in many ways as it was so antithetical to dominant norms of femininity. Profumo suggested that women who had served overseas in the ATS had volunteered to do so 'because many of their young male friends were also serving abroad' and that on the demobilisation of these men, women who wanted to marry should be returned to service at home, and that 'those who are lucky enough to marry should be released under the existing scheme', which prioritised married women for demobilisation, whilst prioritising men on the basis of their occupations. Profumo continued to force his point by arguing that: 'Nothing which is not of paramount importance to the winning of the war against Japan should stand in the way of our womenfolk once more returning to their rightful setting, which must be the home'.¹¹ Thus, home making, reconstructing national life around the nuclear family, was to be the driver of female military demobilisation.

This reconstruction of traditional gender roles extended to the House considering exactly how femininity should be reconstructed and made apparent. While demobbed men would be provided with civilian clothing from clothing depots, women would be given an allowance to go and choose their own clothing, with Profumo arguing that 'no one would venture to prescribe a woman's taste in clothes' and asking that the House be generous in 'affording them the means of becoming once again adequately and gracefully dressed'. It is noteworthy that for Profumo therefore female military service not only removes a woman's inherent gracefulness, but is positioned as an inadequate means of 'performing' femininity; by donning military uniform these women have patriotically laid aside their femininity 'for the duration'. A clothing allowance would return it to them, together with their individuality.¹² Civilian clothing

here both disrupts the uniformity of military service, positioned as so antithetical to femininity, but also acts as a means of differentiating men from women, femininity from masculinity in the post-war world, where women's role is that of consumer, as well as home maker.

The only woman to speak at any length in the Debate was Lady Apsley, Conservative member for Bristol Central. Apsley spoke about demobilisation plans for uniformed men and women. Countering Profumo, she argued that women were not only 'concerned with how many coupons or how much money they are to get for their civilian clothes, important as this subject is' but they were primarily concerned with their place in demobilisation schemes and 'whether they will be permitted to use, in civilian life, the skill which they have acquired in the Services'. For Apsley then paid work overrode domestic work as the key issue to be addressed in the demobilisation of women. She was also the only speaker in the debate to discuss the continuation of the three women's services after the war's end. She claimed that 'the women in the Services are very much concerned to know whether their particular auxiliary service is to continue after the war. That is what they wish'.¹³ Lieutenant Colonel Thornton-Kemsley, Member for Aberdeen and Kincardine, agreed up to a point.

Speaking from a standpoint of military authority, Thornton-Kemsley asserted that at a recent conference of senior officers of the ATS he was surprised to discover that the majority of women there opposed releasing women from military service on grounds of marriage. However, according to Thornton-Kemsley, their concern was not that marriage was being foregrounded over paid work for military women, but that women who had been married before they joined the ATS were going to be released before women who had married while in service, meaning that they would 'steal a march in getting the best available jobs'.¹⁴ Marriage as the criteria for demobilisation was not being opposed here; rather it was accepted but concerns were expressed about one group of married women having a subsequent advantage in the workplace over another group. Marriage combined with paid work, rather than marriage alone, appears here to be the post-war life these women were imagining for themselves in 1944. In their recognition that women may have wanted more in the post-war world than home and family, and in particular in their inclusion of servicewomen in the discussion of demobilisation, however, Apsley and Thornton-Kemsley were in a minority of two. Overwhelmingly, public discourse around demobilisation imagined women's place as being in the home, playing their part in the reconstruction of the nation through marriage and children, providing stability in the domestic sphere. There appeared to be no space for the military woman, uniformed, probably unmarried and certainly without children, away from home, thoroughly undomesticated and unfeminine, in this imagined future.

Creating the Women's Royal Army Corps

Why then, given this widespread assertion of a gendered traditionalism towards the war's end, was the

decision made to maintain women's military services in the post-war period? After all, despite the wishes and plans of many of the women who had volunteered for military service during the First World War, all three auxiliary services had been closed by 1920; in that first total war, service 'for the duration' really had meant that. As in the First World War, it had initially been assumed that, at the war's end, the female military services would be disbanded, and women would return to their peacetime occupations. However, according to Leslie Whately, Director of the ATS between 1943 and 1946, by the end of the war the decision to maintain a female presence in the armed forces was 'a foregone conclusion', if hardly one that attracted any great enthusiasm from either government or the War Office.¹⁵ This decision can probably be traced back originally to Violet Markham's 1942 Report on Welfare in the Women's Services, where she recommended that some women should be retained in the services in order to aid the reconstruction and redevelopment that would have to take place on the continent at the war's end.¹⁶ This recommendation led to the formation of the Committee on the Women's Services in 1943, tasked with surveying the needs of the three Services, and making recommendations for the future need for women's labour in auxiliary organisations. The Committee collected information from the Services, two of whom, the Army and the Navy, were lukewarm at best on the continued presence of women. The War Office argued that, as it did not have a budget or figures for male service yet, women's service might have to be dropped in order to concentrate funding and resources where they were most needed – the male combatant.¹⁷ The Committee concluded however that all three Services would need to employ women in the event of another large scale war (remember this precedes the use of atomic weapons in 1945 and subsequent changing understandings of what a 'large scale war' would mean in the future), and Churchill announced to the House of Commons in July 1943 that: 'for some time after hostilities have ceased in any area the Women's Auxiliary Services will still be needed'. He added that the key area in which they would work would be in the administration of liberated territories and that 'the number of appointments, both during the period of military control and under the proposed relief organisation, is likely to be very small'.¹⁸ In other words, women's services would continue to exist, but in terms of both work undertaken and numbers of women, they would not disrupt the reconstruction of post-war gender roles.

Probably the two key differences between 1918 and 1945, with regard to women's military service, were the decision in the mid-1940s to introduce a period of compulsory military service for men – the National Service programme which was first announced in 1946 and ran between 1949 and 1960 under which most young men had to undertake a period of compulsory military service of eighteen months – and the perceived need for women to be part of the occupying forces in post-war Germany and Austria. Announcing the government's decision to continue military conscription for men after the end of the Second World War the Minister for Labour and National Service George Isaacs told the House of

Commons that: 'In order to lessen the needs of the Services for men ... [it had] also been decided to continue the WRNS [Women's Royal Naval Service], the ATS and the WAAF on a voluntary basis'.¹⁹ The decision to introduce National Service for men at the war's end was neither a straightforward nor a particularly popular decision. Austerity measures led the government to impose an annual defence spending limit of £600 million in 1947, much of which went on the financial costs of trying to develop a nuclear arsenal (the 1946 McMahon Act in the USA effectively ending any co-operation between Britain and the USA, until 1949 the world's only nuclear power) and on the maintenance of military forces in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. This led to acute manpower shortages in the Army as it could not compete with the rising wages available to men in civil society and conscription was re-introduced in order to meet the military's need for manpower at a relatively low cost.

Although conscription only applied to young men, initial discussions show that the re-introduction of conscription for women was also briefly considered. These debates are interesting for the light they shed on thinking about the relationship between gender and the military at the point of transition from war to peace, when reconstruction was a priority. The National Council of Women of Great Britain, a voluntary body which campaigned for equal pay and which was particularly concerned with the position of women in the armed forces, discussed women's national service at its Executive Meeting in February 1946. The Committee argued that, as in the war years, conscription for men should also mean conscription for women, basing its argument on the principle of equality of service which it had long advocated. This was rejected however by the Council's Annual General Meeting on the grounds that it would disrupt married life, even if conscription were not applied to married women. Although one delegate argued that 'national service training would make for better wives and mothers', the primacy of the home and family as being at the core of women's role in reconstruction meant that even a progressive, feminist organisation such as the National Council saw women's role as mothers, wives and homemakers as overriding demands for equality of service.²⁰

A similar pattern was followed when the issue was debated by the Manpower Committee of the Ministry of Labour and in the House of Commons. The Manpower Committee decided early on that conscription for women



'ATS women working on a Churchill tank at a Royal Ordnance Corps depot, 10 October 1942'.

www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205193231 © IWM (H 24517)

would be unpopular, though it did briefly consider conscripting women into a form of civilian, rather than military, national service. When the National Service Bill was debated in the House of Commons in March 1947, only Barbara Gould, Labour MP for Hendon North, suggested that equality of service should apply. Gould tried to persuade the House that it would be 'uneconomical, unrealistic and unfair to exempt woman power from National Service'. She argued that as conscription was being posited as 'the most democratic' means of maintaining the armed forces, it would be undemocratic to exclude women. Like the National Council of Women however, Gould did not include married women in her argument, instead framing her call for conscription only in terms of single women in order to avoid what she called the 'marriage wastage', when married women left the auxiliary services. She also suggested that not conscripting women would give them an unfair advantage in the workplace as 'the employers do not want to take them on and then have them called away a little later, or to have the obligation to take them on again when their service is finished. The consequence is that the girls are being taken on instead of the boys'.²¹ This was the only aspect of Gould's speech to have any impact; a Ministry of Labour memo suggested that in order to avoid young women being given an advantage in the workplace over young men subject to conscription, a form of female national service be introduced. This

though was conceived of as a form of service specific to women, the memo continued that 'the most obvious form of compulsory training for women is training in domestic employment, because this is likely to prove of some value in the women's subsequent life'.²² Thus, even when compulsion for women was considered in this period, it was largely conceived of as a means of helping to ensure the successful reconstruction of the family home.

Women's domestic role, perhaps surprisingly, shaped and underpinned the continuation of the ATS in the immediate post-war period. The key reason given for maintaining the ATS once the conflict was over was the need for women to accompany and support the men of the Army of Occupation in Western Germany. This issue had already been raised in the ATS Overseas Service Debate in the House of Commons in January 1945, when the House debated introducing compulsion for women serving overseas, something that had been avoided previously. While female MPs from across the political parties, including Edith Summerskill and Nancy Astor, argued that winning the war trumped concerns about the impact on women of service overseas, other MPs retorted that a woman's place was at home, under the moral guidance of her parents or husband, not overseas where 'perhaps, there are dangers – not dangers of the battlefield; but where the moral standards do not perhaps compare favourably with those of this country'.²³ Lieutenant Colonel Thornton-Kemsley, who had also spoken in the Manpower Debate, spoke in favour of compulsory overseas service for the ATS, both as a means of supporting male work there and allowing the faster demobilisation of men in support services, but also as an instrument for reducing fraternisation between British soldiers and German women. He argued that: 'we must see that there is a large ATS element in the Army ... I believe very greatly in the natural and healthy companionship of young men and young women in the Services. It can work and it does work'. For Thornton-Kemsley then, ATS women posted overseas were to provide a healthy, British pool of girls and women for British soldiers to socialise with, thus avoiding the temptations of German womanhood.²⁴

The dual role of the ATS in Germany was encapsulated in the then Secretary of State for War Manny Shinwell's announcement to the House of Commons in 1948 that: 'the members of the women's services are an excellent influence on the troops'. He emphasised the significance of women's role there in his comment that: 'the troops have received them with open arms'.²⁵ The War Office was determined that British soldiers would not become a route by which German women, seeking to escape the hardships of post-war Germany and the penalties of Nazism, became British citizens, 'solely in order to escape the consequences of their nationality'.²⁶ A handbook issued to British soldiers employed in Germany warned the troops that:

Numbers of German women will be willing, if they can get the chance, to make themselves cheap for what they can get out of you ... Be on your guard; most of them will be infected

... Many German girls will be waiting for the chance to marry a Briton, whether they care for him or not.²⁷

The employment of ATS in Germany then was as much a social and moral decision as it was one of military efficiency. The continuation of women's military services after the end of the Second World War was thus informed by the wider reconstruction of gender roles, and the reinforcement of traditional discourses of femininity.

However, within this emphasis on women's domestic, romantic and familial roles, was an ongoing discussion regarding the creation of permanent women's branches of the Services. As Kathleen Sherit has shown in her recent PhD, there was widespread opposition to the retention of women in the three services. The RAF initially opposed the retention of women, who were seen as being less reliable than men, as a result of taking longer and more frequent periods of sick leave, of lacking the 'natural authority' of male officers and being more likely to leave the services earlier, presumably on marriage.²⁸ As an article on the WAAF from the *Daily Mirror*'s 'Science Reporter' in March 1945 showed women were still seen as inherently less suited to the particular demands of military life, being less adaptable and more susceptible to worries about families left at home than men.²⁹ Likewise, the Admiralty was not keen on retaining the WRNS, arguing women were on average twenty-five percent less efficient than men because of their:

... lack of physical strength and inability to stand up to prolonged strain, ... inferior mechanical aptitude, lower capacity for the application of knowledge, inclination to get flustered in emergency and [being] more easily discouraged when up against difficulties; lack of capacity for improvisation; unwillingness to accept responsibility and [an] inability to exercise authority.³⁰

Perhaps surprisingly, given the initial reluctance in the Navy and Air Force to contemplate post-war women's services, the War Office was more positive, stating at the war's end that it wanted 3,000 regular servicewomen retained from the ATS and a reserve force of 16,000, to be drawn on when needed.³¹ Concerns about femininity however still informed the creation of this new service.

Recruitment publicity for the post-war women's army corps, which retained the name of the ATS while a new title was discussed, drew heavily on the appeals to women's service used not only in the Second World War, but also in the First. Repeating a slogan used during the war years, one poster from 1947 told its female audience that 'they can't get on without us', showing a smiling, uniformed brunette in front of a smaller drawing of men loading anti-aircraft guns. While this echoed recruitment campaigns during both the First and the Second World Wars that placed women symbolically behind the men who served in the front line, other literature framed women's military service in domestic terms, with one leaflet stating 'you are needed now to look after all of this' over a picture of an army camp, while reassuring

potential recruits that 'it becomes quite homely once you have put a picture or two on the wall'.³²

While the army recognised that it was going to need women's labour in the post-war years, it was concerned to ensure that these women remained separate from, and subordinate to, military men, both organisationally and symbolically. Women were to remain organisationally separate from the rest of the army, with the Women's Royal Army Corps forming, until 1991, a separate corps of the army, led by female officers but organised and controlled by the men of the War Office. As in both World Wars, these female officers had a role that was reminiscent of the philanthropic middle-class women of late Victorian and Edwardian Britain, who had carved a public role for themselves by providing moral guidance to working-class women, being responsible for the welfare and discipline of their subordinates, but not having any say in organisational or policy decisions. More broadly, the gender roles being seen in wider policies of reconstruction, could be observed in decisions made regarding the uniform of the new women's army corps and their relationship to combat.

Mary Tyrwhitt, who had replaced Lesley Whateley as Director of the ATS in 1945, chaired the Committee that considered uniform for the new corps between 1946 and 1949. The Committee approached well-known fashion designers, including Norman Hartnell, Charles Creed and Edward Molyneux to design the uniform as it wanted to avoid the widespread perception during the war years that the ATS uniform had been both unflattering and uncomfortable. A perception that, as Mass Observation had noted, was 'a very appreciable factor in making people feel they don't want to join the ATS'.³³ Hartnell, who designed for the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret, was eventually chosen to design the new uniform, as his design was seen to best embody the elusive combination of feminine elegance and military uniformity that the Committee desired. Hartnell's design was certainly more stylish than the 'drab looking' and unpopular uniforms worn by the ATS. This led him to ask the government to invite him to become a camoufleur during the war. His design reflected the influence of the 'New Look', of which he was a key designer in Britain, with its use of a tight, fitted jacket and a much fuller skirt. The Committee were concerned that, as well as being recognisably feminine, the new uniform be distinct from other uniformed women's services and easily distinguished from the male army uniform. Bottle green was chosen as the colour as it was recognisably military, yet distinct from the rifle green and light infantry green worn by some male regiments, and more flattering than the dowdy khaki of the ATS. By choosing a uniform in which femininity overrode practicality, the Committee emphasised the importance of maintaining dominant gender roles in the recruitment to, and operation of, the new women's corps.

This same emphasis could be seen in the discussions that surrounded the new corps' relationship to combat. Major General McCandlish, the Director of Personnel in the War Office, chaired the Committee that examined the combat role of the WRAC between 1948 and 1949. Although McCandlish himself was broadly in agreement with Mary Tyrwhitt, who argued that the

new corps should be trained with weapons, others on the Committee strongly opposed the arming of women in any circumstances. Although women were never conceived of as being directly in combat, there was discussion of their defensive role – defence conceived of, interestingly, both as defence of the military and domestic home and as self-defence. Running through these discussions is an undercurrent of concern about the morale of the male soldier if women were to be armed. One member of the Committee saw women bearing weapons as antithetical to both femininity and to Britishness, commenting that:

The fact that 'little Olga' is trained to kill and prides herself on the number of notches cut on her revolver butt is no reason why we too should cry 'Annie get your gun'. It is still the soldier's duty to protect his womenfolk whatever they are wearing. Even in these days when war means total war, let us at least retain that degree of chivalry.³⁴

As in the war years, in the debates that had surrounded women's work on Anti-Aircraft sites, the public's supposed reluctance to see women move closer to combat was cited, the Committee concluding that: 'neither the Army nor the nation are yet sufficiently accustomed to the idea of women in the fighting services'.³⁵ Arming women was also seen as being potentially more dangerous for them, removing the non-combatant protection that they allegedly had, though it is difficult to see how far non-combatants were protected in the wars of the mid-twentieth century. McCandlish's response to this was to note somewhat controversially that he expected 'most women would much prefer to be shot rather than raped' drawing the understated rebuke from Tyrwhitt that 'it is not sufficiently clear that most women prefer shooting to being raped'.³⁶ The Committee eventually proposed three potential courses of action. The first proposed the WRAC be regarded as civilian and take shelter with the civilian population in any conflict, the second that they provide non-combat roles such as communications and first aid in any future combat as 'the obvious occupation for women in the case of enemy action is succouring the wounded', and the third was that they be trained to use small arms for self-defence purposes.³⁷ Although McCandlish and Tyrwhitt both favoured the third option, majority opinion favoured the second, and the WRAC was to remain a strictly non-combatant unit until 1980, when its members were allowed to volunteer for small arms training for self-defence.

So how do we approach the creation of the first permanent women's corps in the British Army? – A move that, on the face of it, appears to offer a radical challenge to the reassertion of traditional gender roles that was so central to reconstruction. It is important that examination of the transition from war to a form of peace should pay more attention to lines of continuity, rather than simply falling back on the argument that gender roles returned to their pre-war models in the mid to late 1940s. Obviously, this was not the case – very little else returned unproblematically to the structures of the 1930s. Class, politics and family life were all profoundly shaken by the war years, and it

should not be assumed that gender roles alone were reasserted in any straightforward way. Instead, new ways need to be found to understand the shift from war to peace that allow consideration of the complexities and negotiations of this process. The creation of the new women's services was both radical and reactionary, challenging and conservative. It both offered women a means of continuing the particular form of militarised citizenship that had been open to them in the war years, and combined this with a rather more traditional notion of femininity than was dominant during the war, when the need for women's military labour was arguably rather more urgent. The continuation of the ATS and the formation of the WRAC were both driven by the needs of the military for men, and for women to support these men operationally and socially, but they nonetheless provided a new career path for women which, while it was never conceived of on equal terms with men, was unimaginable in the interwar years. 'Gentle in Manner, Resolute in Deed', the motto of the WRAC, seems then to sum up the complex and contradictory nature of the address to women in the transition from war to peace.

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Of hockey sticks and Sten guns: British auxiliaries and their weapons in the Second World War

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The combat taboo is of significance in gender studies of Britain at war because of the lengths gone to in its defence.¹ It is the crux in models which seek to explain evolving gender relations in wartime: the consistent distance maintained between the sexes in the theory of the Double Helix and the polarisation of gender roles as the militarised male goes off to war to defend domestic femininity. Both hinge on the idea that, however much flux wartime brings, the exclusion of women from combat roles ensures male supremacy.² This paper reveals that despite that taboo, women of the three auxiliary services wielded weapons in the Second World War. It draws upon personal testimonies held by the Imperial War Museum and in the BBC World War Two People's War [WW2 PW] archive, to examine the significance accorded to weapons by the women who used them. Personal testimony permits exploration of both practice and perception, from nonchalance to outrage. It suggests that while the gender boundary was construed as rigid, but could be transgressed, it could be experienced as fuzzy, that is, as a permeable zone of overlap between the sexes.³

The female auxiliary forces had been disbanded in the aftermath of the First World War, but were re-formed shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War as the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS; its predecessor, the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, had been founded in March 1917). There was also the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF, founded April 1918, on the same day as the Royal Air Force, not distinct from the founding of the ATS until June 1939) and the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS, its members called Wrens, first founded in November 1917). Their origins lay in the need to release men for front-line duties. In the First World War, the non-combatant proportion of the army rose from 16.3 percent on 1 September 1914 to 33.45 percent on 1 July 1918; many of these roles could be fulfilled by women.⁴ In the Second World War, where the tooth-to-tail ratio was one to four at the outbreak of war, women were again to perform non-combatant support services for the three male branches of the Armed Forces.⁵ The Royal Warrant forming the Auxiliary Territorial Service on 9 September 1938 foresaw that 'certain non-combatant duties in connection with Our Military and Air Forces may from time to time be performed by women'.⁶ The definition of 'non-combatant duties', however, was to be challenged by the exigencies of war, and could come into conflict with the principle of freeing up men's labour.⁷ The Director of the WRNS between 1939 and 1946, Vera Laughton Mathews, noted that some Wrens were trained to operate the guns which defended their remote boom defence stations because 'otherwise it would have meant bearing men for this purpose alone ... This was approved and in being before the employment of Service women on lethal weapons was discussed inter-departmentally and

prohibited'.⁸ The vacillations in the official position over time are difficult to trace, but can be read through their repercussions. The combat taboo was unambiguous, at least in theory; the justification for the gendered pay differential was that while every man was potentially deployable, women were not.⁹ The question of handling lethal weapons was clearly more ambivalent, however, although the official assumption that women would not be given weapons training is suggested by the fact that when the training of ATS recruits was to be brought into line with that received by soldiers, it was possible to cover the men's six week course in twenty-six days because weapons training was not included.¹⁰

In April 1941, the Army and Air Force auxiliaries became members of the Armed Forces of the Crown in the Defence (Women's Forces) Regulations, awarding them military status rather than that of 'camp followers', a change which enabled the expansion of women's occupations into 'operational areas' such as anti-aircraft and radio location.¹¹ (The WRNS remained a smaller civilian auxiliary force throughout the war, not least because women were not to be deployed at sea. The distinction in status between the military Army and Air Force auxiliaries on the one hand, and the civilian WRNS on the other, does not appear significant in the memoirs discussed below.) Eight months later, women became subject to conscription through the National Service (No 2) Act of December 1941, the first time in British history that compulsory war service was required of women. Around one quarter of the Auxiliaries were thus conscripted, not volunteers.¹² Given the previous expansion of volunteers into operational areas, however, this Act provoked much debate in Parliament and the press (less so in personal testimony or cultural representations) as to what could be expected of the new conscripts, particularly with regard to lethal weapons. The War Cabinet determined that no woman compulsorily recruited into the auxiliary services should be entered for combatant service (i.e. service which involved participation in the use of lethal weapons – their definition) unless she volunteered.¹³ Indeed, the woman had not only to volunteer but to signify in writing her willingness to handle lethal weapons. This requirement has left next to no mark in personal testimonies which suggests signing such a document was not seen as a particularly momentous decision. The existence of this process should not mislead. In practice the combat taboo was not officially broken; for example, because women serving on anti-aircraft batteries never officially fired the weapons, they merely determined their aim, a specious distinction which served to suggest a stable gender boundary. It is worth noting that the taboo lay with firing arms, not with handling them. Wrens tested the guns on Navy aircraft and members of the ATS worked with lethal weapons when, for example,

packing for D-Day, or re-fusing ammunition; such responsibilities appear in contemporary descriptions and images.¹⁴ But these roles could be conceptualised in contemporary representations as mundane support roles appropriate to women, albeit with unconventional objects.¹⁵ In contrast, one justification given by MPs for not arming women was that *civilised* countries did not use women in combat: their role was to give life, not to take it.¹⁶ Other reasons included the lack of sufficient arms and ammunition; women's physical and mental unsuitability, and the distress women adopting such roles would cause their families in particular, and men in general.¹⁷

The defence of the gender boundary through the combat taboo has been the subject of extensive historical investigation particularly in those areas where it was most challenged: in the anti-aircraft batteries; the Special Operations Executive (in which recruits were trained in weapons and unarmed combat) and in civilian home defence, where women agitated to be included in the Home Guard (HG) and armed to help meet the threat of a German invasion.¹⁸ The taboo was defended through a range of strategies such as the spurious distinctions encountered above (the MP for Fulham West, Edith Summerskill, repeatedly challenged Parliament's contradictory attitudes towards women and the wooliness of their definitions of non-combatant);¹⁹ public silence; outright opposition (in November 1941, the War Office sent an order that weapons and ammunition in the charge of the Army or HG units must not be used for the instruction of women)²⁰ and limited compromise (women were permitted into the HG in 1943, but in strictly clerical roles and without a uniform). Yet despite the implications for gender identities suggested by the combat taboo and its challenges, the more mundane but no less significant issue of weapons training for women is barely touched upon in secondary sources. The silence in contemporary sources can readily be explained as expedient, but the replication of the omission in subsequent academic studies is more curious.²¹ The wartime instalment of the practices regarding arms training for women deserves a more secure place in the historical narrative.

In histories of the auxiliary services, publications which allude to training at all most often do so by including captioned images of women bearing arms, sometimes complemented by brief personal narratives. They do not offer any specifics on what provisions there were for weapons training, nor do they engage with the contradiction to the wartime rhetoric of exclusion suggested by their sources.²² The main exception is Georgina Natzio, an author on contemporary military issues, who turned to the Second World War to contextualise the contentious debates at the turn of the twenty-first century on the ethics of the inclusion of women in infantry units. She notes the 'anecdotal evidence of varying quality' which reveals that 'weapons-training for the auxiliaries was carried out, and [...] weapons were issued when it was considered necessary by units taking their own steps'.²³ Natzio concludes that there was a 'constant tension between ethics and pragmatism in military practice and democratic wartime government' with a tendency towards the pragmatic as

the war progressed.²⁴ Historians of the forces, however, have not engaged with the challenge to the combat taboo that such pragmatism suggests. Even if training was received on an ad hoc basis, it nonetheless suggests there was at the very least the imaginative possibility that women might become embroiled in combat situations in which they were not merely to behave as victims.

Personal testimonies offer the views held by the auxiliaries themselves. The published and unpublished manuscripts held by the Imperial War Museum tend to follow the conventions of an autobiographical narrative arc in structure whereas the BBC WW2PW website offers a new and interesting genre of personal testimony.²⁵ The aim of the BBC project was to collect online the memories of people who had lived and fought during the Second World War, in order to form a digital archive intended as a learning resource for future generations. The stories were gathered between 2003 and 2006, when over 47,000 narratives were contributed. Many came directly from veterans, or veterans through an associate centre – museums, libraries and radio stations which ran story-gathering campaigns and which assisted in the submission of a quarter of the stories. There were also contributions from family members. These gathering techniques are reflected in the prose styles which can be in the first or the third person, a written account or one spoken to an individual and then transcribed, a coherent narrative, or snatches of memories lacking context: the most dramatic memory, the most mundane. Ninety-one percent of the stories were gathered from the over-sixty-fives, that is, from those who could offer first-hand accounts of the war. Market research suggested that the main motivation contributors had was the desire to leave a legacy, but they also enjoyed talking, reminiscing and having a willing audience.²⁶ Although male service narratives dominate, the site includes 287 ATS stories, 308 on the WAAF and 103 on the WRNS.²⁷ The awareness of contributing to a national archive through a British institution – the BBC – encouraged women to unearth their memoirs and contribute their memories even if they did not feel they had a grand narrative to contribute.²⁸ At the beginning of the twenty-first century, women were also submitting memories in a spate of commemorative activities on the war, including an initiative to raise a monument to women, and when the expansion of women's roles in the military was the subject of public debate.²⁹ What was striking about the BBC project was that it brought together in one readily accessible and addictive archive the stories of women from across the three services who noted weapons training. It therefore had greater potential than existing disparate autobiographical materials to suggest that these women's narratives were not exceptional even if they remained unrepresentative. It facilitated the conclusion that auxiliaries wielded weapons – rifles, pistols, Sten guns and grenades – on a local, random basis, dependent on personnel, roles, geographical location, the availability of arms and of training facilities.

Women's tales of being trained or armed fall within narratives of personal change, of individual and national endeavour, sorority, class; they can provide the focus, or merit but glancing mention. There are powerful

post-war constructions of the British experience of the Second World War on which these narratives draw: the island nation standing resolute and alone; the contribution of the Home Front; the experience of collective endeavour encapsulated in 'The People's War' of the title of the site. Barely touched upon in cultural representations in the war or after, however, and unlike, say, Blitz narratives, there is no dominant narrative to shape women's memories of wielding weapons, an observation borne out by the wide variety in coverage (absent, glancing, detailed) and tone (bland, perplexed, proud).

At the outbreak of war, women did not all lack experience of arms. There is evidence from the previous war of weapons training. WRNS recruits underwent rifle instruction in 1917-1918.³⁰ Women moving in the circles of the landed gentry or involved in farming had had access to rifles, and shooting clubs were popular in the interwar period. It is impossible to ascertain precise statistics, but in December 1930, for example, there were 184 women's rifle clubs for small-bore and air rifle target shooting, none with fewer than ten members. There were separate clubs for full-bore and shotgun shooting. As photographic evidence suggests, women of the auxiliary services, like their male counterparts, organised shooting clubs and competitions. One image shows 'ATS girls cleaning their rifles at the Miniature Rifle Club, at a West Country Transport depot'. The rifles are service weapons adapted for small-bore ammunition and competitions were arranged between Club members and the Home Guard.³¹ Such clubs fostered skill and helped maintain morale. In 1940, when civilians began to amass arms and band together to meet the threat of invasion, the government took control and organised the Home Guard, assuming all members would be male. But women volunteered, and organised themselves, setting up the Women's Home Defence in 1940, and agitating to be included officially in the HG. It was in that context that Colonel Josiah Wedgwood, MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme, pointed out to the House that: 'there are in this country a great many women who shoot extraordinarily well; many of them are match rifle specialists. I do not know why they should be ruled out [from the HG] on account of sex'.³² Women and children were after all among the targets of German fighter pilots and bombers, and in the event of an invasion would have been in the front line. The Earl of Mansfield (Mungo David Malcolm Murray) spoke on the matter of arming civilians in the House of Lords:

Not only would I train to arms the whole male population from the age of about 14



'Members of the ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service) at the Central Ordnance Depot at Weedon in Northamptonshire, unpacking Winchester rifles sent from the United States under the terms of Lease-Lend, 23 March 1942'.

www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205198290 © IWM (H 18074)

onwards as long as men can stagger, but also, and without making it compulsory, I would train such women as chose to learn the art of using a weapon, because, as I have said, there are no civilians and the German respects neither age nor sex.³³

The need to arm women served to underline the brutality of the enemy, but it also suggested that the conventional gender boundary was increasingly obsolete, albeit with voluntarism providing the get-out clause. Corporal Joan Daphne Pearson, for example, blended both convention and pragmatism when she wrote to her mother: 'I say if Germans kill women and children deliberately in their homes and in their streets, machine-gunning - then the women must be prepared to kill to protect their children'.³⁴ Pearson was herself both able and willing, although her autobiography suggests vacillating official practice. In 1940, she noted 'WAAFs are not to carry arms' but later commented that 'most of us voluntarily attended gun practice with Enfield 103s [sic]. Later, not long after, we were allowed to carry revolvers'.³⁵ Then in 1941 she wrote to her mother that 'it has come out in orders that the WAAF may carry arms'.³⁶ She offers no commentary on the changes, however, resigned perhaps to the contradictions of military bureaucracy, or unable to propose an explanation.

It is sometimes possible to map women's training

against the course of the war but the nature of the sources, which are not always specific on the timing of events, can make this challenging. There is certainly photographic evidence that some auxiliaries received weapons training in 1940 because of the likelihood of invasion.³⁷ Similarly individual HG commanders accepted women into their units and trained them alongside the men, necessitating the prohibition of the War Office cited above. Towards the end of the war, other factors became significant: the opportunities women had had to challenge preconceptions of their temperament and abilities and even the paradoxical possibility that training was less threatening to the gender order when the likelihood of women drawing on it subsided. The unit of Elaine Olivia Scovell, an ATS attached to the Royal Artillery, was offered shooting instruction by their sergeant, Diane Esencourt, 'as a means of diversion', suggesting perhaps that other duties were becoming less demanding. Although Esencourt had been turned down by him previously, this time her Colonel gave permission on condition it was 'carried out with utmost secrecy'. The reason for the need for concealment was explained as 'even at that stage of the war [1945], it was possible that if Hitler learned that women were being trained to use weapons, and especially if any pictures were taken of them doing so, he might use it as propaganda to show that Britain was so short of men that it was necessary to train women'.³⁸ Clearly that was deemed a marker of desperation.

In Scovell's case, the instigation came from her female sergeant and, offered the opportunity, 'nearly all of us answered in the affirmative'.³⁹ The pressure could also come from even further down the military pecking order. Norma Lodge, a radio location mechanic in the ATS, described how she and her comrades successfully requested training, this time in the middle of the war:

Soon after our arrival [i.e. October or November 1942] there was an invasion scare and we were on Red Alert. It was decided to have a mock invasion of the camp and we had to 'defend' it. I was made a 'runner', and had to go from the C.O.'s bunker to other parts of the camp with verbal messages. Most of my 'running' consisted of crouching and even wriggling on my stomach to avoid the 'bullets'. It was after this that we asked for an audience with the C.O. and requested rifle training, so that we could defend ourselves. The C.O. agreed and after that we had regular rifle practice. I think we were some of the first women to have this training.⁴⁰

Proud at being the first, Lodge knew they were not the last. While the narrative emphasises defence, the subject of that defensive action slides from the camp to the women themselves, a slide which nonetheless does not appear to provoke opposition from the Commanding Officer. This narrative also underlines the dangers of underestimating perceptions of the threat of invasion even after the probability receded. It was of course in the context of invasion, and only later regarding overseas service, that there was any possibility of women

encountering the enemy outside of aerial defence.

While there was sustained (and ultimately unsuccessful) pressure put on the government regarding the arming of civilian women, this debate was not overt in the auxiliary services. Some of the excuses mobilised against arming civilian women (the danger of classification as *francs tireurs*, for example, and summary execution) were implausible for auxiliaries with military status. The status of non-combatant roles is relevant here. As seen, the majority of servicemen were performing non-combatant duties deemed vital to the efficient running of their Force, a distribution which could suggest a parallel value of women's non-combatant service as support (although men were not deemed 'auxiliaries') as well as to free men for frontline duties. In the event of an attack, and in contrast perhaps to civilians, auxiliaries were therefore likely to have assumed their duty was to continue to perform their existing roles.⁴¹ Their commanders' views on this matter were not uniform. In 1948 discussions were held on the issue of arming the Women's Royal Army Corps (the post-war incarnation of the ATS) at which the three approaches adopted by commanders during the war in local defence schemes (i.e. in the event of ground attack) were summarised. Auxiliaries would have been called upon to 'use Arms in defence of their HQ, or in self-defence in the last resort'; second, treated as women and ordered to shelter with the civilian population; or required to carry out non-fighting duties, such as rendering First Aid. The issues at stake included whether uniformed women caught in the front line would be 'an asset rather than a liability to the local commander'; the challenges of catering to military and public sensibilities and the navigation of the distinctions between appropriate military and civilian service in Theatres and forward Areas.⁴² This summary suggests that there was no official singular policy, or that if there was, there was still considerable variation in local interpretations based on a sliding scale of emphasis on the components of uniformed female identity. There is only evidence of the auxiliary response to the first option, explored below. It does not require a great leap of imagination to list the possible objections to the second two, however, one of which undervalued continued performance of duties by reducing women to their sex, while the other would have demanded service women perform unfamiliar roles with trained civilian counterparts, again apparently justified by gender, as suggested by the specific mention of First Aid.

Nonetheless, the instigation for training could come from above. Joan Baker was drafted to a Royal Naval Air Station in Cornwall, where the Captain 'apparently became convinced that the country would be invaded by way of Cornwall'. The Wrens were asked to volunteer to learn how to fire First World War Lee-Enfield .303 rifles.⁴³ After receiving instruction at the Firing Range, the volunteers took part in an Active Defence Exercise:

The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, from Bodmin, made a raid on our Station, attempting to gain control, and we Wrens were in a pillbox with our rifles and blank cartridges, as part of the defence force.

There were official referees there, and they judged that we had taken some prisoners, who were led past us, expressing shock at seeing women, in a way which I'll leave to your imagination. Not long after this, a Question was asked in Parliament as to how Wrens at a 'remote Naval Air Station in the South West of the country had the use of rifles, while some of the Home Guard were still only using bottles in socks?' The rifles were quickly rounded up, and we never learned how or where they had come from.⁴⁴

Her story ends there, lacking closure as the experience itself did. Baker's perception of the external gaze centres on outrage, that of the 'prisoners' and at national level. What is less clear is her take. There is a hint of surrealism in the introduction and departure of the rifles, but not in the expectation of the women's participation in the exercise, nor in their success. The description of the Station as 'remote' suggests a perception that this was about appropriate geographical distribution of rare resources; the coy 'leave to your imagination' could either be a shared moment with the reader or the avoidance of strong language on the website. Either possibility underlines an implied awareness (and enjoyment) of the gender transgression of women having the temerity to capture members of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry.

Both Lodge and Baker were present at the inception of the training, which may explain their sense of pride. However for other recruits, it was simply one more expectation submerged amongst the challenges of acquiring new skills and obeying military discipline. These narratives are defined less by the chronology of the war than the chronology of individual service. One Wren described her experience thus:

After we got our uniforms we got squad drill practice several times a week until we could march in step and swing our arms in rhythm which was very hard work. Later I had to learn to take squad drill practice which was even more difficult! We also had lessons in rifle shooting.⁴⁵

The sentence on shooting is remarkable for its lack of colour, compared with the emphatic judgements passed in the previous two sentences. But this style of narration is not atypical: weapons training appears as just one of many new experiences, less unwelcome than some of the alternatives. Betty Rankin, for example, concluded by saying she had enjoyed her time in the army, adding:

During my time at Brockley there were some boring times when nothing much seemed to be happening but one of the enjoyable times was when we were taken up to Whitby for a change. We had daily firing practice from the top of the cliff after we had marched every day up the 200 steps in full kit.⁴⁶

The lack of commentary on having fired a weapon in such testimonies speaks to the fact that it did not strike

recruits as peculiar in terms of their expectations of service life. So Kathleen Mount, a Wren posted to Scapa Flow, listed:

During the time I was stationed there, I learnt to play football. I was five foot six and half inches, and so I played in goal. I also learnt to fire a .22 rifle. My friend and I joined an evening class at the local school in Kirkwall to learn to use a type writer and to speak French. Then when we found that the lessons were on the same night as the camp dances so we gave them up (the lessons I mean).⁴⁷

Sometimes weapons training was understood to have been offered for the mundane reason that appropriate facilities were available. The Wren Phyllis Coulls, for example, was a book keeper stationed at Falmouth Docks where there was a shooting range, 'so you could learn to handle a gun'.⁴⁸ In these narratives weapons do not feature as the marker of gender difference; if anything they suggest a military experience shared by both sexes. This observation echoes Tessa Stone's argument that: 'while a woman's gender was, inevitably, a factor in her self-identity as a tradeswoman and as a woman in uniform ... the military context itself provided a *different* framework within which her identity and status operated'.⁴⁹ In these narratives, there is no sense of transgression noted elsewhere; instead they suggest that the military could provide an environment in which gender boundaries were rendered permeable, through shared experience and role in the war effort.

This is particularly obvious given that women issued with weapons to defend specific locations or equipment did not query that decision, even though this did acknowledge the potential for direct armed conflict with the enemy and could not masquerade as generic training. This role-specific training could be brief and functional. Mollie Crisford, a Wren posted to the RAF radar station at North Foreland, described how:

One evening an RAF sergeant took the girls to the edge of the cliff and taught them how to fire a rifle and shoot with a Sten-gun and throw grenades. They all had their instructions what to do to destroy the radar equipment, if the enemy should invade and capture the equipment.⁵⁰

Clearly such an approach had a very different goal from proficiency or structured use of time, adequate only as preparation for a desperate response to a desperate situation. The ad hoc nature of the training was determined by sex differentiation but its existence defied it. It was the role that ensured the training of those ATS women who staffed the control stations for the Auxiliary Units, units trained to go to ground in the event of invasion in order to maintain communication and perpetrate sabotage. These women were taught how to fire rifles, Sten guns and service revolvers.⁵¹ Theirs was one of the most vulnerable roles because detection was inevitable owing to their equipment. Marina Bloxam, an enthusiastic member of a rifle club before

the war, recalled that they had been given revolvers to 'play with'. With much time to kill, the women amused themselves potting at fruit on trees or jam jars on a wall, another example of weapons providing alleviation of boredom. It was a senior female colleague who told her the real reason they had revolvers: "To shoot ourselves. If the German had got us. Because the Germans wouldn't hesitate at torture because we apparently were a very important link in the setup".⁵² Bloxam was patently proud of being, as she saw it, a part of the British resistance and of the importance of her role to the enemy, as evidenced by being armed. There was no suggestion that she should shoot at the invaders, however.

Conversely unarmed women who served alongside men and performed some of the same roles were most conscious of the illogicalities of official policy and the dangers of asymmetry. Kathleen Burton, a searchlight operator, was trained by a male sergeant and a private to use the machine gun and rifles when her crew first arrived on site, only for the weapons to be removed when the two men left. Guard duties left her with particularly strong memories of the idiocy of being unarmed, because the possibility of meeting the enemy was inherent to the role. 'People were surprised at seeing girls on guard and remarked on it, too. We wore battledress, brown leather gaiters and boots. What guards we were with no weapons to hold!'⁵³ Burton's description is steeped in the external gaze. By contrast Theresa Roberts offers her own emotions in a wry under-statement when she describes how she had to stand guard at a gun site armed with a pick-axe handle and a whistle, while the male guards were armed with rifles: 'understandably we were a little uneasy'.⁵⁴ These descriptions speak to both the time of the experience and the time of recounting. There is little sense of retrospective reinterpretation given the wartime colour, suggesting that women had questioned the policy at the time, but there is also an expectation that present-day audiences will identify with their critical wartime perceptions.

A colourful story which suggests women were not always prepared to accept discrimination is offered by Ruth Godding, who served in the WAAF.⁵⁵ One of her contributions stars the 'lovely, flighty, rich girl, Deirdre' and her green Lagonda racing car. Deirdre took umbrage at the women being issued with hockey sticks to defend themselves in the pending invasion. This section of Godding's narrative is essentially told as a story about class and eccentricity, which enable Deirdre and her friends (fishermen and farmers' daughters, a postman's daughter, factory girls, miners' daughters, shop and hotel keepers' girls) to call in a favour from an acquaintance at a small arms depot and acquire a machine gun and rifles as well as a large revolver. Deirdre tells her acquaintance at the depot, 'We want some b****y guns, that's what the trouble is. They've given us hockey sticks: we want guns and ammunition, and we're not moving from here until we get something to defend ourselves with'. He does not dare defy her, but after a mad chase back to their base, the weapons are confiscated:

They didn't find the large revolver that the soldier from the Durham Light

Infantry had hidden in the folds of the green Lagonda's hood, but even that went missing three days later. Some of those rotten pilots pinched it. We were sure of it. But to tell the truth, we couldn't have lifted it even if the dreaded Hun HAD put his head round the door of the Catholic school!⁵⁶

The humorous scepticism of the final comment above (the punchline of the entry) is also a recurring trope. Godding is not the only narrator to question whether women had the right physical attributes to use certain weapons. Barbara Hammond was one of two volunteers guarding an ambulance convoy overnight. They were both given rifles and had received some practice beforehand: 'Alright for my companion who was very tall and athletic and managed her weapon with great dexterity. Not so mine, it hung, or rather trailed in my wake, and to fire it, if necessity arose, would have been impossible!'⁵⁷ The pointed juxtaposition of weapon and female physicality is often at the expense of the narrator. The ATS Jessie Dunlop worked in a Cipher Room where the Permanent Staff Instructor thought that she should be able to guard the cipher:

They brought a Sten gun for me to practise with. The [Staff Instructor] showed me how to hold it on my hip and how to put it from single shot into automatic. I watched carefully and decided to have a go. I settled it in place and pulled the trigger. It was on automatic and I couldn't stop it. I swung round to ask what to do and both sergeants vanished onto the ground behind some trees, one of them yelling, "Throw it down!" They both decided that it would be best if I used the butt end to stop intruders.⁵⁸

Dunlop relates this as a funny self-deprecating story, singled out for inclusion in her contribution. It is a humour made possible by hindsight and the fact that these skills were never needed; otherwise the inadequacy of the training methods might have come in for greater criticism. It is also a humour which avoids challenging the logic of denying women firearms in favour of alternative forms of defence which require greater physical strength – the butt end of a gun, for example, or a hockey stick. Dunlop's story may offer a reiteration of endearingly incompetent femininity, but it also suits the construction of the British as a nation which muddles through, does not idolise weaponry and which has a soft spot for the amateur. This narrative is in stark contrast to that of Scovell, the ATS whose unit was permitted weapons training in 1945 on condition it was kept secret. Scovell describes the furtive march to the range, where only the men actually involved in the training were permitted that day. The women fired at targets:

Most of us managed very well. We were shooting at the shortest range, and I can still remember my score, three bulls, an inner and a magpie. I kept the card for years afterwards! The sergeant, Diane, and one or two others, did as well as, or even better, than I.

We only had one or two opportunities for shooting on the range, but it was a worthwhile experience and one that most of us would have been sorry to miss.

There is no hint of gendered incompetence here, only of regret that there had not been more opportunities. Scovell was proud that: 'We learned exactly the same way as men were taught'.⁵⁹

The BBC site contains only one narrative which explicitly questions whether weapons training was appropriate for women. Iris Trice, a driver in the ATS, disliked it:

There was just one more action to go through, that was rifle training. This I think was the nearest exercise that should have been for men only. Quite embarrassing to have a brute of a male pulling your feet apart whilst lying flat on your stomach with a heavy gun embedded in your shoulder, which gave you quite a jolt when you pulled the trigger.⁶⁰

The objection has three dimensions. The first is the weight and recoil of the weapon as unsuited to female physiology. (Scovell had also noted 'The .303 is a powerful rifle for a woman, and with our first shots we realised the wisdom of the repeated instructions to keep the butt pressed well into our shoulders'. But Scovell added 'Most of us managed very well'.)⁶¹ The second is the firing position as unsuited to female dignity and decorum. The third is complicated by the gendered interaction, the discomfort of the physical experience but also of being a woman at the receiving end of the (standard) practice of kicking the legs further apart to assist novices to attain a wide enough angle. Trice's narrative stands out as one in which the objections of the authorities find an echo in one of the women whom they purported to represent.

Scepticism relating to gender is also suggested in Antoinette Porter's contribution, but her narrative plays out differently: initial reservations, which the audience are invited to share, are discredited by detail.⁶² Porter was 'aghast' to discover her role was to launch balloons with live devices against Germany. She sets up her story in a framing narrative of humorous disbelief: 'Apparently we, teenagers to a girl, were to launch attacks on Germany from a disused golf course two to three miles from the Suffolk Convalescent Home .. and be taught to handle and fire Lewis guns and rifles in defence of the site'. The humour is based on ironic juxtaposition and the tone is at least in part a response to her family's reactions:

What follows has been the butt of family jokes ever since, and if I were you, I think I should have joined in the incredulous mirth too! ... Picture this if you will, the first op of your 18 year old future mother, instructed to inflate a monstrous balloon with a highly inflammable substance from a huge cylinder (many of them loaded on an RAF trailer and observed by a couple of fag smoking erks!).⁶³

Despite the way in which the age and gender of the group are presented as being in stark contrast to the demands of the role, nothing in the subsequent text does anything but suggest the challenge was met. The teenage girls became skilled in handling their cumbersome and uncooperative weapons, meeting injuries, failures and successes along the way. The incredulity is largely retrospective and drains away in the detail: it says more about perceptions rooted in the present than the past.⁶⁴

As these narratives collectively suggest, the combat taboo was clearly eroded but remained largely intact in Britain in wartime, a fact that speaks more loudly to contemporary constructions of gender than to the demands of a war which led to so many temporary challenges to gender conventions. It is clear that with the threat of invasion, it was not beyond the realm of imaginative possibility that women could become embroiled in more direct contact with the enemy than through aerial attacks, although auxiliaries were more likely to be trained to turn weapons on inanimate objects or themselves than on the invading forces. In personal testimonies, a subtle challenge to the combat taboo is found, more disruptive of convention than those examples which could so easily be dismissed as temporary transgressions, less disruptive, however, in their understatement. The impact of wartime practices on official policy should not be overstated. It was not until the 1980s that women in the Forces officially bore arms. In the WRAC, for example, arms training was introduced in July 1988 and recruits were taught how to handle and fire sub-machine guns, although senior Officer Cadets had been trained to use pistols since 1981. The greatest step towards the integration of the WRAC into the Army was when that training was conducted with the men, for which there is no precedent suggested above.⁶⁵ In the narratives of war, the tone reveals distinctions between being trained or armed. The former appears in personal testimony with virtually no colour at all; training is given no symbolic meaning that stands out in the lists of skills acquired despite the fact that it rendered the gender boundary for non-combatant service fuzzy. Being armed, however, has greater symbolic value in reminiscences. A weapon had the potential to underline the importance of the role a veteran had performed, to affirm her status in a hierarchy of service determined by significance to the war effort and in a military context as determined by her role, rather than her gender. The issuing of weapons signifies the dangers that could have been, and the theme functions in narratives to counter the complacency of hindsight, just as relief at weapons' obsolescence hinges on it. They are seldom viewed as objects of desire, becoming resonant symbols of gender inequality only when the alternative was a hockey stick or a pick-axe handle and disparities between the sexes had no logic pertinent to the situation. Practice could also be determined by the latter rather than by gender. Leslie Whateley commented in a post-war interview:

I can't remember at this distance whether the girls on the searchlights ever operated the machine guns. I think they probably did. If you are on a searchlight and the planes are

diving down the beam at you, are you going to wait for them to shoot or are you going to take some action to stop them? I took all these things for granted when I was director [of the ATS], leaving it to the officers on the spot to take decisions in the best interests of the girls.⁶⁶

Officers thus had to negotiate the challenge of reconciling official policy and deliberate lapses of attention with pressures from below, all within the context of cultural constraints and wartime needs. That story may prove too challenging to reconstruct, having left little historical record. The consequence of practice on the ground, however, could be the removal of the key signifier of gender difference, opening up a more fluid space between combatants and non-combatants, males and females in the military. What is clear from women's narratives, however, is that female veterans seldom realise just how remarkable their hitherto untold stories are.

Notes

1. I am grateful to the organisers and delegates at 'Memories of War: New Narratives and Untold Stories', University of Greenwich (2010), and the WHN Conference, 'Military Women', University of Worcester (2013), where these findings were first aired. I would like to dedicate this paper to my fellow panel members at Greenwich, Helen Glew and Emma Vickers.
2. For an introduction to the competing models, see Penny Summerfield, *My Dress for an Army Uniform* (Lancaster University, Inaugural Lecture, 1997). Margaret R. and Patrice L. R. Higonnet outlined 'The double helix' in *Behind the Lines, Gender and the Two World Wars* ed. Margaret Randolph Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel, and Margaret Collins Weitz (Yale, Yale University Press, 1988), 31-47.
3. The notion of fuzziness in this context was inspired by the work of Irene Visser, 'The prototypicality of gender: Contemporary notions of masculine and feminine', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 19/6 (Nov. – Dec. 1996), 589–600.
4. Richard Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front* (London, Harper Perennial, 2005), 191.
5. *War Cabinet, Release From The Armed Forces Of Key Men In Industry*. Note by the Minister for Co-ordination of Defence. 4 Oct. 1939. Digitised by The National Archives (TNA).
6. Cited and discussed in Helen Gwynne Vaughan, *Service with the Army* (London, Hutchinson and Co., n.d.), 91, 135-6 and Roy Terry, *Women in Khaki: The Story of the British Woman Soldier* (London, Columbus Books, 1988), 155.
7. Peter Howlett, *Fighting with Figures: A Statistical Digest of the Second World War* (London, Central Statistical Office, 1995), Table 3.3: Distribution of total manpower, 38.
8. Vera Laughton Mathews, *Blue Tapestry* (London, Hollis and Carter, 1948), 226. I would be grateful for any leads on this inter-departmental decision.
9. *War Cabinet, Release From The Armed Forces Of Key*

- Men*. 4 Oct. 1939. See also Gwynne-Vaughan, *Service with the Army*, 111: 'On broad lines, a man and a woman in the Army were not of equal value to the State. Even granted that she was a better clerk or cook than he (and she often was), she still was less useful because the State would not agree to send her to the same places, however wild she might be to go and in the last resort, the soldier clerk or cook was a potential reinforcement, the woman was not'. Even in 1945, the Prime Minister was underlining that it was of the utmost importance that 'all men who wore The King's Uniform should have arms and should be trained to use them against the enemy in an emergency, even if they were normally employed in a sedentary or non-combatant role'. *War Cabinet 1* (45); *Conclusions of a Meeting of the War Cabinet*, 2 Jan. 1945. Digitised by TNA.
10. Julia M. Cowper, *The Auxiliary Territorial Service* (London, War Office, 1949), 139.
 11. Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907-1948* (London and New York, Routledge, 2006), 114.
 12. See Jeremy A. Crang, 'The revival of the British women's auxiliary services in the late nineteen thirties', *Historical Research*, 83/220 (May 2010), 343-57.
 13. See *War Cabinet, Directing of A.T.S. to Searchlight Duties*. W.P. (42) 348. Digitised by TNA.
 14. See, for example, Science and Society, Image No. 10555091, 'Princess Royal sees ATS repair ammunition 8-April-1943' or Getty Images UK, 'Gun Girls', 3324090; 'Packing Gun', 3312061.
- For memories of these roles, see Barbara Green, *Girls in Khaki. A History of the ATS in the Second World War* (Gloucestershire, The History Press, 2012), 82. Some images showing women bearing arms depict these auxiliary responsibilities or civilian processes.
15. See Claire A. Culleton, 'Gender-Charged Munitions: The Language of World War I Munitions Reports', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 11/ 2 (1988), 109-16 on the reframing of munitions work.
 16. As late as 1945 there was still an emphasis on Britain as a 'civilised country' in which women would not take part in the combatant services, not because they could not bear arms or were insufficiently courageous or patriotic, but because they had an alternative pre-eminent service to the preservation of the race. Mr Pethick-Lawrence, Debate on ATS (Overseas Service), House of Commons, 24 Jan. 1945, cc 841.
 17. See, for example, the arguments in the House of Commons on the National Service Bill, 9 Dec 1941, cc 1412-500.
 18. Penny Summerfield and C. M. Peniston-Bird, *Contesting Home Defence: Men, Women and the Home Guard in the Second World War* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2007); Juliette Pattinson, *Behind Enemy Lines: Gender, Passing and the Special Operations Executive in the Second World War* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2007); Gerard J. DeGroot, 'Whose Finger on the Trigger? Mixed Anti-Aircraft Batteries and the Female Combat Taboo', *War in History*, 4/4 (1997), 434-453; Gerard J. DeGroot, "'I love the scent of cordite in your hair": Gender dynamics in mixed Anti-Aircraft Batteries during the Second World War', *History*, 82/265 (Jan. 1997), 73-92; Jutta Schwarzkopf, 'Combatant or Non-

Combatant? The Ambiguous Status of Women in British Anti-Aircraft Batteries during the Second World War, War & Society, 28/2 (Oct. 2009), 105-31; Tessa Stone, 'Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity: the Women's Auxiliary Air Force in Great Britain in the Second World War', Women's History Review, 8/4 (1999), 605-24.

19. See for example, Summerskill's interventions in the House of Commons on the National Service Bill, 9 Dec 1941 cc 1412-50 or her opening in the debate on Women in National Service, 3 Aug. 1943, cc 2095-2117.

20. *The Times*, 'No Women Home Guards', 12 Nov 1941.

21. A selection includes Anthony Cotterell, *She Walks in Battledress: The Day's Work in the A.T.S.* (London, Christophers, 1942); Irene Holdsworth, *Yes Ma'am: A book about an ATS Training Depot* (London, Hutchinson and Co. Ltd, 1943); Eileen Bigland, *The Story of the W.R.N.S.* (London, Nicholson and Watson, 1946).

22. John D. Drummond, *Blue for a Girl: The Story of the WRNS* (London, W. H. Allen, 1960), 176: [three WRNS in tropical uniform shooting in the prone position] 'Markswomanship is not officially listed but officers are encouraged to know how to shoot on foreign stations'; Eric Taylor, *Women Who Went to War* (London, Robert Hale, 1988), illus. set within 208-9: [three ATS, one with a weapon slung over her shoulder] 'Have gun, will travel. ATS on active service in north-west Europe'; Jane Waller and Michael Vaughan-Rees, *Women in Uniform 1939-1945* (London, Papermac, 1988), 45: 'Wrens practising on the rifle range in December 1940'.

23. Georgina Natzio, 'Infantrywomen An Ethical Dilemma?' in *Defence Management in Uncertain Times* ed. Teri McConville and Richard Holmes (London, Frank Cass, 2003), 188-213.

24. *ibid.*, 195; 209.

25. The site requests the following reference: 'WW2 People's War is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar'.

26. For further details on the market research conducted, see: www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/about/project_03.shtml.

27. www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/categories/ This distribution does not reflect the respective proportions of the Auxiliary Services (for example, in September 1943 at the peak of women's service, out of a total of 470,700, 232,500 were in the ATS, 180,300 in the WAAF and 60,400 in the WRNS; Howlett, *Fighting with Figures*, Table 3.4: Strength of the Armed Forces and Women's Auxiliary Services, 39.

28. See Lucy Noakes 'The BBC 'People's War' Website' in *War, Memory and Popular Culture* ed. M. Keren and H. R. Herwig (McFarland, North Carolina, 2009), 135-49 and her 'War on the Web: the BBC's 'People's War' website and memories of fear in wartime in 21st-century Britain' in *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War* ed. Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (London, Bloombury, 2014), 47-66.

29. Corinna M. Peniston-Bird, 'The People's War in Personal Testimony and Bronze: Sorority in War and Peace' in Noakes and Pattinson, *British Cultural Memory*, 67-87.

30. Imperial War Museum (IWM), Photograph Archive, Q18701-05; Q18898. Vera Laughton Mathews was the Unit Officer of the WRNS Training Depot at the Crystal Palace in the First World War, where many of these photographs were taken.

31. My gratitude to Brian Woodall at the National Small-bore Rifle Association for discussing these figures (email correspondence, 14 October 2004). For the wartime rifle clubs, see Getty Images www.gettyimages.co.uk/ e.g. GTY.IM/ 3421163, 12 Nov 1941.

32. Josiah Wedgwood, Debate on the Local Defence Volunteers, House of Commons, 22 May 1940, c 262.

33. The Earl of Mansfield, Military Training of Civilians, House of Lords, 29 Sep. 1942, c 391.

34. D. Pearson, *In War and Peace: The Life and Times of Daphne Pearson GC* (London, Thorogood, 2001) 96-7.

35. Pearson, *In War and Peace*, 102.

36. *ibid.*, 109.

37. See, for example, Beryl E. Escott, *Our Wartime Days: The WAAF* (Gloucestershire, The History Press, 1995, this ed. 2009), 79, 'WAAF on weapon training for expected invasion, St Eval, 1940's', another example of image without analysis.

38. E. O. Scovell, IWM DD, 6785.

39. Olivia C. Aykin (Scovell above, named Elaine Olivia Tinn on the frontis page), *Live a little, Die a Little* (Zabbar, Guthenberg Press, 1988), 234.

40. Norma Lodge, BBC WW2PW, Article ID: A1301680.

41. TNA 8694 WO/32/13/73; *Defensive Role of the WRAC in War*. 8 Nov. 1948. I am much indebted to Julie Fountain for alerting me to this file.

42. *ibid.*

43. The Lee-Enfield rifle was the Army's standard rifle from its official adoption in 1895 until 1957, repeatedly adapted. See Kennedy Hickman, 'World War I/II: Lee-Enfield Rifle', [militaryhistory.about.com/od/smallarms/p/leeenfield.htm, accessed 12 Jul 2014].

44. Joan Baker, BBC WW2PW, A3271402. I have yet to find this question in Hansard, but here it is her perception that is significant.

45. Olive [sic], BBC WW2PW, A4124224.

46. Betty Rankin, BBC WW2PW, A2514737.

47. Kathleen Mount, BBC WW2PW, A3894302.

48. Phyllis Coulls, BBC WW2PW, A6792717.

49. Stone, 'Creating a (Gendered?) Military Identity', 620.

50. Waller and Vaughan-Rees, *Women in Uniform*, 41.

51. David Lampe, *The Last Ditch* (London, Cassell, 1968), 133.

52. Marina Bloxam, IWM Sound Archive (SA), 14816/2.

53. Burton cited in Waller and Vaughan-Rees, *Women in Uniform*, 51.

54. Theresa Roberts, IWM SA 11786.

55. Ruth Godding, BBC WW2PW, A7814937.

56. They had been rehoused in the school after their sleeping quarters had sustained a direct hit. Ruth Godding, BBC WW2PW, A7816502.

57. Barbara Hammond née Biggs, BBC WW2PW, A6130388.

58. Jessie Dunlop, BBC WW2PW, A3023164.

59. Aykin, *Live a Little*, 234-5. The concentric circles from the centre of a target are *bull*, *inner*, *magpie*, *outer*.

60. Iris Trice, BBC WW2PW, A2043820.
61. Aykin, *Live a Little*, 235.
62. For (affectionate) ridicule and silences in women's wartime memories, see Penny Summerfield and C. M. Peniston-Bird, 'Women in the firing line: the Home Guard and the defence of gender boundaries in the Second World War', *Women's History Review*, 9/2 (2000), 231-55.
63. 'Erks' were aircraftmen, the lowest rank of the RAF. Antoinette Porter née Hampton, BBC WW2PW, A3112219.
64. On the importance of time if audience expectations are to be countered see C. M. Peniston-Bird, "All in it together and backs to the wall": relating patriotism and the People's War in the 21st century', *Oral History*, Autumn (2012), 69-80.
65. Résumé from Major J. L. Whitchurch, Small Arms School Corps, Headquarters Army Training Centre Pirbright, in correspondence with author, 13 Oct 2010. His unnamed assistant, a former member of the WRAC, kindly prepared an information sheet on the WRAC in response to my query on the nature and timing of women's training.
66. Whateley cited in Terry, *Women in Khaki*, 155. See her memoirs, Leslie Whateley, *As Thoughts Survive* (Melbourne, Hutchinson, 1948) and the parallel pragmatism of Sir Frederick Pile, *Ack-Ack: Britain's Defence against Air Attack during the Second World War* (London, George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1949).

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Handbags to hand grenades: preparing women for work behind the lines in Occupied France¹

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Throughout the Second World War, women undertook a wide variety of work in an attempt to keep the country going and to 'do their bit'. For some women the work they undertook was a natural progression from their own peacetime roles with jobs linked to caring or service, such as nursing or the Women's Voluntary Service (WVS) – work that seemed compatible with notions of femininity and womanhood. As in the Great War, women who joined the auxiliary forces were given non-combatant roles, performing administrative or supporting roles such as driving, staffing mobile kitchens or logistics. They did not undertake any fighting or generally receive any weapons training; this was a man's work and society remained very certain that women were nurturers not killers. This was also reflected in their uniforms which, whilst functional and clearly identifiable, emphasised the wearer's femininity.

Of all the auxiliary service roles, factory work, farm work and functional work that women could undertake, there were two clear areas which were unusual. First, roles where women did step into a man's world and actually opposed the standard ideals regarding how women should behave and second, those in which they took on exactly the same work as the men. Two organisations employed relatively small numbers of women on these bases during wartime. One received huge publicity, whilst the other was clandestine and its existence only became known in 1945.

The Air Transport Auxiliary [ATA] employed 168 female pilots throughout the course of the war to fly aircraft between airfields. They flew 147 different types of aircraft, often types of aeroplane they had never seen before, without radios, with no instrument flying instruction and at the mercy of the British weather. Such was the nature of this work that the 'ATA girls' were often in the public eye (much to the dismay of the men) and reports about their work found their way into newspapers, often causing controversy and discussion. The work of the Special Operations Executive [SOE] staff however, remained anonymous throughout the war, the men and women agents signing the Official Secrets act. The agents regardless of gender all required the same skills: intelligence, initiative, swift decision-making and resourcefulness. Erroneously these criteria were not always attributed to women. However if SOE F (French) section was to operate in Occupied France with any degree of success women were needed and would have to perform the same tasks as their male counterparts.

SOE had been set up in 1940 to assist and co-ordinate local clandestine activity against the occupying forces worldwide. F section employed thirty-nine women to be trained and sent into occupied France as couriers and wireless operators. The ground breaking decision to use women as agents for the SOE was made in 1942. Their

role would be to provide assistance to local Resistance networks in Nazi-occupied territory. In a society where sexual equality was virtually unheard of, and where a woman's perceived duty was to raise the family or work in non-combatant areas of war work such as munitions or driving, official government permission was given to recruit and employ women to be trained to bear arms and to be infiltrated to work behind the lines as secret agents. According to a post-war report on the use of women in F section: 'There was at first considerable hostility on the part of the authorities to employing women in the field, it was evident once this was overcome that they were destined to play an extremely important role in our work'.²

Dame Irene Ward MP was present when the decision was made and later said that: 'the War Cabinet was [not] fully aware of what their decision involved. If they had been, permission would almost certainly have been refused ...'³ It was thought that giving women knowledge of how to use weapons meant that they were not protected by the Geneva Convention, nor could they expect to be treated as Prisoners of War if caught as they would not be in uniform.⁴ In an attempt to forestall this, most women agents were given officer status and commissioned into the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY). However, since SOE operatives would be in civilian clothing on operational deployment, it was unlikely that they would receive favourable treatment if caught by the Gestapo and in all likelihood captured agents would fall under Hitler's 1941 directive of *Nacht und Nebel* in which prisoners disappeared without a trace.⁵ It was further argued that no other women affiliated to an armed service used or trained with weapons. However, Selwyn Jepson, SOE's recruiting officer, argued that the Auxiliary Territorial Service women pulled the lanyard on the trigger of anti-aircraft guns and were therefore responsible for discharging the weapon. By the same rationale SOE women should be trained in and permitted to use firearms if necessary.

Although the decision to use women proved to be controversial in the aftermath of war, during the war years it demonstrated that SOE was a relatively progressive organisation. M. R. D. Foot argued that there were: 'plenty of women with marked talents for organisation and operational command, for whom a distinguished future could be predicted if only the staff could be broad-minded enough to let them join it .. SOE was such a broad-minded staff'.⁶ Its 'broad-mindedness' was demonstrated by the fact that SOE chose to utilise 'woman-power as well as man-power. In accordance with the body's usual principle go straight for the objective, across any social or military conventions that may get in the way'.⁷

According to Vera Atkins, Colonel Maurice

Buckmaster's (head of F section) assistant and intelligence officer who oversaw many female agents training and deployment, one of the reasons that women were to be recruited was that: 'they could move about more freely in Occupied territory .. eventually, of course, several women couriers were called upon to fill a man's place after a sudden arrest and women wireless operators did the same work as the men'. This demonstrates quite clearly that SOE had a policy of equality and that women were doing exactly the same job as the men, sometimes even stepping in for them.⁸

On the whole men viewed the use of women in the field favourably. Nonetheless some of their comments were overtly sexualised, describing an agent's looks or mannerisms. For example, Francis Cammaerts described Yvonne Cormeau as 'the only member of the party who seemed to have sex-appeal for the male members' and as 'the sexiest woman it has ever been my privilege and pleasure to know'.⁹ Leo Marks referred to Violette Szabo as 'a dark haired slip of mischief'.¹⁰ They were also quick to praise the women agents, when deserved. John Hind Farmer said of Nancy Wake that: 'During the attack ... Hélène [Nancy] behaved in a most outstanding manner. [She] showed an exceptional courage and coolness in face of enemy fire',¹¹ and Circuit Leader Francis Suttill said of Andrée Borell that: 'Everyone who has come into contact with her in her work agrees with myself that she is the best of us all' and she often acted as Lieutenant (second in command). For him, she was 'wholly lacking in nerves; ... *un garçon manqué*'. He told London that she 'has a perfect understanding of security and an imperturbable calmness'. He concluded: 'Thank you very much for having sent her to me'.¹² The presence of a woman might also have helped dissipate some of the masculine attitudes that may have arisen in an all-male environment, especially when adrenalin was high and the emphasis was on espionage and resistance. A woman's presence may have been viewed as calming, as highlighted above, and she might have provided an alternative perspective on issues or offered support in a way a male colleague could not.

Whilst a female agent's English counterparts may have accepted the presence of a woman and treated her equally in France her presence and, in some cases, authority may have caused problems as:

France in the early 1940s was a nation led by men, more so than Britain. French women did not have the right to vote; they were certainly not expected to take charge of anything but the kitchen and the nursery. The Resistance groups F section hoped to arm and co-ordinate were likely to be predominantly male, not to mention self-consciously masculine. They might agree to take orders from a British or Anglo-French envoy, especially if he provided them with weapons – but from a woman?¹³

Despite this, examples of female authority working successfully can be cited. For example the case of Pearl Witherington who led a *Maquis* of 3,000 when her leader Maurice Southgate was arrested.

Under normal circumstances women who were selected to work for SOE were likely to be given the role of either wireless operator or courier. Some were employed in the early days of SOE to set up safe houses and work as initial points of contact for other agents but this was rare. SOE did not have a prescribed method for recruiting its female agents, nor did they set out to look for women of a certain class, age or nationality. Selwyn Jepson said that: 'all he wanted to be told was the names and whereabouts of individual men or women under the age of 45 inside or outside the services with perfect French for specialised work in connection with the war effort'.¹⁴ The potential agent's experience, motive and personality would become the most important elements of their recruitment. The pre-requisites for an SOE F section agent were standard and of vital importance: 'the first qualification was that they had to be able to pass as a native of the place they were in, so they had to be French or speak native French and they had, obviously, to look French and as if they would be able to have all the other necessary qualities for it'.¹⁵

Therefore the F section candidate must: speak French fluently preferably without an accent, although even that could be explained away by their cover story; they should have knowledge of France and the French way of life; have the ability to blend in (although appearance was a factor, decidedly British or Jewish features could be difficult to explain away); the candidate should be sympathetic to the Resistance and *Maquis*; they should have: 'physical courage and sufficient intelligence combined with just enough leadership to enable them to carry out one simple and specific job'.¹⁶ Jepson was aware that the agents had many different motives:

..there were those seeking escape or relief from domestic pressure. An unhappy marriage, loss of a loved one that might be assuaged by devotion to a cause; perhaps the loss had been through the war simply to carry on where the dead had to stop. Above and beyond these personal motives one has to remember the basic fact that of all stimuli, war is the strongest, enough to deny self in a common need to defeat the enemy.¹⁷

For some agents, such as Nancy Wake, Andrée Borrel and Madeleine Damerment, joining SOE F section meant that they could return to the Resistance work they had been involved in prior to their flight to England. All three women had worked on various escape lines, all of which had been betrayed to the Nazis. These women were accustomed to the work and the dangers that working undercover in Occupied France entailed and must have been delighted to find the ways and means of returning to the field. For some agents, the motive will never be discovered. For example, Yolande Beekman's own family had no idea why she would want to join SOE. She had led a quiet life and was not especially patriotic; there is even some evidence to suggest she was pregnant when she was infiltrated and yet she joined SOE, working as a wireless operator for several months before being arrested.¹⁸

According to Juliette Pattinson 'maternal responsibility' was also a factor which motivated some

women to join F section.¹⁹ In an interview held at the Imperial War Museum (IWM), Odette Sansom stated:

I used to say, well, I've got children and they come first. It's easy enough to go on thinking that way. But I was tormented ... Am I going to be satisfied to accept this like that, that other people are going to suffer, get killed, die because of this war and trying to get freedom for my own children. Let's face it. So am I supposed to accept all this sacrifice that other people are making without lifting a finger in any way?²⁰

Evidently Odette was torn between motherhood and 'doing her bit' and she was not the only mother in SOE who may have had similar misgivings. Yvonne Cormeau and Violette Szabo both had children, and Yvonne Rudellat was a grandmother – all of these women may have gone through similar debates and thought processes to Odette. As far as SOE was concerned being a mother did not exclude them from the recruitment process, indeed, it could actually provide motivation and devotion to the cause. Motherhood did however raise issues further down the line in training – 'motherhood and combat are often viewed as mutually exclusive, since one is seen as conferring life and the other as taking it'.²¹ These women were to be taught the most intimate of killing methods as well as how to blow targets up, which, some might argue is at odds with the very nature of motherhood and indeed womanhood.

Juliette Pattinson argues that maternal instinct may 'transform them [women] into formidable killers and that women may choose to fight or undertake work behind the lines as an act of motherly love and to protect their young',²² although conversely they run the risk of orphaning their children. W. N. Maxwell suggested that women may fight 'under the sway of the maternal instinct, with its protective impulse and its tender emotion, which had been roused by the sight of the wounded or the stories of outrage'.²³

SOE was able to recognise these diverse motivations and utilise them once the agent was in the field. To equip agents to do this work to the best of their ability, they were sent for training, sometimes this lasted six months, at other times merely three weeks. The training included a Preliminary School (up to four weeks), Paramilitary School (three to five weeks), and Finishing School (varied duration), in addition to a flat in London where agents would be briefed prior to going into the field.²⁴ The first part of training was aimed at identifying unsuitable recruits and rejecting them as soon as possible. To house these courses SOE requisitioned several stately homes, including Beaulieu Palace House, Hampshire, earning the training schools the nickname 'Stately Homes of England'.²⁵ There does not appear to have been a rigid structure to SOE training, it seems to be largely dependent on the agents' ability and the timescale in which they were to be infiltrated. Some agents trained for months, while others, such as Odette Wilen only completed half of their training as they were desperately needed in the field.

It was anticipated that the training be exactly

the same for the women as for the men and they were expected to partake in all elements of the course. In some aspects of the training, women would be at a physical, and possibly emotional, disadvantage to the male recruits. Courses such as 'Silent Killing' and 'Close Combat' would be strenuous, as the smaller female frame may find it difficult to outweigh the heavier male build.²⁶ Although this appears to have been dealt with in the SOE syllabus which stated that: 'Students should not always be paired off in equal sizes. Sometimes, small men should be paired with big men' and so, one may surmise, women against men.²⁷

Use of a knife was also taught, recruits being expected to practise on straw dummies, but also on one another as the actuality of attack even if only feigned could be shocking and unnerving. This is highlighted by the experience of Virginia Hall, who practised with a dummy knife smeared with red lipstick to identify how accurate she had been against her target. Virginia 'became very adept at using a knife against a dummy. The day they graduated to working on one another, the drill was to sneak up behind one of the other recruits and slit the throat. Virginia accomplished the task with no problem. But when the man turned round and Virginia saw the lipstick smear on his throat, reality sank in ...'²⁸ Thus, the reality of being a trained killer did not sit comfortably with some of the female agents. Pearl Cornioley (née Witherington) speaking in 2003 said: 'I personally think and believe that a woman is made to have children not to kill; she is made to give life, not take it away'.²⁹ This repeated her earlier 1983 response: 'I did not have anything to do with it because I just did not want to go out and fight ... I do not think it's a woman's job that, we're made to give life, not take it away'.³⁰ She felt very strongly about a woman's place in combat and whether or not they should kill. Nonetheless, as mentioned above, she would become a very successful Resistance leader. However, this position may not have been the case with all the female recruits and indeed some women felt the need to fight or kill to protect their children. Odette Sansom said: 'are you going to let other people save the future of your children without you even lifting a finger to try to help?'³¹ Violette Szabo reputedly said: 'I only want to have some Germans to fight and I should die happy if I could take some of them with me'.³²

It may be true to say that maternal instinct and a natural tendency to nurture hindered the progress of some women on this particular section of the course. But, other women excelled at this type of training. One such recruit was Yvonne Rudellat, who trained in the use of the Fairburn and Sykes knife: 'to the considerable surprise of some of the instructors, it was found that female agents – Yvonne Rudellat included – were far more skilful at using a knife than most of the men'.³³ Rather amusingly Virginia Hall was told by her instructor that 'a knife should be used daintily'.³⁴ This use of feminine language in such a situation seems contrary. It is unlikely that a male recruit would have been told to use a defensive weapon 'daintily' and it is apparent that this use of language was an attempt at making the training less grotesque for women.

Training unarmed or with a knife would have been



'Allied women pilots of the Air Transport Auxiliary service leaving an airfield near Maidenhead, 19 March 1943'.

www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205193567 © IWM (CH 8945)

matter of how hard you hit them; it's where you hit them!' ³⁸ She thought that even sixty years on and in her eighties she would still be able to kill someone using techniques she was taught at Arisaig House.

One agent expressed a fear that this type of training would leak into his everyday life and that one day he would 'get entangled in a row' and would run the risk of 'seriously injuring or even killing another man before realising what is happening'. ³⁹ As stated previously, in the syllabus training was intended to make an agent 'dangerous' and 'attack-minded'. ⁴⁰ This was both hazardous and advantageous, it could make one instinctively respond in an unsuitable way to a situation, but it could also save one's life. This embedding of self-defence into an agent's psyche highlights that recruits to SOE would have to learn to think and behave very differently from their upbringing and

previous lives. They were learning techniques that would turn them from mothers, housewives and 'respectable' women into someone who could kill in cold blood and defend themselves to the death against an attack. Once these women had trained in these tactics it could stay with them for life and, even though it may never have been used in the field, these women remained 'trained killers' forever.

completely alien to women (and some men) and it would seem that the SOE expected women to fail at an exercise such as this. Yet this was obviously not the case. Indeed Nancy Wake admitted that silent killing taught you to kill someone in 'a cold blooded fashion using only your bare hands' but that she 'concentrated as hard as anyone on those lessons, against the day I might have to use it'. ³⁵ To ensure that these techniques became second nature and that the agent could draw on them when needed the syllabus was clear in its objectives:

One of the primary objects of the instructor is to make his students attackminded, and dangerously so. No effort should be spared to realise this object, which should be regarded as one of the instructor's chief responsibilities. No instructor should be satisfied unless his students become thoroughly proficient in the performance of the few simple things enumerated in the syllabus. Dull as it may become, constant repetition is the only road to proficiency and constant repetition there must be, no matter how much students may complain of boredom. Their business is to learn, at any cost. By proficiency is meant the ability to execute all the requirements of the syllabus swiftly, effectively and neatly, without having to stop to think. ³⁶

Importantly, how hard one hit an opponent was of little consequence, it was where you hit them that was significant. For example, Nancy Wake weighed eleven stone and was five foot seven inches tall, and physically she was not very strong, however, 'her instructors assured her that if she hit exactly the right spot she could still be effective enough to kill someone'. ³⁷ This is reiterated by Pearl Cornioley who recollected: 'it's not a

In addition to unarmed combat and knife training, firearms training was also given on this course. As with 'Silent Killing', the aim was that use of the firearms should become instinctive. Women were expected to train with the same weapons as the men, and many excelled in their use. Some women recruits were already accustomed to using firearms, such as Violette Szabo. Szabo was 'reputed to be the best shot in SOE', ⁴¹ and whilst on her training course in September 1943, her training officer Mrs Turbett commented that: 'she had the eye of a hawk and was very quickly extremely efficient with both automatic and Sten gun'. ⁴² This was because Violette had spent much of her childhood at fairs, successfully shooting at targets and winning prizes. Nancy Wake achieved a reputation for being a 'crack shot' because her shots never went too high (a problem often faced by users of the Sten gun). Virginia Hall also excelled at firearms training as she was an accomplished and experienced hunter, well used to handling firearms. She was provided with a Browning repeater and told that it was 'the lightest gun available' at the time (early 1941) and that 'by the end of three weeks, you'll be very comfortable with it'. ⁴³ Some concessions were made to women who were naturally weaker and some agents were given lighter alternatives to the standard weapons issued. For example, Yvonne Rudellat was issued with a .32 short barrelled Colt as she found the .38 and .45 too heavy and cumbersome. Weighing just one and quarter pounds, the Colt .32 was the lightest hand gun available and even then 'she found

it remarkably heavy'.⁴⁴ Some agents did not do well at weapons training for various reasons. Noor Inayat Khan was said to be 'Pretty scared of weapons'. This is not surprising given her delicate upbringing in a Sufi house surrounded by mystics and music, a world of guns and explosives must have come as a shock. However Noor tried to overcome it and her assessor's report continued, she 'has shown a great improvement in the last few days and with a little more training will be quite good'.⁴⁵

Another element of training at Beaulieu, which helped prepare the agent for life in France and its possible consequences, was the infamous mock interrogation. Although the SOE syllabus said that: 'If you are arrested by the Gestapo, do not assume that all is lost; the Gestapo's reputation has been built up on ruthlessness and terrorism, not intelligence. They will always pretend to know more than they do and may even make a good guess, but remember that it is a guess; otherwise they would not be interrogating you', agents were still dragged from their beds at any time of the night and were forced to withstand a Gestapo style interrogation.⁴⁶ The training staff would be in uniform and the trainees would be questioned to ensure that they knew their cover story and how to react to interrogation. Verbal and physical abuse was used to ascertain an agent's ability to stand up to the rigours of Gestapo torture and their familiarity with their cover story.

For some it was clearly a frightening experience and Mrs Sanderson, Noor's escorting officer said:

I found Noor's interrogations almost unbearable, she seemed absolutely terrified. One saw that the lights hurt her and the officer's voice when he shouted loudly. Once he said 'stand on that chair!' It was just something to confuse her. She was so overwhelmed she nearly lost her voice. As it went on she was practically inaudible. Sometimes there was only a whisper. When she came out afterwards, she was trembling and quite blanched.⁴⁷

The mock interrogation was fundamental for both men and women trainees. There is no evidence to suggest that men or women were treated differently. It would seem unlikely at this stage of training that any allowances would be made for women, especially in this specific aspect. The Gestapo would not make any allowances because their suspect was female, so it would be unrealistic to expect this type of allowance from the training officers. Also, Beaulieu represented the final stage of training: if trainees were not making the grade at this stage, they never would and they would not be accepted for work in the field.

Once the agents had finished their training it was the instructor's reports and a decision from Baker Street, SOE's London headquarters, which decided whether they would continue on to work in the field. The reports can seem a little confusing at times. Some agents, for example Noor and Violette, have quite damning criticisms made of them yet these were overruled and both agents continued on to work and die in the field. Violette was said to be was a very popular recruit, however, her

character was complex and caused many problems for those deciding whether or not she should go forward for work in the field. Her motive was a cause for concern and although she had a 'pleasant personality',⁴⁸ and was 'sociable, likeable, painstaking, anxious to please, keen, mature for her age in certain ways',⁴⁹ she was 'in others very childish'.⁵⁰ The instructors were concerned that the only reason she wished to continue training was: 'simply because she enjoys the course, the spirit of competition, the novelty of the thing and being very fit – the physical side of the training'.⁵¹ It appealed to the tom-boy in her nature and the reality was not consolidated yet. After all, she was only twenty-two and similar to Noor in that she was idealistic. The real danger of going into Occupied France was not realised and the course was a vehicle for fun and adventure.

However, Violette must have taken some aspect of it all seriously. She was concerned for the welfare of her child and she also returned to complete her training after recovering from an ankle injury sustained during parachute training. This shows determination and the fact that she really was going to 'go through with it' and was willing to go into France as an agent. There was still a drawback to overcome at this stage; her training officers were not yet convinced of her suitability. Although she was physically capable of doing the work, her attitude caused concern:

I have come to the conclusion that this student is temperamentally unsuitable for this work. I consider that owing to her too fatalistic outlook in life and particularly in her work [and] the fact that she lacks ruse, stability and the finesse which is required and that she is too easily influenced, when operating in the field she might endanger the lives of others working with her. It is very regrettable to have come to such a decision ... with a student of this type who during the whole course has set an example to the whole party by her cheerfulness and eagerness to please.⁵²

Nonetheless this document was dismissed by head of F section Colonel Buckmaster and, as with Noor, Violette was given permission to be infiltrated into Nazi-Occupied France.

Another agent whose report was less than complimentary was Yvonne Cormeau's. She was reported as having 'very little personality or aggressiveness'. She was also described as 'intelligent and quick-witted without being intellectual', a conscientious worker with a lot of common sense who, however 'seems to live on her nerves and might become rattled in a difficult situation'.⁵³ In spite of this, SOE decided to deploy Yvonne and she was dropped behind enemy lines by parachute on 22 August 1943. Other agents' reports were much more straightforward, and they were sent into the field without too much cause for concern. Among these was Madeleine Damerment, described as 'quiet and unobtrusive, her courage was proven, and she had seemed a good choice'.⁵⁴ She was dropped by parachute on 29 February 1944 – straight into the hands of the Gestapo.

The man who had final say over an agent's destiny was the head of F Section, Colonel Buckmaster, and he vehemently justified his decisions in his interview at the IWM saying: 'this was not a joke, this was not bravado' and that an agent was 'not to go unless they were completely satisfied that they were alright'. Buckmaster believed that SOE did not make 'any serious mistakes [with recruiting] we did nothing that led to tragedy, I think that in one or two people we were somewhat disappointed and had to, not cancel their job but put them onto something else. We had to be very tough about it because other people's lives were at stake'.⁵⁵ However, as described above, some women who might have been considered as unsuitable by their instructors made it into the field. Unfavourable reports were made at the training schools and yet they were still sent into Occupied France. It would seem that the need for wireless operators and couriers was very high at certain points of the war and it is probable that these agents would not have been sent to France if they had undertaken training at a different time. When the need was highest, standards were lowered and/or an agents' training was cut short. This may have resulted in a more careless or dangerous agent.

In conclusion, SOE trained its agents to give them the best possible chance of survival in a difficult and dangerous situation. The training was not simply a formality for most agents; rather, for those who already had experience of working undercover in Occupied France, it was a way for SOE to be sure that it had done the best it could to prepare the operatives for their work. They were taught the latest weapons, explosive and wireless techniques, and were equipped with the most recent equipment and information to give them a reasonable chance of survival. It seems that the women of SOE F Section received the same training as men, and while some leeway was allowed in terms of the weight of weapons carried or distances run, the bulk of the training was the same. After all the job of a wireless operator or courier was the same once in the field. Women could not be given a softer option simply because of her sex. If a job needed doing she would have to do it regardless of her natural physical or mental ability. This is why only women of these abilities were selected in the first place. There were exceptions to this rule and Buckmaster occasionally sent agents that his instructors believed unsuitable. For two of the most famous ones – Noor Inayat Khan and Violette Szabo – his decision was fatal.

It would seem that women were judged fairly by their male instructors. However, some of the comments in the reports could be regarded as sexist and one would certainly not expect to find similar references to 'sexiness' used in a report about a male trainee. But when it really counted the instructors said plainly what they thought and if they believed an agent was unsuitable, as the examples above demonstrate, they wasted no time in saying so. The training of female agents for SOE F Section seems to have been a success. Although for some agents training was much shorter than for others, all of them attended the basic training courses and inevitably learnt skills that they had not previously possessed and that would equip them for work in the field. Their ability to shoot, operate wireless sets and use close combat and

silent killing techniques may have come as a surprise to some instructors and even to the women themselves. Whether the training was comprehensive enough cannot be assessed as there is no way of measuring it. Suffice to say the women were taught the same skills as the men and were able to demonstrate their ability in these areas. It seems clear that some of the women should have gone no further than training in the safety of England, but the majority proved that there was a place for women in SOE F section.

Notes

1. I would like to acknowledge the helpful feedback and comments received from the peer-reviewer in the preparation of this article.
2. The National Archives (hereafter TNA), HS7/121, *Use of Women in F section, 1943-1969*.
3. Irene Ward, *FANY Invicta* (London, Hutchinson, 1955), n.p. Irene Ward was elected into parliament in 1931. During her time there she became very involved with women's rights; she campaigned for women's suffrage in India and was concerned with the evacuation of children during the Spanish Civil War. During the Second World War she was concerned with women's employment and equal pay; she chaired the women's power committee, which advised the Ministry of Labour, and visited factories and ATS [Auxiliary Territorial Service] bases. From August 1943 to February 1944 she travelled through China, India, and the Middle East on behalf of the MOI [Ministry of Information], explaining the British war effort, later she visited newly liberated France'. After the war she 'published an account of the Women's Transport Service, *FANY Invicta* and lobbied for an official history of the SOE, an organisation in which she had many friends. She became Britain's longest serving woman MP until she stood down in February 1974'. Helen Langley, 'Irene Ward', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004), [www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45466, accessed 9 Jan. 2011].
4. The Geneva Red Cross Convention was signed in 1864 and was revised in 1906 and 1929. Public Record Office FO 372/33. The only mention of women in the 1929 Geneva Convention stated: 'Prisoners of war have the right to have their person and their honour [sic] respected. Women shall be treated with all the regard due to their sex'. Convention between the United States of America and Other Powers, Relating to Prisoners of War, 27 July 1929. Cited in Juliette Pattinson, 'The Gendering of Military Identity: Women in the Resistance and SOE' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Lancaster, 2004).
5. 7 Dec. 1941. Translation: 'Night and Fog'. On 12 December, Wilhelm Keitel issued a directive which explained Hitler's orders: 'Efficient and enduring intimidation can only be achieved either by capital punishment or by measures by which the relatives of the criminals do not know the fate of the criminal'. He further expanded on this principle in a February 1942 letter stating that any prisoners not executed within eight days were 'to be transported to Germany secretly, and further treatment of the offenders will take place here; these measures will have a deterrent effect because – A. The

prisoners will vanish without a trace. B. No information may be given as to their whereabouts or their fate'. [www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007465, accessed 15 Aug. 2014].

6. M. R. D. Foot, *SOE in France* (London, HMSO, 1966), 47.
7. Foot, *SOE in France*, 47.
8. Hugh Popham, *FANY 1907-1984* (London, Leo Cooper, 1984), 68.
9. Francis Cammaerts, CX 11238, Reels 2 & 3.
10. Leo Marks, *Between Silk and Cyanide: A Codemaker's War 1941-45* (Stroud, The History Press, 2007), 493.
11. TNA, HS6/570 John Hind Farmer's Interrogation, 2.
12. TNA, HS9/183 Andree Borell, Military Cross citation.
13. Lianne Jones, *A Quiet Courage* (London, Corgi, 1990), 35.
14. Madeleine Masson, *Christine* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1975), 147.
15. Interview with Gervase Cowell conducted by Juliette Pattinson, 3 June 1999.
16. TNA, HS7/121 *Use of Women in F section*.
17. Masson, *Christine*, 147.
18. In mid-1944 Yolande's mother, Mrs Unternahrer contacted SOE requesting an interview at which she stated that: 'when her daughter parachuted into France last September her mother knew she was pregnant, and consequently expected by now to have some news of a new arrival'. TNA, HS9/114/2 Interview with Mrs Unternahrer, Mother of Yolande Beekman, 19 July 1944.
19. Pattinson, 'The Gendering of Military Identity', 110.
20. Imperial War Museum (IWM) audio archive, 9478, Reel 1, Odette Sanson.
21. Pattinson, 'The Gendering of Military Identity', 111.
22. *ibid.*, 112.
23. W. N. Maxwell, *A Psychological Retrospect Of The Great War, 1923*. [https://archive.org/stream/psychologicalret032834mbp/psychologicalret032834mbp_djvu.txt, accessed 15 Aug. 2014]
24. Dennis Rigden, *SOE Syllabus* (Richmond, The National Archives, 2001), 2. First published 1943.
25. Rigden, *SOE Syllabus*, 2. SOE's Special Training Schools (STSs) for F section were: Preliminary School, STS 5, Wanborough Manor, Puttenham, Surrey; Paramilitary School, STS 21, Arisaig House, Arisaig, Inverness-shire and Finishing School, STS 31, Beaulieu, Hampshire.
26. Silent killing was an unarmed or knife technique invented by Eric Fairburn and William Sykes, two former Shanghai policemen. It was a combination of Ju-jitsu, Judo, Karate, Kung Fu and Tae kwon do. It had been developed to deal with the criminal underworld of Shanghai where drugs, murder and gang warfare were prevalent in the 1930s. Silent killing was added to the SOE syllabus in June 1942, when Fairburn and Sykes were employed by SOE to instruct their own course. The reason for its introduction was that an agent may have encountered a situation where they were unarmed and were required to defend themselves in addition to confidence building. They may need to kill a sentry quietly so as not to attract attention when attempting sabotage or executing an escape plan. Indeed it may simply be used as self defence against the enemy or as

a way of quietening someone who has become out of control.

27. Rigden, *SOE Syllabus*, 361.
28. Judith Pearson, *The Wolves at The Door* (Guildford, The Lyons Press, 2005), 70.
29. Interview by author with Pearl Cornioley (née Witherington), May 2003, Hotel St Aignan, France.
30. IWM Sound archive, 8689 C 1&2, London, Pearl Witherington (1983).
31. IWM audio archive, 9478, Reel 1, Odette Sanson.
32. *ibid.*
33. *ibid.*
34. Pearson, *The Wolves at The Door*, 70.
35. Peter Fitzsimmons, *Nancy Wake* (London, Harper Collins, 2001), 178.
36. Rigden, *SOE Syllabus*, 362.
37. Fitzsimmons, *Nancy Wake*, 177.
38. Interview by author with Pearl Cornioley, May 2003, Hotel St Aignan, France.
39. Stella King, *Jacqueline* (London, Arms and Armour, 1989), 95.
40. Rigden, *SOE Syllabus*, 362.
41. M. R. D. Foot, *SOE 1940-46*, (London, Eyre Methuen, 1984), 61.
42. Turbett cited in R. J. Minney, *Carve Her Name With Pride* (London, Newnes, 1956), 87.
43. Pearson, *The Wolves at The Door*, 69.
44. King, *Jacqueline*, 90.
45. TNA, HS9/836/5 Noor Inayat Khan PF.
46. Rigden, *SOE Syllabus*, 85.
47. TNA, HS9/836/5 Noor Inayat Khan, PF.
48. TNA, HS9/1435 Violette Szabo PF.
49. *ibid.*
50. *ibid.*
51. Marcus Binney, *Women Who Lived For Danger* (St Ives, Hodder and Stoughton, 2002).
52. Liane Jones, *A Quiet Courage* (Reading, Corgi, 1991), 179.
53. *ibid.*
54. *ibid.*, 216.
55. IWM Sound Archive, BXC 8680 1&2, London, Maurice Buckmaster.

Operating secret machines: military women and the intelligence production line, 1939-1945

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It was a very ordinary job. Women did repetitive jobs during the war ... [vehicle] manufacturing, munitions factories in shifts, they worked on the line. We worked in shifts, we worked this machine. It was dull, it was repetitive.

As a description of wartime women's labour during the Second World War, Ruth Bourne's reminiscences of her wartime work could have described any one of a wide variety of occupations. Indeed, her words deliberately stress the similarities between the work she performed, and that of other machine operators during wartime. Specifically, Bourne highlighted the monotony and tedium of the machine work to which she and other women workers across Britain regularly endured. However, this form of machine work was different; as Bourne went on to explain:

The only thing about it was there was always the chance that your machine, and if you worked it properly and didn't make mistakes, would find the answer, and that was the interest really. That was the motivation. "I wonder if this one will bring up an answer?" And you were pleased, but you never *knew* what was in the answer, nobody ever told you anything.¹

First, Bourne's work did not produce a tangible material asset, such as a shell or aircraft component; rather her machine produced an 'answer', or a piece of information. Second, unlike other forms of machine work, such as munitions production, where the purpose and outcome of an individual's efforts on the production line were clear, Bourne never knew what her 'answers' meant. The 'answer', the information derived from the machine's processes and its potential significance to the war effort was deliberately withheld from her.

At the outbreak of war in 1939, Ruth Bourne was a school pupil in Switzerland. She came from a distinctly professional middle-class background, her father being a doctor and her mother, prior to marriage, having worked as a musician. With the outbreak of war, Bourne returned to Britain and resumed her education in Wales. Upon the conclusion of her schooling, she passed the matriculation exams and planned to attend university where she intended to read Modern European Languages, with the intention of progressing into a career in journalism. However, rather than continuing in education Bourne, at the age of eighteen, opted to volunteer for the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS) rather than wait to be called up. After a period of basic training, she was assigned to a mysterious and secretive category of work with the equally enigmatic title, 'Special Duties X' (SDX). Still, without having been informed what this work actually

was, Bourne and the other women assigned to SDX, were called into a room and informed that they would be performing secret work. Furthermore, they were told that the job would involve anti-social hours, no scope for promotion and no opportunity to leave the position if it proved to be unpleasant though, as shall be seen, this was not always the case and many did resign. The young women were asked to make a decision, based on that information alone, and those who agreed were asked to sign the Official Secrets Act. It was only after they had made this commitment that they were informed what their work was to be. In Bourne's case, that turned out to be operating specialised cryptanalytic machinery, called Bombe Machines, designed and built for the British cryptanalysis agency, the Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS).² Despite the secrecy surrounding the agency, the recruitment process and the machines, the work was highly reminiscent of many other types of machine work conducted by women up and down Britain during the Second World War; a point that, as noted above, Bourne stressed.

The basic aspects of Bourne's story are familiar elements of the narrative of female machine operation at Bletchley Park, the wartime headquarters of GC&CS, and its outstations. Young women, usually from 'good' backgrounds, from middle-class or upper-working-class families, and with often a relatively high standard of education, were recruited into GC&CS. In their thousands, they performed, in secret, machine labour of a factory type, facilitating the work of Britain's now famous code breakers. This article examines the wartime experiences of GC&CS's uniformed machine operators and contextualises them within the wider experiences of female industrial workers in wartime Britain, highlighting continuities and contrasts between the 'secret world' of industrialised espionage and British industry as a whole. Analysis of GC&CS's military machine workers raises a number of interesting concerns. These include a consideration of the nature of the work conducted by these workers, the conditions in which they worked and the status of their jobs. It is also necessary to discuss the selection and recruitment processes employed by GC&CS. Finally, it is instructive to speculate on the reasons why the agency tended to recruit primarily from the middle classes. In order to address these issues, the article has made use of a variety of source materials. Primarily, this has been administrative documentation and memoranda created by GC&CS. The other major sources of information include oral histories, conducted for this project, but also by the Bletchley Park Trust. Supplementing oral history as a source of veterans' memories of GC&CS, the article draws heavily on published memoirs.

Applying a social history approach to the study of British secret intelligence agencies in the Second World

War is surprisingly unusual in academic histories of these agencies. This is despite the obvious utility of such study and the growing wealth of research into everyday wartime life in other branches of the British military establishment, particularly the women's services. For instance, both Lucy Noakes and Tessa Stone have explored the integration of women into the British Army and Royal Air Force (RAF) respectively, and the challenge integration posed to existing conceptions of gender, particularly in the overtly masculine sphere of military organisations.³ Significantly, Penny Summerfield has argued that the military authorities were more concerned with ensuring that trained female workers were directed to appropriate work and not wasted, rather than to defend existing gender boundaries.⁴ In the case of intelligence agencies, which were typically quasi-military in nature, combining a mixture of figures from the military services, civilian staff and civilians placed into uniform, the same cannot be said. Aside from limited consideration in wider treatments⁵ the only major published considerations of women in intelligence is Tammy Proctor's analysis of intelligence agencies during the First World War.⁶ Certainly, GC&CS, by far the largest intelligence agency in modern British history, has thus far avoided sustained analysis of the gender dynamics which highly coloured its wartime operations.

Compared to the wider experience of women workers in wartime Britain, the GC&CS case study offers a number of obvious examples of continuity. Like women workers in wartime factories, the women at GC&CS were usually young, aged between eighteen and thirty. They performed relatively low status auxiliary roles while higher skilled, higher prestige and higher paid work was predominantly allocated to men.⁷ The agency began the process of mechanising its functions during the war, primarily from 1940 onwards, and GC&CS soon adopted the wider national policy of employing women to operate its newly created shop floor.

Where GC&CS did differ remarkably was in the social class and education of the women recruited. Despite the efforts of wartime propagandists to portray the wartime shop floor as a socially unifying environment in which men and women of all classes and backgrounds worked side-by-side, the reality was that female industrial workers were disproportionately drawn from the working classes.⁸ Meanwhile, GC&CS's female war workers were typically drawn from two sources: the Civil Service and the women's branches of the armed forces. Given the relative exclusivity of these bodies, which tended to recruit heavily from the middle classes and the upper working classes, the recruits drawn from this route reflected the recruitment practises of their parent organisation.⁹ In fact, GC&CS's recruitment policies excluded working-class women further by recruiting most heavily from the most socially exclusive of the auxiliary armed services – the WRNS. Some 2,500 women, approximately half of the uniformed women workers employed by GC&CS, were drawn from the WRNS.¹⁰ Similarly, though not as exclusive as the WRNS, the women's branch of the Royal Air Force contributed some 2,000 uniformed women to the agency. By contrast, the Army's Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) held a

reputation as being predominantly working class, and comprised only eight percent, some 414 staff members, of GC&CS's women workers drawn from the military services.¹¹ The majority of these women, drawn from the two women's military services which were considered to be socially selective, conducted machine labour. This included the operation of cryptanalytic machinery, such as the Bombe machines, and communications machines such as the British Type-x cypher machine (the primary British high-grade cipher system).

GC&CS was an information production line. Its primary purpose was to process the intercepted wireless transmissions of the Axis powers and derive useful intelligence from the contents of these messages. This was no easy task. The Axis powers utilised sophisticated machine generated ciphers to prevent precisely what GC&CS was attempting to achieve. The primary Axis military machine cipher system was Enigma, which offered a high degree of security with the added advantage of being small and therefore portable.¹² These features made the system highly attractive and the machines were widely utilised by the Axis powers. Thus the job of GC&CS was effectively three fold. Messages had to be made readable, translated, and assessed and prioritised for their intelligence value, before being dispatched to GC&CS's various client ministries and military commands.

Given the linear nature of GC&CS's task, it is unsurprising that the agency's structure resembled a virtual production line with dedicated sections allocated to specific processes, be it cryptanalysis, translation and analysis, and communication with the outside world. With the increasingly mechanised nature of cipher security during the Second World War, as well as the sheer volume of Axis wireless traffic, it naturally followed that GC&CS necessarily had to mechanise cryptanalysis in order to successfully respond to these challenges.¹³ This had been recognised by the late 1930s when it became clear that a serious campaign against the Enigma system would require the development of mechanised cryptanalytic apparatus.¹⁴ The fruits of research and development into this problem were the Bombe machines.

Earlier still, Britain had begun the process of mechanising its own methods of securing information and by 1937 had introduced the Type-x cipher machine. Sophisticated apparatus modelled on the Enigma system, Type-x machines were to play a dual role at GC&CS. First, as a means of security and second, following some tinkering, as a key part of the process of mechanically deciphering Axis Enigma messages by performing the role of an Enigma emulator. This led to increased mechanisation at Bletchley Park and its satellite stations. Many of these machines, the Bombe machine in particular, were highly labour intensive devices and the result was that GC&CS required a significant labour force. By December 1944 in excess of 8,000 workers were employed, approximately half of whom were machine operators.¹⁵ To meet these staffing requirements, GC&CS turned to the military authorities who provided many thousands of young women from the armed forces. The result was the paradox described above; an agency that

employed a great many young, educated, middle-class women to perform blue-collar work highly reminiscent of factory labour. In the wider context of wartime Britain, such work was typically performed by women from the working classes, often with only an elementary school education.¹⁶

There are several explanations for the agency's preference for educated middle-class women over their working-class counterparts in industry. Firstly, despite deeming the work to be both of a low grade and skill, the agency paradoxically also concluded that the operation of its machines was intellectually taxing.¹⁷ Secondly, the agency was drawn from the cryptanalytic services of the War Office and Admiralty of the First World War and held long established ties with these institutions, as well as the Foreign Office. These ministries were also GC&CS's client organisations, obvious partners from which to draw resources and labour. Thirdly, the agency also associated education and social class with trustworthiness and integrity. Given the highly secret nature of its work the agency was, therefore, keen to recruit from environments which it perceived to provide the best promise of security. This attitude was certainly both present and overt in the recruitment of the agency's middling and senior tiers of staff member and, as discussed below, it is not overly speculative to assume that this attitude also extended to the recruitment of lower tier staff members.

Bombe machine operation, the most labour intensive of GC&CS's wartime occupations, was conducted by women from the WRNS. Some 200 Bombe machines were built and were operated at Bletchley Park as well as at several of the agency's satellite 'outstations'.¹⁸ Each machine operated on a twenty-four hour basis and required a team of some ten operators during that period.¹⁹ Type-x operation, on the other hand, was primarily conducted by women recruited through the Civil Service (usually the Foreign Office), but also in considerable numbers by members of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF). As an aside, it is worth noting that women from these various organisations also performed other duties within GC&CS. For instance, women from the Civil Service also performed a great deal of the administrative clerical work within GC&CS, and women from the WRNS also served as machine operators on other cryptanalytic machines such as the Colossus Computer. Of the work conducted at Bletchley Park and its outstations, Bombe work most closely resembled wartime factory labour. Work on the Bombes was segregated by gender; the operators, exclusively female and drawn from the WRNS, worked on a round-the-clock three-shift pattern, to ensure that the vital process they performed continued uninterrupted. Meanwhile, technical maintenance work was conducted by male RAF technicians.²⁰

The Bombe machines, housed in large brass cabinets, contained a mass of complex wiring and circuitry. Each Bombe machine, those of British design, contained some 108 rotors (called drums). The job of the Wren operators was to configure, or 'plug up', the machines according to configurations dictated by cryptanalysts.²¹ Once the machine was in operation, the

drums would rotate until one of three outcomes forced it to stop. Firstly, this could have been that the Bombe Menu was correct and the machine had processed the various potential Enigma settings without logical contradiction. Secondly, the menu was incorrect and a logical contradiction had been discovered. Thirdly, a malfunction had occurred. A Bombe machine could stop many times before the correct setting had been discovered. When a stop occurred as a result of malfunction the machine had to be meticulously cleaned.²² The machines were also oily and the process of cleaning them made the work rather dirty. In order to camouflage the oil stains, some Wrens asked permission to wear the Navy Blue uniform shirts of their male companions – a request which was denied.²³

The work was also heavy and physically taxing and required women of good eye-sight, height and physical strength, and these physical demands of the work at least partly explain why GC&CS employed young women.²⁴ Meticulous attention to detail, in an environment of constant noise from the machines, was also essential because, even a small mistake could result in an electrical 'short' which would cause the machine to perform an improper stop. Inside each of the machine's drums were a collection of wire brushes which required precise placement with the aid of tweezers and failure to place them accurately resulted in stops.²⁵ The difficult and trying nature of the work, both physically and mentally, was exacerbated by the three-shift system. While the specific hours of the shift system differ slightly in various accounts the common theme appears to be 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.; 4 p.m. to midnight; and midnight to 8 a.m. The WRNS would do a week of each shift and then rotate onto the next shift.²⁶

To add to the pressures placed upon the Bombe operators, the conditions of their shop floor were also generally quite poor. Bombe operator Alice Wolnskyj recalled that: 'the atmosphere was noisy and stifling, being quite airless. The windows were high and mostly blacked out. I recall a voice over the tannoy, around 9 pm, announcing, "Wrens may remove their collars and ties and roll down their stockings!"'²⁷ Diana Payne made similar observations and added that the conditions would not have 'passed the Factory Act'.²⁸ The fact that Wrens operated Bombe machines in uniform, as depicted in the accompanying illustration, is an important point to highlight. As noted above, operating oily Bombe machines was a dirty business. Yet, despite that, Wrens were expected to maintain military discipline, including uniform etiquette. Thus, while the work was undeniably a form of factory machine labour, which would in a different form of institution have employed blue-collar workers (who conducted their work in overalls), the middle-class white-collar (in the literal sense in this case) status of the Wrens was preserved even in this most impractical of circumstance – symbolising the importance of social class and status both within the WRNS and GC&CS. While Wrens might have been engaged in blue-collar work, they remained, in the eyes of the agency, white-collar workers.

In short, Bombe operation was dirty, monotonous work which required constant meticulous attention to detail as well as no small amount of physical

effort, all of which was conducted in a hot and noisy environment. Moreover, the women were regimented and under constant supervision by senior Wrens and male overseers who ran the Bombe rooms. Meanwhile, the agency itself was under no illusions that the work it assigned to Bombe operators was highly reminiscent of factory labour and classified it, in addition to Type-x operation and other 'low grade' labour, in these terms – though not with factory remuneration as will be discussed below.²⁹ Uniform was an important distinction between GC&CS's women machine workers and those workers engaged in higher grade work. For instance, for male dominated cryptanalysis, even when employees were drawn from the Armed Services, uniform regulations were relaxed if not ignored entirely.³⁰ Women operating machines were also typically of junior rank, whereas cryptanalysts, if not commissioned, were often promoted to the most senior non-commissioned ranks. For instance, Asa Briggs was promoted to the rank of Regimental Sergeant Major, a rank that reflected the high status which the agency placed upon his work.³¹ The result was that, uniform, in the case of junior enlisted personnel, was an indicator of relatively low status compared to those out of uniform. Moreover, the vast majority of these individuals were also young women.

Type-x machines were primarily operated by women recruited from the Civil Service and by women from the WAAF, while, as with the Bombes, maintenance was conducted by men.³² Also as with Bombe operation, labour was subject to strict factory and military discipline, a point highlighted by the agency's second-in-command Nigel de Grey: 'Labour was "directed" and the interest nil. It became necessary to intervene and institute factory methods. This was done chiefly by keeping careful records of output per watch, per machine and per girl'.³³ Mary Pain, a WAAF officer who had been involved in working on the machines, recalled the difficulty in using them:

The setting up, for the machine would change each night, [...] was quite hard work. It was tricky and you had to be quite strong. You had to move the machine's wheels round with your finger or thumb, and that could be extremely painful. Some girls brought in pieces of wood to help.³⁴

Further highlighting the physical difficulty of employing the machines, some were perceived to be less arduous to operate, and as such a rotation system had to be put in place to alleviate competition among staff.³⁵ As with Bombe operation, the work was split into a three-shift system. Yet even operating on a twenty-four hour basis, it proved impossible for any shift to be able to process every job that came in due to the scale



Uniformed Wrens operating Bombe Machines at Eastcote Outstation, Middlesex.

'0104 Standard Bombe Bay Attending Wrens', Bletchley Park Trust Archive, Bletchley. Reproduced by kind permission of the Director GCHQ, © Crown Copyright.

of the workload and the shortage of staff. As a result of the effects of the shift system, the size of the work load and the degree of concentration required by operators, the work proved to be both physically and mentally exhausting. Pain described women falling asleep at their machines and allowing staff to take fifteen minute breaks in which to sleep. Mary herself did the same, 'using my gas mask as a pillow. It made all the difference, you could then get through the night without falling asleep again'. Yet despite the bottle-necks in terms of staff numbers and machine numbers and the pressures of the work, the section became more efficient as time went on due to the growing proficiency of the staff.³⁶

To make matters worse the venue of the Cypher Office, which housed large numbers of machines, was the subject of a considerable number of complaints and internal correspondence.³⁷ In 1943 GC&CS investigated the complaints and one commentator reported to Commander Bradshaw, GC&CS's chief administrator, a list of problems. First, that the windows, when covered by blackout curtains, did not provide enough air. Second, that the slats on the windows were installed incorrectly facing the wrong direction. Third, that the fan system in one of the rooms required reversing and a channel to the open air.³⁸ A month later another individual sent to investigate the building's problems commented that: 'Ventilation was not good and the atmosphere was heavy'.³⁹ Thus, working conditions in the section were clearly amongst the worst at Bletchley Park.

The section was also beset by a high rate of both staff illness and resignations (despite, as noted above, recruits often being informed at their initial briefings that that this would be impossible). The cause of these problems lay in the poor working conditions, the stress of the work and the poor management. One initiative was to introduce 'Music while you work', but this proved problematic because a neighbouring section

required a quiet working environment.⁴⁰ Some senior figures within the agency took a less than sympathetic attitude, as illustrated by one male officer. Captain Melrose, instructed to investigate the section's problems, suggested that operators required reminding that they 'are doing war work and must be willing to put up with some discomfort'. He also recommended that the agency ignore certificates produced by staff members from medical professionals excusing night work, on the basis that '[I]t is no greater hardship working at night than during the day'.⁴¹ However, as Christopher Grey notes, subsequent studies have shown that shift and night work, particularly those shifts which regularly changed between night and day work, do have significant impacts on both physical and mental health.⁴²

Furthermore, Melrose also concluded that the resignations and sickness within the section were a product of a 'nervous disability' among a number of its staff.⁴³ This was in spite of the fact that sickness rates within the section stood at between six and seven percent, twice that of the rest of Bletchley Park. GC&CS arranged for an outside doctor to examine the section's sick staff members. The doctor concluded that all the cases were genuine and furthermore noted that: 'the hours are long and that there was a distinct element of strain'.⁴⁴ Secondly, a list of all the staff who had resigned from the section due to ill health showed that of the twenty-eight individuals listed, only three were listed as having had either a 'nervous break down', 'psychoneurosis' or an 'anxiety state'. The majority suffered from a variety of illnesses, not limited to debility, tuberculosis, asthma and bronchitis.⁴⁵ Of course, stress and overwork may well have been a compounding or even causal factor in the general ill-health within the section. It generally appears that, even by the standards of Bletchley Park, Type-x work was particularly arduous and that E Block, given its problematic ventilation system, was a particularly poor working environment. The section, while staffed by women, was led by men who appear not to have understood the problems faced by their female workers and this resulted in further poor morale within the section. Damningly, one internal report on the section reported that there was a 'tremendous lack of personal touch' and that there was nobody in the section who was 'really interested' in the welfare of its female workers.⁴⁶

However, in Mary Pain's opinion, male supervisors ultimately proved to be successful because 'they carried a certain amount of weight with the girls'.⁴⁷ This would suggest that women had equally gendered expectations about authority figures as men. Conversely however, Summerfield notes that the women interviewed in her study of wartime women, who tended to be placed under the authority of men, remembered them as 'old and unfit' and that men in non-combat roles in general were typically less competent and conscientious than they were.⁴⁸ It would appear, therefore, that in the case of Pain's section at least, the female employees responded better to male supervisors than was often the case elsewhere in the British wartime workplace.

Clearly then, like Bombe operation, Type-x operators were heavily managed, worked on difficult machines, in often highly trying conditions, which

were clearly and explicitly run on factory methods. Yet both forms of work, exclusively in the case of Bombe operation, drew heavily upon workers drawn from the large pool of labour to be found in the predominantly middle-class WRNS and WAAF. Another important difference was pay; a WAAF Aircraft Woman First Class could expect to receive 18s 8d a week and a leading Wren 22s 9d.⁴⁹ However, the earnings of British female manual wage-earners, inclusive of overtime, night work and other means of increasing their income, typically received twice the weekly wage of GC&CS's machine operators throughout the majority of the war.⁵⁰ Regarding the issue of resignation, clearly the agency wished to discourage resignations because of the obvious security considerations and made this clear from the moment of initial recruitment. However, in the case of those with medical ailments the initial claims made to would-be recruits, that they were tied to the work for the duration of the war, was clearly untrue. Individuals who found the work and conditions so oppressive that it made them unwell could find escape provided they were able to convince a doctor that they were sufficiently ill to continue.

Of course, in some respects it is possible to draw clear parallels between Bombe and Type-x operators and descriptions of wartime factories generally. For instance, Norman Longmate depicts the conditions of women's labour in a wide variety of factories in strikingly familiar terms. Longmate reproduces accounts from women workers which highlight long hours; hot, noisy windowless factories floors; monotony; physical and mental exertion and male supervision.⁵¹ However, the key difference at Bletchley, as already noted, lay in the social circles from which women factory workers and Wrens and WAAs were drawn.

In summation, how might the reason GC&CS turned towards women in the armed forces for wartime labour be explained? First, GC&CS emerged in 1919 from an amalgamation of the Admiralty and the War Office's cryptanalytic departments and as a result had a long standing relationship with those Ministries and the newly formed Air Ministry, which also emerged as an independent body, from the same sources, in 1918. Meanwhile, during the Second World War, it was these Ministries that served as GC&CS's primary clientele and as such they had a vested interest in injecting personnel and other resources into an agency which was producing increasingly valuable military intelligence. However, it is interesting to note, again, that the ATS was significantly under-represented at Bletchley Park and its outstations. This was in spite of the fact that the War Office, as noted, had as lengthy a connection to, and as much to gain from, GC&CS as either the Admiralty or Air Ministry. Clearly, therefore, additional factors are necessary to explain GC&CS's recruitment policy.

Second, despite viewing Bombe and Type-x operation as 'factory like', the agency was also convinced that the work was at least relatively intellectually challenging and thus required, particularly in the case of Bombe operators, a source of recruitment which would largely guarantee educated workers. The agency was, therefore, suitably pleased with the resulting

intake of recruits which included an 'unusually high percentage' of individuals with either University training or a Higher School Certificate.⁵² This stood in contrast to the majority of female British factory workers, of whom the vast majority had received only elementary education.⁵³ However, despite education's utility as an indicator of class composition,⁵⁴ Nigel de Grey described the agency's WAAFs as 'the lowest form of life [within the agency] generally not up to school certificate standard'.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, he also noted that the ATS service women recruited by the agency were as well educated as the Wrens, suggestive of relative exclusivity in its recruitment from that channel, limited though it was. Evidently, therefore, the agency could be and was selective, as determined by its (male) officers' assessments of the difficulty of the work and the requisite educational attainment necessary for (female) recruits to perform it.

Therefore, education, while clearly an important factor, cannot alone be the determining factor in GC&CS's determination to recruit generally middle-class women. This suggests a third factor, that these recruitment pools were selected *because* they were a source of middle-class staff members. This is because British upper- and middle-class society and in particular its intelligence services, the officers of which were exclusively drawn from those backgrounds, associated elevated social class as an indicator of trustworthiness and integrity.⁵⁶ In the view of Peter Calvocoressi, the head of the agency's Air Section and a senior Bletchley Park manager, employees shared a common, middle-class educated background, and that upbringing generated the kind of character traits GC&CS were looking for. Employees made 'unwittingly for the most part, the same assumptions about life and work and discipline and values'. By implication, these produced character traits, which, in his view, were partially responsible for the maintenance of the secret of Britain's wartime code-breaking efforts for nearly thirty years.⁵⁷ Similarly, Sir Paul Dukes of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) wrote in 1938 that the qualities that made a good member of the secret service were not:

acquired in any secret service training establishment. They are bred first in school and university life, in form room and lecture room, on the cricket and football grounds, in the boxing ring, at the chess table, in debating clubs.⁵⁸

It is unsurprising, therefore, that they tended to look towards individuals of familiar backgrounds when it came to the question of recruitment. Furthermore, the preference for employing individuals with exclusive educational backgrounds, linked to the idea of character and integrity, was not restricted to the intelligence agencies. As Peter Mandler suggests, there was a common belief that the 'gentlemanly spirit' was defused to the social elites through public school.⁵⁹ For instance, fifty percent of the administrative class of the Civil Service was drawn from public/fee paying schools, while only twenty-eight percent came from LEA grammar schools, twenty percent from direct grant schools and just two percent from secondary modern schools.⁶⁰ As a result, it is unsurprisingly the senior managers of intelligence

agencies, invariably drawn from Britain's educated middle-class intellectual elite and further insulated from wider British society by a strict cloak of secrecy, who were particularly wedded to the notion that education and upbringing were important guarantors of security.

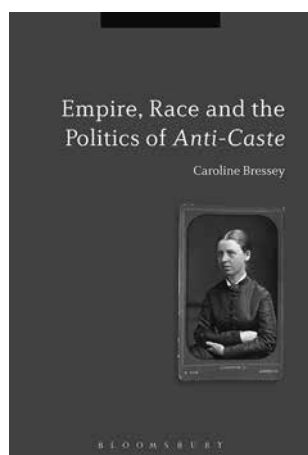
The selection of young women to low status labour, to plug the labour shortages created by the war, was common in Britain and GC&CS was no exception. However, the interplay between perceptions of gender and social class at this unique agency did lead to the unusual situation in which machine work was predominantly conducted by educated middle-class women. This was created by a combination of three factors: the relationship between GC&CS and the Admiralty and the Air Ministry; the relatively high requirement for educated workers and perceptions of social class which led to the predominant recruitment of GC&CS's military women from the two most socially exclusive sources for these recruits; the WRNS and the WAAF.

Notes

1. Ruth Bourne interview with Christopher Smith, 8 May 2010.
2. Bourne interview with Smith.
3. Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907-1948* (London, Routledge, 2006); Tessa Stone, 'Creating a (gendered?) military identity: the women's auxiliary air force in Great Britain in the Second World War', *Women's History Review*, 8/4 (1999), 605-24. For an exploration of gender as it applied to the part-time military Home Guard, see: Corinna Peniston-Bird and Penny Summerfield, *Contesting Home Defence: Men, Women and the Home Guard in the Second World War* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2007).
4. Penny Summerfield, 'The Patriarchal Discourse of Human Capital: training women for war work 1939-45', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 2/2 (1993), 201.
5. For recent examples related specifically to GC&CS see Stephen Budiansky, *Battle of Wits: The Complete Story of Codebreaking in World War II* (New York, The Free Press, 2000); R.A. Ratcliff, *Delusions of Intelligence: Enigma, Ultra and the End of Secure Ciphers* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006); Christopher Grey, *Decoding Organization: Bletchley Park, Codebreaking and Organization Studies* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012).
6. Tammy Proctor, *Female Intelligence: Women and Espionage in the First World War* (New York, New York University Press, 2003). For an unpublished account of GC&CS which considers gender see Annie Burman, 'Gendering Decryption Decrypting Gender: The Gender Discourse of Labour at Bletchley Park 1939-1945' (Unpublished Master's Dissertation, Uppsala Universitet, 2013).
7. The National Archives (TNA), HW 50/50, Nigel De Grey, Memorandum, 17 Aug. 1949.
8. Geoffrey G. Field, *Blood, Sweat and Toil: Remaking the British Working Class, 1939-1945* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011), 145; Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and*

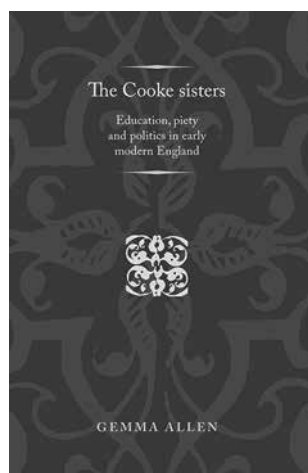
- Patriarchy in Conflict* (London, Croom Helm, 1984), 56-7.
9. For details of the social makeup and perception of the women's military services, see Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, 113-15; Gerard J. DeGroot 'Lipstick on her Nipples, Cordite in her Hair: Sex and Romance among the British Servicewomen During the Second World War', in eds Gerard DeGroot and Corinna Peniston-Bird, *A Soldier and a Woman: Sexual Integration in the Military* (Harlow, Pearson Education, 2000), 100-18.
 10. Frank Birch, *The Official History of Sigint, 1914-1945*, Vol. 1, Part 2, John Jackson ed. (Milton Keynes, Military Press, 2004), 109. This, now published, internal history of GC&CS, produced by the Government Communications Headquarters in three volumes, was written shortly after the Second World War and remained classified until the volumes were released to TNA between 2001 and 2004.
 11. Kerry Johnson and John Gallehawk, *Figuring It Out At Bletchley Park, 1939-1945* (Redditch, Book Tower Publishing, 2007), 46-50. This volume is a compendium of statistics primarily drawn from GC&CS's weekly administrative reports beginning in March 1942.
 12. Much has been written on the Enigma cipher system, and a detailed description of it is unnecessary here. For an example of a detailed technical description see Simon Singh, *The Codebook: The Secret History of Codes and Code-Breaking* (London, Doubleday, 2000), 124-42.
 13. Johnson and Gallehawk, *Figuring It Out*, 170.
 14. Birch, *The Official History of Sigint*, Vol. 1, Part 1, 20.
 15. Johnson and Gallehawk, *Figuring It Out*, 3-10.
 16. Field, *Blood, Sweat and Toil*, 145.
 17. Nigel De Gray, Memorandum, 17 Aug. 1949, HW 50/50, TNA.
 18. John Keen, *Harold 'Doc' Keen and the Bletchley Park Bombe: Code name CANTAB*, 2nd ed. (Kidderminster, M & M Baldwin, 2012), 39-43.
 19. 'Locations and Numbers', 29 Jul. 1942, HW 62/4, TNA.
 20. 'Peter Howkins interview - Summer 2001' in *The Bletchley Park Trust Archive (BPTA) Other People's Stories 3*, ed. Dave Whitchurch, (n.p., n.d.), 45.
 21. Diana Payne, 'The Bombes', in *Codebreakers: The Inside Story of Bletchley Park*, eds F. H. Hinsley and Alan Stripp (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), 134.
 22. Cooke in *Other People's Stories 3*, 25.
 23. Bess Farrow in *Other People's Stories 3*, 28.
 24. Payne, 'The Bombes', 134.
 25. *ibid.*, 134.
 26. Cooke in *Other People's Stories 3*, 25; Payne, 'The Bombes', 135-6.
 27. Alice Wolnskyj to Christopher Smith, Personal Correspondence, 27 Apr. 2010.
 28. Payne, 'The Bombes', 134.
 29. Nigel De Gray, Memorandum, 17 Aug. 1949, HW 50/50, TNA.
 30. Sinclair McKay, *The Secret Life of Bletchley Park: The History of the Wartime Codebreaking Centre by the Men and Women Who Were There* (London, Aurum Press, 2010), 166.
 31. Asa Briggs, *Secret Days: Codebreaking at Bletchley Park* (Barnsley, Frontline Books, 2011), 107.
 32. Bob Vicary in *Other People's Stories 3*, 33.
 33. Grey and Sturdy quoting HW 14/145, TNA, 29; Christopher Grey and Andrew Sturdy, 'A Chaos that Worked: Organizing Bletchley Park', *Public Policy and Administration*, 25/47, (2010), 57.
 34. Mary Z. Pain, 10595/3, reel 2, 17 Jan. 1989, Imperial War Museum (IWM) Sound Archive.
 35. *ibid.*
 36. *ibid.*
 37. Given that it appears that Type-x machines were employed in numerous sections of GC&CS, it is impossible to confirm whether Mary Pain was employed in the Cypher Office, though it appears highly likely.
 38. Unknown author [illegible signature] to A.D. (A) [Commander Bradshaw] Ventilation in Block 'E', 10 Sep. 1943, HW 64/62, TNA.
 39. N. W. [Unknown] to Commander Bradshaw, 23 Nov. 1943, HW 64/62, TNA.
 40. Captain Melrose to A.D. (A) [Commander Bradshaw], 9 Nov. 1943, HW 64/62, TNA.
 41. *ibid.*
 42. Grey, *Decoding Intelligence*, 192.
 43. Captain Melrose to A.D. (A) [Commander Bradshaw], 9 Nov. 1943, HW 64/62, TNA.
 44. A.D. (S) [The document is signed under the title A.D. (A), however it does not appear to be the signature of Nigel de Grey who held that position] to A.D. (A) [Commander Bradshaw], 13 Oct. 1943, HW 64/62, TNA.
 45. Mr. White to Captain Melrose, 11 November 1943, HW 64/62, TNA.
 46. N. W. [Unknown] to Commander Bradshaw, 23 Nov. 1943, HW 64/62, TNA.
 47. Mary Z. Pain, 10595/3, reel 2, 17 Jan. 1989, IWM Sound Archive.
 48. Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998), 132; 167.
 49. Appendix 2 to E.O.C. 535: Rates of Pay for a provision Assessment for Mobile Women Serving with the Women's Forces, [n.d.], HW 64/67, TNA.
 50. Summerfield, *Women Workers*, 200.
 51. Norman Longmate, *How We Lived Then: A History of Everyday Life during the Second World War* (London, Pimlico, 2002), 335-50.
 52. Nigel De Gray, Memorandum, 17 Aug. 1949, HW 50/50, TNA.
 53. Summerfield, *Women Workers*, 57.
 54. *ibid.*, 57.
 55. Nigel De Gray, Memorandum, 17 Aug. 1949, HW 50/50, TNA.
 56. Grey, *Decoding Organization*, 137.
 57. Peter Calvocoressi, *Top Secret Ultra: The Full Story of Ultra and its Impact on World War II* (New York, Pantheon, 1980), 16.
 58. Christopher Andrew, 'F. H. Hinsley and the Cambridge moles', in *Diplomacy and Intelligence During the Second World War*, ed. Richard Langhorne (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985), 32.
 59. Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (London, Yale University Press, 2006), 167.
 60. David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain 1920-1970* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), 132-33.

Women's History Network Book Prize 2014



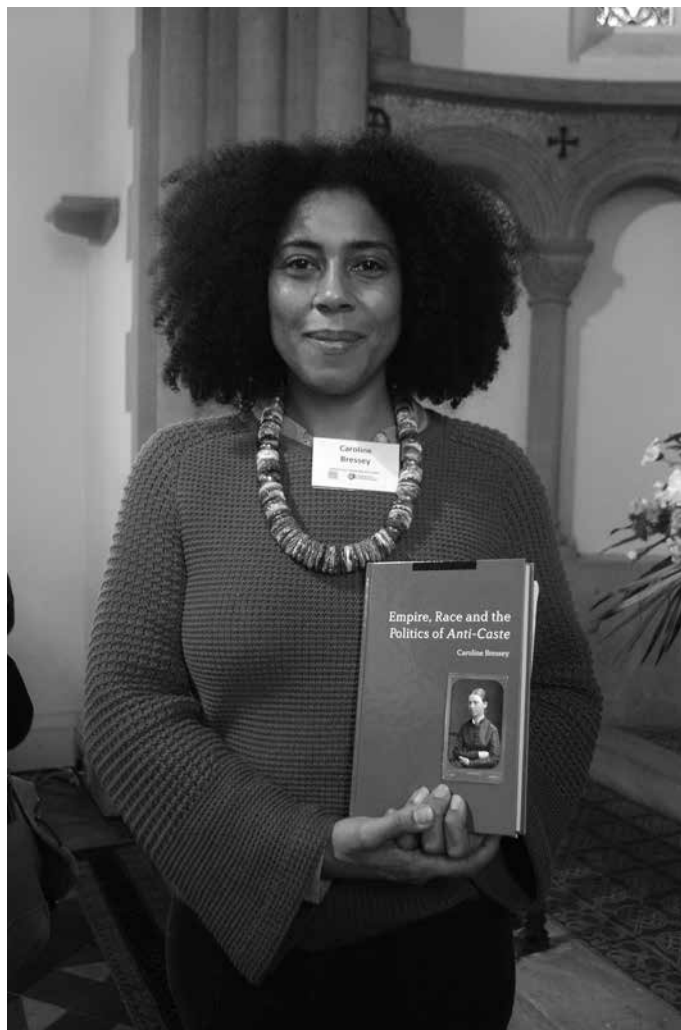
The winner of this year's competition is Caroline Bressey, *Empire, Race and the Politics of "Anti-Caste"* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). Congratulations to Caroline for a book that the judges thought was an 'excellent study of a remarkable episode in anti-racist politics, written with passion and a sensitive engagement'. By situating Catherine Impey, the editor of *Anti Caste*, within her varied social, religious and political

networks Caroline provides 'original insights into the complex inter-relationship between different radical causes' and the links between the local, the national and the global.



The entries for the prize were so strong this year that the panel decided to announce a runner up, Gemma Allen, *The Cooke Sisters: Education, Piety and Politics in Early Modern England* (Manchester University Press, 2013). Congratulations to Gemma for a well-researched, impressive study of the five Cooke sisters who all achieved a high level of humanist learning in Elizabethan England. The judges thought that the book provided 'a new perspective

on the question of women's power and elite women's education in this period'.



WHN book prize winner Caroline Bressey

The panel wishes to thank all the authors and publishers who took part in the competition for the opportunity to read work of such high quality.

Book Reviews

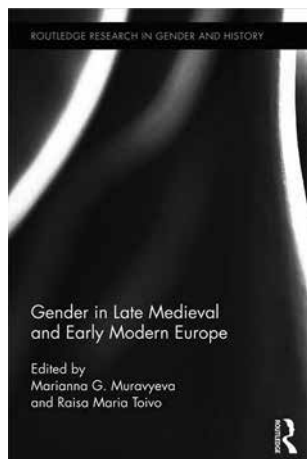
Marianna G. Muravyeva and Raisa Maria Toivo, eds, *Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Routledge Research in Gender and History

Routledge: London and New York, 2013. £80, ISBN 978-0-415-53723-0 (hardback), pp. 240

Reviewed by Leah Astbury
University of Cambridge

Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe has a mighty task: 'revising the "canonical" gender concept of a dichotomous hierarchy', while also attempting to 'specify what gender actually was in this period' (p. 5). Muravyeva and Toivo complain that too many histories

have been preoccupied with proving female oppression, instead of considering the complexity of individual circumstances and relations. They convincingly argue that Western European narratives that place too much emphasis on meta-intellectual and religious shifts in explaining gender relations do not work in a Northern European context. As well as widening the geographic scope of traditional pre-modern gender histories, collectively the twelve authors of this edited volume challenge the conventional separation of medieval and early modern and attempt to prove that 'gender was a dynamic process, rather than an essentialist and stable dichotomy' (p. 5). The book is divided into four parts, respectively addressing wider historiographical debates and the validity of the use of terms such as 'patriarchy' and



'morality'; the construction of gendered identities, specifically within religious discourses; how conventional narratives of witchcraft as gender-specific do not work in a Nordic context; and how gender relations were inscribed in the law and tested by individuals.

The first chapter by Androniki Dialeti explores the use of the term 'patriarchy' from its origin in seventeenth-century

discussions of absolute monarchy to current scholarship. Dialeti points to a crisis in the scholarship of pre-modern gender, arguing that we must continue to destabilise our notion of patriarchal norms as more than a system of male domination and female subordination. The second chapter by Isle Paakinen examines Christine de Pizan's 'apology of women'. De Pizan's work, Paakinen argues, was grounded in scholastic philosophy and theology and although her intentions were that of an Italian humanist her approach to the metaphysics of gender was atypical for her time. The final chapter in the historiographical section, by Anne-Marie Kilday, considers whether early modern British prescriptive notions of subdued femininity map onto gendered language in legal records. Although women rarely committed violent crime, Kilday argues that when they did, they were characterised as transgressing the boundaries of normative female behaviour.

The second part begins with Sari Katajala-Peltomaa's treatment of demonic possession in late medieval Southern France and Italy as a 'violation of idealised femininity' (p. 82). Katajala-Peltomaa explores the meaning of 'possession' before its association in the early modern period with witchcraft, when it was seen as a 'normal' part of religious life for the clerical elite and laity (p. 74). The fifth chapter by Päivi Räisänen-Schröder examines the meting out of gendered identities within confessional boundaries of Anabaptism, proposing that the 'feeling of belonging to a persecuted, yet righteous minority, seems to have been more important than the "normative" social roles attributed to women' (p. 102). The final chapter in this section by Constanta Vintila-Gitulescu focuses on the Orthodox Church's treatment of cases of male impotence in eighteenth-century Russian principalities.

In the third section, Louise Nyholm Kallestrup considers gendered ideas of the witch in early modern Denmark, seeing discourses about the threat to the household as more dominant than theological teachings in determining who was accused and prosecuted. The eighth chapter, by Raisa Maria Toivo, shows that in an agricultural community such as seventeenth-century Finland, witchcraft accusations focused on farming and household authority, as a way of exploring why male witches should not be treated as anomalous to an otherwise female phenomenon. David Nash asks whether prosecution of men for moral crimes such as

blasphemy in early modern England should be seen as the mirror image of the persecution of women in witchcraft trials. Both, he argues, 'operated and promoted gender stereotypes of specific forms of antisocial behaviour' (p. 153).

The final section examines legal definitions of gender. Riika Miettinen discusses the deployment of gendered identities in suicide cases in seventeenth-century Finland and Sweden, as moments which 'threatened the community and were hard to comprehend' (p. 185). The chapter by Mari Välimäki proposes that during the seventeenth century women were increasingly allocated more responsibility and blame in breach of promise cases in Sweden. She argues that the consolidation of legislation meant a promise of marriage was only valid if confirmed in front of witnesses, effectively making the seduced, as well as the seducer, culpable if the marriage should fall through. The final chapter by Marianna G. Muravyeva investigates homosexuality in eighteenth-century Russia, arguing that in monasteries, same sex desire was not thought 'to diminish or deprive men of their masculinity' but was simply understood as 'an inability to combat lust' (p. 218).

Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe does not simply thrust masculinity into the mix, in the hope of making gender history more than the study of women. The reach and depth of the authors' research is impressive, as is the contribution of new and original source material. Muravyeva and Toivo's aim to evade the traditional dichotomy between men's and women's history is largely successful: each chapter considers gender identities as a whole, rather than focusing on one sex. Particularly valuable is the contribution this volume makes to Northern European histories, although the chapters sometimes felt restrictively short. Indeed, one wonders whether it could have benefited from being more geographically limited. Nevertheless, this makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing task of improving our understanding of gender relations in the pre-modern period.

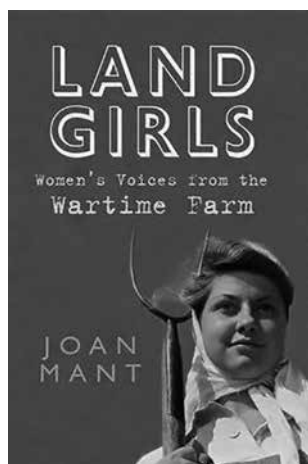
Joan Mant, *Land Girls: Women's Voices from the Wartime Farm*

Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2012. £16.99, ISBN 978-1-4456-1048-1 (hardback); £9.99, ISBN 978-1-4456-1979-8 (paperback), pp. 183

Reviewed by Sue Johnson
Independent Scholar

For all too long the Women's Land Army (WLA) was the forgotten service. It was not until December 2008 that it received official government acknowledgement of the work it undertook during World War 2. Given that the work was to produce food to sustain the civilian population and thus maintain morale and support for the war effort, it was a role of significant importance and thus deserved recognition, perhaps sooner but at last, later.

The Women's Land Army is fascinating for many reasons – as part of the history of the Home Front, as



to how Britain managed food production without the benefits of regular imports, for the role of women in wartime and as a study of the challenge to perceived notions of femininity during the mid-20th century. Despite these reasons it has been a somewhat under researched topic. However, slowly but surely more histories of the WLA are emerging, often based on oral testimony and this is one such history. Joan

Mant was a Land Girl and has subsequently collected the memories of other participants. She, and many others, regarded their work as worthy of being remembered. A photograph of her 2008 medal is proudly displayed in the book along with a quote from Hilda Gibson saying the medal was 'a powerful and touching gesture to thank us for what we did' (facing p. 65). This book is a selection of oral testimonies to explain just what they did do. The methodology of the author is unclear; there is no indication of the time period when the testimonies were collected except that requests were made in the press and on the radio. There is also no indication where, or if, these memories are archived. Although the book may not have academic gravitas, it is a fascinating collection of memories and can be used to good effect by historians or simply enjoyed for the variety of information the testimonies offer. It is up to the reader how they wish to use the material but the book is true to its title; it is a selection of women's voices from the wartime farms.

The role of the Women's Land Army in World War 1 is recognised and the book then divides into two sections. Part 1 comprises of chapters 1-10 and a rich cornucopia of memories is used to support the theme of each chapter. These range from the important question of why women joined the Land Army – after all it was hardly a glamorous life and many did voluntarily join – on to their initial interview, the delights of the uniform, training, social life and how they lived. Part 2, chapters 11-23, addresses the different types of work undertaken. A wide range of experiences emerges. Two most important themes are food and personal hygiene, both being difficult to access. The women remember with great clarity what they had to eat on a daily basis, either because it was so delicious or so awful. Hunger is a recurring theme and Daphne Jauncey (p. 48) recalls eating raw potato, swedes and turnips out of desperation. That seems a treat compared to Betty Cutt's dinner of rook pie (p. 33)! Keeping clean was a difficult task as hot water seemed to be scarce in some of the billets or had to be shared by many. Some had the luxury of a bath every week but one young woman was only allowed a pint of hot water on a Saturday. Dorothy Fox cut her hair short when it became 'lousy' and simply 'carried on' (p. 44).

As chapter 8 illustrates, being in the Land Army was not just a struggle with hunger, dirt, cold weather and tough, heavy work. It could also be dangerous as some farms were in the firing line. Nancy Johnson farmed

near the Thames Estuary and spent many nights in an air raid shelter and days under a tree or tractor as bombs fell (p. 69). Many of the women had to deal with prejudice from older male farm workers who felt women were not up to the job, despite farmers' wives and daughters doing exactly the same without criticism. As many were 'town' girls there was a belief that they were 'fast' (p. 78) and so they learned to dodge unwelcome suggestions and advances.

This book provides information in the form of reminiscences rather than analytical discourse. It is very interesting and offers so many individual snapshots of life in the Women's Land Army. What stands out is the pride with which participants remember their wartime role. On p. 75, we are reminded that this was the 'Cinderella Army' with no gratuity on dismissal, just twenty clothing coupons in exchange for their uniform, and prior to 2008, public recognition came in a stained glass window in Salisbury Cathedral and in the D-Day Tapestry in the D-Day Museum in Southsea. Joan Mant sums up the contents of her book aptly: 'a mixed bag of memories but we look back with pride' (p. 178).

Rosalind K. Marshall, *Mary, Queen of Scots, 'In my end is my beginning'*

Edinburgh: National Museums Scotland

Enterprise, 2013. £12.99, ISBN 978-1-905267-78-1 (paperback), pp. x + 112

Reviewed by Gillian L. Beattie-Smith

University of the Highlands and Islands and The Open University

A major exhibition of the life of Mary, Queen of Scots was held at the National Museums Scotland (NMS) last year. The exhibition consisted of over 200 objects from their collections, from public collections in Scotland, England, and France, and from families connected to Mary and to the period, including the Royal family. Historian Rosalind K. Marshall, an expert on Mary, Queen of Scots, was commissioned by the NMS to write this companion book. The book, containing 145 illustrations, is in two parts: the first tells the story in three chapters of Mary's life, while the second provides a catalogue of the exhibition. Although it may seem an odd combination, the catalogue supports Marshall's excellent account with evidence, and so the two marry well.

This was not an exhibition to rush, but one to make the visitor reflect on the contrasting perspectives of Mary. Visitors walked through at a particularly slow pace. They read the labels and considered carefully each object or picture on display. The aim of the exhibition was, according to Dr Gordon Rintoul, Director, NMS, 'to throw new light on this remarkable Scottish Queen



and bring her story and legacy to life'. Not only did the exhibition succeed in bringing Mary to life, but Marshall's book provides a legacy of the exhibition. The book gives the reader the opportunity to walk through the exhibition studying the information and the illustrations of the artefacts which support Marshall's narrative of the life of the Queen. All the paintings and artefacts are illustrated in the book, but some are in Marshall's text and others are in the catalogue, and this is where confusion arises. Where the item is illustrated in the chapters, the catalogue number is given, so the reader can find the detail in the catalogue. But, in the catalogue, the page numbers of where the reader can find the illustrations in the chapters are not given, so the reader struggles to match description and illustration when studying the catalogue. I found myself flipping between the catalogue and Marshall's story, hunting for either the illustration or the detail. Nonetheless, the illustrations of the collections in the exhibition are well produced.

The entrance to the exhibition was breathtaking. The visitor was confronted with the two-and-a-half-metre high Blairs Memorial Portrait. The painting, by an unknown Flemish artist, was commissioned by Elizabeth Curle, one of Mary's chamber-women who, with Jane Kennedy, attended Mary at her execution. The painting was produced as propaganda to create the image of Mary as Catholic martyr. Mary stands before the viewer with a crucifix in her right hand and a prayer book in her left, wearing a white ruff, a white veil, two strings of rosary beads around her neck, and a crucifix on her bodice, dressed in black on a black background, surrounded by Latin inscriptions and royal iconography – martyr and queen. The painting is larger than life, shocking and dramatic; it succeeds in seizing the visitor's emotional response from the first moment and holding it for the rest of the exhibition.

Marshall has a light and entertaining style, but her writing parallels the drama of the exhibition. She tells us that Mary's father, James V, 'suffered a complete nervous collapse' following his defeat by Henry VIII's army. We are told 'he retired to his palace ... the final blow came when word arrived that his pregnant Queen had given birth ... to a daughter instead of the much desired son ... he turned his face to the wall and died. At six days old, the infant Princess Mary became Queen of Scots'. I have lived most of my life in Scotland but I was educated in England, so my perspective of Mary was an English, and a Protestant one. Marshall's narrative is balanced and gives clarity to the divisions and unions of kingdoms.

Mary's life had sex and drama and murder in abundance. Her second husband, Darnley was involved in the murder of her friend, Rizzio. Darnley was killed in 1567 in an explosion said to have been arranged by the Earl of Bothwell, who raped her to become her third husband. After her army's defeat, Bothwell left and Mary was held captive. She abdicated the throne in favour of her son, Prince James, who at only 13 months was crowned in the Protestant Chapel Royal at Stirling Castle. Mary's execution at the hands of Elizabeth was, as she stated on the scaffold, her end, but it was also her beginning. Her line continued through her son, James VI

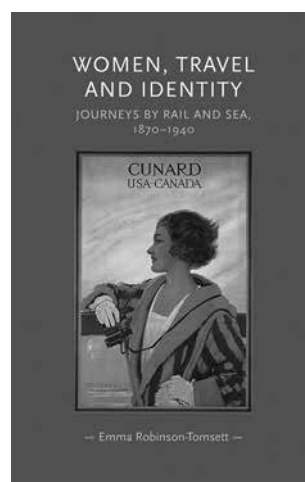
of Scotland, and the union of the crowns of Scotland and England on the death of Elizabeth.

Mary, Queen of Scots is one of the most famous figures in both Scottish and English history. Was she betrayed? Was she a Catholic martyr? Was she a murderer? Rosalind K. Marshall's extensive knowledge provides us with evidence, with analysis, with evaluation to help us make up our own minds; moreover, she tells an excellent and thoroughly engaging story of a fascinating woman.

Emma Robinson-Tomsett, *Women, Travel & Identity: Journeys by Rail and Sea, 1870-1940*

Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013. £65, ISBN 978-0-7190-8715-8 (hardback), pp. x + 244

Reviewed by Gillian L. Beattie-Smith
University of the Highlands and Islands and The Open University.



The rise in academic interest in travel writing has led to its inclusion in debates in literary studies, and to discussions concerning its reliability and appropriateness as a source of knowledge in disciplines such as sociology and history. In recent years there has also been an increase in interest in women's travel writing growing from earlier associations of travel with men and with masculine space. The range of published

work is wide and not all builds on the growing literature and research in its contextualisation of the knowledge presented to the reader. Robinson-Tomsett sets out in her introduction to contextualise her study as focusing on 'gendered identities' and seeking to understand 'the journeyer identity women constructed' and she asserts that journeys by rail or sea removed women from 'the daily commitments that prevented them from participating in leisure activities at home' (p. 7). Such a context suggests a significant contribution to the literature.

The book consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 provides an interesting statistical analysis of the numbers of women travelling between 1870 and 1940. Here she examines British ship passenger lists. Chapter 2 is very wide ranging and seeks to explore the meanings attributed to the journey, by examining women's representation in advertisements, the crime thriller, and Mills & Boon. She goes on in Chapter 3 to explore behavioural expectations through etiquette books as well as for women who travelled for work, for example as domestics. In Chapter 4 Robinson-Tomsett explores gendered spaces, the public and the private, and interrogates questions of heterotopias and liminality. Chapters 5 and 6 consider the social aspects of travel, and

ships and trains as sites of romantic opportunity, and she also considers the hazards to women of travelling with male journeyers and male crew. Chapter 7 is a synthesis of the earlier chapters.

Robinson-Tomsett uses twenty-five sources that were made public, but also draws on fifteen unpublished diaries, letters and memoirs. Eleven of the published accounts are taken from Bedford College's student magazine. It is unclear what methodology Robinson-Tomsett has applied in her selection of the texts. Michel de Certeau argues, all writing is travel writing,¹ and in his literary review Carl Thompson points out 'there are few literary texts that do not make some reference to travel',² therefore, it would be helpful to have a clearer contextualisation and statement of her hypothesis. It is also unclear in her introduction why she has chosen the period she has, particularly considering the likely effects on women and on travel of two world wars, which the dates of the book encompass. However, the book touches on some interesting topics and suggests areas for further research. It skirts around some useful arguments, for example, her consideration of Wolfgang Schivelbusch's concept of the 'machine ensemble' highlights the connections created by the physical structures which support travel and their confined and located spaces, rather than the separations that movement on the journey suggest.

There is no doubt that the book makes a contribution to debates on travel writing and it will make an interesting starting point for further closer study. However, because it draws mainly on the early works of theorists such as Lacan for discussions of women's discourse or Foucault on heterotopias, it was disappointing to see so little acknowledgement of the current and growing body of literature on women's travel writing and to see very few references to the many women scholars working in this field.

Notes

1. Michel de Certeau, 'Spatial Stories', in Susan L. Robertson (ed.) *Defining Travel: Diverse Visions*, Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, pp. 88-104.
2. Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing*, London, Routledge, 2011.

Christopher Richardson, *A City of Light: Socialism, Chartism and Co-operation – Nottingham 1844*

Nottingham: Loaf on a Stick Press, 2013. £7.99, ISBN 978-0-9569139-4-4 (paperback), pp. 243

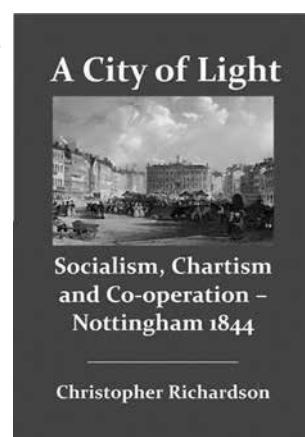
Reviewed by Cheryl Law
Independent Scholar

The means of production of *A City of Light* satisfyingly mirrors its subject through the intriguingly heralded 'Loaf on a Stick Press', a reference to the 'banner' held aloft in eighteenth-century food riots in England of a loaf of bread tied with a black ribbon. It is the wittily apposite name for the publishing arm of the Nottingham Radical

History Group. This marker in the current democracy of publishing plays well with local history as it lays down a quadrant on a defined region and enables local complexities and seeming contradictions to be explored whilst foregrounding previously ignored or undiscovered activists. This detail is one of the successes of *A City of Light* as it isolates a regional district in a year of political struggle, enhanced by the narrative spinning back and forth through salient touchstone years around 1844 to make political connections and achievements as visible as the lace-makers' product.

Stephen Yeo's Foreword endorses the validity of an alternative approach to history, still exposing history's core questions, no matter the size of its canvas. An additional bonus is that Richardson proves how much valuable source material waits in the treasure houses of local history libraries. This is an investigation into the ideals, methods, and personnel of socialism, Chartism and co-operation in Nottingham through the movements' interactions, alliances, and conflicts of their membership, their local and visiting national 'leaders'. The determination needed by working people to face derision and danger to wrench any vestige of autonomy from the ruling class during this period is a valuable antidote to contemporary political disengagement. Richardson's narrative of the painstaking and often dangerous accretion of socialist endeavour into a local movement brings into focus women such as Emma Martin, a Social Missionary, on a campaigning tour, forced to use the Market Place to hold her meeting against capital punishment. Often excluded from hiring public halls because of the radical nature of their message as well as lack of funds, sometimes even banned from open-air sites, or threatened with attack, the need for forming societies and raising funds for purpose-built sites is another thread in the fight for freedom of expression. Dissenters across the religious spectrum defeated the stranglehold of the established church with its compulsory local taxes levied for the maintenance of religious buildings, freeing money to establish independent spaces for use as alternatives to the public houses. Meeting halls for campaigning, debates, libraries, education classes, reading rooms, and socialising were crucial to the growth of radical politics. Establishing independent spaces to assemble was matched by the struggle for freedom of the press, and it is radical publications such as the socialist weekly journal, the *New Moral World* that Richardson mines so effectively as a primary source.

The thrust of the study ranges over the diverse experiments on how to achieve their goal of freedom and representation. Some Nottingham socialists 'from the overcrowded hovels of our manufacturing hells' (p. 46) were desperate enough to journey for two months by ship to attempt a new life in North America or



Canada. Others abjured religion, taking secularism and atheism as an alternative route. As Friendly Societies developed into the Co-operative challenge, the middle class 'shopocracy' came under threat as co-operators developed independence through mutuality, whilst the Chartists' six-point political reform People's Charter secured both alignment and tension with other activists. A local study seems suited to chart overlapping and competing concerns and strategies within a movement that may mistakenly be viewed as a cohesive category.

However, this book not only investigates the local manifestations of national developments but also highlights features that were unique to Nottingham. One such is, 'the establishment of a number of Operatives Libraries in the third decade of the nineteenth century, which represented another response by working men to the demand for unrestricted access to knowledge' (p.102). The concept of independent agency is well illustrated here as the difference between the size, location and nature of Subscription Libraries, as compared to Artisans' Libraries and Operatives Libraries, highlighted how misapprehensions by middle-class reformers of working-people's lives, habits and needs had to be remedied by the working classes' own initiatives. Richardson also includes individual women activists; of particular interest are those involved in publishing and selling radical newspapers during the campaign relating to the unstamped press, such as Susannah Wright, Mary Ann Smith, and Susannah Cooper.

A City of Light reveals object lessons in political strategy that could still be of use, just as it focuses on many issues that are still familiarly current in our political landscape 170 years later. The use of tactical voting, the Conservative Party's behaviour toward the poor together with their categorisation of the deserving and undeserving poor, the defamation of strikers, the disregarding of reports on human rights' abuses together with a description of a reporter as 'a scandalising vagabond' (p.198). We are yet to build 'a city of light for all to see, free from poverty and crime and meanness' (Frontispiece) but perhaps much of this book can inspire us to keep trying.

Brian Unwin, *A Tale in Two Cities*. Fanny Burney and Adèle, Comtesse de Boigne

London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014. £20, 978-1-78076-784-0 (hardback), pp. xiii + 259
Anne Stott

Formerly Birkbeck, University of London and the Open University

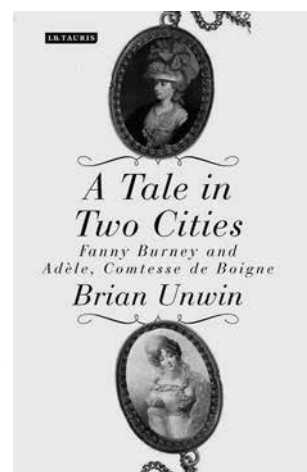
Brian Unwin, a former civil servant and banker, and the author of a well-received account of Napoleon's exile, has written a joint study of two remarkable memorialists Fanny Burney (1752-1840) and Adèle, Comtesse de Boigne (1781-1866). With their thirty-year age gap, they were not really contemporaries, and although their lives overlapped in many ways the two women never seem to have met. Yet they had much in common. Both were highly skilled reporters and storytellers, living in the

midst of great events, meeting some of the same people, such as Talleyrand and Germaine de Staël, and having an extensive knowledge of each other's capital cities.

Unwin does not seek to provide a structured chronological account but a glimpse of the period through the eyes of two women who were close to the centre of great events. His approach, a mixture of the biographical and the thematic, inevitably leads to some repetition. Two early chapters give overviews of their lives. He then proceeds to a discussion of their relationships (in some cases tenuous, in others highly significant) with Napoleon, the Duke of Wellington, the British and French royal families, and artists and intellectuals. En route, he provides some fascinating details. Burney's accounts of the 'madness' of George III and her appalling sufferings while undergoing her mastectomy will be well known to most British readers, but du Boigne's indignant description of the Duke of Wellington climbing a ladder in order to supervise the removal of the (looted) bronze horses of Venice from the arch of the Carousel provides a piquant and unfamiliar picture of Paris under allied occupation (p. 100).

The two women had different social origins. While Fanny Burney was the daughter of the upwardly mobile musicologist, Dr Charles Burney, Adèle du Boigne was the daughter of the Marquis d'Osmond, and on her mother's side was related to the Franco-Irish Dillon family. This gave them very different relationships to their respective royal families. For five miserable and exhausting years Burney was a mere employee of Queen Charlotte, whereas Adèle du Boigne was a personal friend of Madame Adelaïde, the aunt of Louis XVI, and later of Queen Marie-Amélie, the wife of Louis-Philippe. It was this closeness to the Orléans branch of the royal family that enabled her to play a key role in the July Revolution of 1830.

By an odd coincidence the two women were married in the same chapel, that of the Sardinian ambassador in London. Fanny Burney was then forty-one, and her marriage to the impoverished émigré, Alexandre d'Arblay, was a love match, undertaken in spite of religious differences and her father's disapproval. This would probably have seemed romantically sentimental to the clear-headed Adèle, who at the age of seventeen married General Benoît du Boigne, a man thirty years her senior, purely as a business arrangement to guarantee her and her parents' financial independence. There was no pretence of love or affection, the marriage was stormy, possibly violent, and there were no children. Unwin describes Adèle's decision as calculating and mercenary (p. 47), but does not pause to consider what other options might have been open to a young girl in her position. The marriage also seems to have been bigamous (p. 48) but this point is not followed up.

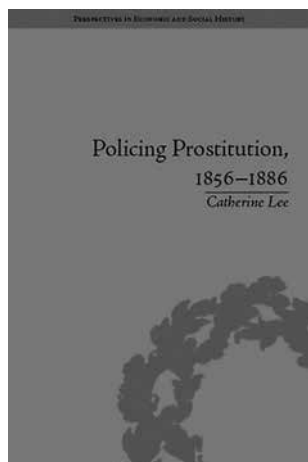


This is very clearly a book intended for the general reader. No manuscript sources are cited. 'England' is used rather than 'Britain' so that a Scottish peer, the Marquis of Douglas and Clydesdale, is described as 'English' (p. 79)! Adèle du Boigne's father's birth in the slave colony of St Domingue is mentioned without comment, and his statement that she was 'a political animal to the core' (p. 5) misses the opportunity to discuss what this might have meant for a woman in the period. All this limits the book's usefulness for historians. Nevertheless, Unwin writes well and tells his story in a very engaging manner that enriches our understanding of the interaction of Britain and France in the period.

Catherine Lee, *Policing Prostitution, 1856-1886*

London and Vermont: Pickering & Chatto, 2013. £60, ISBN 978-1-8489-3274-6 (hardback), pp. 163

Reviewed by Zena Austin
University of Kent



Catherine Lee's book provides a fresh and current perspective on the history of prostitution using a range of qualitative and quantitative data, including petty sessional records, newspaper articles and censuses in order to reveal the ways in which Victorian morals, attitudes and governance propelled many working-class women into or away from prostitution.

Lee uses a 'bottom-up' method to engage the reader with an abundance of data, focusing on specific Kentish towns. She explores the women's gaol sentences, lifestyles and living arrangements, giving the reader a sense of the complexity of lifestyle choices for women on the streets and the penalisation of the poor in general. She successfully promotes the reader's empathy by describing the situations encountered by women who chose to earn a living from prostitution whilst also showing their often gritty characteristics.

Lee draws attention to the role of newspapers and it could be argued that in some ways they not only created, but also reproduced the social construction of the 'type' of woman the 'unrespectable' prostitute represented. The emotive prose used by the newspapers to describe the attire, language and behaviour of the women in court was arguably a medium to implicitly influence readers to adhere to 'respectable' dress and conduct, and thus avoid association with the lowest classes (much in the way that the modern media uses terms such as 'benefit scrounger' or 'chav' to define 'them' as opposed to 'us').

Tackling established themes including discussions of legislation and the role of 'rescue and reform' discourse, along with challenging previous notions that prostitutes

were victims without agency, Lee demonstrates with clear examples (such as the case of one Harriet Wood, pp. 48-9), that agency – albeit with very limited alternatives – was present in women's lives. Lee argues that women were not always hapless victims, but that some were shrewd operators who cajoled men into getting drunk, lured them into a false sense of security and then stole from them without rendering any sexual services, thus leaving the man as a victim of crime. Such examples support the book's point that the dynamics between the prostitute, the client and the criminal justice system were not as clear cut as one might think.

Lee's research shows that many prostitutes were already known to the police before the infamous Contagious Diseases (CD) Acts came into being in the 1860s, and that despite these new statutes most of the women sent to gaol or fined thereafter were prosecuted under pre-existing legislation such as the Vagrancy Act (1824). Lee argues that the records show that most women did comply with the CD Acts legislation without too much protest, and those that did not may have been coaxed into disruptive behaviour by repeal campaigners. Furthermore, with regard to the CD Acts, Lee suggests that the police were bound by official procedure as opposed to being out of control and harassing every working-class woman in sight, as campaigners alleged.

Lee thus causes the reader to rethink some preconceptions on the history of prostitution and its policing. The two parallel policing systems endured in Kent towns covered by the CD Acts were somewhat punitive: some unfortunate women were brought before the magistrate by the local police for charges under the Vagrancy Act 1824 and also charged by the Metropolitan Police Dockyard Division under the CD Acts on the same day. Lee highlights that many of the arresting officers were used as witnesses, convincingly demonstrating the extensive surveillance of women by serving police officers living in their community. This also highlights why one of the key arguments in the CD Acts repeal campaign – that of mistaken identity – was flawed, as many of the local officers were fully aware of the women's identities.

Throughout, the question that kept coming to mind, with regard to the ways in which prostitution was viewed and dealt with in society then and now, was: to what extent have things changed in terms of moral attitudes and punishment? The book's structure was clear and concise, with each chapter introducing real historical figures for the reader to identify with. The book provides the undergraduate who has an interest in the topic some key starting points regarding methods and the types of primary sources to consult. I would also recommend it as an interesting read for the educated lay person, post-graduate and anyone interested in the social history of sex work.

BOOKS RECEIVED AND CALL FOR REVIEWERS

I would like to thank all those who responded to my call for reviewers in the last issue. You have collectively reduced the pile of books in my office most effectively, and already some interesting reviews are coming in. Please keep up the good work!

The following titles are available so if you would like to review any of the titles listed below, please email me, Anne Logan at bookreviews@womenshistorynetwork.org. As I mentioned last time, please don't feel you need to be an expert to review, if you have a general interest and knowledge of the relevant historical period and/or territory then that will count for a lot. The ability to summarise a work and write interestingly about it is the most important thing.

Jad Adams, *Women and the Vote: a World History* (Oxford)

Margaret Bonfiglioli and James Munson, *Full of Hope and Fear: the Great War Letters of an Oxford Family* (Oxford)

Colin Jones, *The Smile Revolution in 18th Century Paris* (Oxford)

P. G. Maxwell-Stuart, *The British Witch: The Biography* (Amberley)

The following titles are still available from the lists published in earlier issues of the Magazine.

Kate Côté Gillin, *Shrill Hurrahs: Women, Gender and Racial Violence in South Carolina, 1865-1900* (University of South Carolina Press)

David Loades, *Jane Seymour* (Amberley)

John Hudson, *Shakespeare's Dark Lady* (Amberley)

Nicola Phillips, *The Profligate Son: or a True Story of Family Conflict, Fashionable Vice, and Financial Ruin in Regency England* (Oxford University Press)

Blain Roberts, *Pageants, Parlors, and Pretty Women: Race and Beauty in the Twentieth Century South* (University of North Carolina Press)

Nancy Rosenberger, *Dilemmas of Adulthood: Japanese Women and the Nuance of Long-term Resistance* (University of Hawaii Press) [Based on oral interviews, hence on recent period.]

Elizabeth R. Escobedo, *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits: the Lives of Mexican American Women on the World War II Home Front* (University of North Carolina Press)

Christina Laffin, *Rewriting Medieval Japanese Women: Politics, Personality and Literary Production in the Life of Nun Abutsu* (University of Hawaii Press)

Nina Reid-Marony, *The Reverend Jennie Johnson and African Canadian History, 1868-1967* (University of Rochester Press)

Sue Tate, *Pauline Body: Pop Artist and Woman* (Wolverhampton Art Gallery)

Women's History Magazine Back issues

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

£5.00 inc postage (UK)

£6.50 inc postage (Overseas)

Most issues are available, from Spring 2002 to the present. Discover the contents of each issue at www.womenshistorynetwork.org/category/magazine/editions/

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

All of the above can be found in the WHN electronic

Newsletter

The WHN Newsletter, which is emailed to members monthly, enables us to keep you up-to-date with news, conferences and other events concerning women's history.

The Newsletter also provides 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, Meleisa Ono-George, at:

newsletter@womenshistorynetwork.org

To download current and back issues visit the Newsletter pages at

www.womenshistorynetwork.org/category/news/newsletters/

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 single-authored monograph that makes a significant contribution to women's history or gender history and is written in an accessible style. The book must be written in English and be published in the year prior to the award being made. To be eligible for the award, the author should be a member of the Women's History Network (UK) and be normally resident in the UK. The prize will be awarded in September 2015.

Entries (books published during 2014) should be submitted via the publisher by 31 March 2015

For further information please contact June Hannam, chair of the panel of judges.
Email: bookprize@womenshistorynetwork.org

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.

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 31st May 2015. 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.

For further information and before you apply please email Ann Hughes a.l.hughes@keele.ac.uk

WHN Community History Prize sponsored by The History Press

An annual £500 prize for a Community History Project which has led to a documentary, pamphlet, book, exhibition, artefact or event completed between the 1st of January 2014 and 31st May 2015.

To be eligible for the award the project must focus on History by, about, or for Women in a local or community setting. Candidates must submit both evidence of the project in written or photographic form and a 500-1,000 word supporting statement explaining the aims and outcomes of the project.

Individuals or groups can nominate themselves or someone else by 31 May 2015; for further guidance or advice on the application process email Professor Maggie Andrews maggie.andrews@worc.ac.uk

Getting to Know Each Other



Name: Charmian Cannon

Position: I started my professional life in 1945 as a school teacher, took a degree in sociology at LSE as a mature student and then worked in the higher education of teachers, at the London Institute of Education and the College of St Mark and St John. I retired in the 1980s but continued with part-time teaching of English to non-English speakers and then as a student at the U3A. I took an MA in Women's History in 2011 and now I am an intermittent 'independent scholar'.

How long have you been a WHN member?

Since from around 1995. I was a member of a group of women at the U3A studying Women's History. It was boringly presented and I suggested we did it through the life histories of ourselves, our mothers and grandmothers. I supported it by studying Life History at Sussex University and we then made a presentation at a WHN conference.

What inspired your enthusiasm for women's history?

Reading my grandmother's monthly letters to her siblings which cover the period 1902 - 1943 and are very long and descriptive. They inspired me to approach women's history through using life histories and putting them into context.

What are your special interests?

My grandmother's letters led to my interest in the relationship between individual women's lives, changing family and class cultures and wider historical events - particularly women's responses to war through my grandmother's vivid accounts of family life in the First World War.

I am also interested in the development of education for women and girls historically and in different parts of the world, and the need for opportunities for learning throughout a lifetime. I was able to take advantage of both as I went to a school for girls founded by Frances Mary Buss in 1850. And my first qualification was in teaching physical education at the earliest PE Teacher Training College for women in this country, founded by a pioneering woman from Sweden in 1903. My degree as a mature student in the 1950s was made possible by a full maintenance grant; it wouldn't be now so I am a bit of history myself.

I have also recently become interested in women's social mobility using a life history approach.

Who is your heroine from history and why?

A difficult question. I admire women who have worked to improve girls and women's education, their own and others - such as the members of the Women's Co-operative Guild, who responded to the request from Margaret Llewellyn Davies in 1914 for information about their experience of maternity. And young women such as Malala the Pakistani girl who defied the Taliban for the right to go to school.

My interest in women and war was inspired by two strong women: my maternal grandmother's accounts of family life in the First World War and my mother's experiences in the second, so perhaps they are my heroines. My grandmother suffered great loss, but she and my mother did nothing spectacular to escape the 'cage' of domestic life; to them it was unquestioned and to their families a haven from the stresses of war.

WHN AGM Report 2014

This is an edited version of the reports given by the steering committee members at the AGM held at the 2014 Annual Conference in Sheffield. The full minutes of the AGM and all the reports are available on the WHN website.

This has been another successful year for the WHN with both our membership and our profile in the media steadily growing. Our finances are healthy, partly due to the increase in membership, and this has enabled us to expand our stock of publicity materials and update the website. A new prize for Community History was awarded for the first time this year but both the Clare Evans Prize and the Carol Adams Prize were not awarded for the second year running. The steering committee agreed to discuss how to increase entries at a future meeting.

Steering Committee Membership Changes

Thanks to the following who have stepped down during the year or at the AGM: Jane Berney, Barbara Bush, Tanya Cheadle, Sue Bruley. Meagan Butler, Amanda Capern and Imaobong Umoren.

A warm welcome to the following who were all voted in at the AGM: Joanne Bailey, Alana Harris, Eve Colpus, June Purvis, Catherine Lee, Penny Tinkler, Robin Joyce, Felicity Cawley and Caroline Bressey. June Purvis was elected as convenor. All other posts will be decided at the next meeting of the steering committee.

Trustees

As the WHN is a charity it requires a minimum of three trustees, all of whom are drawn from the steering committee. As Barbara Bush and Jane Berney were retiring from the steering committee and consequently as trustees, the AGM approved the appointment of June Purvis and Alana Harris as trustees with immediate effect.

Magazine

The AGM approved the change of name of the magazine to *Women's History*.

Next meeting of the Steering Committee

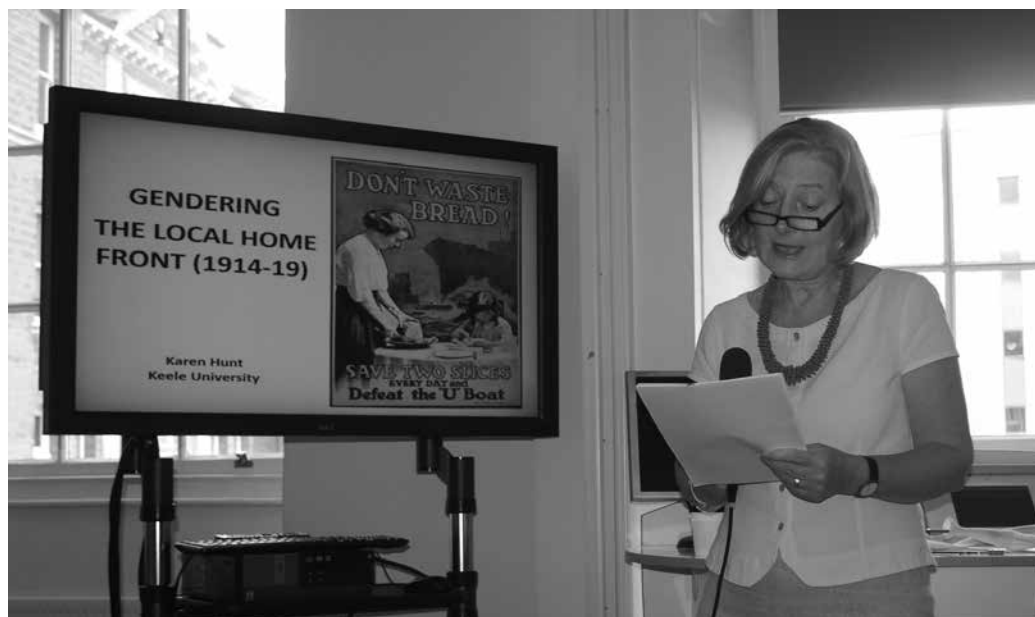
All members of the WHN are welcome to attend meetings of the Steering Committee as observers. Meetings are held three times a year and the next meeting will be on Saturday 8 November at 11.30am at Senate House, University of London, Malet Street, London, WC1E 7HU.

Home Fronts: Gender, War and Conflict: WHN Annual Conference Report 2014

In the opening remarks of her illuminating keynote which focussed on the home front in a Derbyshire village, Karen Hunt light-heartedly touched on the plethora of First World War commemorations. They were everywhere, she reflected, but this should not make us immune to the many important aspects of the conflict that were still open for debate, particularly on the home front. The diversity of experiences in time and place that she then explored exemplified the extraordinary range of topics and themes that were evident at this year's conference, from defending house and home in an ancient Greek siege to widows in the English Civil War, from non-combatant women in South Vietnam to the home front in the Falklands. With almost thirty panel sessions and more than 100 papers delivered, the richness and variety of contributions was a constant source of discussion throughout the three days.

It was apt that the 2014 conference was organised by Maggie Andrews and her team at the University of Worcester, and intriguing to be based in what used to be an infirmary with reminders of the impact of war all around. Maggie Andrews has been a key player in a variety of First World War commemorative projects this year, both locally and nationally, with a particular focus on the Home Front. Her own conference paper, on housewives and mothers in the films of the Second World War, exposed the silence that still surrounds this particular group of women; and this theme of gendered absence was apparent in the papers of many other delegates. As Karen Hunt concluded, there is still so much more to be done.

Karen Hunt's was the second of four engaging keynote speakers. The conference was kicked-off by Susan-Mary Grant's exploration of southern confederate women in the American Civil War. Here the battle front was the home front and the shocking images of urban destruction and the poignant words of the women themselves as they wrestled with food shortages, with gardens turned into graveyards, with their fragile status as refugees, was an eye-opener for many of us familiar only with Scarlet O'Hara. For her keynote, Deborah Thom drew on her role as an advisor for the redesign of the Imperial War Museum. She revealed how the original remit of the museum in 1917 was to reflect the experience of the whole population with women's contribution an important part. The letters, diaries, interviews, photographs and so on, which were amassed, have become a vital source of home front history, albeit one shaped by those who gathered and recorded it. The final keynote was on German women and the home front in the Second World War. Here Lisa Pine described a situation both familiar yet also very different to the British experience with food shortages, education campaigns, munitions work and widespread evacuation but one intensified and worsened by the Nazi perception of womanhood, by allied bombing and the devastating



*Plenary session –
Professor Karen Hunt*

impact of defeat.

The conference benefited from being in one location, with on-site accommodation in comfortable student rooms, good food (particularly the conference dinner) and copious amounts of tea, coffee and chocolate bars to fuel each break. The Friday night reception and prize-giving ceremonies for the WHN Book Prize and the new Community History Prize (both reported here) were accompanied by accordion music and were followed by an inspiring drama about the F.A.N.Y., one which deserves a much wider audience. As well as the chance to be entertained and awed by the play, delegates were offered a range of other activities such as tours of the Infirmary museum, film screenings and trips to a nearby abbey. It was an inspiring conference on a great theme, well done to everyone who made it happen.

Kate Murphy
Bournemouth University

Bursary Holder's Conference Report

There is something utterly exhilarating about attending a conference for, about and run predominantly by women and the WHN's annual conference, Home Fronts: Gender, War & Conflict, was no exception. It took place in the former Worcester Royal Infirmary, presided over in its time by a succession of innovative Matrons, and concluded in the grounds of the former Stanbrook Abbey, built in 1871 as home for an enclosed order of Benedictine nuns, founders of the one of the oldest private presses in England.

As a member of the judging panel for the WHN Community History Prize, sponsored by the History Press, it was a privilege to congratulate the winners, St Ives Archives, for their fantastic research into the women textile workers of the town. The judging process



*Panel on women's
organisations in WW1
Left to right - Sue Anderson-
Faithful, University of
Winchester; Kate Murphy
(Panel Chair), Sarah
Hellawell, Northumbria
University; Wendy Michaels,
University of Newcastle,
New South Wales.*

was a tricky job since the panel were presented with such a high calibre of community-focussed research projects carried out by and about women. It was exciting to find such enthusiasm for uncovering the hidden stories of women's experience, led in many cases by first-time researchers, guided or supported by professionals. The creativity and assurance with which their findings were presented bodes well for the continued promulgation of contributions to the field.

Although the focus lay on Home Fronts of the 20th century, there were a number of papers relating to earlier history that demonstrated the universality of certain themes. One such was a thread concerning the forms of relief and support for wives and families surviving during their husbands' time away at the front. Susan Mary Grant led, in the first keynote, with her examination of the 'Dislocations of the Home Front for Southern women during the American Civil War', when the Front was literally camped in some of these women's front yards.

The next day, John Black's paper on the influence of the 'Women Volunteers in the Army Pay Office at Woolwich during 1914' in distributing separation allowance and outdoor relief, demonstrated that behind every faceless administrative system, there are people who work to ensure that it is as humane as possible. This thread was picked up in Paul Huddie's investigation into 'Victims or Survivors: army wives in Ireland during the Crimean War'. Curious as to why so many Irish wives were not claiming the relief payments to which they were entitled from the Royal Patriotic Fund, Huddie uncovered evidence that some feared to apply lest their Catholic children were whisked away to be converted by the Anglican administration (not the case, protested the Bishop in the press), or were indeed making their own way by taking work in service or as shirt-makers in the army towns.

Appropriately for the location and the date (the anniversary of the Battle of Worcester falls on 3 September), some papers examined women's experience during the English Civil Wars. A stand out for me was Talya Housman's paper 'Two English Scripts of Ravishment: Divisions between Royalist and Parliamentary Utilisation of Rape', which focussed on the 17th legal definition of 'ravishment': to seize (property) by violence. In the Royalist scripts examined by Talya, the consent of the woman was of lesser importance than the representation of rape as theft of property from a man: a husband or father. To the Parliamentarians, however, the scripts act as a metaphor for the *polis*: an emerging idea of an offence against the person, without their consent. So, just as a woman is sexually assaulted against her will, so, the Parliamentary script reads, King Charles ruled without the consent of the people and stole their freedom of action. The offence is still viewed through the filter of male experience, but at least a step closer to understanding that a woman might not be a mere chattel after all...

I could go on – with apologies to those whose papers I have travestied in an attempt to summarise them. There were so many elements to take in. I was

thrilled to chair Deborah Thom's outstanding keynote on how the Imperial War Museum has presented the 'Public History of Women and War' since its establishment in 1917; whilst conversations over coffee cups about The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the protocols of grief in time of war, the visual rhetoric of the women's recruiting poster and the hierarchies of women's work will keep me thinking for a long while yet. I would like to say many thanks to the Women's History Network for my bursary – I hope that the work I produce as a result will prove it was well worth the investment!

Jenni Waugh

Independent heritage and community history consultant

<http://jenniwaughconsulting.com/>

Shop Online and Raise Money!

Have you heard about easyfundraising yet? It's the easiest way to help raise money for The Women's History Network! If you already shop online with retailers such as Amazon, Argos, John Lewis, iTunes, eBay or HMV, then we need you to sign up for free to raise money while you shop!

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How much can you raise?

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We've raised significant funds with easyfundraising so far but we need your help to keep donations coming in. Sign up at www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/whn and start making a difference ... simply by shopping.

Community History Prize

The Women's History Network has awarded the Community History Prize for the first time this year. It is sponsored by The History Press. Details of the impressive range of shortlisted entrants can be found at: www.thehistorypress.co.uk/womens-history-network. It was great to see so many examples of grass-root Women's History taking place in communities across the country. The shortlist included projects on women who worked in Cambridge Laundries, the use of badges to explore Women's History and an oral history of a 1960s single mothers' home in Nottingham. The projects involved drama productions, exhibitions, plays, videos and marches.

The winner was St Ives Archive with their project on the textile industries of St Ives where women made dresses for the silk garment factory Crysedex and for John Lewis and Berketex. The judges were very impressed that not only was the project inspired by a member of the public, but it also brought together a wide range of different researchers and resources from the community and shed light on a group of women workers

who were truly hidden from history. The careful documentation of the research and Youtube video www.youtube.com/watch?v=LuSXHRQ1m9k were organized to ensure that the research has a legacy and will be able to be accessed by others interested in this fascinating area of history in the future.



*Left Maggie Davis of the St Ives Archive,
right Sophie Bradshaw of the History Press*

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.womenshistorynetwork.org/
whnmagazine/authorguide.html](http://www.womenshistorynetwork.org/whnmagazine/authorguide.html)

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

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 or join online at www.womenshistorynetwork.org

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*You may now join the WHN online – just go to
www.womenshistorynetwork.org and follow the instructions.
Payments, standing-order mandates and Gift-Aid declarations can all be
accessed online as well – see panel on page 22 for further details*

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: Sue Bruley, 22 Woodlands, Raynes Park, London SW20 9JF

Email: 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:

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- 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.

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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 _____ 20__, and annually thereafter, on the same date, the sum of

(in figures) £ _____ (in words) _____.

Signature: _____