

Women's History

The journal of the Women's History Network



**Autumn
2020**

Articles by
Eilidh Innes
Julie Beckers
Lorraine Grimes
Emmanuelle
Morne

Plus
Seven book reviews
Prize Awards
Getting to know
each other
Committee Report

women's
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Rescheduled from 2020
Call for Papers
Women's History Network Annual
Conference
Homes, Food and Farms
3-4 September 2021

**Venue - Museum of Rural Life, University of Reading,
6 Redlands Rd, Reading RG1 5EX**

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In recent years women's history has made a significant contribution to debates and explorations of histories of homes, families and domestic life. Women's multiple and varied roles in the production, preparation and consumption of food, as farmers, housewives, gardeners and workers in agriculture and other industries, have been uncovered. The 2021 Women's History Network Annual Conference aims to build upon this work and bring together those interested in interrogating and expanding women's history and the history of homes, food and farms. Our Keynote speakers will include:

Laurel Forster – author of *The Recipe Reader: Narratives, Contexts, Traditions* (2010)

Prof. Jane Whittle – Lead Investigator on Leverhulme funded 'Women's work in rural England 1500-1700: a new methodological approach'

We invite submissions of **200-word** abstracts for papers of **15-minutes in length** which take a critical look at these areas of history.

We also welcome and encourage participation from anyone interested in other areas of women's history in the **Open Strand**. Contributors to this strand have the option of offering a 5-minute ignite talk, a 10-minute lightening talk or a poster. We invite submissions of *100-200 word* abstracts, stating your preferred mode of delivery.

All submissions must be on the form downloadable from
<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/the-womens-history-network-annual-conference/> to
conferenceorganiser@womenshistorynetwork.org by **30 March 2021**.

Finally, in 2021 we will be organizing our first **Women's History 3 Minute Thesis** competition – if you are a postgraduate student, studying any area of women's history, and would like to take part, please send your name, contact details and details of the title of your thesis, the institution at which you are studying and your supervisor to conferenceorganiser@womenshistorynetwork.org by 1 May 2021.

Welcome to the Autumn/Winter 2020 issue of *Women's History*. This is an open issue of the journal and includes a wide mix of articles that range from fifteenth-century Italian nuns to twentieth-century British sanitary products. We are pleased to announce the winners of the WHN book prize, the WHN Community History Prize and the WHN Schools Prize and there are also regular features of book reviews and WHN Committee news.

The four articles in this issue share themes of community and respectability as well as gendered negotiations between public and private spaces. Eilidh Innes has taken as her focus the nineteenth-century English theatre impresario John Hollingshead, using his management of London's Gaiety Theatre, from 1868 to 1886, to examine relationships between him and the actresses he promoted – the Gaiety Girls. Making comparisons with the #MeToo movement of today, Innes draws out the social and cultural factors that influenced the behaviour of this late Victorian entrepreneur and how this impacted upon the agency of the women performers he put on stage. Men's dominance of the public sphere, as underlined by Innes, is a recurring theme in Emmanuelle Morne's exploration of women in the British Chartist movement. As Morne reveals, three decades before Hollingshead began his eighteen-year stint at the Gaiety, Chartist women were defying the conventions of domesticity that kept them indoors, and were speaking out in support of the cause. By interrogating the rhetoric of the female-only associations that were established, Morne shows how the potency of home and hearth could become a powerful political tool, in a sphere usually dominated by men. Seemingly away from the public sphere, taking holy vows and becoming a nun is perhaps the most striking way to retreat into a private life but as Julie Beckers discloses in her exposition of the convent of Santa Maria di Monteluce in Perugia, external links could still remain. Becker's focus is a tabernacle, created by the renowned Florentine artist Ferrucci, that was installed in the church in 1483. Paid for by Eufrosia and Battista Alfani, two sisters who led the convent as abbesses for more than forty years, the commissioning of the tabernacle exposes a range of subtle connections between the enclosed world of the convent and the public world outside. Tensions between the public and the private/personal lives of women is also a theme that runs through Lorraine Grimes' analysis of the Mothers' Unions failed campaign against sanitary pad advertisements in the 1920s. Grimes uses the language of the advertisements to unpick how traditional notions of morality, as represented by the Mothers' Union, were pitted against new inventions of modernity and science-based consumerism.

We hope that you enjoy the articles in this issue and that you will forgive us for only being able to produce two issues of the journal this year. The effects of Covid-19 have been far-reaching and it means also that we have a slightly different format than would usually be expected in the Autumn/Winter edition. Because the WHN was unable to hold its annual conference this year, these reports are not included however we have been able to include details of the various Prizes that have been awarded.

We also say a reluctant goodbye to Zoe Thomas who has served the journal brilliantly well for the past two years, as our Committee Liaison. We are also bidding farewell to Hollie Mather, Angela Platt, Ellie Macdonald and Kiera Wilkinson. We welcome three new members to the editorial team: Helen

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Glew, Kate Terkanian and Samantha Hughes-Johnson.

Women's History is the journal of the Women's History Network. We invite articles on any aspect of women's history from all those interested in researching and writing about women's history and we hope that the diversity of subject matter in this issue will inspire you to contribute. As well as open issues, we also produce special issues on themed topics and are interested to hear from anyone who might have suggestions for future themed issues.

Editorial Team: Kate Murphy, Laurel Forster, Helen Glew, Susan Hawkins, Samantha Hughes-Johnson, Katharina Rowold, Kate Terkanian.



Cover Image:
Nellie Farren as Little Jack
Sheppard on the front
cover of a Gaiety Theatre
Programme, 1885.

'A Licensed Dealer in Legs': John Hollingshead and the 'Principal Boys' of the Gaiety Theatre, London 1868 – 1886.

Eilidh Innes

PhD student at Anglia Ruskin University

John Hollingshead (1827–1904) was a nineteenth-century journalist and theatre manager who worked with Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray. He became part of their bohemian set centred around the West End of London, before going on to become the first manager of the now defunct Gaiety Theatre. In telling the story of his life and career, I wanted to avoid writing a history of another great man and instead bring in the missing women's voices: the voices of those he employed and who helped to make him successful. The recent #MeToo, #TimesUp and #WhyIDidn'tReport movements have highlighted the continuing exploitation of female performers by powerful male movie producers. When researching Hollingshead's management of the Gaiety (1868–1886), it became apparent that this practice was common under his management. In order to explain why this happened, it is necessary to examine the factors that created this particular working environment. This article examines the way class and gender intersected in the period to create an exploitative environment for female performers. Along with intersectionality, it draws on Marina Warner's feminist exploration of female icons to examine the way Hollingshead used images of women to promote the Gaiety.¹ In addition, Sylvia Walby's theory of patriarchy is employed to show that the wider system of patriarchy that existed in the mid-nineteenth century gave women very few options for employment, and that women and their sexuality were tightly controlled not only in the home but also on stage.² The Habermasian notion of the homosocial public sphere, where men related to each other in a certain space on an equal footing, will also be explored, with particular reference to the area of London, centred around the Strand, that held the Gaiety Theatre and the offices of many of the popular periodicals of the time.³ This space was where Hollingshead first wrote his articles for Dickens and Thackeray and where he met and exchanged ideas with other journalists, musicians, artists and theatrical people. As Christopher Breward notes, 'the Strand continued to draw its distinctive atmosphere from the anti-authoritarian conviviality and rather puerile concerns of an all-male coterie of writers, actors and bon viveurs'.⁴ The anti-authoritarianism prevalent in this space, with its undertone of danger and excitement, was produced by the fact that the theatres and periodical offices shared their space with pursuits such as gambling and prostitution. This meant that the entertainment at the Gaiety regularly pushed the boundaries of what was considered respectable. This environment and its influence upon Hollingshead will be examined, particularly in the light of his comments that he was a 'Conservative-Anarchist' who liked to challenge authority.⁵

Hollingshead claimed in his history of the Gaiety Theatre that he was 'the founder and manager of the Greatest Variety Theatre in the World'.⁶ Whilst he was stage manager at the Alhambra Theatre (the upmarket music hall) from 1865–68, Hollingshead claimed to have introduced the can-can from France, and deliberately courted the attention of the censor by

staging a play entitled, *Where's the Police?*, which resulted in him being fined in a magistrate's court for the illegal performance of a stage play in a music hall. He took this taste for publicity with him to the Gaiety when he became its first manager. When it opened its doors on 21 December 1868, Hollingshead arranged for scented fans with the Gaiety's programme for the evening printed on them (sponsored by Rimmel) to be given out to the female members of the audience.⁷ The involvement of Rimmel, a perfume manufacturer, gave a frisson of danger to a respectable space.⁸ It is likely that Hollingshead knew this, and wanted to make this a part of the Gaiety experience. The Gaiety was designed as a space where the middle classes could feel comfortable and consider a home from home: in this very public sphere, they could feel as if they were in their own private domain. However, in spite of his attempts to court female theatregoers, the Gaiety was known as 'the Nudity Theatre' in Hollingshead's time, and Hollingshead claimed in his memoirs that he was blackballed at the Reform Club for his association with it.⁹ Breward agrees with this assessment and argues that the Gaiety 'provided lightly exotic burlesques to a predominantly male market'.¹⁰ It is certainly true that his successor, George Edwardes (1855 – 1915), made efforts to make the Gaiety more 'respectable' by altering the women's costumes so that they were less revealing and created the musical comedy to replace the burlesque performance, but 'such men still formed the core audience for Hollingshead's and then Edwardes's risqué fare'.¹¹

A clue to Hollingshead's attitude to theatre management is given in his own writings. He defined a theatre manager as a 'licensed dealer in legs, short skirts, French adaptations, Shakespeare, taste and the musical glasses'.¹² This definition, although perhaps initially meant in jest, was frequently applied by Hollingshead himself to his work as manager of the Gaiety and he used it throughout his autobiographical works. To the twenty-first century eye, he exploited and objectified women. Even at the time, Hollingshead described his shows as performances that were designed to appeal to those who wanted to 'hear a song or see a dance, or stare at a particular young lady' after dinner.¹³ The fact that the Gaiety's core audience were young men-about-town was suggested by a contemporary cartoon (Fig. 1).

In his biography of Hollingshead's successor, George Edwardes, Alan Hyman argues that women did not go to the Gaiety under Hollingshead's management because 'respectable, married women refused to go to a theatre where brazen, well-endowed females disported themselves on stage whilst the mashers in the stalls trained their opera glasses on them'.¹⁴ Hyman's comments suggest that a married woman was considered to be 'respectable' because she did not show her sexuality in the public sphere, whereas those women who were making a living from performing were 'brazen' and therefore not 'respectable'. This illustrates how class and gender intersect to suggest that working-class women who were actresses were not worthy of consideration as citizens,

THE SACRED LAMP OF BURLESQUE.

[“Throughout my management I have always endeavoured to keep the Sacred Lamp of Burlesque burning.”—John Hollingshead's *Gaiety Manifesto*.]

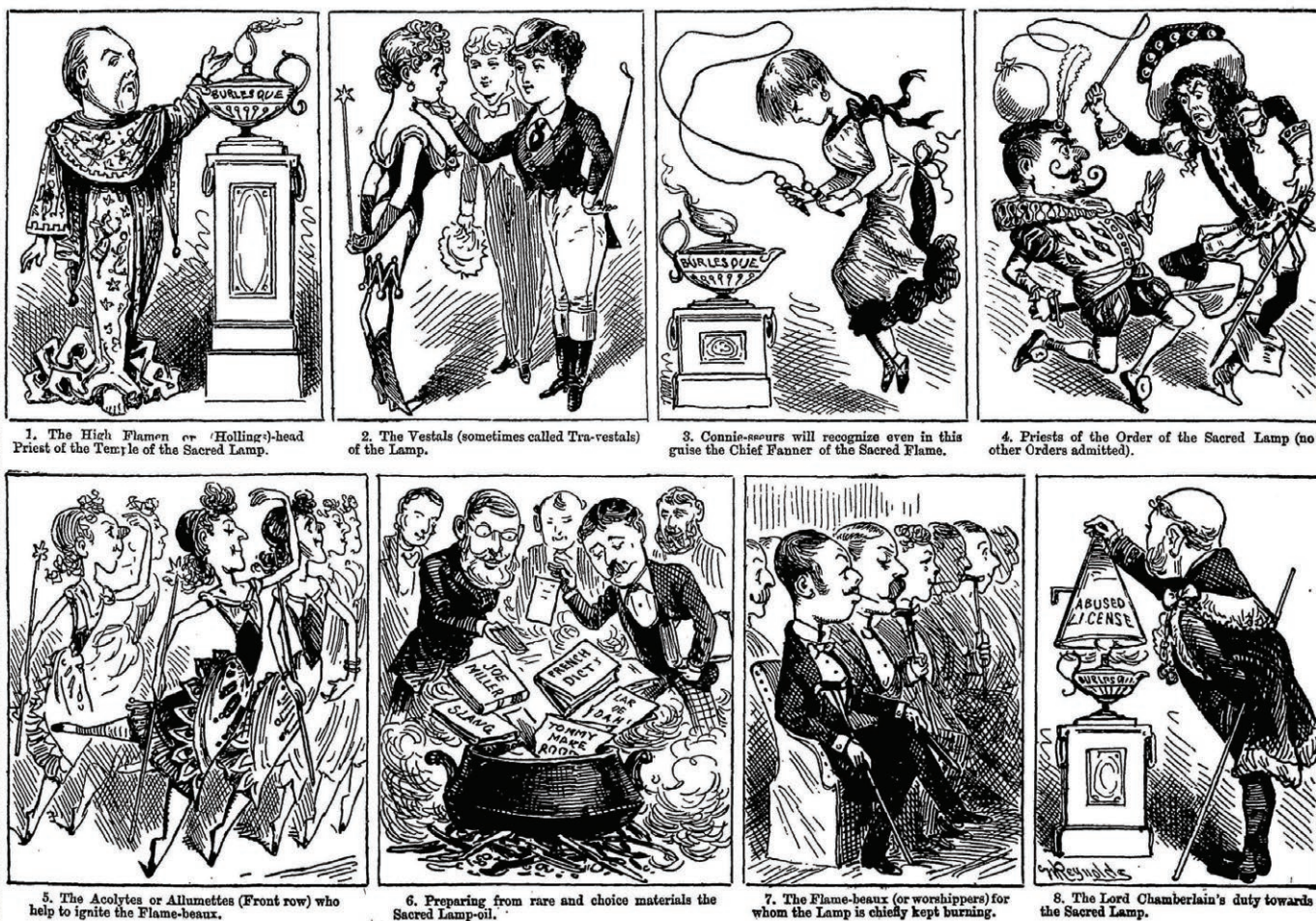


Fig 1: 'The Sacred Lamp of Burlesque'. *Funny Folks: A Weekly Budget of Funny Pictures, Funny Notes, Funny Jokes and Funny Stories*, 8 Jan. 1881. © British Library Board.

and certainly not worth an exploration into their lives by historians. This partly explains why so few detailed accounts of their lives exist and why the focus is generally upon theatre managers. Though Hollingshead himself claimed that the Gaiety could not depend solely on one section of society for its audience (as it would have very quickly gone out of business) and he utilised his networks in the press to publicise this view, it is quite obvious from this press release that men are the playsgoers in question:

The public, I am told, are all 'mashers'. If by 'masher' is meant a playgoer who thinks for himself, this theory may be right; but if it means the modern dandy, it is decidedly wrong. A theatre which, unlike most theatres, has been kept open almost night and day for fifteen years, which during that time has taken and expended between six and seven hundred thousand pounds, can hardly find its main support in a score or more of eccentric young gentleman.¹⁵

In spite of his protestations, it is certainly the case that his core audience were young men about town and the Gaiety's shows were tailored towards them, even though he introduced matinees so that women could attend the theatre and still be seen as 'respectable'. The fact that his theatre became known

for its chorus girls or 'Gaiety Girls' also suggests it was the male audience he had in mind. Gaiety Girls under Hollingshead consisted of a chorus of women in revealing costumes, as well as 'principal boys', who were actresses cast in male roles in order for them to wear tights and skimpy costumes.

In Pierre Bourdieu's view, theatres are 'ordinary commercial businesses whose concern for economic profitability forces them into extremely prudent cultural strategies, which take no risks and create none for their audiences'.¹⁶ Hollingshead was a pragmatist and freely admitted that he cancelled any theatrical piece that did not make a profit. However, whilst Hollingshead's shows were designed to have commercial appeal, they also pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable on the stage, particularly in terms of women's costumes. After all, an appreciative male audience was unlikely to complain to the Lord Chamberlain about the length of the chorus girls' dresses and it has been speculated that many theatre managers preferred to risk the wrath of the Lord Chamberlain with regards to women's costumes than lose money at the box office.¹⁷ This suggests that the (male) censor was not in the habit of shutting theatres down if women's costumes did not conform strictly to the rules and that a certain amount of 'sexualised performance' was permitted.¹⁸

The anti-authoritarian atmosphere of the West End and

the spaces where Hollingshead conducted his business, such as the bohemian coffee houses and theatrical green rooms, produced the kind of manager John Hollingshead was and the kind of productions he staged at the Gaiety, particularly burlesques. Victorian burlesques involved the sending up of popular plays or stories, and usually starred 'principal boys'. They were often heavily ad-libbed to avoid being censored by the Examiner of Plays, as references to politics, sex and religion were not permitted on the stage. In essence, Hollingshead's management style was encapsulated by the burlesque performance. A popular work would be staged, with which the audience would already be familiar, and star 'principal boys'. Because of this, it was likely to do well at the box office, whilst simultaneously testing the boundaries of authority, as not only did the women's costumes risk a fine from the Lord Chamberlain, but many of the ad-libs were political references which, if reported, risked the performance being halted. In reality, this was rarely the case. More often than not, the Lord Chamberlain or Examiner of Plays would have a quiet word with the theatre's manager, asking them to tone down the performance. Censorship was rarely overt and Hollingshead would have been aware of this. Much of his anti-authoritarianism was in fact nothing of the kind; it was all for show. The Gaiety was rather like *Punch* which poked fun at the authority figures of the day but with no real malice behind it. It was simply a diversion; a confection designed to amuse his well-connected friends after dinner.

Promoting the Gaiety Theatre: Women as Fairies or Spirits of Music and Theatre

Hollingshead issued what he referred to as annual notices to the public on the anniversary of the opening of the Gaiety, in which he listed the performances given during the past year, the actors and actresses he had employed, and the number of nights that the Gaiety had remained open.¹⁹ He also revealed that in 1882, he spent £40,000 on advertising in the press, which suggests that advertising played a key part in the Gaiety's brand.²⁰ The Gaiety's programmes were attractively designed and Hollingshead did not charge a fee for them, which suggests that he valued the opportunity to give them out and have the playgoers advertise the theatre on his behalf. These images often depicted women embodying virtues or feeling, such as fairies or spirits of music and theatre. This form of iconic identification in representations of women is not unusual in popular culture. Marina Warner suggests that this was because 'men often appear as themselves, as individuals, but women attest the identity and value of someone or something else, and the beholder's reaction is necessary to complete the meaning'.²¹ Warner's work highlights the fact that 'stories of statues coming to life can be found in folklore from Finland to North America'.²² She described the stories as containing the following elements, 'the woodcarver carves the doll, a tailor makes her clothes, and a gardener gives her a speech'.²³ Hollingshead followed deep-rooted cultural practices: he chose the actress, collaborated with his costume designers to dress her and identified the part she was to play in a performance, whether it was burlesque, comedy or operetta. Warner asks the pertinent question: 'to whom does she belong?'²⁴ As will be seen below, the evidence suggests that Hollingshead, whilst he did not own the actresses in his employ, certainly exercised a great deal of control over them.



Fig 2: Photograph of Nellie Farren as Ganem in *The Forty Thieves* at the Gaiety Theatre, 1880. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Hollingshead: 'a Model Actors' Manager?'

John H. Barnes wrote in his memoir *Forty Years on the Stage* that Hollingshead was 'a model actors' manager', but was he?²⁵ Hollingshead claimed he persuaded Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923) to perform in London and that appearing at the Gaiety had 'taught Madame Bernhardt her commercial value'.²⁶ Bernhardt saw it rather differently; her biographer suggested that she was well aware of her 'commercial value' and was able to use this to negotiate a share in the profits from her performances.²⁷ Bernhardt herself remarked that her performances 'drew a crowd nightly to the Gaiety Theatre, and I remained the favourite'.²⁸ The pressure to perform was something that she felt deeply as, like others, she had to 'perpetually stoke the fires of admiration' in order to maintain her success.²⁹ In her memoirs, she recorded her concerns over her appearance as she was preparing for her first performance at the Gaiety, 'Three times over I put rouge on my cheeks, blackened my eyes, and three times over I took it all off again with a sponge. I thought I looked ugly, and it seemed to me I was thinner than ever and not so tall'.³⁰ Constance Collier (1878-1955), who was a chorus girl under George Edwardes at the Gaiety, described actresses as having their 'beauty...exposed and exploited to the public'.³¹ It appears that Bernhardt felt the same.

However, there was a darker side to Hollingshead's

management practices. Collier said somewhat bitterly in her autobiography that the theatre 'attracts like a light the mysterious evil things of the night'.³² It is likely that she was referring to the rich men who courted the Gaiety Girls and plied them with expensive gifts. She admitted that there was another side to the adulation and expensive gifts and eventually left the Gaiety to become a 'legitimate' actress so that she could avoid being one of the Gaiety Girls who had fallen out of favour and were unable to find work.³³ Bernhardt also detailed a campaign against her by other male performers in the Comédie Française, in which they spread hurtful rumours in order to discredit her.³⁴ The unpleasant nature of the rumours suggests that her male colleagues felt threatened by her success and the power she gained. This may be why she felt under pressure to perform; certainly she appeared onstage unwell and under the influence of opium, meaning that she forgot some of her lines.³⁵ Feminist scholars argue that 'power relations are about people's lives' and in this case, Bernhardt had gained a rare financial independence denied to many women at the time.³⁶

Kerry Powell's research on women and the Victorian theatre explores the dictatorial management style of actor-managers such as Henry Irving and W.S. Gilbert and illustrates the fact that 'even major Victorian actresses [were] keenly sensitive to the control that actor-managers exerted over them'.³⁷ Emily Soldene (1838–1912), an actress who was employed under Hollingshead at the Gaiety, gave a sense of what it was like to work for him. She revealed the last-minute nature of the Gaiety's shows; the fact that performers were expected to rehearse and produce an opera in one week and the necessity of learning lines while changing between Acts, 'I got my verse of the 'Quarrelling Duett' as I came off the Second Act. I learnt it while changing for the Third, and remembered it all right'.³⁸ This shows Hollingshead was a rather demanding theatre manager but Soldene also revealed another side to him. She described Hollingshead as 'always highly superior and sphinx-like', which suggests she was in awe of him to a certain degree but also that he was a formidable man.³⁹ In addition, a rather more autocratic streak to his management is suggested by the following rather revealing sentence from his autobiography, '...it is a singular fact...that all these ladies – beginning with Miss Loseby and Miss Tremaine, had as much refinement and regard for the discipline of a management which they knew regarded their best interests as its own'.⁴⁰

Powell argued that 'one way for an actress to survive and prosper in such an atmosphere was to provide her public and the actor-managers with the type of performance they expected'.⁴¹ In the case of Nellie Farren (1848–1904) and Kate Vaughan (1852–1903), both women expressed a dislike of burlesque, but both felt obliged to keep performing in such productions whilst working for Hollingshead. Powell also pointed out that theatre managers, 'cast a jealous eye at any woman who might threaten their own place in the limelight'.⁴² This certainly applied to Hollingshead. A contemporary memoir recorded a particular incident where he apparently pinned the following notice to the stage door of the Gaiety:

LADIES DRAWING LESS THAN TWENTY-FIVE SHILLINGS A WEEK ARE POLITELY REQUESTED NOT TO ARRIVE AT THE THEATRE IN BROUGHAMS.⁴³

The memoir in question claimed that Hollingshead 'recognised

the show girl as a factor of the Gaiety', but equally it could be argued that he wished to avoid the chorus girls drawing attention away from him.⁴⁴

The Gaiety Girls: Women as 'Objects of Display'

Kerry Powell argues that 'sexual attractiveness to men was almost essential to success' and that for many actresses 'survival rather than respectability' was of paramount importance.⁴⁵ Hollingshead employed several well-established actresses when putting together his company at the Gaiety, such as Dame Madge Kendal (1848–1935) and Nellie Farren, alongside their husbands, but appears to have preferred to recruit members of his company from the music halls. Throughout his memoirs, he describes the female members of his company in positive terms, suggesting that he had a good relationship with them. Hollingshead said of Madge Robertson, later Kendal, that 'the world knew, admired and honoured her as 'Mrs Kendal' at the Gaiety'.⁴⁶ However, Hollingshead barely merits a mention in her autobiography so it is not known what her opinion was of him.⁴⁷ Similarly, he is rarely referred to in Sarah Bernhardt's memoirs, and then only in passing. Of Nellie Farren, he declared 'how pleasant the engagement must have been to both of us requires no more proof than the fact that she remained with me for eighteen years'.⁴⁸ It is difficult to know what she thought of the arrangement as she did not publish an autobiography and interviews with her are scarce. Farren largely exists in documents through the eyes of the men who worked with her or who admired her from the stalls. William Leverton, who worked in the box office at the Haymarket Theatre, described Nellie Farren as an incomparable principal boy, who was known as 'Our Nellie' by her devoted followers.⁴⁹ The lack of documents written by Farren herself means that it is difficult to know what drove her. However, a rare surviving interview with the *Western Mail* gives us a glimpse into her character. On being dismissed as merely a burlesque actress (the assumption being that this was easier than straight roles), she retorted that it was in fact much harder as she had to be able to sing and dance as well as act.⁵⁰ The *Penny Illustrated Paper* described her as 'the lady who has never been eclipsed in boy parts'.⁵¹ A memoir from the 1920s reported that Nellie Farren was 'the most marvellous woman, in her time, that ever came upon the stage'.⁵² This suggests that she had a longstanding rapport with the audience and was able to cultivate a large following who would attend the Gaiety to see her, regardless of which production she was performing in. Hollingshead described her as 'a Gaiety fixture, not to be removed unless the company went with her', which suggests she had a great deal of influence not only at the Gaiety, but with him personally.⁵³ This is also reflected in an interview with the *Graphic* towards the end of her career. The *Graphic's* interviewer in 1898 reported that her wage, which had started out at five shillings per week, 'grew by annual increments to a cool 50 shillings'.⁵⁴ The average wage of a labourer in 1898 was 16s 9d.⁵⁵

As is the case with Nellie Farren, not many documents survive that reveal much about Kate Vaughan. A rare interview with *The Era* in 1889 revealed that she did not like burlesques, even though she played in all the burlesques that Hollingshead staged during the seven years she was a member of the Gaiety company. She told the reporter that she could not perform in burlesques and that the stage manager, Robert Soutar, had



Fig 3: Photograph of Kate Vaughan as Amina in *The Bohemian Gyrl* at the Gaiety Theatre, 1877.
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

told her without malice that, 'you are the very worst burlesque actress I ever saw; you can dance, and that is all you can do'.⁵⁶ She observed that she 'seemed to hit the public taste and was a great success – at least, so they all told me'.⁵⁷ She also revealed that she did not like dancing, but felt that she had to do it because 'it won me great fame and a lot of money'.⁵⁸ In a later interview with the *Northern Echo* the male journalist recorded that she told him 'unblushingly' that she liked playing 'principal boy' parts.⁵⁹ What is interesting about this is that both Nellie Farren and Kate Vaughan reported separately that, for different reasons, they did not like playing in burlesques but did so in spite of this. It is impossible to tell if Hollingshead pressured them to perform or if they did it because of a sense of loyalty to him or if, as Kate Vaughan said, it was purely to maintain their financial independence.

Hollingshead recruited both Phyllis Broughton (1862-1926) and Constance Gilchrist (1864-1946) from the music hall and described his relationship with the latter as 'a form of apprenticeship'.⁶⁰ He noted that Constance Gilchrist had 'several opportunities of 'bettering herself', which she at once declined – in one case, against my wish'.⁶¹ This suggests that Hollingshead had a rather patriarchal attitude towards some

of his female employees. Constance Gilchrist's views on this are not recorded. Phyllis Broughton was equally tight-lipped in an interview with *The Era* in 1893, stating only that Hollingshead had employed her at the Gaiety following a performance at the Canterbury music hall and that she had remained there for five years.⁶² Aside from commenting that Hollingshead's 'word was his bond', which suggested that he kept his word with regards to her contract, she declined to say anything further, saying that: 'I am a most uninteresting person. I have no anecdotes for you, no experiences, no traveller's tales'.⁶³ Phyllis Broughton was described as 'a notorious prostitute on the Gaiety stage' by the Liberal MP Viscount Harcourt, in extracts from his diary.⁶⁴ This illustrates the attitude of the Victorian man towards women who exhibited their sexuality in the public sphere: to him an actress was synonymous with a sex worker.⁶⁵ Miriam Hansen argues that this was because the bourgeois public sphere 'was gendered from the start – as an arena of virtuous action, and civilised interaction, for the "public man"'.⁶⁶ Therefore, 'a "public woman" was a prostitute, a commoner, a common woman'.⁶⁷ Incidentally, there is no evidence that Phyllis Broughton was a sex worker. Harcourt also recorded his views on Nellie Farren and described her as being 'younger and prettier than ever with hardly anything on' when he attended a 'very stupid burlesque' at the Gaiety.⁶⁸ This is backed up by the recollections of actress Ellaline Terriss (1871-1971), who recorded in her autobiography that:

...the handsome ladies of the old Gaiety burlesques who were the idols of the crutch-and-toothpick brigade... were tall, beautiful creatures, generally in tights, with an odd diamond butterfly or two pinned on their shapely legs and sometimes in other most ridiculous places'.⁶⁹

Ellaline Terriss's comments are interesting because they strongly suggest that women at the Gaiety were 'objects of display, to be looked at and gazed at and stared at by men'.⁷⁰ Laura Mulvey equates women with 'scenery onto which men project their narcissistic fantasies' and Hollingshead's comments about producing shows for people who wanted to 'stare at a particular young lady' suggest that there was more than an element of truth in this.⁷¹ However, the situation is rather more complex than that. As Imani Perry argues, the family 'heralded by a man whose wife, children and chattel attended, was the basic social unit'.⁷² This came under great pressure due to 'growing urbanization and large numbers of single working-class women in American and European cities' and challenged 'the domestic Victorian ideal'.⁷³ The expansion in the number of working-class women who, 'though exploited, maintained a greater degree of autonomy than their foremothers', meant that they were likely to be seen as challenging 'the cult of domesticity', particularly if they had a career as an actress and displayed their sexuality on stage as part of their role.⁷⁴ The Habermasian notion of the bourgeois public sphere as 'the sphere of private people come together as a public' has been criticised by feminist thinkers such as Miriam Hansen, as women were not part of this space.⁷⁵ However, as Thomas A. King notes, 'the male self was not a single or stable entity' and men 'became different from themselves as they occupied different social or body spaces'.⁷⁶ He points out that the link between masculinity and 'visual mastery' was not in place in the nineteenth century and that

to 'identify the gaze with maleness per se is to designate... a historically and culturally limited mapping of male bodies and social space'.⁷⁷ He notes that the male gaze 'occludes the contradictions of a class society by appealing to the identity of men'.⁷⁸ This is where intersectionality is most useful as a way of explaining the complexities of Hollingshead's management of his female performers. As Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge point out in their work on intersectionality, the 'events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor'.⁷⁹ Certainly if we apply this to Nellie Farren, Kate Vaughan and the other female members of Hollingshead's company in order to unpick the 'power relations', we can see that they are 'intertwined' and 'mutually constructing'.⁸⁰ Ultimately, 'power relations are about people's lives, how people relate to one another, and who is advantaged or disadvantaged within social interactions'.⁸¹ Certainly the 'power relations' at the Gaiety were biased in favour of Hollingshead, who was not only part of a network of influential people and a member of the more exclusive London clubs, but also a man of property. This, and the fact that he preferred to recruit from the music halls which were much more likely to have female, working-class performers, meant that it was very difficult for them to negotiate a proper wage with him, as they were relatively powerless. Sarah Bernhardt and Nellie Farren were likely to have been the only female performers with whom Hollingshead negotiated on equal terms.

In his 1958 book about London's West End, the actor Guy Deghy declared that Hollingshead's project at the Gaiety was 'frankly and unashamedly a leg show' and that the burlesque was 'little more than a pretext for showing attractive, tight-sheathed female limbs and bosoms within the limits of decorum'.⁸² He described the Gaiety Girls as 'honest to goodness Cockneys' and noted that they were 'professional chorus girls earning a living'.⁸³ He suggested that Hollingshead did not pay them well, so they needed to look for other ways of supplementing their wages.⁸⁴ Understandably, they did this by becoming escorts, or in the parlance of the 1950s, 'courtesans'.⁸⁵ Deghy argued that they were not the same as the prostitutes who young men-about-town went to meet in the supper clubs because 'no man was ashamed to be seen out with one of them'.⁸⁶ Indeed, there was apparently a certain amount of prestige to be gained from going out with a Gaiety Girl.⁸⁷ This line of thinking suggests that Deghy divided prostitutes by class with some being more acceptable than others. Deghy took the view that, although this appeared to make Hollingshead 'little more than a glorified brothel-keeper', he did not believe this was the case and then went on to list Hollingshead's achievements in the theatre.⁸⁸ This work illustrates how entrenched the structures of patriarchy were in the 1950s, as Deghy appears to suggest that the exploitation of women by powerful men is permissible as long as they have other achievements to their name. He is also guilty of drawing parallels between women in the public sphere and sex workers.

Interestingly, Hollingshead did not go unchallenged at the time about the performances he staged at the Gaiety. He received letters that appear to have been complaints from members of the public about the presence of women 'of doubtful moral character' in the theatre's audience.⁸⁹ His reply was that theatre managers had 'no power to sift and screen their audiences' and that 'no such power exists of improving audiences by force'.⁹⁰ This is not quite true. As Erica Rappaport notes, West End theatre managers 'manipulated pricing, show

times, ticket sale locations, and a choice of theatrical fare to target wealthy audiences'.⁹¹ To that end, Hollingshead built a restaurant at the Gaiety and introduced matinee performances in order to make the theatre into a respectable environment for the middle classes. In her work on the Victorian nude, Alison Smith suggests that, in art and the theatre, 'vice and immorality were sited around the figure of the prostitute, invariably presented as a deviant woman to attract and capture the male gaze'.⁹²

It is unclear if the women who wrote to Hollingshead to complain about prostitution at the Gaiety were in fact expressing what Smith called 'moral anxieties' about the female body being on display on stage but this may well have been behind their letter writing.⁹³ In addition, what Jeffrey Weeks describes as 'the ideology of respectability' which emphasised 'the need for social discipline' may also have played a part.⁹⁴ Weeks took the view that the word prostitution was applied to women 'who did not readily fit into emerging definitions of appropriate sexual behaviour'.⁹⁵ However, Tracy Davis paints actresses as less passive in their role on stage in her work on the Victorian actress, noting that although women were 'vehicles of gratification' their 'identity, sincerity, and appearance were illusory'.⁹⁶ She takes the view that 'their success relied on not giving away the hoaxes of the consumer's control or full reciprocity of enjoyment'.⁹⁷ As Winnie Tamm points out, the removal of women's agency by the male gaze can be responded to in a number of ways.⁹⁸ For those women whose careers depended upon being a subject of the male gaze, 'using [it] to their own advantage [was] a strategy for survival among women in limiting conditions'.⁹⁹ This was certainly the case with the women of the Gaiety. They appear to have been perfectly aware of the male gaze and its dark side and so the women they presented on stage were what the male playgoers wanted to see: beautiful but not real. In addition, as Sylvia Walby argues, employment options for working-class women in the nineteenth century were severely limited by legislation, while middle-class women were 'excluded from the public sphere of the state' and expected to remain in the private sphere of the home.¹⁰⁰ Becoming an actress was not seen as 'respectable' so was not a viable career option for many middle-class women. This was compounded by the fact that 'wage labour by itself does not provide freedom from patriarchal control'.¹⁰¹ Women in the nineteenth century had few, if any, rights and could not own property or vote. This meant that they were vulnerable to exploitation. Walby notes that 'first wave feminism' can be traced back to 1850, but it is unclear whether any of the actresses Hollingshead employed were involved in this movement.¹⁰² It was likely to have been too risky for them to speak out as their livelihoods were at stake.

The recent #MeToo movement highlights the problems of speaking out against the widespread sexual harassment of women and the fact that survivors of sexual violence are often still not believed, while those accused of sexual violence are often defended by many powerful and influential members of society.¹⁰³ To speak out in the twenty-first century is brave and risks loss of employment, but to speak out in the nineteenth century would have meant loss of earnings and possible destitution if an actress could not find a new situation. Constance Collier wrote of the perils of those Gaiety Girls who had fallen out of favour and the precarious situation they found themselves in.¹⁰⁴ Wisely, she took the decision to change

to straight roles to ensure the continuance of her career.¹⁰⁵ In addition, because actresses were viewed as 'flaunting [their] beauty to accrue influence and wealth', Davis argues, 'like the prostitute, she must perpetually stoke the fires of admiration, or perish'.¹⁰⁶ Kate Vaughan certainly seems to have been aware of this as she continued to perform in burlesques throughout her time at the Gaiety, despite later admitting that she did not like them. To a lesser extent, Nellie Farren also seems to have realised that Hollingshead's decision to promote her as a burlesque actress was a sound one from a financial point of view. Perhaps both Farren and Vaughan realised that, as Warner argues, they were in fact like Pandora and 'subjected to the desires and shaping will of others and given...few choices from the gamut of archetypes'.¹⁰⁷

'The Other Sort of "Actress": Hollingshead and the Corinthian Club

A memoir of London written by H.G. Hibbert who claimed he was a friend of Hollingshead's, hinted that Hollingshead had led a rather more scandalous life than the one which he depicted in his autobiography. Hibbert took the view that Hollingshead could have written 'a profoundly interesting volume of reminiscences' and that he did not believe that Hollingshead's life had been as 'devoid of scandalous experience' as he claimed.¹⁰⁸ Quite what the 'scandalous experiences' Hibbert referred to is unclear. However, a rather darker side to Hollingshead's attitude to women is suggested in a contemporary memoir written by James Glover, Musical Director of Drury Lane Theatre, which described a raid on the 'Gardenia', a gentlemen's club, in the early hours of the morning that resulted in the arrest of the female performers.¹⁰⁹ Many of the women arrested gave their profession as 'milliner' or 'actress' but one was reported to have said to the police: 'I'm no bally actress or milliner – you bloomer – otherwise what would I be doing out here doing a high-kicker show in a low-necked dress at this hour of the morning?'¹¹⁰ The memoir went on to report that Hollingshead himself opened a club of a similar nature, called the 'Corinthian', in York Street, St. James's Square, on his retirement from the Gaiety Theatre in 1885.¹¹¹ Glover noted that 'a huge army of real actresses, all in the front line of comic opera, were elected as honorary members'.¹¹² He also recorded that they were not often seen at the club and, because of this, 'the other sort of "actress" came along' until the club was eventually raided and closed down by the police.¹¹³ Hibbert claimed that Hollingshead was inspired to open the Corinthian by the 'very convivial gatherings in the Alhambra canteen' when Hollingshead was stage manager there.¹¹⁴ William Boosey recorded in his memoirs that 'all the young bloods of the time collected for supper and dancing' at the club and claimed that Hollingshead was in the habit of holding supper parties there.¹¹⁵ This is backed up by George Grossmith, who recorded with some pride in his memoirs that he used to be 'asked to the grown-up parties of Mr Toole, Mr Charles Millward, Mr Henry Neville and Mr John Hollingshead'.¹¹⁶ What these parties involved exactly is unclear as he did not elaborate further. Hollingshead does not give us much information about the 'Corinthian' apart from fact that the members were 'men of position' and included those from the aristocracy.¹¹⁷ He also recorded that he spent £1000 on brickwork and padded walls after complaints from the neighbours in St. James's Square.¹¹⁸ In 1893, when the 'Corinthian' was closed by the police,

Hollingshead wrote to the press to defend it, even though he was no longer involved with its management, and attacked the 'sham morality' of the authorities.¹¹⁹ He complained that the government received its rates and taxes from the club whilst doing nothing about prostitution in Piccadilly Circus.¹²⁰ Hollingshead's attitude to the club suggests that he saw women as a commodity to be exploited by men and that he took the view that men, especially powerful men, required discreet clubs where they could eat, drink and be entertained by women, regardless of whether this was legal.

Conclusion

Hollingshead's management of the Gaiety Theatre was enormously influential: he shaped not only his successor's productions at the Gaiety, but also Florenz Ziegfeld in America. Ziegfeld was described as a manager who 'create[d] an onstage illusion of female beauty'.¹²¹ This is essentially what Hollingshead was doing at the Gaiety with Nellie Farren and others. Like Hollingshead, Ziegfeld also controlled what his showgirls did outside the theatre, by giving them instructions about what to wear.¹²² Michael Lasser argued that the showgirls Ziegfeld put on stage were a 'fantasy' and that 'men swallowed it, and women accepted it for what it was'.¹²³ The concept of the glamorous showgirl began with Hollingshead's Gaiety Girls and the attitudes of Nellie Farren, Kate Vaughan and Sarah Bernhardt suggest that they were well aware of this. Though it is true that Hollingshead introduced matinees, employed well-known actors in his company, brought over the Comédie Française and other companies to perform at the Gaiety and never pretended to be anything other than 'a licensed dealer in legs' – we are left with the fact that he did exploit women. This was either by paying them a great deal of money to keep performing in the kind of show that they did not like because it brought in more revenue for the theatre, or by paying them so little that they were forced to supplement their income by becoming sex workers to satisfy the desires of the young men-about-town. This probably accounts for the Gaiety being labelled as 'the Nudity Theatre' in Hollingshead's time. Hollingshead's management style was clearly skewed towards placing women on stage who the male members of the audience would find attractive because it made him (and his backers) a great deal of money. As Warner put it, 'creation is seen as possession' and the edicts aimed at his female performers were clearly a form of control, if not ownership.¹²⁴ Though Victorian actresses had some financial freedom, they were, as Warner noted, 'subjected to the desires and shaping will of others', in this case John Hollingshead and the patrons of the Gaiety Theatre.¹²⁵

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The Alfani Tabernacle by Francesco di Simone Ferrucci for the Reformed Convent of Santa Maria di Monteluca in Perugia.¹

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In March 1483, as the chronicle of Santa Maria di Monteluca in Perugia states, the Florentine master Francesco di Simone Ferrucci (1437-1493) came to the lay church of the Poor Clares convent to install a tabernacle on the altar of the Sacrament [Fig. 1]. The chronicle at Monteluca, known as the *Memoriale*, reports that the tabernacle (an architectural and liturgical structure used to preserve the consecrated host), appeared completely in marble and was a '*bellissimo lavoro*' (a beautiful work).² The master had brought the tabernacle to the church himself and the goods had been paid for by Eufrosia and Battista Alfani, two sisters who were high-profile abbesses at the recently reformed female Franciscan house.³ This article considers the commissioning and the importance of this wall-mounted tabernacle, as a means by which religious women might remain connected with the outside world.

Eufrosia Alfani (c. 1425-1489) who entered the convent in 1449, and her sister Battista (1438-1523), who joined her sister in 1452, had each been elected to the highest office of abbess at the convent several times. A great honour by all means, as Santa Maria di Monteluca was one of the oldest and most important establishments of the order of Poor Clares in Italy. Founded in 1218, Monteluca was steeped in history by the time the Alfani sisters arrived in the mid-fifteenth century. Its long and, at times, difficult history ensured the convent had become central to both the religious and devotional fabric of Perugia. But it was equally important as an economic and political player, contributing to the urban economy as well

as being home to a host of girls coming from elite families in the city.⁴ The Alfani was one such wealthy family, part of the urban elite that rose in Perugia in 1424, when a power vacuum that was left by the *condottiero* (mercenary captain) Bracci Fortebraccio, who saw the city returned to the Holy See as part of the Papal State. The pious Alfani were a large family with several branches who were descended from the great fourteenth-century lawyer, Bartolo da Sassoferrato. They were bankers and merchants and some of its members, such as Eufrosia and Battista's nephew Alfano, held important positions at the Papal court in Rome. Influenced by regional neighbours such as Florence, where elite families nurtured an intellectual pursuit in the arts and acted as patrons, the Alfani too became interested in their cultural surroundings. Alfano, the family member who led the Treasury in Rome, for example, became a patron for Raphael and Pintoricchio.⁵ In this vein, Eufrosia and Battista followed suit to become cultural protagonists in their convent, a less obvious activity seeing the character of their enclosed life, as we shall see.

The introduction to this article mentions the Alfani sisters as being high profile and this notion cannot be stressed enough. They were leading figures at Monteluca for more than a quarter of a century, often alternating two of the most important positions in the hierarchy of convent administration as abbess and vicar, which was a sort of deputy to the more important function of abbess. Eufrosia Alfani became a young vicar for the first time in 1453, under abbess Lucia da Foligno.



Fig 1: Francesco di Simone Ferrucci, Sacrament tabernacle, 1487, marble and polychromy. S. Maria di Monteluca, Perugia. Photo by author.

She was elected vicar again in 1459, 1468, 1470, and abbess in 1462, 1473, 1479, 1486, and 1488. Her sister Battista, about thirteen years Eufrosia's junior, became vicar for the first time in 1483, and abbess in 1491, 1496 and 1503. After 1503, three women from other pivotal and elite Perugian families took over the much sought-after positions at the convent: Veronica Graziani, Eufrosina degli Oddi and Francesca Baglioni.⁶ Eufrosia and Battista were much respected members of the community. The chronicle notes an elaborately written necrology for both women; none of the other abbesses were the subject of such a detailed farewell. Eufrosia, who succumbed after a long period of illness in 1489, was tenderly described by Lucia da Foligno who wrote the two-page necrology as *'la dolce nostro matre'* (a sweet reverend mother); someone who had invited renewed devotion and spiritual activity at the convent after the 1448 reform. Da Foligno adds that *'con la sua eloquentia era medico et medicina de omne nostra spirituale infirmitade'* (with her speech she was both medic and medicine for the spiritually weak), inspiring several generations of nuns to find truth in their individual paths, while healing spirits along the way.⁷ When Battista died in 1523, she had spent seventy-one years at

the convent, first spending time at the convent school of Sant' Antonio da Padova also in Perugia, before entering Monteluca. When she passed away, she was eighty-five years old. In her necrology, abbess Veronica Graziani writes of her exemplary life, her talents as a scribe, but also her intellectual fervour and the encouragement she gave her fellow nuns in their own devotional and intellectual activities.⁸ Alfani women would be present at Monteluca until at least 1830, when Luisa Alfani entered the convent.⁹ The value of their continuing presence throughout the historical development of their Perugian home cannot be underestimated. The Alfani, among others, sowed the seeds for future economic, social, cultural and political activity at Monteluca.

Intellectual Activity Post-Reform

Santa Maria di Monteluca, together with the Cistercian convent of S. Giuliana the most prestigious female religious house in the region, was reformed by the nearby convent of Santa Lucia in Foligno in 1448. Reform denoted a need for change. Reform meant that the nuns at Monteluca had somehow made a mistake, or were perceived by the male clergy who ultimately initiated the reform, to have made a mistake. The specific reason for reform at Monteluca remains hidden by the absent documents of history, including a Book of Reform that has long been lost. The chronicle does note a needed return to the fundamental principles of the order of Saint Clare, yet the specific reason as to why this change was needed remains unclear. Battista Alfani did share the following sentiments in the chronicle in 1488: *'Non havemo meritato poterla sequitare nella perfectione della evangelica povertà et penuria de le cose temporale come è stato nostro grande desiderio'* (We have not deserved to be able to follow in the perfection of evangelical poverty, and to deplete ourselves from temporal things as was our great desire). The fact Battista thought the community was undeserving of the Franciscan lifestyle of poverty and meddled in earthly activities could be a motivation for reform, although she does not detail what the *cose temporale* (temporal things) might have been. Battista's reaction could have been that of a humble nun, a reaction in step with the nature of her office.¹⁰ In most cases however reform was deemed necessary when communities breached enclosure. At any rate, during the fifteenth century a reform movement, also known as the Observant movement, sprang up all over Europe, not just within the Franciscan Order.¹¹

At Monteluca, the required change was quite rigid; twenty-four sisters, all of noble birth, from the recently reformed Poor Clare convent of Santa Lucia in Foligno arrived at Monteluca on 21 December 1448, late in the evening. Monteluca's ruling abbess, Nicholosa de Francesco de li Oddi da Perugia, perhaps reluctantly, was asked to hand over the keys of her convent to the reforming and therefore newly elected abbess from Foligno, Margarita da Sulmona. Margarita, who had been noticed by the friars of the local Observant Movement for her pious and charitable nature, was sent to Monteluca to initiate its reform. After a number of liturgical and architectural changes to Monteluca, the convent was deemed Observant, after which Margarita left to be involved in numerous other reforms, emanating from Monteluca. One of the side effects of having been reformed was that Monteluca became a formidable reformer in its own right, sending clusters of nuns to other Poor Clare communities in need of change.¹²

The renewed, mandatory interest in living life as Observant, was pivotal for the development of intellectual capital in the community. From right after the reform until deep into the sixteenth century, internal and external patronage of the arts in the broadest sense marked the activity of both lay patrons and the nuns themselves. The Alfani sisters spearheaded this venture and successfully and independently added to the intellectual culture of their community.¹³ In 1488, forty years after the reform, Eufrosina Alfani created the chronicle of Monteluce; a book that narrates life inside the convent and that portrays the nuns' social life in detail. When Eufrosina died in 1489, just one year after the conception of the book, Battista became its principal scribe until she herself passed away in 1523. The idea of a written chronicle was inherited from the female reformers coming from Foligno. The chronicle presented communities like Monteluce and other reformed groups as well, with the opportunity to reflect upon daily life. These writings also present the modern researcher with the opportunity to gauge what was at stake in reformed groups. The nuns at Monteluce left their original convent in 1910 and were moved to another location in Perugia, where they continue to add to their chronicle in the enclosure of their house.¹⁴ The chronicle discloses information on a system of artistic patronage, and much of the intellectual and artistic activity at Santa Maria di Monteluce can be found within its elaborately written pages. Here, we find out Battista ordered books and a libretto for the convent library; we read about her interest in writing about the history of other reformed communities; we take note of her activities as a scribe in the scriptorium of the convent, which was initiated after the 1448 reform. We can also trace her patronage of Raphael who produced the *Pala Monteluce* (altarpiece) for the altar of the lay church, a high-profile commission representing a Coronation of the Virgin, which Battista did not live to see installed as she died before its intended arrival in Perugia.¹⁵

The Raphael commission has been extensively studied by a number of scholars, but what is perhaps less often mentioned is that the well-known piece can be seen as a metaphor for the struggle of nuns as patrons. The painting was commissioned in 1503 and contractually negotiated by Alfani and a male intermediary. Funds left to the convent by sister Illuminata de Perinello were used to pay for the first instalment. In the chronicle, Battista states that she asked master Raphael to depict '*una tavola o vero cona grande*' (a painting of very large proportions). The scribe notes that the convent had requested the advice of many citizens and had chosen Raphael as the executor of their wishes. Yet the painting, which only arrived in 1525, was stolen by the French at the end of the eighteenth century and brought to Paris. After its retrieval by the Italians, it stayed in the Pope's growing collection in Rome. Battista's initial fifteenth-century efforts thus resulted in an 1824 copy of the work being hung in the lay church where the Raphael once graced its walls.¹⁶ Abbess Maria Taccini, writing in the chronicle in the 1830s, expressed her distaste for the arrival of the copy, writing that '*la sudetta copia fu di publica universale soddisfazione. Magra consolazione*' (the copy received universal acceptance from the audience. Small consolation).¹⁷

Yet the nuns at Monteluce, specifically the Alfani sisters, looked beyond Raphael. For example, the chronicle details architectural changes in the convent post-reform, but also the commission of smaller works such as crucifixions, mantels for Madonna statuettes and terracotta images of

Christ the Redeemer. The nuns equally paid for a painting by Bartolomeo Caporali in 1477-79 representing the Adoration of the Shepherds, for the nuns' choir. They also commissioned two large frescoes by Fiorenzo di Lorenzo with a crucifixion accompanied by saints Clare and Francis for the refectory and lay church. Among these numerous, and at times mundane, commissions by the nuns of Monteluce, one hitherto little-known work can be discerned: a marble tabernacle by the hand of a Florentine master, still held in the lay church of Monteluce to this day.¹⁸ The tabernacle appears as an elaborate monument, decorated with a complex iconographical plan detailing both the patronage of the Alfani family and the importance of the consecrated host.

Alfani Taste at Monteluce

The choice of a Florentine sculptor may seem less obvious for a group of Poor Clares from regional Perugia. Yet, the motivation for this decision can be understood by examining two factors; the artistic style in Perugia on the one hand and the personal taste of the Alfani family on the other. Perugia, as briefly mentioned, was returned to the Papal States in 1424. This meant that Florence and Perugia shared the same political territory and Florentine influence on artistic decision making and patronage could clearly be felt in the Umbrian capital. As Lyle has argued, Perugia was dominated by 'foreign' artists during the period 1390-1470, and a relatively high number of altarpieces by these artists survive, in particular pieces by artists from Siena and Florence. Taddeo and Domenico di Bartoli worked in Perugia around 1400. Gentile da Fabriano (from the neighbouring Marches) made a well-known Madonna and Child for the church of S. Domenico during the 1380s and 90s and Fra Angelico produced the *Guidalotti Polyptych* in 1437 for the same church under the patronage of Elisabetta Guidalotti. The Florentine, Piero della Francesca was also active in the city and painted a polyptych for the Perugian nuns of Sant' Antonio da Padova in the 1460s.¹⁹

Motivated by major political and religious events that encouraged the rise of patriotic sentiments, such as the death of Bernardino da Siena in 1444, the second half of the fifteenth century also saw the rise of local artists working on projects induced by renewed civic pride.²⁰ Patrons looked more and more towards the stock of artists in Perugia, yet a 'foreign' taste did not disappear entirely. If local artists during the period 1450-1480 were active, they emulated the Sienese or Florentine style. These artists, native to Perugia, took advantage of the earlier generation of 'foreign' artists working in Perugia and were themselves often trained in major centres such as Florence, Venice, or Rome. Here, they worked alongside more celebrated and skilled artists. The Perugians simply brought these skills with them when returning home. With these newly developed skills they easily entertained the taste of Perugian patrons.

When we reach the last decades of the Quattrocento and the beginnings of the Cinquecento, the admiration for local artists was at its peak and the previous 'invasion' of 'foreign' stock seems forgotten. Between the 1460s and 1475, Perugian painters, for the first time, started to gain national and international recognition and reputation.²¹ It would be unfair, in light of the local activity in Perugia by painters such as Perugino and Raphael, to reclassify Perugia and the

region that calls the city its capital as a new arts centre, yet the creativity engendered both by the region as a periphery and the taste of its patrons, should be more fully recognised as Lyle and others have suggested. In this light, their commissioning of a Florentine and hence a 'foreign' sculptor to produce a tabernacle in the 1480s seems unpatriotic, yet where are the borders of artistic territory? Were the sisters consciously following individual artistic taste by commissioning a Florentine to embellish their lay church? Were they unable to locate a local artist to produce a specific commodity such as a wall-mounted tabernacle, which was at this stage, a rather novel liturgical decoration? Based on their patronage of the local Fiorenzo di Lorenzo, Bartolomeo Caporali, and a young Raphael, I think the latter. In light of Lyle's sharp analysis, the Alfani and the nuns of Monteluce followed the trends of the art market and adapted their taste to what was *en vogue*, yet to furnish their lay church with novel liturgical ornaments, they searched further afield.

Cose de Sacrestia: A Fashionable Commission for the Outside World

We travel back to March 1483, when the chronicle notes that the Florentine master had come to Monteluce to install the marble structure that would hold the Body of Christ. This was to be in the outer or lay church. The chronicle specifically states that both Eufrazia and Battista had paid for the tabernacle using money left to them by their mother to be spent on *cose de sacrestia* (things for the sacristy) or something that pleased her daughters and was a token of her affection for both her children. According to the chronicle, their brothers, probably Giovanbattista and Tindaro, had been given the task of passing this money on to their sisters in the convent. Giovanbattista died in 1483, and his wife, a Baglioni, joined Eufrazia and Battista taking the name Franceschacherubina at the convent of Monteluce, perhaps denoting regular previous contact between Giovanbattista and his sisters. When the initial inheritance the sisters received was not sufficient to pay for the tabernacle, the Alfani brothers supported their sisters and gave them the remaining funds. It is worth quoting this passage from the chronicle in full:

In this year (1483) during the month of March, the master who completed the tabernacle produced to hold the consecrated Body of Christ, made in marble, came from Florence to install the work at the convent. The work was ordered by the brothers of sister Eufrazia and sister Battista and paid with the inheritance their mother had left them. They were to use the money how they pleased, for things for the sacristy. She left them the money for their devotion. With this knowledge their brothers left them the freedom to do it how they wanted. And they did so, and for the extra cost, which had not been left to them, their brothers supplied more.²²

Although some examples of nuns acting as patrons can now be found, this was still an unusual situation. Individual nuns, and specifically strictly enclosed Poor Clares, were not allowed to own or sell property, including money. The *forma vita* (way of life) they had received from Saint Francis stipulated they were to live a life in strict poverty.²³ Though collectively the convent

could grow quite a fortune, nuns themselves were to remain poor.²⁴ Numerous instances in history have proven this rule was harder to maintain than initially thought, yet for the Alfani to order a tabernacle with their mother's money and with the help of their brothers, is a fine example of slightly bending the rules and of deciding what the *chiesa de fuore* (the outer or lay church) would look like. In turn, the Alfani commission is a clear sign from one world to another - from the nuns behind the high walls of the convent to the lay worshippers in the outside world. Though enclosed, the tabernacle was a vessel through which these sacred virgins communicated; an invisible *fenestella* (window) that denoted the fragile relationship between seen and unseen, heard and unheard, a pivotal balance in the conventual architecture.²⁵ The sacred note the nuns shared is passed through the iconography found on the marble structure of the Ferrucci tabernacle.

We find the Alfani connection on the tabernacle almost immediately, through the depiction of their coat of arms: a gold lion with a red crown below carved candelabra, which appears below a column supporting the pediment of the marble structure. Other than being fashionable during the later fifteenth century, the choice of a tabernacle seems obvious as the convent had, around 1478, changed its dedication from the Annunciation to the Assumption, celebrated on August 15. The commissions of the nuns, post-reform, clearly display institutional knowledge of this shift in dedication; works commissioned after 1448 put an emphasis on the various roles that the Madonna, as Mother of Christ, Bride of Christ, and Queen of Heaven had to play for a conventual community. The tabernacle, with the Christ Child depicted, directly points towards the Madonna as the mother who gave birth to the Incarnate Christ.

Francesco di Simone Ferrucci was recorded for the first time working as an artist in 1463-6, when he decorated the *Badia Fiesolana*, an eleventh-century former Benedictine convent rebuilt by Cosimo I the Elder de' Medici in the fifteenth century. By 1466 he opened his workshop in Florence and by the 1470s, was working together with Verrocchio in Santa Maria Minerva, on the tomb of the beloved Francesca Tornabuoni who had died in 1477. According to Ames-Lewis, Ferrucci would be most remembered for the monument he produced for the Renaissance lawmaker Alessandro Tartagni in San Domenico, Bologna.²⁶ Ferrucci was not particularly inventive, and a lot of his work was borrowed from the well-known Florentine sculptor, Desiderio da Settignano. In fact, Wolohojian has argued that some of Ferrucci's work is Desiderian in style.²⁷ To Ferrucci's credit, as argued by Butterfield and Elam, Desiderio's whole combination of artistic elements was faithfully copied as a model for other sacramental tabernacles across Tuscany and Central Italy during the fifteenth century.²⁸ The most beautiful and influential example being the tabernacle he produced for the transept chapel of the church of San Lorenzo in Florence, which was under Medici patronage. Hence, Ferrucci was not the only artist to look elsewhere for inspiration.

By commissioning a wall-mounted tabernacle, the Alfani sisters, as we have seen, were following an innovation in liturgical decoration reserved solely for the consecrated host. The structure of the tabernacle is already mentioned in the Book of Exodus, as a tent carried around by the Israelites during their wanderings in the wilderness and their conquest of the promised land. The structure, a portable earthly dwelling place, has continually been used as a place of sacrifice

and worship. In Christian usage, it denotes a receptacle in which a ciborium, containing the consecrated elements of the Eucharist, is placed.²⁹ In the fifteenth century, changes in Christian practice meant that the host had to be placed on or near the altar, hence the introduction of painted altarpieces that included a tabernacle. So, a new kind of receptacle was required, suitably worthy of holding the wafers left unconsumed after the Mass.³⁰ In Germany, these 'holy houses' were known as *sakramenthaus*, in Northern Europe they were called *sacramentsnissen*, while in Italy the new receptacle took the form of a wall-mounted tabernacle, or freestanding *tempietto* (canopy).³¹ Sacrament tabernacles became the most sought-after liturgical ornaments in the *Quattrocento* church; the Alfani sisters were thus in search of an innovative structure through which to display both their knowledge of the latest liturgical edifices, and their own pious character, post-reform.

The word *tabernacolo* describes the niche, or frame, that literally indicates the function of containment. What is contained, in fact, represents a complicated ontological issue: that of the mystic Body of Christ, which is alive and present through the wafer. Wright justly claims the tabernacle as the vessel that frames a substance that becomes present and absent again. For the worshipping church audience, tabernacles provided a desire to see beyond that which was contained, in expectancy of the actual Body of Christ. Tabernacles signified frames of hope, through which access to the sacred was facilitated.³² This hope was not one-sided and not only fostered by the lay audience. The nuns, albeit through a small communion window that was completely covered when unused and only opened by the priest (unfortunately lost at Monteluce during the seventeenth century), equally received consecrated wafers that were kept in the Ferrucci tabernacle.³³ This entryway touched upon the fragile nature of conventual architecture in demanding strict *clausura* (enclosure). The space denotes a necessary, yet weak link in the structure of the architecture, as Hills and Douglas have both mentioned.³⁴

Modes of Sisterhood: Nuns and Opportunity in *Clausura*

Nuns entered religious communities and thereby formed new sacred families and gained permanent membership of a spiritual community, contrasting, as Evangelisti comments, with the merely transitory membership of their earthly and worldly families.³⁵ Yet, convents also reproduced the dynamics of the society in which they existed and nuns, though enclosed and living by a new code of life inside the walls, were tightly linked to the outside world. Women entered the convent, not only to fulfil their own spiritual aspirations or to avoid marriage, but also as the result of family strategies.³⁶ Girls who entered the convent committed themselves to virginity and perpetual dedication to God and through this allegiance, the nun was afforded particular praise in Christian society. It also gave outside relatives a certain 'protection by proxy'; nuns prayed for the salvation of their family members, of cities and fellow sisters. Hence, a girl behind the walls signified quite the spiritual and monetary investment; families of prestigious convents often financially supported religious houses, atoning for their own sins in doing so. Nuns also made their voices heard from within the convent. As we have seen with Eufrazia and Battista Alfani, they were scribes and historians and also mystics, poets, and playwrights. In many ways the confines of

the convent offered more opportunities to women in fifteenth century society than the 'free' world outside of the walls. It would however, be wrong to assume that nuns could act as independent cultural actors. However, the fact that the Alfani sisters did indeed have the relative freedom (assisted by their brothers) to order an innovative liturgical monument, does denote their status both inside and outside of the community. Furthermore, with their commission, Eufrazia and Battista sent a clear message to both the lay and clerical community outside; that of a pious community in tune with appropriate decorum, visualised by a marble monument hung on the altar wall, which divided the nuns' choir on one side and the lay church on the other. A sacred sign to an earthly realm.

An Alfani Message in Marble

From the 1480s onwards, Francesco di Simone di Ferrucci's workshop was able to exploit the demand for new liturgical ornaments and started to produce tabernacles. Apart from the Alfani coat of arms, the tabernacle betrays an iconography that suits the liturgical aspirations of the community at Monteluce well. The Ferrucci tabernacle is elaborately embellished and appears inscribed with the words '*Ego Sum Alpha et Omega Principum et Finis dicit Dominus Deus qui est et qui erat Venturus est Omnipotens*' from Revelations I, verse 8 (I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, said the Lord, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty). The edifice is executed in high quality and influence from da Settignano, as mentioned, can clearly be noticed, especially when compared to the S. Lorenzo tabernacle in Florence, but also Benedetto da Maiano's Altarpiece of the Annunciation shows influences of cultural cross-pollination.³⁷ The Monteluce tabernacle is gilded and framed by torch-bearing and heavily robed angels in *contrapposto* or counter pose; the inclusion of flames alludes to Christ as the light of the world. On top of the inner niche, which harbours a dove, the blessed Infant Jesus appears in front of a host, raised above a chalice that is carried by angels. This depiction is almost identical to the Infant displayed on the S. Lorenzo tabernacle. At the summit of the Monteluce piece, in a segmental arch, God the Father flanked by *putti* (angels), appears, making the connection between the miraculous Christ Child and his heavenly father. The *predella* (base of the tabernacle) which contains a *Veronica* (a representation of Christ's bleeding face on a cloth), held by two *putti*, further enhances the true presence of Christ. As Wright remarks, the whole ensemble of the tabernacle resonates with the Franciscan message of the *Imitatio Christi* (imitation of the life of Christ); after all, Saint Francis had a vision of the Infant Jesus incarnated before him during the Christmas preparations in 1223, in the crib at Greccio near Assisi.³⁸ The tabernacle also visualised an *Imitatio Mariae* (imitation of the life of Mary), a focus on the life and exemplary model of the Madonna. Seen together with the painting of the *Madonna and Six Angels* (1465) which the nuns commissioned earlier from Bartolomeo Caporali to be placed above the Altar of the Sacrament, the Ferrucci tabernacle, together with a wooden crucifixion that would be commissioned in 1498 by Battista, completed a set of visual representations in the lay church that not only exploited both painted and sculpted images of the Incarnate Christ Child, but that paid attention to the function of the Virgin Mary as a mother who sacrificed her Child for the salvation of Mankind.³⁹

The painting begun by Raphael, which should have arrived during Battista's lifetime, completed the Marian narrative of the altar wall, bestowing the highest distinction to the Virgin; her coronation as the Queen of Heaven. The Alfani sisters, and perhaps principally Battista, cleverly attached themselves to this narrative through the display of their coat of arms on the Ferrucci tabernacle, which carried their mark at Monteluce *ad finitum*. This impression left in marble was, however, a humble sign of a household that, above all, respected and heightened the reformed institutional character of a prestigious Poor Clare convent. As the chronicle's scribe and abbess, Veronica Graziani notes at the time of Battista's death: '*era refugio et consolatione a tucte; si ben non era nell'offitio, le sore recorrevano a lei per li consigli*' (She [Battista]) was a refuge and consolation for all. Whether or not she was in office the sisters trusted in her for advice). In committing to her task at the convent, Battista Alfani thus honoured both her earthly and sacred heritage.⁴⁰

Notes

1. I would like to thank Illuminare (Centre for the Study of Medieval Art – KU Leuven) for enabling me to commit to research on the nuns of Monteluce, and specifically Prof. Barbara Baert for reading and commenting on drafts of this paper.
2. Chiara Augusta Lainati, ed, *Memoriale di Monteluce. Cronaca del monastero delle clarisse di Perugia dal 1448 al 1838, con un'introduzione di Ugolino Nicolini* (S. Maria degli Angeli, Assisi: Edizione Porziuncola, 1983), 39 (henceforth *Memoriale*); On Ferrucci in Perugia see Adolfo Venturi, 'Francesco di Simone a Fiesole', *Archivio storico dell'arte*, 5 (1892), 371-86; Cornelius Von Fabriczy, 'Die Bildhauerfamilie Ferrucci aus Fiesole', *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, supplement 2 (1908), 1-28; John Pope-Hennessy, *Catalogue of the Italian Sculpture in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, vol. III (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1964), 170; Francis Ames-Lewis: 'Francesco di Simone Ferrucci', in *Donatello e i suoi: scultori Fiorentini del primo Rinascimento*, ed. Alan Phipps Darr and Giorgio Bonsanti (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1986), 247-52; Stephan S. Wolohojian, 'Francesco di Simone Ferrucci's Fogg 'Virgin and Child' and the Martini Chapel in S. Giobbe, Venice', *The Burlington Magazine*, 139/1137 (1997), 867-69; Linda Pisani, *Francesco di Simone Ferrucci: Itinerari di una sculture Fiorentino fra Toscana, Romagna e Montefeltro* (Florence: Olschki, 2007).
3. For an historiography on the topic of religious women from a spiritual and cultural angle in the Middle Ages see June L. Mecham, 'Breaking Old Habits: recent research on women, spirituality and the arts in the Middle Ages', *History Compass*, 4/3 (2006), 448-80; A selection of recent work on female religious patronage on the Italian Peninsula see Silvia Evangelisti, *Nuns: a history of convent life, 1450-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Paul Benjamin, *Nuns and Reform Art in Early Modern Venice: The architecture of Santa Cosma e Damiano and its decoration from Tintoretto to Tiepolo* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); G. Pereti, *In the Courts of Religious Ladies: Art, Vision, and Pleasure in Italian Renaissance Convents* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016).
4. Monica Benedetta Umiker and Chiara Emanuela Giusti, 'Per I Codici delle Clarisse di Monteluce di Perugia: un manoscritto sconosciuto', *Bollettino della Deputazione di Storia patria per l'Umbria*, CVIII (2011), 545-98; For an overview of the

economic, political, social, and religious history of Monteluce see Peter Höhler, 'Frauenklöster in einer Italienischer Stadt: zur wirtschafts- und social geschichte der Klarissen von Monteluce und der Zisterzienserinnen von S. Giuliana in Perugia', *Quellen und Forschungen aus Italienischen archiven und bibliotheken*, 68 (1988), 167-270.

5. Erminia Irace and Manuel Vaquero Piñeiro, 'Alfano Alfani, mercante banchiere nella Perugia del Rinascimento', *Mediterranea ricerche storiche*, 39 (2017), 39-58; for a recent genealogical study on the Alfani family, see Paola Monacchia, 'La famiglia di Bartolo e la sua discendenza', in *Bartolo da Sassoferrato nel VII centenario della nascita: diritto, politica, società. Atti del convegno storico internazionale. Todi – Perugia 13-16 ottobre 2013*, eds. Paola Monacchia (Spoleto: Fondazione CISAM, 2014), 33-66.
6. *Memoriale*, 618-19.
7. For the necrology, see *Memoriale*, 47-49.
8. *Ibid.*, 124-25.
9. *Ibid.*, 602.
10. *Ibid.*, 83. Also see Monica Benedetta Umiker, 'La Ricezione di S. Chiara d'Assisi nel Monastero di S. Maria di Monteluce in Perugia', in *Il Richiamo delle Origine. Le Clarisse dell'Osservanza e le Fonti Clariane*, eds. Pietro Messa, Angela Scandella and Mario Sensi (Santa Maria degli Angeli, Assisi: Edizione Porziuncola, 2009), 51.
11. Jane Tibbets Schulenberg, 'Strict Active Enclosure and its Effects on Female Monastic Experience', in *Distant Echoes*, ed. John Nichols and Lilian Thomas Shank (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian publications, 1984), 51-86.
12. *Memoriale*, 7-8.
13. For the description of the reform, see *Memoriale*, 1-8; For the concept of reform in the Franciscan community including the reform of female Franciscan houses see James D. Mixson, 'Religious Life and Observant Reform in the 15th century', *History Compass*, 11/3 (2013), 201-14 and James D. Mixson, *A Companion to observant reform in the late middle ages and beyond* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).
14. *Memoriale*, 1-3; see also Kate Lowe, *Nuns' Chronicles and Convent Culture in Renaissance and Counter Reformation Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). The nuns of Monteluce continue to add to the history of their house. A second volume of the Monteluce chronicle detailing the history of the convent from 1839 to 1927 was published in 2003. See Clarisse del monastero di S. Erminio, eds, *Memoriale di Monteluce. Cronaca del monastero delle Clarisse di Perugia dal 1839 al 1927, con introduzione di Gabriella Zarri e Rita Chiacchella* (Assisi: Edizione Porziuncola, 2003).
15. For the books and the libretto see *Memoriale*, 124; for Battista's scribal activities see *Memoriale*, 124 and Monica Benedetta Umiker, 'I codici di S. Maria di Monteluce e l'attività scittoria delle monache', in *Cultura e desiderio di Dio. L'Umanesimo e le Clarisse dell'Osservanza, Atti del II giornata di studio sull'Osservanza Francescana al femminile*, eds. Pietro Messa, Angela Emmanuela Scandella and Mario Sensi (S. Maria degli Angeli, Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 2007), 73-80; For the most recent publication on Battista's scribal activities, see Marco Guida, 'Battista Alfani da Perugia tra chiostro e scrittore', *Frate Francescano*, 86/1 (2020), 69-79. For the commission of the Coronation of the Virgin by Raphael in 1505 see *Memoriale*, 85. For a transcription of the original contract see John K. G. Shearman, *Raphael in the Early Modern Sources, 1483-1602* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2003),

- 752-55. For an overview on recent research, see Alberto Maria Sartore, 'Begun by Master Raphael: The Monteluca 'Coronation of the Virgin'', *The Burlington Magazine*, 153/1299 (2011), 387-91.
16. *Memoriale*, 85-86. On the theft see Julie Beckers, 'The Theft of the Pala Monteluca and its Return to the Italian Peninsula', *Boletín de Arte*, 17 (2017), 36-42.
17. *Ibid.*; *Memoriale*, 604. For the efforts to retrieve the painting after Napoleon's defeat, see *Memoriale*, 594, 602 and 604. See also Giovanni Boccali, 'Due Opere Pittoriche di Raffaello Sanzio e notizie storiche nelle cronache delle Clarisse dell' Umbria', *Studi Francescani*, 85 (1988), 84.
18. *Memoriale*, 39. Also see Umiker, 'La Ricezione di S. Chiara d'Assisi', 52. For the works by Fiorenzo di Lorenzo, and the crucifixion accompanied by saints Clare and Francis for the refectory and lay church, see *Memoriale*, 52 and 68. Also see Jeryldene Wood, 'Breaking the Silence: The Poor Clares and the Visual Arts in Fifteenth-Century Italy', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 48/2 (1995), 262-87 and by the same author: *Women, Art and Spirituality: The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 242.
19. Beverley Lyle, 'Peripheral backwater of Innovative Upland? Patterns of Franciscan Patronage in Renaissance Perugia, c. 1390-1527' (Unpublished PhD thesis, Oxford Brookes University, 2008) 40. Lyle studied the influences of foreign style on art in Perugia, and the stylistic preferences of Perugian patrons; For the superiority of Fabriano during the first half of the fifteenth century see Keith Christiansen, 'Peregrinus and Perugian Painting in the fifteenth century', *The Burlington Magazine*, CXXXIII/939 June (1981), 335-55; For Fra Angelico remains see Bill Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).
20. Cynthia L. Polecchiti, *Preaching Peace in Renaissance Italy: Bernardino of Siena and His Audience* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000).
21. Lyle, *Peripheral backwater*, 88.
22. *Memoriale*, 39.
23. The fact that Poor Clares were not allowed to own, sell or purchase property was intimately linked to the tenets of their Franciscan beliefs, which heralded poverty as the main rule of life. See Jeffrey Hamburger, 'Art, Enclosure, and the Cura Monialium: Prolegomena in the Guise of a Postscript', *Gesta*, 31/2 (1992), 108-34 and Joan Mueller, *A Companion to Clare of Assisi: Life, Writing, and Spirituality* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).
24. For 'disobedient' nuns see Craig Monson, *Nuns Behaving Badly: Tales of Music, Magic, Art, and Arson in the Convents of Italy* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
25. Barbara Baert, *Pneuma and the Visual Medium in the Middle Ages and Early Modernity (essays on wind, ruach, incarnation, odour, stains, movement, Kairos, web and Silence* (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 151-52. Baert discusses the *fenestella* as a door or window through which the goddess Fortuna was venerated, an entryway for luck or opportunity.
26. Ames-Lewis, *Francesco di Simone Ferrucci*, 247-52.
27. Wolohojian, *Francesco di Simone Ferrucci's Fogg Virgin and Child*, 868.
28. Andrew Butterfield and Caroline Elam, 'Desiderio da Settignano's Tabernacle of the Sacrament', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 43/2/3 (1999), 349; Alison Wright, 'Tabernacle and Sacrament in Fifteenth Century Tuscany', in *Carvings, Casts and Collectors: The Art of Renaissance Sculpture*, ed. Peta Motture, Emma Jones and Dimitrios Zikos (London: V & A Publishing, 2013), 50.
29. Specifically, 25-31 and 35-40 in the Book of Exodus; Anabel Thomas, *Art and Piety in the female religious communities of Renaissance Italy: Iconography, space, and the religious women's perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 169.
30. Wright, *Tabernacle and Sacrament*, 42.
31. *Ibid.*; For the presence of *sacramentsnissen* in Northern Europe, including the Scandinavian countries, see: Justine Kroesen and Peter Tångeberg, eds, *Die Mittelalterliche Sakramentsnische auf Gotland (Schweden): Kunst und Liturgie* (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2014); For the Host, the centre of the whole religious system of the later Middle Ages and onwards, see Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
32. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 292; Wright, *Tabernacle and Sacrament*, 55.
33. This communion window is lost at Monteluca due to structural changes during the seventeenth century. A fine example of this kind of window can be seen at the former female Benedictine convent of San Maurizio al Monastero Maggiore in Milan. Also see Baert, 'Pneuma and the Visual Medium', 151-52.
34. Helen Hills, *Invisible City: The Architecture of Devotion in Seventeenth Century Neapolitan Convents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 166-76, and Mary Douglas, *Purity and Dangers: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966), 121.
35. Evangelisti, *Nuns*, 9.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Otto Kurz, 'A Group of Florentine Drawings for an Altar', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 18/1 (1955), 20-21; Maiano see Doris Carl, *Benedetto da Maiano. A Florentine sculptor at the threshold of the High Renaissance* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006).
38. Wright, *Tabernacle and Sacrament*, 55 and also Erwin Rosenthal, 'The Crib of Greccio and Franciscan Realism', *The Art Bulletin*, 36/1 (1954), 57-60.
39. For the crucifixion see *Memoriale*, 68.
40. *Memoriale*, 125.

'Now Science Solves Woman's Oldest Problem': The Mothers' Union Campaign Against the Advertisement of the Disposable Sanitary Pad in the Interwar Period.

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From the 1920s, advertisements appeared in various newspapers promoting a new product; the disposable sanitary pad. The advertisements claimed that science had now 'solved woman's oldest problem' and offered 'hygienic freedom such as women never knew before'.¹ The advertisements sparked outrage among members of the Mothers' Union (MU) who sought the assistance of the National Vigilance Association (NVA) in their efforts. They wrote several letters of complaint to the newspapers who printed the advertisements, and to the companies who produced the products. Their fruitless attempts to abolish or censor the advertisements are noteworthy, as they portray the conflicting ideologies during the interwar period of traditional values of morality emphasised by the MU and NVA, and the emergence of new 'scientific' consumerism which sought to cast women in a 'modern' light. This article will critically analyse the language in the advertisements, question the MU's efforts against them and answer why their attempts to restrict them were unsuccessful.

The First World War and the influenza epidemic of 1918 led to social, economic and technological change and also accelerated scientific advancements in the western world.² The increase of female employment in the public sphere and female nurses' work on the warfront had a significant impact on society in Britain.³ Cellucotton had been used during the First World War for bandages and nurses recognised its convenience and potential for other uses. The advertisements for the sanitary pad reflected the link between science and war noting that it was 'nurses in war-time France [who] first discovered it...made of Cellucotton wadding, the world's super-absorbent'.⁴ The emergence of 'medical consumer culture' in the late nineteenth century included ads for products such as soap and deodorant and emphasised the importance of sanitation.⁵ The advertisements for sanitary pads drew on science as a rhetorical tool which was common in interwar marketing. One advertisement in 1928 declared that 'science has at last found the solution of woman's most intimate problem...The new scientific discovery is what every woman has wanted since the days of Eve'.⁶ They also focused on the importance of hygiene, stating that 'many ills...are traced to the use of unsafe and unsanitary makeshift methods'.⁷ Rosann Mandziuk argues that the advertisements used the 'authority of science to define the social implications of menstruation' and implied that makeshift methods would lead to ill health.⁸

The interwar years became a period of intense modernism, medicalisation, capitalism, and patriarchy.⁹ After the war, the MU continued to uphold Christian values of respectability and thus opposed modern consumerism and changes to ideas of womanhood and motherhood. The MU was not unusual in this - there was a general desire by many women's organisations to re-build traditional family life after the war.¹⁰ According to Pat Thane, during the interwar years feminists saw the home as potentially a base for the

empowerment of women rather than as necessarily the source of their inescapable bondage.¹¹ Efforts were made to reinstate and reinforce traditional gender roles. According to their leaflet in 1926, the MU stated that they were 'a great company of Christian women banded together [who] preserve a high standard of life, of prayer and example'.¹² The aim of the MU was:

To uphold the sanctity of marriage, to awaken in all mothers a sense of their great responsibility in the training of their boys and girls - the fathers and mothers of the future. To organise in every place a band of mothers who will unite in prayer and seek by their own example to lead their families in purity and holiness of life.¹³

Emphasis was placed on women as the portrayers of moral good, particularly mothers. The MU published literature on the importance of preserving 'holy marriage' and 'the religious and moral training of young and kindred subjects'.¹⁴ They were strongly against women's suffrage, married women's work, and divorce became an absolute disqualification for membership. Unmarried mothers were also exempt from the organisation. According to their leaflet in 1929, 'the Mothers' Union affirms the Christian principle of the permanence of the relationship between husband and wife'.¹⁵ Nevertheless, their popularity was notable and in 1929 there were over 8,900 branches with nearly 400,000 members in the UK.¹⁶ While membership remained strong, the organisation was situated within a rapidly changing society in regards to sexual morality.

During the First World War, venereal disease emerged as a public health issue. In 1916, the Royal Commission for the Treatment of Venereal Disease was founded. The NVA campaigned against prostitution and continued their campaign for social purity into the post-war period. Kate Fisher argues that while there was an increase in the public depiction of the human body during the interwar decades, the extent of this should not be exaggerated.¹⁷ Despite public campaigns against prostitution and VD, there largely remained a public silence surrounding sex and sexuality.¹⁸ In 1918, Marie Stopes' book *Married Love* discussed issues of birth control and sex, and became a bestseller.¹⁹ According to Fisher, rapidly changing attitudes led to 'discontinuity between the generations'.²⁰ The advertisements for sanitary pads emphasised this generational change: 'your daughter will be saved' from 'a great hygiene handicap'.²¹ The advertisements also focused on the demands of women in 'modern' society: 'the lives of women today are different from those of yesterday. More is accomplished, more is *expected*'.²² Continued pressure of time, and the increased responsibilities of women were reiterated: 'the modern woman, unlike her predecessors, cannot afford to lose precious days'.²³ Kat Eschner argues that the advertisements framed menstruation as a handicap that required fixing rather than a natural process for women.²⁴

Before disposable sanitary pads came on the market, most women relied on homemade cloth pads. Through a series of oral history interviews, Lara Freidenfelds found that practices for making cloth pads varied from 'old sheets, old things that you had around the house and things like that'.²⁵ Some women threw away the cloth after use, but others washed and reused them, depending on their income.²⁶ The adoption of the menstrual pad was slow. Early versions of the pad were noted as 'bulky, rough, and a one-size-fits-all design'.²⁷ In addition, the pad did not have the same level of absorbance as cloths and there were limited methods of disposal in public areas. The lack of female public toilets and insufficient disposal bins in the early twentieth century would have made replacing pads difficult.²⁸ Working outside the home meant that a woman either had to make one pad or cloth last the day, or change and carry the used version home. As more girls and women entered secondary school and the workplace, they were forced to take menstrual paraphernalia with them.²⁹ Carla Pascoe argues that most women relied upon re-usable, homemade pads until at least the 1940s in England, Australia, the United States, Canada and New Zealand.³⁰

In the late 1920s, the Mothers' Union led a campaign with the aim of either abolishing the advertisements or censoring the language used. Adrian Bingham argues that social conservatism remained important in the print media in the early decades of the twentieth century.³¹ He states that prior to 1960, sexual content was not printed on a daily basis in the popular press, but issues on sex and sexuality were printed sporadically.³² One advertisement for sanitary pads reads: 'you can wear the flimsiest frocks and sheerest thing without a second's thought'.³³ The statement provoked a sense of promiscuity which ran contrary to the MU's efforts to promote social purity among women. Another advertisement stated: 'a bridge, a dinner, a dance...a flimsy frock to be worn...these no longer come as problems'.³⁴ In October 1927, the MU wrote to *The Daily Sketch* and *Daily Mirror* newspapers portraying their outrage at 'the nature' of the advertisements. They wrote, 'we are astonished that a responsible paper should, even in these days, consent to insert it [the advertisement] in its present form'.³⁵ Having received no reply from the papers, they contacted the NVA to ask for help in their campaign. In January 1928, Mrs Maude of the MU wrote to Frederick Sempkins, the Secretary of NVA.

We have been very much concerned about the advertisement of Kotex and have received many letters from members asking us to protest ... I hope very much that something may be done – the advertisement is certainly an outrage. Believe me.³⁶

The advertisements did not explicitly call the products 'sanitary pads' but rather, called them by their brand name such as 'Kotex' or 'Camilla'. It is not clear from their letters what it was in the advertisements they were particularly enraged about. For some, the subject of women's fertility in the media was enough to cause offence.

The mass production of newspapers and magazines in the early twentieth century led to a wider readership of printed media.³⁷ Bingham found that from 1918, two-thirds of the population read newspapers daily.³⁸ The advertisements for sanitary wear appeared in women's magazines and tabloid newspapers such as *The Daily Chronicle* and *The Daily Mirror*.

Anne Spurgeon has noted that the Kimberly-Clark company, which produced Kotex, found it difficult to persuade some magazines to accept advertisements for the sanitary pad.³⁹ Martin Pugh has found that although many women's magazines had originally been pitched at a middle-class readership, huge sales figures suggest that they were also widely bought by working-class women during the interwar period.⁴⁰ Similarly, literature on birth control appeared to be aimed at literate middle- and upper-class consumers, although Claire Jones has found that there was a greater class balance in terms of readership on birth control during the 1920s.⁴¹ Likewise, the early advertisements for sanitary pads were aimed at upper- and middle-class women. One advertisement in 1927 claimed, 'women in the better walks of life are adopting this scientific way'.⁴² As Claire Jones has argued, the middle classes in particular were eager consumers of medical remedies and technologies.⁴³ The women depicted in the advertisements wore long evening dresses and were exaggeratingly slim, as elongated features became 'markers of sophistication and class'.⁴⁴ As you can see from this advertisement, [Fig. 1] the imagery included a number of young well-dressed women.⁴⁵

In addition, the products were expensive when they were first introduced and in 1921 each pad cost the equivalent

Now Science Solves Woman's Greatest Problem

The new way approved by doctors and nurses, which 5,000,000 women have adopted practically overnight.



**Security and Immaculacy under ALL conditions.
Non-Detectable under closest-fitting frocks.
No Disposal problem. Deodorizes!**

Easy Disposal and 3 other important factors

- ① No laundry. As easy to dispose of as a piece of tissue—thus ending the trying problem of disposal. Kotex is also thoroughly deodorizes.
- ② Utter protection and non-detectable—Kotex absorbs 16 times its own weight in moisture, 5 times that of cotton-wool. Scientifically designed to be Form-Fitting, Kotex is undetectable when worn with smoothest fitting frocks.
- ③ Easy to buy anywhere. Many shops keep them ready-wrapped in plain paper—simply help yourself, pay the assistant, that is all.

5 times more absorbent
Kotex is the only sanitary pad filled with Cellucotton wadding, the remarkable super-absorbent recently discovered. Thus it provides the amazing absorbency of 16 times its own weight in moisture. It is five times as absorbent as the ordinary cotton-wool pad. Thus sheerest frocks may now be worn in peace of mind and security, regardless how trying one's hygienic problem. Kotex discards as easily as tissue. No Ask for them by name.

IMPERCEPTIBLE—even under closest-fitting gowns
Kotex is scientifically designed for SAFETY and NON-DETECTABILITY in wear. Years of experiment were spent perfecting it. Kotex is obtainable at chemists, drapers and stores everywhere. 12 in sanitary wrapped boxes. Be sure the name KOTEX is on the box you purchase. If name Kotex is not there, you are not obtaining genuine KOTEX. Only Kotex is "like" Kotex. No other product is "like" Kotex.

To-day get Kotex and learn what it has come to mean to the great numbers of women who have adopted it. It is at least worth a trial!

KOTEX
PROTECTS—DEODORIZES.

No laundry—discard at once as a piece of tissue.

To HILDA V. ADAMS, Registered Nurse, KOTEX LIMITED, 23, Eagle Street, London, W.C.1. You may send me sample of Kotex and book, "Personal Hygiene," in plain envelope.

Name: _____
Address: _____
B.N.L., 4/10/27.

Fig 1: From Belfast Newsletter, 4 October 1927. With thanks to Irish Newspaper Archives. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AuGoel96Ym4>

of a loaf of bread.⁴⁶ The advertisements suggested a possibility of improving social status through consumption stating that the disposable sanitary pad provided 'greater personal immaculacy, new freedom, and relief from embarrassment and fear from the most trying conditions'.⁴⁷ One advertisement assured that 'under old conditions, the average woman spent almost one-sixth of her time in self-consciousness...too many of her activities were ill-timed. Now she lives every precious day, unhandicapped'.⁴⁸ The advertisements focused on changes in the busy lifestyle of 'modern women'. According to Mandziuk, the advertisements demonstrated the intersection of consumer culture, patriarchy, and women's desires for the economic and emotional benefits of modernity.⁴⁹ She argues that menstruation, the sign of women's bodily threat to patriarchy, became resituated in discourse as the very thing that robs women of their female identity and self-worth.⁵⁰ However, the MU was more concerned with the public discussion of menstruation and the language which portrayed women as promiscuous.

While the MU promoted discretion, consumerism and mass markets began to change the public discourse surrounding menstruation. In January 1928, the MU received a reply from one company, Kotex, which did not portray any empathy for the MU's concerns stating 'there exists today, a broader minded customer audience'.⁵¹ The MU also sent a letter of complaint to the London Council for Public Morality against the language used in the advertisements, but it is not clear if they received a reply. In December 1927, Frederick Sempkins of the NVA wrote to the national Advertising Association, an agency which represented advertising companies and promoted responsible advertising. He stated:

I have no knowledge of the substance myself, but I have received a good many complaints of the wording of the advertisement, which is held, and I think rightly held, to be very objectionable in its blatant immodesty.⁵²

It is interesting that the MU encouraged Sempkins, who admitted he had no knowledge on the issue, to write on their behalf. They may have assumed that the NVA as a much larger organisation would have carried more weight. The Advertising Association replied that 'there is nothing in the advertisement which would justify criticism in view of the article advertised'.⁵³ The Association added, 'inserting this advertising in the newspapers ... is a matter for each individual newspaper to decide for itself'.⁵⁴ In 1928, the editor of *The Daily Chronicle* responded to a complaint by the NVA stating that the advertisement was 'of the highest order' and was 'very subtle and refined'.⁵⁵ The editor replied:

I should be very interested if you would be so kind as to tell me where modifications could be made in future insertions. That is any suggestions which could be made to avoid offending readers. If you will be kind enough to give me your comments on this point, I shall be very much obliged indeed.⁵⁶

Sempkins, unsure with how to respond, replied that he would take the 'opportunity of consulting some of the ladies', presumably female members of the NVA or the MU.⁵⁷ It is interesting that the MU, and therefore the women themselves, were removed from the correspondence as Sempkins and

the male editors were left to debate the issue. Nevertheless, Sempkins wrote to the MU for their input and they followed up with a list of suggested changes to the advertisement.⁵⁸ The MU was not against the selling of the product itself, but rather the language used in the advertising. Other members of the MU took issue with the display of the products in shops and sent letters to those which started to display this commodity in their windows.⁵⁹ On 31 March 1928, Mrs Oliver of the MU stated 'we have gone to considerable lengths in attempting to stop this advertisement ... The trouble is that the advertisement is exceedingly well written. The people doing it are most competent'.⁶⁰ The display of sanitary products in shop windows brought public attention to menstruation, something which had been traditionally hidden from public discourse. Claire Jones has researched the sale of contraceptive products in Britain in the 1920s. Similar to menstruation products, they were originally sold and displayed discreetly behind the shop counter.⁶¹ According to Jones, 'from at least the second decade of the twentieth century, surgical stores in particular began to proudly display their contraceptive products within their shop windows' and vending machines selling sheaths could be found outside pharmacies and on street corners throughout Britain by the late 1920s.⁶² It would be interesting to know if there was a reaction from the MU to the contraceptive window displays or vending machines. In the 1920s, *The Herald* was the only newspaper that accepted advertisements for birth control.⁶³ It would be also interesting to know if the MU or NVA also took issue with advertisements for birth control.

Advertisements for sanitary pads in the early 1920s portrayed menstruation as something which was to be concealed, a problem rather than a natural bodily function.⁶⁴ Pascoe argues that modern products have not enabled women to embrace or accept menstruation, but rather to deny its very existence.⁶⁵ Public embarrassment was associated with menstruation and self-assurance, 'confidence' and 'peace of mind' was ensured only through consumerism, similar to marketing strategies today.⁶⁶ Eschner argues that the advertisements established a precedent for how menstruation products were marketed.⁶⁷ Mike Simes and Dale Berg have examined advertisements from 1985 to 2010 and found that menstrual product advertisements typically contribute to the perpetuation of the silence and shame surrounding menstruation.⁶⁸ Although tampons were introduced in the 1930s, they did not become widespread until the 1960s and 1970s, mainly due to opposition from the Catholic Church. Margaret Ó hÓgartaigh argues that Catholic Bishops feared 'women might derive sexual stimulation from Tampax'.⁶⁹ According to Pascoe, there was stigma associated with using 'internal protection' but this began to fall away with the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1960s and 1970s.⁷⁰ Currently, there is now a push for women to return to re-usable products like washable pads and rubber cups, prompted by environmental concerns.

Overall, the development of a 'consumer culture' in the interwar period led to a juxtaposition between modernity and traditional womanhood. After the First World War, the MU campaigned to defend the Christian family and to promote purity amongst women. While traditional gender roles were reinserted and reemphasised, there were rapidly changing attitudes between younger and older generations in terms of gender roles and sexuality in public discourse. Advertisements for the disposable sanitary pad boasted that women could

now wear 'the flimsiest frock' in confidence thanks to the new product. Despite the MU's attempts, alongside the NVA, to have the advertisements censored, the advertisements continued to be published regularly. Furthermore, early advertisements had a distinct class element aimed at middle-class women. While take-up was initially slow due to the expense of the product and inconvenience of public disposal, sanitary pads became increasingly more affordable and more popular throughout the twentieth century. While the MU was not against the sale of the disposable sanitary pad, discretion surrounding menstruation and other 'women's issues' was of the upmost importance. Their campaign against the advertisements portrays generational conflicts in the interwar era between efforts to secure 'social purity' and rapidly changing attitudes surrounding consumerism, modernity and menstruation.

Notes

1. 'Now Science Solves Woman's Oldest Problem', *Sunday Graphic*, 2 Oct. 1927; 'Hygienic freedom: Such as women never knew before', *The Daily Mirror*, 2 May 1928.
2. See Jay Winter (ed.) *Cambridge History of the First World War, Volume III: Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
3. See Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War* (London, Routledge, 1981); Rachel Basinger, *Hidden in History: The Untold Stories of Women During World War I and World War II* (Florida, Atlantic Publishing, 2019); Vivien Newman, *We Also Served: The Forgotten Women of the First World War* (South Yorkshire: Pen and Sword History, 2014).
4. 'Now Science Solves Woman's Oldest Problem', *Sunday Graphic*, 2 Oct. 1927.
5. For medical consumer culture see Thomas Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and the Spectacle 1851-1914* (California: Stanford University Press, 1990); Takahiro Ueyama, *Health in the Marketplace: Professionalism, Therapeutic Desires, and Medical Commodification in Late-Victorian London* (California: The Society for the Promotion of Science and Scholarship, 2010). For sanitation see T. J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).
6. 'Camelia', *Daily Mirror*, 21 Mar. 1928.
7. 'What the World Expects of Women Today', *Daily Sketch*, 3 Jan. 1928.
8. Roseann M. Mandziuk, "'Ending Women's Greatest Hygienic Mistake": Modernity and the Mortification of Menstruation in Kotex Advertising, 1921-1926', *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 38/3-4 (2010), 55.
9. See Christopher Laurence and Anna K. Meyer (eds) *Regenerating England: Science, Medicine and Culture in Interwar Britain* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000).
10. Caitriona Beaumont, 'Housewives, Workers and Citizens: Voluntary Women's Organisations and the Campaign for Women's Rights in England and Wales during the Post-War Period' in Crowson, Hilton and McKay, *NGOs in Contemporary Britain: Non-State Actors in Society and Politics Since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 60.
11. Pat Thane, 'Visions of Gender in the Making of the British Welfare State: The case of women in the British Labour Party and social policy, 1906-1945', in Gisela Bock and Pat Thane (eds) *Maternity and Gender Policies: Women and the Rise of the European Welfare States 1880s-1950s* (London: Routledge, 1991), 96.
12. 'The Work and Power of the Mothers' Union', leaflet dated 1929, National Vigilance Association Files, London School of Economics, Women's Library Archive, 4NVA/4.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Cordelia Moyse, *A History of the Mothers' Union: Women, Anglicanism and Globalisation, 1876- 2008* (Woodbridge: Boydell Publishing, 2009).
17. Kate Fisher, *Birth Control, Sex, and Marriage in Britain, 1918-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 69.
18. Layne Parish Craig, 'Lysistrata on the Home Front: Locating Women's Reproductive Bodies in the Birth Strike Rhetoric of the Malthusian during the First World War', in Faith Binckes and Carey Snyder (eds), *Women, Periodicals, and Print Culture in Britain 1890-1920s: The Modernist Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 389.
19. See Fisher, *Birth Control, Sex, and Marriage in Britain*; Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate Life in England, 1918-1963* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Lesley Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain Since 1800* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000); Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2009).
20. Fisher, *Birth Control, Sex and Marriage*, 1-2.
21. 'A Great Hygienic Handicap that Your Daughter will be Spared', *The Daily Chronicle*, Oct. 1927.
22. Emphasis in original.
23. 'What the World Expects of Women Today', *Daily Sketch*, 3 Jan. 1928.
24. Kat Eschner, 'The Surprising Origins of Kotex Pads', *Smithsonian Magazine*, 9 Nov. 2018. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/surprising-origins-kotex-pads-180964466/>
25. Lara Freidenfelds, *The Modern Period: Menstruation in Twentieth-Century America*. (New York: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 133.
26. See Carla Pascoe, 'The Bleeding Obvious: menstrual ideologies and technologies in Australia, 1940-1970', *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, 20 (2014), 76-92.
27. Freidenfelds, *The Modern Period*, 143.
28. See Carla Pascoe, "'Discreet Dance": Technologies of menstrual management in Australian public toilets during the twentieth century', *Women's History Review*, 24/2 (2015), 234-51.
29. Barbara Brookes and Margaret Tennant 'Making Girls Modern: Pakeha women and menstruation in New Zealand, 1930-70', *Women's History Review*, 7/4 (1998), 565-81
30. Pascoe, 'Discreet Dance', 247.
31. See Adrian Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press in Interwar Britain* (Oxford: Oxford Historical Monographs, 2003).
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. 'This Ends the Worries of Old-Time Hygienic Methods', *Daily Mirror*, 26 Mar. 1927.
35. Letter dated 11 Oct. 1927 to Miss Fitch, Kensington from The Mothers' Union, NVA Records, LSE, 4NVA/4.
36. Letter dated 16 Jan. 1928 to Mr Sempkins, National Vigilance Association from Mrs Maude, the Mothers' Union,

NVA Records, LSE, 4NVA/4. Kotex was a brand name.

37. See Faith Binckes and Carey Snyder (eds), *Women, Periodicals, and Print Culture in Britain 1890-1920s: The Modernist Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019).

38. See Bingham, *Gender, Modernity and the Popular Press*.

39. Anne M. Spurgeon, 'Marketing the Unmentionable: Wallace Meyer and the introduction of Kotex,' *The Maryland Historian*, 19/1 (1988), 26.

40. Martin Pugh, *'We Danced All Night': A Social History of Britain Between the Wars* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), 175.

41. Claire Jones, 'Commerce, Contraceptives and Consumers in England and Wales, 1880-1960', *Social History of Medicine*, 29/4 (2016), 742.

42. 'A Great Hygienic Handicap that Your Daughter will be Spared', *Daily Chronicle*, Oct. 1927.

43. Jones, 'Commerce, Contraceptives and Consumers', 737.

44. Mandziuk, 'Ending Women's Greatest Hygienic Mistake', 49.

45. More advertisements for sanitary pads during the 1920s can be viewed here: www.vintageadbrowser.com/beauty-and-hygiene-ads-1920s/54

46. Spurgeon, 'Marketing the Unmentionable', 26.

47. 'Now Science Solves Woman's Oldest Problem', *Sunday Graphic*, 2 Oct. 1927.

48. 'This Will Make a Great Difference in Your Life', *Belfast Newsletter*, 12 Jan. 1928.

49. Mandziuk, 'Ending Women's Greatest Hygienic Mistake', 56-7.

50. Ibid., 58.

51. Letter 19 Jan. 1928 from Andrew Milne to Mr Sempkins, NVA Records, LSE, 4NVA/4.

52. Letter dated 3 Dec. 1927 from F. Sempkins, National Vigilance Association to J. J. Hart, of The Advertising Association, NVA Records, LSE, 4NVA/4.

53. Letter dated 5 Dec. 1927 from J. J. Hart, The Advertising Association to Mr Sempkins, National Vigilance Association, NVA Records, LSE, 4NVA/4.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. Letter dated 19 Jan. 1928 from Andrew Milne, *The Daily Chronicle*, to Mr Sempkins, National Vigilance Association, NVA Records, LSE, 4NVA/4.

57. Letter dated 20 Jan. 1926 from Mr Sempkins to Andrew Milne, NVA Records, LSE, 4NVA/4.

58. Letter dated 31 Mar. 1928 from Mrs Oliver, The Mothers' Union to Mr Sempkins, NVA Records, LSE, 4NVA/4. Unfortunately, the list of changes has not survived in the archive.

59. Letter dated 19 Jan. 1928 from Andrew Milne to Mr Sempkins, NVA Records, LSE, 4NVA/4.

60. Letter dated 31 Mar. 1928 from Mrs Oliver, The Mothers' Union to Mr Sempkins, NVA Records, LSE, 4NVA/4.

61. Jones, 'Commerce, Contraceptives and Consumers', 750.

62. Ibid.

63. Fisher, *Sex Before the Sexual Revolution*, 69.

64. Ibid.

65. Pascoe, 'Discreet Dance', 247.

66. 'Camelia', *Daily Mirror*, 21 Mar. 1928; 'Now Science Solves Woman's Oldest Problem', *Sunday Graphic*, 2 Oct. 1927. For critical analysis of modern day advertising for sanitary wear, see: 'The last enemy to be conquered is mother nature:

Menstruation in advertising', https://www.reed.edu/anthro/adprojects/2011/case_jacobson_spillane/

67. Kat Eschner, 'The Surprising Origins of Kotex Pads', *Smithsonian Magazine*, 9 (Nov. 2018). <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/surprising-origins-kotex-pads-180964466/>

68. Mike R. Simes and Dale H. Berg, 'Superstitious Learning: Menarche and Menstrual Product Advertisements', *Health Care for Women International*, 22/5, (2001), 455-69.

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The Rhetoric of Female Chartists as a Space of Emancipation (1838-1842).

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Chartism emerged in the 1830s from the social and economic conditions of the advent of industrial capitalism. It united the working class around a common set of demands, the six points of the People's Charter, which encompassed manhood suffrage, secret voting, the discontinuation of property qualifications for MPs, salaries for MPs, equal electoral districts and annual elections. Chartism, which reached its height between 1839 and 1842 and became the first national working-class movement in British history, has often been defined as a male dominated movement. The role of women was generally perceived as simply to support men. However, if the main leaders were all male, women through the creation of their own associations did play an important role, as this article will explore.

To date, very few studies have been devoted to the involvement of women in the Chartist movement. Dorothy Thompson's seminal 1971 work *The Early Chartists*, was a collection of documents that included an 'Address of the Female Political Union of Newcastle upon Tyne to their Fellow Countrywomen' and an extract from *the Rights of Woman* by R.J. Richardson.¹ In *The Chartists* (1984), an essay collection by the same author, a subchapter is entitled 'The Women'.² More recently in 1991, Jutta Schwarzkopf published a book, *Women in the Chartist Movement*.³ This study essentially focused on the local anchoring of female Chartists and not on their specific discourse as activists. Furthermore, in 1992 Anna Clark published an article about 'The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity: Gender, Language, and Class in the 1830s and 1840s' in which her main concern was with the rhetoric elaborated by male Chartists.⁴ However, female Chartists were full activists who elaborated and developed a specific rhetoric. So, to what extent did the rhetoric of female Chartists provide a space of emancipation, given that for women at the time the mere fact of expressing their views in the public sphere was synonymous with a transgression of the existing social norms?

The Rhetoric of Female Chartists and the Representations of Women's Role

According to the traditional Victorian representations of women's role in society, their main duty as wives and mothers was to support and comfort the members of their family. These representations were bound to influence female Chartists' rhetoric. Consequently, rhetoric that focused upon self-sacrifice and domesticity was used in particular circumstances, for instance when it came to raising money to ensure the survival of families of convicted Chartist activists. From their personal experience these women perfectly knew that the whole family depended on the wages earned by husbands. Depriving them suddenly of their main source of income constituted an immediate threat to their financial survival. Therefore, women as caring and compassionate human beings were expected to bring moral support to these Chartist families in distress, and felt that it was their duty to do so.

A key way of documenting the activities of women in the movement is through their 'addresses'. Addresses were statements adopted by an assembly of Chartists at the end of a public meeting, excerpts of which might be published in *The Northern Star*, the main mouthpiece of Chartism. This extract from an address made by the Female Chartists of Manchester, which appeared in the newspaper in July 1841, clearly shows how the appeal to their 'Sisters of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales' drew on their traditional role as comforters for the most destitute:

With a forlorn, sorrowful, and agitated mind by day, weeping and mourning and sighing over their husbands' sufferings; and dreary and sleepless hours by night, their children bereft of kind and affectionate fathers, and the long affection and concord which existed betwixt them cut asunder by the tyrants.⁵

The women's daily life here is depicted mostly in the emotional mode. Their obvious aim was to appeal to their female counterparts' sensibility, through some kind of mirroring effect, based on working-class women's identification with their fellow sisters, in order to arouse their sympathy and gain their moral and financial support. At this stage, female Chartists' discourse was in keeping with the traditional representations of women as extremely sensitive, compassionate human beings. From this point of view, female Chartists' involvement appeared as a natural and necessary extension of their domestic duties and cares and as such could be related to previous female social and political commitments, for instance, as members of Female Reform Societies, or as opponents to the Corn Laws or to the New Poor Law. Dorothy Thompson, in her essay 'Women and Nineteenth Century Radical Politics', asserted that many women had joined the reform movement notably to fight against the New Poor Law of 1834. In this respect she noticed that: 'Women and girls went to the fore'.⁶

Although female Chartists' rhetoric had a prevailing humanitarian dimension, it also had a strong political undertone as shown by their strong indictment of the cruel policy of class legislation implemented by the Whig government. Class legislation refers to the idea that the law embodied and justified the property owning classes' prejudice against the character and behaviour of manual workers as a class. The women's convicted husbands were presented as harmless victims of an arbitrary rule and explicitly likened to martyrs as conveyed in this excerpt from an address delivered by the Females of Holbrook at a Chartist meeting in 1842, 'Remember their husbands were banished for their devotion to that good cause for which so many have been made martyrs'.⁷ The term 'martyr' had been carefully chosen because it was charged with religious connotations and endowed with an evocative power. This idea that wives should be totally devoted to their husbands and support them in all circumstances was at the core of the ideology of domesticity that was so influential in the 1830s. As Anna Clark asserts, 'Domesticity

was an important subtext in Chartist language because in the politics of the 1830s gendered notions of virtue demarcated the working class as different and inferior to the middle class'.⁸ Female Chartists defined themselves primarily as auxiliaries supporting their fathers, brothers or husbands. Dorothy Thompson pointed to the fact that, 'for the most part, however, their activity and their programmes were supportive of male political demands'.⁹ As wives and mothers, female Chartists had a natural right to stand up and step into the public sphere in order to be able to provide decently for the needs of all members of the family and to obtain the recognition of their rights as citizens. The same idea was taken up at a public meeting by Mary Ann Walker who was to become one of the most influential figures among female Chartists, as reported in the *Royal Cornwall Gazette*:

The events which were at that moment taking place in the North, where their sisters and brothers were being cruelly and unjustly transported, or else plunged into dismal and pestiferous dungeons, for no other cause than standing up for their rights and demanding bread to appease their hunger and save themselves from dying of starvation in their native land, were unfortunately of a nature to drag woman from her retirement, and call upon her to lift her voice, against such deeds (Great cheering from the men and cries of Bravo Miss Walker and hear, hear from the ladies).¹⁰

The notions of injustice, suffering and arbitrariness were at the core of Walker's discourse which rested on well-known, established facts and which appealed to women's sensibility and sense of responsibility. This posture, as offended mothers and wives, enabled them to compensate for the impropriety of leaving their natural sphere in order to express publicly their sympathy and support for the Chartist movement. As guardians of the material and moral comfort of the members of their families, it was then legitimate for women to act for the preservation of the dignity of their hearths. Malcolm Chase in his innovative study of Chartism highlighted the fact that, 'Defending the domestic ideal in itself also justified women mobilizing for Chartism'.¹¹ The family was conceived of as an individual unit strictly restricted to the private sphere, but also as an emblem of the close links that existed between all Chartist activists united within a family in order to further the same cause. By caring for the welfare of their families and securing their moral and material comfort, women were also bound to secure the welfare of the whole nation. By legitimating their commitment to the Chartist cause through their devotion to domestic duties, female Chartists emancipated themselves to a certain extent because they were stepping out of their natural sphere. Writing and signing their addresses was, for these committed women, a first step towards their emancipation from their male counterparts. Apart from this call for help, female Chartists advocated collective action such as in the following excerpt from a discourse delivered in *The Northern Star* on 9 February 1839 by the members of the Female Political Union of Newcastle: 'We call upon you to join us and help our fathers, husbands and brothers to free themselves and us from political, physical, and mental bondage'.¹²

This quotation deserves careful consideration. Indeed, some sort of discrepancy can be perceived between the first

and the second parts of this statement. The prevailing mode in female Chartists' rhetoric at this stage was one of careful reverence for men, the latter being granted a prominent place in the conduct of the movement in respect of the established hierarchy between sexes. Women however also expressed their own claim to full emancipation, both as human beings and citizens. Their discourse took on a transgressive dimension when they went as far as challenging the distribution of roles between men and women within a society whose main foundation was the influential ideology widely known as the theory of separate spheres. Within this ideological framework, particularly influential in the middle and upper classes, women's influence should be confined to the domestic sphere whereas only men should reign over the public sphere. The members of the Dunfermline Female Political Union were aware of the constraints and restrictions imposed on women by society. Nevertheless, in this extract from an address in February 1839, they openly expressed their conviction that it was their duty to be part of the Chartist movement along with men: 'We unite, that our men may be freemen, and not slaves'.¹³

The members of the Female Political Union of Newcastle shared the same view: 'We have been told that the province of woman is her home, and that the field of politics should be left to men; this we deny'.¹⁴ Women's change of status here is made particularly striking through the shift from the passive mode ('we have been told') to the active mode ('we deny'). They were perfectly aware of the controversial nature of women's public involvement in a mass political movement and the necessity for the women involved to transgress the boundaries of the domestic sphere. Their vision of politics, as delineated within these lines, was a broad one. Politics was not restricted to political stratagems. It touched all domains of life in society and, as citizens, women should not be left aside. (The notion of citizenship here is to be taken in its universal value.) Politics had been identified both as the source and the cause of their sufferings but also as the possible remedy for all their grievances.

Gradually female Chartists, far from being only passive onlookers, firmly asserted their claim to be independent autonomous human beings. They resolved to assume their own destinies rather than remain passive submissive beings in keeping with the traditional. They did not hesitate to speak out, challenging the mainstream discourse on women's supposed role within society and thereby, symbolically, emancipating themselves through their bold statements.

The Specificity and Ambivalence of Female Chartists' Rhetoric

Chartist women did not abandon their commitment to domestic duties, rather they used the necessity to manage home and hearth as a means of legitimising their move beyond the domestic sphere (although they did not question the legitimacy of the distribution of roles and space between men and women within society). However, this also proved an obstacle to their capacity to achieve a higher degree of emancipation with regards to their political commitment.

The female Chartists of Stockport clearly expressed their opinion on this subject, in an address reported in *The Northern Star* in May 1839, 'We regret that we should be driven by dire necessity to depart from the limits usually prescribed for female duties; but when ... even with the most rigid



Fig.1: Chartist meeting on Kennington Common, *Illustrated London News* 15 Apr. 1848. Courtesy of Bishopsgate Institute.

economy we are unable to provide for the actual necessities of subsistence.¹⁵ Female Chartists in their discourse tended to adopt a defensive mode almost apologizing in advance for their supposedly inconvenient behaviour and indirectly insisting on the necessity for them to justify their change of attitude and their departure from the prescribed norms imposed on women, on strictly rational and moral grounds.

The degraded condition of their hearth had become the very symbol of their own destitution and oppression as human beings. In this respect, this excerpt from an 'Address of the Female Political Union of Newcastle' published in 1839 is informative regarding the inner feelings of these women, 'For years we have struggled to maintain our homes in comfort, such as our hearts told us ... our husbands are over-wrought, our houses half-furnished, our families ill-fed and our children uneducated.'¹⁶

The preservation of their homes as a major concern took on a sort of political dimension as it became central to their rhetoric to justify the legitimacy of women's commitment to the Chartist movement. Malcolm Chase makes the point that: 'Most Chartist women concentrated on immediate practical issues concerning the security and quality of family life'.¹⁷ The causes of their distress and sufferings were felt to be mainly political and directly linked to the so-called class legislation elaborated and implemented by the upper classes in order to serve their sole interests. The female Chartists of Manchester, for instance, maintained that, 'We have a right

to struggle to gain for ourselves, our husbands, brothers and children, suitable houses, proper clothing, and good food.'¹⁸ Such an assertion was bound to counteract the claims that women's support for the Chartist movement amounted to an intrusion by females into a male dominated field. The concept of intrusion worked both in terms of space, with the intrusion of women alongside men in the public sphere, but also in terms of the sphere of influence, meddling in politics usually being considered as a privilege reserved for men. Thus, female Chartists were able to create a space of their own in which they could legitimately express their claims in a supposedly male-dominated field, thereby opening up new perspectives by considering the consequences of class legislation from a female angle. By openly showing great care for their homes and families, concerns largely shared by middle-class women, female Chartists might acquire some sort of respectability and could give the lie, in some way, to the criticism voiced against them in the middle-class press. Here they would be depicted, for instance, as unfeminine women whose virtue was lower than that of middle-class women. However, it was also ambivalent in as much as it was emblematic of the acceptance by working-class women of the assignment of women to the domestic sphere as prescribed by the middle-class influenced domestic ideology. The members of these families endured both material and moral insecurity and their children were bound to live the same harsh lives as their parents. The detailed depiction of their miserable plights as wives and

mothers would serve as a basis for the justification of their involvement in the Chartist movement. The condition of the members of the working classes was felt to be very similar to that of slaves of the upper classes. The likening of workers and their families to slaves was to become a recurrent pattern in the rhetoric of female Chartists. The same rhetorical figure had already been extensively used in 1825 by William Thompson, in his influential pamphlet, *Appeal of One Half the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain Them in Political, and Thence in Civil and Domestic, Slavery* which exposed the legal condition of married women as being similar to that of slaves.¹⁹ In the case of female Chartists, slavery had a double meaning including both economic and political slavery.

The notion of class conflict between the ruling and working classes and the sharp contrast between rich and poor is another leitmotiv in Chartist women's discourse, as shown by this excerpt from the address of the Female Political Union of Newcastle published in 1839, 'The scorn of the rich is pointed towards us'.²⁰ This metaphor, used to convey the contemptuous manner in which the upper classes looked at the poor, is particularly powerful because, apart from being perceived as degrading and dehumanizing, it is symbolically equated to a deadly weapon threatening the poor. The rhetoric of female Chartists in this example undoubtedly testifies to a certain degree of class-consciousness on their part, which was bound to have a deep influence on their rhetoric. According to them, the ruling classes were directly responsible for this situation through class legislation which resulted in their extreme poverty and their continuously degrading living conditions. The working classes were deprived of the right to vote by the upper classes. Their disenfranchisement was thus felt to be at the root of all their evil because they had no voice in political debate. They therefore directly suffered from the consequences of the decisions made unilaterally by the ruling classes, with a view to secure their ascendancy over them:

We have searched and found that the cause of these evils is the Government of the country being in the hands of a few of the upper and middle classes, while the working men who form the millions, the strength and wealth of the country, are left without the pale of the constitution, their wishes never consulted, and their interests sacrificed by the ruling factions.²¹

The term 'factions', applied here to the upper classes, had a very negative connotation and implicitly referred to the political schemes devised by the members of the ruling classes which were perceived as serving primarily their own particular interests at the expense of the common interest. These practices, the Chartists believed, were also meant to maintain the upper-class hegemony through the high taxation and very low wages which compelled large numbers of working-class women and infants to work long hours every day for meagre wages. Such practices were vigorously denounced. The antagonism between the ruling and working classes is strongly emphasized here just as it was in the rhetoric of male Chartists which testifies, on the part of female Chartists, to a process of reappropriation of male Chartists' rhetoric.

The upper classes' leadership over society was clearly exposed as brutal and illegitimate and the franchise was perceived as the only possible means to achieve more justice

and equality for the working classes. The same idea was taken up by the members of the Northampton Female Radical Association who spoke out against the harsh sufferings inflicted on the members of the working classes, 'which we are convinced arises from an unjust system of legislation'.²² In the same way, Mary Ann Walker expressed at a public lecture, her deep rejection of the effects of 'corrupt class legislation'.²³ Acute class consciousness was at the core of the Chartist movement's distinctive identity. As highlighted by James Epstein, 'Chartism was a class movement'.²⁴ Female Chartists' rhetoric in these two instances also conveyed their awareness of the political stakes of the debate. They were denouncing a whole system of government based only on the preservation of class interests and advocated a radical reform of the whole existing system. Similarly, the Female Chartists of Manchester criticized the way in which the country was governed by the ruling elites and denounced the policy of the government in an address from July 1842: 'It rests with the industrious people whether they will any longer submit to a system so wicked, fraught with injustice and misrule'.²⁵ The two main political parties at the time, the Whigs and the Tories, were indirectly stigmatized and rejected as being totally oblivious to the interests and the condition of the working classes.

The claim to political emancipation in society through the abolition of class legislation was expressed by the members of the Female Political Union of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in a very straightforward and practical way:

'For these evils there is no remedy but the just measure of allowing every citizen of the United Kingdom, the right of voting in the election of the members of Parliaments ... or, in other words, to pass the People's Charter into a law and emancipate the white slaves of England'.²⁶

Female Chartists' rhetoric in this assertion, in its declaration of their support for the Charter and the struggle for its implementation, is very similar to that elaborated by their male counterparts. Taking up the leitmotiv of the equation of workers to slaves (without making any distinction between male and female workers), all share the same slavish condition and are united in support of the same cause. It should be noted that female suffrage is not explicitly mentioned here as a separate cause to be fought for. Female Chartists espoused the men's cause rather than promoting their own rights. Even if some of them created associations of their own, they openly asserted their will to work in close partnership with men, and to serve as auxiliaries in the struggle led by men, as is shown in this October 1842 extract from the *Royal Cornwall Gazette*:

'A meeting of female Chartists was held on Monday evening, in the National Charter Association Hall, Old Bailey, for the purpose of forming a Female Chartist Association, to cooperate with the male association, and for the objects connected with the interests of the People's Charter'.²⁷

In this statement, female Chartists appear to be oblivious to their own particular interests as women - rather they identified themselves and their interests with those of male Chartists. The women implicitly emphasized their subordination to male Chartists. The Charter was at the core of their claim. Just like their male counterparts, female Chartists seemed to

share the same concerns and expressed their claim through a common language that reflected their shared subordinate social and political condition. Another instance of common rhetoric between female and male Chartists can be found in an excerpt from the address delivered by the female Chartists of Stockport transcribed in May 1839: 'We feel justified in declaring our conviction that nothing less than the adoption of the principles of the People's Charter can effectually remove the existing distress, or secure the safety of the working classes.'²⁸ Evidently the women did not intend to lead the movement along with men, rather they conceived their own role within the Chartist movement primarily as auxiliaries to men. This is corroborated by this excerpt from an address adopted by the Female Radical Association of Carlisle in 1838: 'Also, that, if need be, we will follow our husbands, our fathers, our sons and our brothers, to the battlefield, to cheer and comfort them in the hour of danger, bind up their wounds, and instigate them to fresh deeds of valour.'²⁹

The phrase 'if need be' is interesting because it implies that it was the duty of women in certain circumstances to leave their so-called 'natural sphere' and join men in this fight as if for them there were no other choice. Creating associations of their own, therefore, could be seen as transgressive and, at a symbolical level, might represent a path towards the emancipation of female Chartists within the movement.

This idea is taken up again in another excerpt from the same discourse in which female Chartists explained their strategy and mode of operation '... we have followed the example of our sisters in Birmingham, Newcastle, Glasgow, and several other places, and have entered into a union sacred by its purposes, of aiding and encouraging the unions of men all over the United Kingdom.'³⁰ From this it emerges that, according to this pattern, men should be on the front line whereas women should mainly stay behind the scenes and assist them in their struggle. Female Chartists did not intend to compete with men over the leadership of the movement. Therefore, this conception of male/female power relationships also reflects male Chartists' ambivalent attitude towards female Chartists' contribution to the movement. Moreover, by pursuing the election of working-class men to Parliament, female Chartists could hope that their interests would be at last taken care of by MPs. This posture may also be perceived as a way for female Chartists to impose some sort of limitation on themselves so as not to offend their male counterparts by potentially threatening their hegemony within the movement and more generally in the political sphere. Such a submissive attitude was perfectly in keeping with the Victorian representation of women as passive beings dependent on men's protection and support. In this scheme, men were still perceived as the guardians of women's interests. Men, in keeping within the traditional Victorian imagery of manhood, were depicted as fighters and warriors whereas women acted as comforters and nurses, standing by their sides and supporting them in their struggle. According to commonly accepted historical interpretations of Chartism, as pointed out by David Jones, this posture was deliberately encouraged by male Chartists: In fact, these adult-working men, whose own economic security and independence were threatened, were in Chartism to reassert the 'the customary relationships between the sexes'.³¹ Nevertheless, the objects defined by the female members of these associations, as the Female Radical Association of Carlisle expressed above, enabled them to counterbalance

and even undermine the apparent transgressive nature of their commitment. To those who opposed the Chartist movement, true femininity and politics were regarded as sharply antagonistic notions. The members of the Female Political Union of Birmingham, for instance, were apparently fully aware of this obstacle. However, they did not hesitate to assert that their commitment as supporters of the Chartist movement was legal and rightful even if it necessarily implied questioning and challenging the existing laws, 'If there was any policeman in disguise, any spy, any literary prostitute, ... she [Mrs Lapworth, Chairwoman] would say to him, we are doing all that is lawful and right'.³²

Chartist women did not mean to convey the image of transgressive figures. In the same way, they claimed their love for their country and attempted to prove that their commitment was in accordance with God's will. As Dorothy Thompson points out: 'They [women] articulated their grievances sometimes in general political terms ... sometimes in ethical or religious terms, appealing to the Bible for the legitimization of protest'.³³ At this point, female Chartists were only at the beginning of a long process of political apprenticeship and their discourse, at least in these examples, was still apparently deeply influenced by the prevailing Victorian representations of men and women's functions within society. In this respect, they were still women under men's influence rather than emancipated women. David Jones, in his article 'Women and Chartism', explained how this interpretation was widespread among historians of the period: 'In general, so we are told, female Chartists in the years 1838-1842 were content to play a dependent or deferential role, and there was a notable lack of advanced thought amongst them. For their part, male Chartists often patronized or used their female counterparts'.³⁴

The education traditionally imposed on women at this time was aimed essentially at preparing them to be good wives and devoted mothers. Therefore, women were ignorant of the basic requirements in matters of political activities and militancy. In this regard, men such as the Chartist leaders Feargus O'Connor and Richard Oastler played an important part in their political apprenticeship as well. Members of the Female Political Union of Ashton-under-Lyne did not fail to pay tribute to these men for awakening their conscience and for symbolically opening up their eyes: '... thanks to our noble advocate Stephens, and his gallant friends, O'Connor and Oastler, the mist is now dispelled from our eyes'.³⁵ This reappropriation process implied both a subordinate position on the part of women through imitation and duplication (that is, female Chartists taking up the arguments already put forward by male Chartists) but it also entailed potential emancipation for female Chartists through an enlargement of the scope of their rhetorical pattern.

These Chartist women were certainly aware that, by so doing, the legitimacy of their commitment would not be liable to the easy questioning of their opponents. Creating associations of their own, rather than mixing with men within already existing structures, may have been socially more acceptable. It testifies, also, to a degree of emancipation on the part of female Chartists because, by having their own associations, they would then have the capacity to make their own decisions regarding the conduct of their movement. Apart from their assigned common political object, meaning the adoption of the Charter, the mission of these female Chartist associations consisted mainly of bringing material

and moral comfort to those in distress. This was very close to the philanthropic actions initiated by middle- and upper-class ladies' committees within parishes and thus could be related to a long-established tradition of female philanthropy.

Chartist women, therefore, developed their own specific rhetoric. Far from being theoretical, it was derived from the experience of their hardships in daily life (as exemplified by child and female labour in the mines and mills) and was oriented toward action. This testifies to their will to make their own decisions and, together with other women committed to the same cause, to initiate concrete actions regardless of the requirements and the codes of true femininity as conceived by the upper classes.

Towards Female Chartists' Rhetorical Emancipation

The rhetoric of the members of the Ashton-under-Lyne Female Political Union is a case in point. In their address to their fellow-countrywomen, as published in *The Northern Star*, they intended to create a climate of confidence and some kind of sisterhood between all potential female supporters of the Chartist cause throughout the country. Far from exercising any kind of constraint or resorting to threats against those women who might have been reluctant to join the movement, they were very cautious in expressing their purpose, at least in the first lines of their discourse: 'Dear sisters, We the females of Ashton-Under-Lyne, venture to address you in a spirit of love and kindness; hoping you will co-operate with us.'³⁶ Gaining their fellow countrywomen's trust was a necessary preliminary in order to obtain their support. According to traditional representations, women were supposed to have a strong influence and were endowed with a powerful capacity for persuasion of their relatives. Female Chartists did not question the foundation or the validity of these assertions which were part of the prevailing middle-class ideology and the Victorian representation of women. These very specific feminine qualities were to be implemented in order to convince the people around them, either friends or relatives, to join the movement and to support the Chartist cause. More generally, female Chartists often referred to their fellow countrywomen and potential supporters as 'sisters in bondage' thereby emphasizing the close link between them, as they shared the same condition of 'political slaves'. They were concerned with constructing a collective sense of group identity between female Chartists, who all shared the same miserable plight and moral sufferings. They defined themselves primarily as female members of the working class. Through the recurrent use of the personal pronoun 'we', female Chartists constituted themselves primarily as a collective entity.

Chartist women were also trying to forge some sort of common language based on a set of universal moral values which would symbolically serve as a bond between all females who belonged to the working class and who were willing to get involved in this fight for justice and equality. An example is this excerpt from an address delivered by the members of the Newcastle Female Political Union in 1839: 'We entreat you to join us to help the cause of freedom, justice, honesty, and truth to drive poverty and ignorance from our land, and establish happy homes, true religion, righteous government, and good laws.'³⁷ In their plea, these female Chartists appealed to universal moral values and presented an idealized vision of

a new society in which justice and honesty would prevail. It is through a supposed common adherence of women to universal moral values that female Chartists hoped to convince their countrywomen to join them in what was mainly presented as a moral crusade rather than a mere political fight. The political content of their speech and its potentially revolutionary implications tended to be deliberately underplayed in order to alleviate women's reluctance to support the Chartist cause.

A close link was established between the need for a deep moral reform of society, politics and even religion, and the necessity of securing comfort and happiness for the working classes. Female Chartists made use of their moral virtues to downplay the radical nature of their commitment, thereby showing their skills for efficient communication and elaborate rhetoric as well as an acute awareness of the perceptions of women's role in society and the strong impact these had on women themselves. However, the tone of their discourse sometimes took a more radical turn when they explained to their countrywomen the meaning and the practical implications of their fight, as was the case with the Chartist women of Ashton-under-Lyne, who spoke of 'our attempt to emancipate our husbands, and children and ourselves from the tyrants that have ruled our country so long with a rod of iron.'³⁸

The notions of class conflict and the oppression of the working classes by the ruling classes definitely emerged as keynotes in female Chartists' rhetoric. The domination and arbitrary leadership of the ruling classes was expressed in terms of physical violence through the allusion to physical chastisement and the image of the rod which explicitly referred to the physical chastisements inflicted on slaves. Nevertheless, the fact that the emancipation of working-class women was mentioned last is not insignificant. It testifies to female Chartists' will to achieve, at last, their own emancipation as well. The order in which it appears draws attention to this singular request, while respecting some sort of hierarchy within their concerns, as if their husbands' and children's interests should come first. It also accounts for the existence of a sense of a double belonging for these women who identified themselves both as members of the working-class and as females. In this particular case, gender identity symbolically took the lead over social belonging and class identity. Female Chartists deliberately used a limited number of recurring arguments which were essentially grounded within class struggle and the leitmotiv of their sufferings as wives and mothers, in order to justify their involvement within the Chartist movement. This closely contributed to the coherence and homogeneity of their rhetoric while skillfully undermining the sense of transgression of their naturally devoted domestic duties. According to Anna Clark, female Chartists also acquired a distinct political identity 'as mothers, workers and activists that differed in important ways both from the middle-class ideal of domesticity and from male Chartists' notions of women's role'.³⁹

In this way, female Chartists were able to achieve another kind of emancipation from the political point of view. The term emancipation was charged with a strong symbolical meaning. It inevitably recalled the emancipation of slaves which had only recently been achieved (in 1833), while the debate on the abolition of slavery had been a central political issue for several decades. However, female Chartists firmly asserted their determination to fight for their own rights and to achieve female suffrage which required, on the part of

these women, an awareness of their own abilities as women to campaign for their rights and to exercise suffrage. They went as far as conceiving a new order of things in which they would at last occupy the very place which, according to them, they deserved in society.

Moreover, this idea relates to the belief that the enhancing of women's place and condition in society would also pave the way to social progress. Improving their condition and that of their families would enable women to better fulfill their mission as mothers and wives. Domestic duties implicitly took prevalence over political concerns, both of which were closely linked. Female Chartists recurrently insisted on the fact that they would never have left the private sphere if the survival of their families had not been threatened. Instead of rejecting the idea that their primary mission was to be good mothers and devoted wives as being arbitrarily imposed upon them by the ruling classes and the tenants of the domestic ideology, they chose to exalt this mission as some kind of accomplishment of their natural role. It was also a source of pride and dignity for them, that they could develop their own ways within this clearly established pattern.

Chartist women did not fear to express their specific needs and to voice their personal aspirations. They insisted that this right (i.e. the right to female suffrage) be recognized by the majority of masculine members of the Chartist movement. The members of the Female Union of Ashton-under-Lyne no longer relied on men to represent and promote their own interests as women: '...we do not despair of yet seeing intelligence the necessary qualification for voting, and then Sisters, we shall be placed in our proper position in society, and enjoy the elective franchise as well as our kinsmen.'⁴⁰ They wished that the criteria for suffrage, rather than being based on property rights, should be based on common sense and intelligence. The assumption here, that intelligence was something that should be considered equally shared by both sexes, was in itself highly controversial and can be seen as a subversive assertion at several levels.

Indeed, the very idea of promoting the extension of suffrage to women was vigorously opposed by a majority of MPs as well as by a large part of public opinion. Male Chartists themselves were fully aware of this reality and therefore had quickly decided to withdraw the claim for female suffrage from the Charter. Furthermore, the supposed extensive social changes that would necessarily be brought about, if women were granted the vote, fostered great anxiety about the future of British society. It potentially threatened the commonly accepted hierarchy between men and women to which male Chartists themselves obviously subscribed.

Nevertheless, so desperate were female Chartists, when confronted with their inability to relieve their husbands' and children's sufferings, that they even seemed ready to take up arms against their oppressors, as was asserted in the address by the Female Union of Ashton-under-Lyne: 'In conclusion, dear Sisters, we wish you to be assured that we hate bloodshed and strife, that our very souls revolt at the bare idea of a civil war but then they that would work us and then skilly [sic] us to death, deserve no mercy at our hands.'⁴¹ Beyond the revolutionary nature of their discourse, an underlying threat of violence undoubtedly pervaded their words. Although they tended to deny it in the first lines of this discourse (maybe in order to have a more powerful impact on their audience), in their despair these women appear determined to use all possible

means, including violence, to achieve their aims and to make their voices heard. These threats might not be verbal threats only, at least such is the impression conveyed through their words and the tone of their statement. This might be equated to some kind of verbal excess as well; female Chartists growing impatient with the indifference and sometimes ruthless methods of the ruling elites. These female Chartists, by using very strong words and crude images, were radically breaking from the idealized figure of woman as the *Angel in the House*, as would be celebrated in the famous eponymous poem by Coventry Patmore, and all the stereotypes of the feminine ideal which sustained this ideological construction. Furthermore, physical force and violence was usually associated with men, not with women.

As a result, female Chartists who held such discourse were often charged by their opponents with having 'unsexed' themselves and their daring attitudes were clearly exposed as unnatural and unwomanly. Therefore, this was a way to reply to their opponents by implementing the same rhetorical strategy. Resorting to violence did not result from a deliberate spontaneous choice on the part of these desperate women. They knew and felt that it was totally contradictory to their own nature as women but they felt they had no other choice. They believed it was the only way that they could compel members of the upper classes finally to listen to them. Their threatening tone and their fierce hatred toward those they considered their enemies and oppressors dramatically contrasted with the traditional Victorian representations of women's role in society, as passive submissive beings. However, this hyperbolic rhetorical strategy implemented by female Chartists could also prove counter-productive by potentially deterring other women from supporting their action and joining the movement, fearful that it might affect their reputations or undermine their respectability.

Female Chartists were evidently determined not to make any concessions towards their clearly identified enemies: the ruling elites and the members of the upper classes. It testifies to their strong political consciousness, as shown through their rhetoric and their use of the pervading motives of class conflict and the master-slave relationship. Their discourse also symbolically embodied the emergence of a kind of feminist consciousness because these women were fully aware of their own status as oppressed beings in society.

Even though the voice of Chartist women tended to be primarily a collective one ('we') some female Chartist speakers such as Susannah Inge or Mary Ann Walker from the City of London Female Chartist Association seemed to have acquired a reputation for their talents as orators and distinguished themselves thanks to their personal charisma.⁴² At this time, a woman speaking in public, especially in order to express political opinions, was regarded as improper and inconvenient. In one of her addresses, Susannah Inge, who emerged as the leader of the City of London Female Charter Association, vigorously rejected the idea that women should not interfere with politics, 'Do not say you have no business with politics, and that you leave such things for your husbands, fathers and brothers. You have an interest in politics, a deeper interest than you are aware of.'⁴³ In her discourse, Inge kept her distance from the common assertion that women should not meddle with politics. She also urged women to overcome their fears and reluctance and to step into the field of politics in order to stand up for their own interests. Her style was

quite straightforward, very simple, perfectly adapted to her audience which consisted mainly of uneducated working-class women and men. She used simple, concrete words and short sentences without including any subordinate clause.

In 1839, the members of the Female Radical Association of Keighley had also vigorously incited women throughout the United Kingdom to rebel against their slavish condition, 'If you, then, are wishful to be free, stand up with a bold front, like women determined to shake off the bonds, of despotism and join with us in demanding our just rights.'⁴⁴ The fight led by female Chartists against the existing system of government was clearly likened to the struggle for the abolition of slavery. These women addressed women only and were exclusively concerned with improving women's condition in society. Women were urged to fight in order to emancipate themselves from their slavish condition.

The only remedy to their oppression and their only way to achieve full emancipation was to be enfranchised. Susannah Inge, in going against commonly accepted conventions, dared to challenge an assumption made by a Mr Cohen, according to whom, women were by nature not qualified to exercise the franchise properly. This episode was related in the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* in October 1842, 'Miss Susanna Inge, Secretary to the association, should like to ask Mr Cohen why he considered women not qualified to vote, if they were not qualified to fill public offices? It did not require much physical force to vote.'⁴⁵ At this time, confronting a man and challenging his opinion in public would have been seen as transgressive. At the same meeting, Mary Ann Walker also showed firmness and determination in her discourse which denied Cohen's assertion that women could be too easily influenced by men to be able to exercise the franchise in a rational way. Such an assertion reflected existing prejudices against women as easily corruptible creatures without any strong will.

It is worth noting that a significant number of men appear to have supported her stand against Cohen, as the *Royal Cornwall Gazette* reported, 'Cheers from the men'.⁴⁶ Mary Ann Walker was said to have been a very popular and influential figure within the Chartist movement. In her speech, she had 'declared herself a Chartist in name and feeling'⁴⁷ thereby indicating her strength. Walker's devotion to the Chartist movement and its assigned objectives, including the implementation of the Charter, was coupled with a deep concern for women's rights and notably the extension of the franchise to women. She expressed her ideas with enthusiasm and succeeded in arousing sympathy and generating enthusiastic support from her audience:

Thanks were also unanimously and enthusiastically accorded to Miss Mary Ann Walker, who, in acknowledging the compliment, called on the ladies present to enroll their names in favour of the National Charter, assuring them and the gentlemen that the more numerous the enrolment, the more marked would be the expression of thanks to her, and the more worthy of her estimation.⁴⁸

Beyond her personal satisfaction at receiving compliments for her performance as a public speaker, Walker was more concerned with securing the future of the Chartist movement than with her own personal glory. She encouraged members of the audience to join the ranks of the existing female Chartists

associations in order to promote the movement. The very fact of speaking in public in front of an assembly consisting of men and women was another sign of the emancipation of women devoted to the Chartist cause. Women were not supposed to speak in public, all the more so when tackling controversial political subjects such as universal suffrage. Her style was clear and simple without any artificial rhetorical ornaments and she was therefore able to convey her message in an efficient and straightforward way. The widely recognized influence of Susannah Inge and Mary Ann Walker within the Chartist movement is symbolical of the degree of emancipation that female Chartists could achieve.

To conclude, female Chartists gradually elaborated their own rhetoric. Although much influenced, at least at first, by the arguments put forward by male Chartists (notably through the leitmotifs of class conflict or master-slave relationships), it gradually acquired its own specificity and became a space of emancipation. Through their rhetoric, female Chartists eventually achieved a political identity that was distinct from that of their male counterparts, one that combined elements of the middle-class ideal of domesticity. These elements were refashioned through a process of reappropriation and thus, to some extent, this ideological construction acquired a new dimension. Female Chartists' rhetoric was the locus of a dual kind of emancipation. By forging their own rhetoric in order to voice their own specific claims as women, female Chartists emancipated themselves both from the prevailing representations of women's function within society (though they were careful enough to avoid openly rejecting their natural mission in matter of domestic and family duties) and also from male Chartists. Finally, the specific rhetoric developed by female Chartists was to prove influential in the long term since echoes of their discourse could be found in the 1850s, for instance, in the discourse of the members of the Sheffield Female Political Union, one of the first organizations specifically launched by women to claim female suffrage.

Notes

1. Dorothy Thompson, ed., *The Early Chartists* (London: Macmillan, 1971).
2. Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists* (Hounslow: Temple Smith, 1984).
3. Jutta Schwarzkopf, *Women in the Chartist Movement* (London: Macmillan, 1991).
4. Anna Clark, 'The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity: Gender, Language, and Class in the 1830s and 1840s', *Journal of British Studies*, 31/1 (1992), 62-88.
5. *The Northern Star*, 24 Jul. 1841. *Address of the female Chartists of Manchester to their Sisters of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales*.
6. Dorothy Thompson, 'Women and Nineteenth Century Radical Politics: A Lost Dimension', in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (eds.), *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, (London: Pelican Books, 1976), 119.
7. *The Northern Star*, 5 Feb. 1842. *The Females of Holbrook to the Chartists of Great Britain and Ireland on behalf of Mrs Frost, Mrs Williams and Mrs Jones*.
8. Clark, 'The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity', 66.
9. Dorothy Thompson, 'Women Chartists' in *The Dignity of Chartism*, Essays by Dorothy Thompson edited by Stephen Roberts, (London, New York: Verso, 2015), 44.

10. *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 28 Oct. 1842.
11. Malcolm Chase, *Chartism: A New History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 43.
12. *The Northern Star*, 9 Feb. 1839. The Female Political Union of Newcastle was created on 30 December 1838 in order to raise money to cover the costs of arrested Chartists, to support delegates to the National Convention and families of striking workers.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *The Northern Star*, 25 May 1839.
16. *The Northern Star*, 9 Feb. 1839.
17. Chase, *Chartism*, 28.
18. *The Northern Star*, 24 July 1841.
19. William Thompson, *Appeal of one Half of the Human Race, Women, against the pretensions of the other Half, Men, to retain them in Political, and thence in Civil and Domestic Slavery* (1825), (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), 57.
20. *The Northern Star*, 9 Feb. 1839.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *The Northern Star*, 22 June 1839.
23. *The Northern Star*, 10 Dec. 1842.
24. James Epstein, *The Lion of Freedom: Feargus O'Connor and the Chartist Movement* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 3.
25. *The Northern Star*, 24 Jul. 1841. *Address of the Female Chartists of Manchester to their Sisters of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales.*
26. *The Northern Star*, 9 Feb. 1839.
27. *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 28 Oct. 1842.
28. *The Northern Star*, 25 May 1839.
29. *The Northern Star*, 22 Dec. 1838.
30. *Ibid.*
31. David Jones, 'Women and Chartism', *History*, 68/ 222 (1983), 1-21, 1.
32. *The Northern Star*, 9 Nov. 1839.
33. Thompson, *the Dignity of Chartism*, 131.
34. Jones, 'Women and Chartism', 1.
35. Address of the Female Union of Ashton-under-Lyne, *The Northern Star*, 2 Feb. 1839. Feargus O'Connor was a prominent Chartist leader. Richard Oastler was a very popular orator who campaigned for factory reform and the abolition of the new poor law in the 1830s and 1840s. He also supported Chartism.
36. *The Northern Star*, 2 Feb. 1839.
37. *The Northern Star*, 9 Feb. 1839.
38. *The Northern Star*, 2 Feb. 1839.
39. Clark, 'The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity', 77.
40. *The Northern Star*, 2 Feb. 1839.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Susannah Inge (1820-1902) had limited education and worked as a housemaid. In 1842 she became Secretary of the newly created *London Female Chartist Association*.
43. *The Northern Star*, 2 July 1842.
44. *The Northern Star*, 12 Oct. 1839. *From the Female Radical Association of Keighley to the Females of the United Kingdom.*
45. *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 28 Oct. 1842.
46. *Ibid.*
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Ibid.*

Book Reviews

Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2019. £14.99 9780300251838 (paperback), pp. xx + 296

Reviewed by Houda Hamdi Marion
Independent Scholar

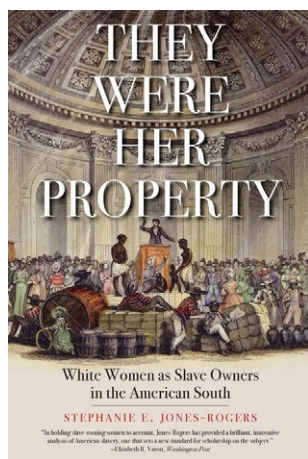
'Southern slave-owning women had existed in a world in which slavery and ownership of human beings constituted core elements of their identities.' (p. 183)

They Were Her Property is a corrective book published in 2019 by the American historian Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers. It enacts what a true historian should do: unveil what the past hides from us. The book reveals that white women in the Antebellum South were not mere bystanders or reluctant actors in the institution of slavery. They were actively involved in sustaining the slave-owning enterprise. Relying on court records, real witnesses and archived stories, the author contends that white women strongly petitioned against the coverture law, which, at that time, stipulated that wives' assets were the property of their husbands, because they wanted to secure the property they already owned before marriage. Human property, in fact, helped them maintain

their economic and social status. Indeed, white women were often even more invested in slavery than their male counterparts. Even after Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, which legally eradicated slavery, white women in the South aggressively sought to preserve this institution and orchestrated intemperate acts to secure the luxury of the free labour they had.

They Were Her Property subverts the conventional belief that slaveholding was predominantly a male domain. It portrays Antebellum women as experts and pioneers in the slave market. They were involved in public slave transactions. They made deals, bargained, and gained tremendous profits. In many cases, the transactions were in their own homes and therefore, outside the official laws regulating the purchase of slaves. White women were protected by law in reclaiming their slaves back from the debtors when their husbands mismanaged their plantations. They were given an 'undeniable' right to exclude their husbands' interference in the management of their own human assets. By law and acts, the book suggests that white women had more control on the slave-owning enterprise than men themselves.

Beside the financial autonomy that slavery provides for them, Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers contends that white women's need for human property was related to childbirth and nursing: some white mothers refused to nurse their babies; others had difficulties nursing their children. Subsequently, they demanded that enslaved mothers or 'wet nurses' breastfed



their own children, which most of the time happened at the cost of the enslaved women's own children. The demand for wet nurses engendered three things: it increased the sales of enslaved mothers, therefore further enslaving their bodies; it commodified the nursing process; and, since the need for wet nurses was not 'a last resort' as previous historians have argued, black women were further sexually assaulted in order to give birth in the same

periods as their white mistresses in order to breastfeed the white babies and tend to their needs.

They were Her Property is a heart-rending book. Beside stealing the milk from enslaved infants, it portrays acts of extreme violence perpetrated by white mistresses. They tortured and starved their slaves. They mutilated and killed enslaved babies and children, crimes, which, however, went unpunished by the law. Because 'slavery and ownership of human beings constituted core elements of their identities' (p. 183), Southern women, during the Civil War, hid and imprisoned their slaves, and turned to the territories not yet touched by the abolitionist laws. When slavery was officially abolished, white women demanded compensation from the government for the loss of their human property. They publicly expressed their fear of social and economic death. Some of them went even further as to keep in bondage the children of the freed parents, creating, thereby, more family separations and trauma.

The book is a brilliant instance of the uncanny in its efforts to bring to light what has been repressed in the Antebellum American history. Readers of this book are now fully aware that white Antebellum women are not the fictive incarnation of Scarlett O'Hara in 'Gone with the Wind.' Instead, they were violent perpetrators and participants in the horror of the slave-owning enterprise. In the end, this piece of history showed us that racism or denying the humanity of the racial 'other' has no sex. Without any doubt, *They Were Her Property* is a tremendous contribution to the American history, African American literature, and other minority studies because, in unveiling the Southern Belle's involvement in the institution of slavery, the book articulates the importance of shedding light on the 'xed' dark zones of history and grand narratives.

Jennifer Holmes, *A Working Woman: The Remarkable Life of Ray Strachey*, Matador, 2019. ISBN 978 1789016 543 (hardback), £20, pp. xiv + 394.

Reviewed by Ruth Cohen
Independent Scholar

Ray Strachey (1887-1940) is today mainly remembered for her role in the British women's suffrage movement and for her pioneering 1928 history of it, *The Cause*. Jennifer Holmes' stated agenda in this biography is to 'set the record straight' about Strachey, whose work and life she believes have hitherto received insufficient attention and who, she argues, has been unfairly criticised by historians.

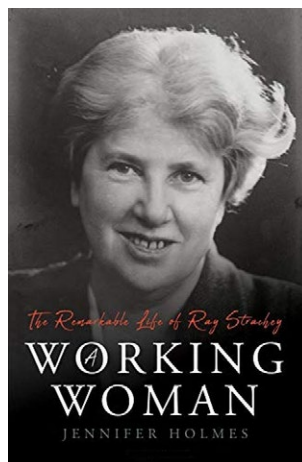
Holmes introduces us to Strachey's warmth and dynamism; her considerable achievements, and her varied abilities and interests, which ranged from the activism, writing and journalism which were central to her life and work, to mathematics, engineering, amateur painting and even (not always successful!) bricklaying. She highlights Strachey's commitment both to public life and to domestic responsibilities and also suggests that previous accounts have sidelined key men in Strachey's life, including her husband Oliver Strachey, in favour of her close relationships with women.

The biography takes a mainly chronological approach. Early sections cover Strachey's childhood, her early years in the suffrage movement and the period between 1911 and 1918, during which she married and produced two children while continuing with public work. Later sections cover her life and work in the immediate postwar period, the later 1920s and the final years before her untimely and unexpected death in her early fifties. Appendices include family trees for her mother's American Quaker family, her father's Catholic Costelloes and also the redoubtable Stracheys, with whom she was linked not only through Oliver, but also through her two closest women friends, Elinor Rendel and Pippa Strachey. The select bibliography usefully demonstrates the diversity of her published writing, and a valuable addition is the large number of photographs.

The study usefully highlights the influence of feminist and reforming ideals on the young Strachey, drawn from her beloved maternal grandmother and from her father (although contact continued over the years, her mother left the family home when she was five). From early on, Strachey showed herself a powerful character who would have an impact in the world. Family and friendship connections helped; for example, in her youth she was friendly with J. M. Keynes, while her uncle by marriage, Bertrand Russell, tutored her for entrance to Newnham College, Cambridge.

Strachey's years at Newnham coincided with what she later called the 'flowering time' of the women's movement and so it is unsurprising that she did not distinguish herself academically. Instead, she threw herself into working for 'the cause', proving an energetic, lively and effective organiser and speaker. Helped by personal connections, she quickly became active in the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and was a devoted long-term ally of Millicent Fawcett, backing her during the divisions which later emerged within the NUWSS.

In wartime, Strachey also put much of her energies into promoting and organising women's work. Unusually for the time, she combined activism not only with marriage but also with two young children. Post-war, she went on to lobby for women's access to, and equal pay in, professional jobs, stood unsuccessfully for Parliament (three times), worked for MP Nancy Astor (initially unpaid), and for a while was involved with the League of Nations Union. In the 1930s, for the first time fully reliant on paid work as earlier financial help from family dried up, she combined working for Lady Astor with earning from writing, journalism and later broadcasting. Despite a range of other interests, women's employment continued to be a major theme, as with her 1935



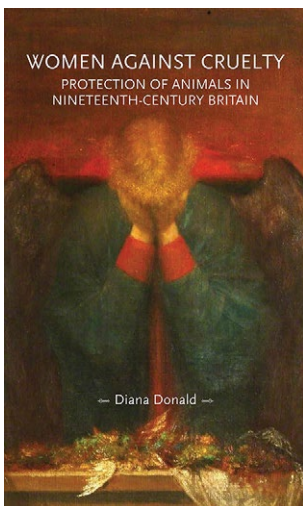
book, *Careers and Openings for Women*, and her foundation of the Women's Employment Federation.

Throughout Strachey coped with children, a sometimes difficult marriage and a mother needing help due to long term mental health problems. She had advantages of course, especially financial support for years from Bernard Berenson, her mother's second husband; and while her children were little was able to offload them on occasion to relatives. Later on, although needing to earn and also committed to voluntary activity, she was increasingly a tower of strength for others, providing unstinting support both practical and emotional not only to her mother and her own adult children, but to other relatives and friends.

Drawing on a wide range of sources, including Strachey's own wonderful letters and diaries, Holmes brings this energetic and capable woman vividly to life. Only a couple of questions arise. Given the emphasis at the beginning on 'setting the record straight', it would have helped to know more about the previous criticisms of Strachey to which Holmes is responding. And, perhaps understandably given the very richness and variety of the source material and of Strachey's life and interests, sometimes a detailed focus on a relatively minor event detracts from the overall thread. These are minor points, however. Overall, this handsomely produced and highly readable study has a great deal to recommend it.

Diana Donald, *Women Against Cruelty: Protection of Animals in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020. £85.00, 978-1-5261-1542-3 (hardback), pp. xiii + 282

Reviewed by Carrie (C Lou) Hamilton
Independent Scholar



The early twenty-first century has witnessed a flourishing of the history of human-animal relations. Diana Donald's *Women Against Cruelty*, the first detailed study of women in Britain's nineteenth-century animal protection movement, makes a significant contribution to this relatively new field. The book expands our empirical knowledge of British women's roles in the movement's formative decades, and engages questions regarding the relationship between gender, class and animal activism.

Women Against Cruelty contests the well-worn thesis — prevalent in the mainstream historiography on animal protection — that the movement was not about animals at all, but about elite reformers' desire to discipline the working classes via anti-cruelty legislation. According to Donald, the social control thesis has both simplified the history of animal protection and obscured its gender politics, most notably female activists' emphasis on education and care rather than punishment.

The book weaves a chronological account of major organisations and campaigns with detailed examination of

women's words and actions. Chapter One opens with an overview of early nineteenth-century ideas about women and animals, citing literature and educational works, including Mary Wollstonecraft's books for children, and concludes with the first stirrings of women's activism. Chapter Two provides a detailed account of the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals (RSPCA), founded in 1824. Donald provides ample evidence — from the society's records, membership details, newspaper reports and writings of contemporaries such as John Stuart Mill — against the social control thesis, promoted by nineteenth-century socialists Karl Marx and Flora Tristan as well as modern historians. Acknowledging that the RSPCA's 'high-minded and monied evangelicals, together with Quaker and Utilitarian merchants and bankers and their wives and daughters' (p. 77) were far removed from the realities of working people's relationships to their animals, Donald insists that the society nevertheless understood the two groups as victims of the same corrupting forces: industrialisation and urbanisation. And women were the ones most likely to demand radical solutions, even though they were largely excluded from early RSPCA decision making.

In Chapter Three we are introduced to mid-century campaigns — including for the welfare of urban horses and dogs — in which women played more prominent roles. Misogynist attacks on those who led and funded these groups confirmed stereotypes of upper-class women as sentimentalist and ignorant. Such accusations in turn reflected the gendered binaries — rationalism vs. sentimentalism, concerns for people vs. care for other creatures — that shaped debates about animal protection throughout the century. The chapter concludes with the RSPCA's ladies' association, founded in 1870, coinciding with the general expansion of women's public activity and the rise of suffragism. But even as women such as Angela Bourdett-Couts took on more prominent positions, they never — in contrast to their American counterparts — directly challenged the male dominance of the movement.

Chapter Four examines cultural constructions of gender and human-animal relations in the Victorian era. Works of art and literature were full of representations of women's care for domestic animals, on one hand, and portraits of men and boys hunting 'wild' animals, on the other. Young males who tortured small creatures were believed to be exercising healthy, normative masculinity; the reform of such boyish behaviour was one aim of the The Band of Mercy movement, founded and led by women in the 1870s. In her concluding discussion of Anna Sewall's *Black Beauty*, Donald contests interpretations of the popular novel as a parable for slavery or imperialism; it was, she argues, a didactic text aimed at alleviating the suffering of horses at the hands of men of different classes.

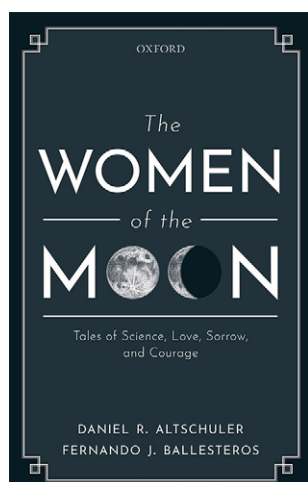
By the end of the century women came into their own as leaders, especially in the anti-vivisectionist movement. In Chapter Five Donald makes the case for understanding anti-vivisectionism as a feminist cause, one that went well beyond the question of cruelty to become a moral debate about the role of science and technology in British society. The debate was also distinctly gendered, pitting women against doctors and 'men of science' — many of whom belonged to the RSPCA. Contrary to accusations of 'bestiarianism' (p. 191), leading female anti-vivisectionists such as Frances Power Cobbe 'wrestled with the ethical and philosophical problems of vivisection in ways that transcended the stock self-justifications of scientists' (p. 192). As the final chapter (Six) details, by the 1890s feminism and

animal protection were closely identified. Even if gendered stereotypes persisted, women's approach to animal protection proved fundamental for social change; 'the allegedly 'extreme' responses of some women to particular forms of animal suffering often anticipated or even shaped the mainstream opinions of later years' (pp. 257-8).

Donald's book ends by reminding us that debates about the respective value of masculinist/rationalist approaches and feminist traditions of care persist well into the twenty-first century. *Women Against Cruelty* locates these debates within a longer historical tradition. It also demonstrates that accusations against animal activists of hypocrisy, which continue to plague the contemporary animal rights movement, date back at least to the Victorian age. Finally, the book fills a gap in the history of women's nineteenth-century philanthropy and reform; most female animal advocates were also involved in other causes, most notably slavery abolition. The book would benefit from a longer, separate conclusion fleshing out its implications for women's history, the history of human-animal relations and animal studies more broadly. But Donald's research has, in her own words, uncovered 'a wealth of archival and other primary course material' (p. x). It is to be hoped that others follow her lead, further expanding an area of scholarship with important implications for history and contemporary activism alike.

Daniel R. Altschuler and Fernando J. Ballesteros, *The Women of the Moon: Tales of Love, Sorrow and Courage*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. £20.00, 978-0-19-884441-9 (hardback), pp. x + 299

Reviewed by Ruth Watts
University of Birmingham



Greater awareness of the way women are often ignored, undervalued or written out of their history has prompted scholars in many disciplines to find and restore female achievers involved in them, including a developing interest in women in science. Dava Sobel, for instance, a prime contributor to the public understanding of science, has recently drawn attention to women astronomers through her book *The Glass Universe: The Hidden History of the Women who took Measure of the Stars*. This

explores the careers of the group of women who, rather astonishingly when women were still denied places at Harvard University, were employed by Harvard College Observatory in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as 'human computers'.

This story is one of the many also told in *The Women of the Moon*, demonstrating how at a time when men dominated astronomy as they did nearly all science, a group of industrious, scientifically committed women painstakingly and brilliantly worked on the first glass photographic plates, to classify spectra and analyse their position and density. They

not only produced ground-breaking catalogues of the stars and their data, but some of them made their own discoveries. Written by two male astronomers, the American Altschuler and the Spanish Ballesteros, the book utilises a thought-provoking angle to explore the question of women in science, especially in astronomy, in that they have used the twenty-eight names of women commemorated in officially named craters on the moon. Published in Spanish this translation by Harriet Konishi enables their biographies of each woman to reach an English-speaking public. Before the twenty-eight biographies there is an introductory chapter giving a brief history of the solar system, an explanation of the moon itself, both visible and 'dark' sides, and how human understanding of it evolved together with lunar nomenclature. Like the biographies and the following appendices on the moon and the tides, all this is fully illustrated, including pictures or images of each woman and of the location and details of each crater dedicated to them, a timeline of when the women were honoured and on which side of the moon their crater is. At the beginning of each chapter the chief biographies or documents the authors have drawn on are indicated.

As the authors themselves recognise, the only commonality of the women honoured was their relationship with science. Only thirteen were actually astronomers of whom only one was not American or British – a fact symptomatic of the scientific and technical dominance of these countries at the time of naming. Four of these were from those 'Harvard Computers', discussed in greater length by Sobel. The six other scientists were very distinguished: Gerty Cori, Marie Curie and Irene Joliot-Curie were rare female Nobel prize-winners; noted scientists although not Nobel-nominated, Lise Meitner and Amalie Emmy Noether led difficult lives that were compounded by the fact they were Jewish women in Nazi Germany; Sofia Vasilyevna Kovalyevskaya, a brilliant mathematician, was just beginning to reap the honours her genius warranted when she died from flu. Of the other nine, five were astronauts – four of them trained in varying degrees in science and engineering, while one was a 'teacher in space' – and two were commemorated for their philanthropic services to science. The other two come from the classical period: Saint Catherine, although her life is shrouded in myth and doubt and Hypatia of Alexandria, whose history is also masked by a paucity of contemporary documents but who appears to have contributed much to modern western mathematics through her commentaries.

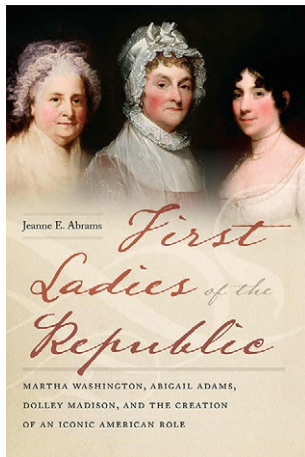
This absorbing book, carefully delineating sufficient facts for the non-specialist to be able to follow, brings to light many names which should be better known in both history and science. It also clearly demonstrates the deep seated prejudices against women in science which even today can affect women's chances and certainly their pay, status and prospects of promotion.

The authors question why so few women, twenty-eight out of 1,586, were honoured in this way. The prestige of being named on our nearest neighbour is high but even with other planets having named craters, the uneven ratio remains. Recognising that the answer lies in the ways that women have been regarded in science over the centuries, and still often are at the highest levels, the authors hope that their book will alert readers to these injustices and help towards some restitution. Given that there are many more outstanding women in science now known but there are thousands of unnamed craters, even on the moon, in this particular, at least, amends would not be too difficult.

Jeanne E. Abrams, *First Ladies of the Republic: Martha Washington, Abigail Adams, Dolley Madison and the Creation of an Iconic American Role*, New York: New York University Press, 2018. \$75, 9781479886531 (hardback), pp. 328

Reviewed by Chelsey David

Independent Scholar



Anyone who has embarked on a reading of Michelle Obama's *Becoming* or Hillary Rhodham Clinton's *Living History* will, on reading Abrams account of the three first ladies of the Republic, instantly find well-trodden and recognisable ground. Abrams's narrative draws out, at times humorously and empathetically, the trials and tribulations of these three First Ladies, Martha Washington, Abigail Adams and Dolley Madison as they charted their course and laid the

foundations for the role of 'First Lady of the Land'. Abrams skilfully draws out, through a meticulous analysis of their writings and letters, the trials and tribulations faced by the women whose position has always remained something of a conundrum – neither queen, elected official or paid brand ambassador, yet with all the burdens of these roles and certainly all of the stinging public criticism, but little in terms of either private or public gratification.

Abrams's account is unique in that it seeks to contextualise and directly compare the three 'First Ladies of the Republic'. While each of these have been written about many times, it has always been either as individuals or in portraits of their marriages. I would argue that Abrams does not entirely succeed in her goal of comparison. While she deftly draws attention to times when the three interacted, through letters and social events, and can easily chart the links of Washington and Adams due to their time as the inaugural first and second lady, the age gap between Madison and her two predecessors and the intervening years of Jefferson's presidency make it harder to include her meaningfully in this comparison. Equally, the comparisons are not always direct. Instead, Abrams focuses on overlapping events and correspondence either between or concerning the ladies. Whereas other comparative works of First Lady biography, such as Kate Anderson Bower's work on modern First Ladies are able to directly compare First Ladies on a thematic basis, thereby providing a more sustained comparison of the women and their roles.

However, Abrams's approach is both empathetic and informative, from Martha Washington fretting over finding a suitable school for her brood and feeling like a 'state prisoner' (p. 36) to Abigail Adams's frustration over a seemingly unrelenting stream of negative press coverage of her every move, sentiments certainly shared by a number of her twentieth- and twenty-first-century successors. Abrams's account is largely set in the period post revolution, and as such seeks to contextualise the role of these politically aware and active women within the somewhat confining background of republican motherhood – women relegated to their proper place within the domestic

sphere, not active public participants except in their role as spousal helpmeet or moral childhood educator. While Abrams does provide an overview of their lives pre-First Lady, this is somewhat uneven. Abigail Adams early life comprises a substantial section of the book, yet Dolley Madison's is only a few pages. Her main focus is what happens once they and their 'handsome' presidents ascended to the presidential residence – was the happily ever after actually so? It would appear not, though Abrams provides fascinating details of the criticisms levelled at the women: the courtliness of Washington; the meddling of Adams and her dour receptions; and Dolley Madison as being a political and social butterfly on both the campaign trail and the Washington scene. Such details provide colour and life to a narrative that can at times get bogged down in Abrams's own unease in her treatment of the First Ladies, both in terms of their attitudes and contemporary interpretations. This is especially the case in her treatment of Abigail Adams. Abrams is at pains to draw a distinction between Abigail's views on women's roles and their rights, which were indeed progressive for their time, and the trend towards anachronistically grafting of modern feminist ideals onto these figures. However, in many ways this mirrors the unease and uncertainty felt by both women themselves and the public about the new role of First Lady. This can be seen in the shifting titles used to describe them at the time, from 'Lady Washington' (p. 64), 'Presidante' (p. 199) and ultimately 'Lady Presidentress' (p. 225). Having recently been, once again, denied the prospect of an American Presidentress, it is interesting to see the relatively slow metamorphosis of the role. Yet how many attributes of it, pioneered by these three redoubtable women, have become fixed over time? When we think of individuals who have pioneered and shaped the role of First Lady one immediately thinks of names such as Roosevelt, Kennedy, Ford, Reagan, Clinton and Obama. Yet on reading Abrams's account it is clear to see how much, in fact, they are successors to the pattern established by the three founding ladies, and it is in many ways shocking to see how much of the role has remained unchanged despite the intervening three centuries.

Taef El-Azhari, *Queens, Eunuchs and Concubines in Islamic History, 661–1257*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019. £90, 978-1-4744-2318-2 (hardback), pp. viii + 449.

Reviewed by Jennifer Markey

Independent Scholar

The study of women in Islamic history, this intriguing work notes, is frequently limited to the religious sphere, overlooking the dynamic political roles female rulers played in the Umayyad, 'Abbasid, Fatimid and Seljuq dynasties. Here, Taef El-Azhari, Professor of Islamic and Middle Eastern History at the University of Helwan, brings to new light the achievements of remarkable individuals such as Arwa of Yemen and Dayfa Khatun, regent of Aleppo, ably depicting the extent and limitations of female power.

Women's freedom in the medieval Muslim world was severely curtailed; treated 'as chattels' (p. 17), they were unwelcome in the political sphere, though also used to gain power. An example is the *atabeg* system, when an office holder acted as 'guardian-regent' (p. 301) to a young prince. This could involve a close association with, and even marriage to, the boy's

mother; in the Seljuq tradition, it was an honour to marry a king's divorcée as it was believed to cement loyalty to the monarch. Such familial connections and royal favour could, however, also benefit women. Though part of the slave trade, concubinage presented opportunities; in a manner reminiscent of the Empress Theodora's rise to co-ruler of Byzantium, Khayzuran, a former slave, married the 'Abbasid caliph al-Mahid in 775 after bearing him two sons, and became regent upon his death.

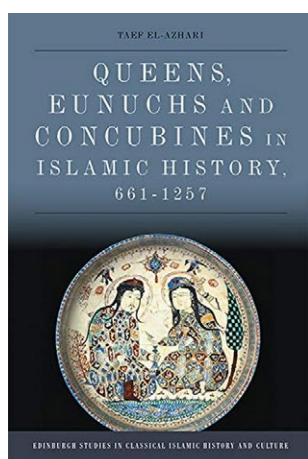
As Khayzuran's story indicates, regency for a minor son or, in Arwa's case, an incapacitated husband, was a frequent route to power, though male approval remained necessary. Arwa, the first known Muslim woman to rule independently, was initially required to enter a 'ceremonial' (p. 233) marriage following her husband's death. This patriarchal influence persists in assessments of her reign. In addition to acting as sole ruler of Yemen, Arwa, almost uniquely in the Islamic world, had her name declared in the *khutba* (Friday sermon) and was elevated to the status of *hujja* (supreme religious authority, lit. undisputed proof). Nonetheless, it was suggested that her achievements were due to her being 'a male, enveloped in a female body' (p. 240). The implications are clear: only men were truly capable of wielding power.

That individual success did little to improve women's overall status is seen clearly in El-Azhari's profile of Dayfa Khatun. A ruler of outstanding ability, as a champion of Sunni Islam she also commissioned the building of madrasas. In a bitter irony these institutions, founded by a woman, barred girls from entry. Soberingly, El-Azhari notes that, while modern Muslim-majority countries in Asia have seen the rise of female leaders, such a development has yet to reach the Middle East due, he suggests, to the 'patriarchal interpretation of the Qur'an' (p. 382).

El-Azhari concludes that women were generally deemed 'children of a lesser God' (p. 371), a term also applied to eunuchs, the other focus of this study. Like women, eunuchs were considered inferior, 'never granted usual names' (p. 280) and, like concubines, were slaves, often for sexual services. These disadvantages notwithstanding, they came to be highly prized as political advisors. Collaboration with women was not uncommon; analysing the career of the formidable tenth-century 'Abbasid military commander, Mu'nis al-Khadim, El-Azhari argues that 'it was likely [...] the royal mother, Shaghab, [...] instructed Mu'nis on foreign campaigns' (p. 168).

Stripped of a 'biological future' (p. 144) and thus assumed to be unconditionally loyal, eunuch advisors were often considered preferable to intact males. As Mu'nis' career demonstrates, this belief could prove fatally naïve. Lack of heirs could simply redirect rather than remove personal ambition. In 932, alarmed by Shaghab's extravagance, Mu'nis deposed her son, the caliph al-Muqtadir, replacing him with his brother al-Qahir. Mu'nis' own position, however, was precarious. Despite 'closely monitor[ing]' (p. 175) al-Qahir, he was ultimately executed after attempting a second coup.

Mu'nis' position as a military commander, while at

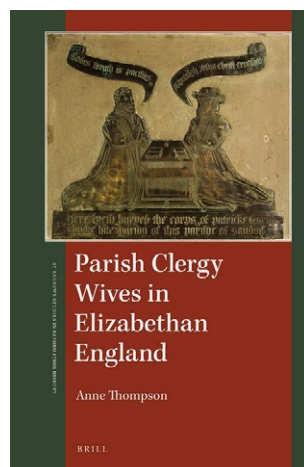


odds with popular images of effeminate harem-dwellers, was not unusual. Notable eunuch commanders included Maysur, who defended the Fatimid caliphdom against a Berber advance, and Raydan, who defeated both Emperor John Tzimiskes of Byzantium and the rebellious Fatimid commander Abu Mahmad. In discussing the important tasks they were entrusted with, El-Azhari convincingly demonstrates the respect these eunuchs enjoyed. More tenuous is the assertion that eunuch soldiers were a common presence on the battlefield. Citing contemporary chroniclers' use of the term *tashwari* (servant), he suggests that almost half Saladin's troops were eunuchs. While El-Azhari argues that *tawashi* was 'only applicable to eunuchs' (p. 148), other studies suggest that, in this context, it simply referred to the soldiers' rank, without necessarily indicating that they had undergone castration.

This possible inaccuracy notwithstanding, *Queens, Eunuchs and Concubines* remains a valuable resource on power and gender in the medieval Muslim world. With its careful categorisation of the distinct roles played by eunuchs and concubines, extensive use of primary sources and detailed case studies, this book should prove of interest to anyone concerned with the history of the Middle East.

Anne Thompson, *Parish Clergy Wives in Elizabethan England*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019. €130, 978 90 04 35390 9 (hardback), pp. xii + 295

Reviewed by Julie Chamberlain
Independent Scholar



The introduction of clerical marriage after Queen Elizabeth I came to the throne was 'one of the most notable social and religious changes of the Reformation, with visible and significant impact at the parochial level' (p. 1). Clerical marriage was briefly allowed under Edward VI in 1549 but abolished under Mary with newly-created families split up. It was granted again under Elizabeth with a Royal Injunction in 1559 stating that a wife had to be vetted first by acquiring a Letter Testimonial

signed by two justices of the peace swearing to her good character.

The lack of detailed evidence means the lives of these pioneering women have remained largely unstudied, and there are no helpful diaries or letters. Anne Thompson has, through huge amounts of wide-ranging research, found enough to create this detailed, well-written and strongly evidenced book, discovering reactions to the new women in the parsonage, and tales of some of the individuals themselves. By examining 1,000 parish registers she has found nearly 500 ministers' wives, though in many cases there is no more than a mention. She has read 737 wills by clergymen and thirteen by their widows. Ecclesiastical court records turn up not just entertaining stories but allow us 'to observe the details of individual lives, to uncover agency, expectations, perceptions, and resentments, and to place them all within the wider context' (p. 17). Thomson has also uncovered eleven Letters Testimonial which had not been previously known, plus marriage licences. She has pulled all this and more together to create this study where 'the primary aim has been to keep the

women themselves at the forefront of the discussion' (p. 21).

She does, though, start with setting the scene. She discusses the enthusiasm or not of the clergy to marry, how much marrying was an indication of the man's reformist beliefs . . . including the European context, and how far it was accepted by the lay population before the Elizabethan reform. The speed of some marriages suggested the couple were already in a relationship. The social standing of the Elizabethan clergy wife is discussed, with contemporary writers scorning the women and equating them with the insult 'priests' whores'. It was thought only servants, widows and low status women would marry a clergyman. However, what evidence there is shows some were the daughters of local yeomen or Aldermen, and being a servant was a stage in a woman's life and not a sign of low status.

As Thompson points out, for the first wives 'there was no handbook setting out the duties and expectations associated with this innovative role' (p. 125). The need for a Letter Testimonial highlighted 'a clear link between a minister's wife and her husband's calling' (p. 132). She should be pious, look after the house to allow her husband to concentrate on his work, dress modestly and be obedient. Good behaviour was remarked on in church memorials and there are court records of lay complaints when women transgressed. They also had a role in public, helping the poor and sick, though there is a lack of evidence to describe this.

The women slip from the picture a bit in a chapter looking at the impact of marriage on a clergyman's charitable work and

donations in his will. A large decline in giving by both married and unwed clergy is found by 1600, but not surprisingly married clergy were seen to be prioritising the needs of their family over the wider community in bequests. However, the Elizabethan system of parish poor relief meant there was less reliance on the minister to provide relief for the poor anyway. The desperate state of the clergy widow, unable to take over her husband's trade and dismissed from her home is looked at. Some remarried quickly – even to the replacement minister in the parish.

Thompson also investigates the local reaction to the arrival of a wife, but warns against mixing the reaction to an individual to the religious and social changes she personified. Church court records provide interesting stories but may not tell all the story. Some wives adopted a view that they were superior to other local women, which created resentment, but others were remembered in parishioners' wills and became godmothers to their children.

The author has investigated a huge number of sources to find snippets of evidence about many marriages from the participants and those who lived alongside them. She wanted to show their lived experience and has carefully constructed different bits of the evidence to create a picture of the lives of many women and their husbands in this fast-changing time, which in view of the lack of first-hand accounts is a remarkable achievement.

BOOKS RECEIVED AND CALLS FOR REVIEWERS

The following titles are available for review, so if you like to review any of the titles listed below, please email Katharina Rowold, Book Reviews Editor, at bookreviews@womenshistorynetwork.org.

You don't have to be an expert to review, if you have a general interest and knowledge of the relevant historical period or territory then that will count for a lot. The ability to summarise a work (within the word limit!) and write interestingly about it is the most important thing. Any suggestions for books to review are also welcome - just email the book reviews editor as above.

Christine Walker, *Jamaica Ladies: Female Slaveholders and the Creation of Britain's Atlantic Empire* (University of North Carolina Press, 2020)

Alexandra J. Finley, *An Intimate Economy of: Enslaved Women, Work, and America's Domestic Slave Trade* (University of North Carolina Press, 2020)

Linda Steiner, Carolyn Kitch and Brooke Kroeger (eds), *Front Pages, Front Lines: Media and the Fight for Women's Suffrage* (University of Illinois Press, 2020)

Ludmila Miklashevskaya, ed. and translated by Elaine MacKinnon, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia: A Life in the Shadow of Stalin's Terror* (Bloomsbury, 2020)

Cassia Roth, *A Miscarriage of Justice: Women's Reproductive Lives and the Law in Early Twentieth-Century Brazil* (Stanford University Press, 2020)

Emily Priscott, *Singleness in Britain, 1960-1990: Identity, Gender and Social Change* (Vernon Press, 2020)

Rachel Mesch, *Before Trans: Three Stories from Nineteenth-Century France* (Stanford University Press, 2020)

Bonnie G. Smith, *Women in World History: 1450 to the Present* (Bloomsbury, 2020)

Diana Peschier, *Lost Souls: Women, Religion and Mental Illness in the Victorian Asylum* (Bloomsbury, 2020)

Boyd Cothran, Joan Judge and Adrian Shubert, *Women Warriors and National Heroes: Global Histories* (Bloomsbury, 2020)

Sharon Wright, *The Mother of the Brontës* (Pen & Sword, 2020)

Eugenia Russell and Quentin Russell, *Struggle and Suffrage in Watford: Women's Lives and the Fight for Equality* (Pen & Sword, 2020)

Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Valkyrie: The Women of the Viking World* (Bloomsbury, 2020)

Barbara Jones, John Fagg, Melissa Wolfe, Tom Wolf, *Simple Pleasures: The Art of Doris Lee* (D. Giles, 2020)

Nina Baker, *Adventures in Aeronautical Design: The Life of Hilda M. Lyon* (Crampton-Moorehouse, 2020)

Jean Barman, *Invisible Generations: Living between Indigenous and White in the Fraser Valley* (Caitlin Press, 2019)

Roberta J.M. Olson, *Artist in Exile: The Visual Diary of Baroness Hyde de Neville* (D Giles, 2019)

Akko Takeuchi-Demirci, *Contraceptive Diplomacy: Reproductive Politics and Imperial Ambitions in the United States and Japan* (Stanford University Press, 2018)

Keridwen N. Luis, *Herlands, Exploring the Women's Land Movement in the United States* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018)

Penny A. Weiss (ed.), *Feminist Manifestos: A Global Documentary Reader* (NYU Press, 2018)

Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward (eds), *Irish Women and the Vote*, new edition (Irish Academic Press, 2018)

Brianna Leavitt-Alcantara, *Alone at the Altar: Single Women & Devotion in Guatemala, 1670-1870* (Stanford University Press, 2018)

Martin Sheppard (ed.), *Love on Inishcoo, 1787: A Donegal Romance* (Matador, 2018)

THE WOMEN'S HISTORY NETWORK

WINTER SEMINAR SERIES 2020-21

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2 December

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Natalie Haynes

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Amy Aronson

Make Room for Motherhood: Feminism,
Family, and the Unpublished Articles of
Crystal Eastman

27 January

Shamima Aktar

"Colleens, Cottages, and Rolling Green
Fields"; The Making of Irish Women

10 February

Carissa M. Harris

"Two women in one house/Never did
agree": Internalizing Misogyny in Late
Medieval England and Scotland

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Aimee Loiselle

"Working Women and Global
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Needleworkers to Export Processing
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WHN Community History Prize 2020

This year we had fourteen entries for the prize, down from last year's record twenty-eight but under the circumstances of a pandemic a good number and evidence that women's history is alive and carrying on, albeit having to think even more creatively about projects and their delivery. Entries came from a broad variety of areas and it was heart-warming for the panel to see the range of projects being undertaken.

I would like to thank my fellow panel members: Sue Bruley, Mel Weatherly, Cathy Hunt and Nicola Gauld and also the History Press, the sponsors of the prize. Without them the prize would not be where it is today, and hopefully their sponsorship will continue.

After a Zoom day of deliberation and debate we arrived at four highly commended entries and one winner. The highly commended entries were:

The Friends of Winckley Square for their project 'The Extraordinary Women of Winckley Square'. The project was designed to redress the previous imbalance in the documented history of Winckley Square, Preston, which only included men. The 'Extraordinary Women of Winckley Square' culminated in guided walks, talks, debate, articles, broadcasts and full colour exhibitions attracting large visitor numbers.

Skippko Arts Team for their project 'Women Reflecting on Women – are we there yet?' Skippko artists worked collaboratively with community participants from across Leeds, most with no prior experience of heritage work, to research and record the histories of working-class women. Participants looked at Leeds Suffragettes before exploring women's stories in their own families that would otherwise be unheard and unrecorded.

A team led by Sarah Marsden, Christopher Boyko and Claire Selby for their project 'Remembering Resistance: A Century of Women's Protest in the North of England'. Remembering Resistance was an NLHF project which brought to life the last 100 years of women's activism in the North of England. Through a collaborative programme of engagement events and activities, the project developed a rich picture of when, where, and why women have fought for change.

Alarum Productions for 'I Dig Canals'. This was a community oral history project working with volunteers to capture accounts of women's involvement in campaigns to restore UK canals post-war to 1970s, focusing on the Black Country. The project created a new, publicly available resource of 19 oral histories, a book, 15 podcasts and a short film.

The winning project was 'Doing It Ourselves: The First Neighbourhood Co-operative Nursery, Walthamstow'. The project was led by volunteers under the supervision and financial oversight of On the Record, an organisation who 'improve opportunities for people to participate in heritage and cultural activities'.

The project was initially suggested by former parents of the First Neighbourhood Co-operative Nursery who approached On the Record for advice. The project then collected and

archived the history of the First Neighbourhood Co-operative Nursery, a ground-breaking parent-led co-operative nursery in Walthamstow, London from 1977 to the early 1990s. Created by a group of local women, the co-operative was based on feminist principles and created a unique experience for both parents and children.



Parents and staff of the First Neighbourhood Co-Operative Nursery revisit the nursery site in 2019

Doing it Ourselves involved a team of volunteers, women aged 17 – 70, who recorded and preserved this important history. The project culminated in a creative exhibition at a local community centre and successfully engaged local parents with the history of the nursery and the idea of parent-led co-operative childcare. A permanent archive documenting the First Neighbourhood Co-operative Nursery is now based at Bishopsgate Institute. A podcast, produced by a young volunteer, is available online at <https://holdingthebaby.org/>

The panel were very enthusiastic about the excellent project. We were especially impressed with the intergenerational nature of it in this valuable and under researched area. We were also delighted that it involved people from a Eurasian heritage and was in response to an initiative from former service users. It was great that women felt empowered by what they discovered.

The project represented excellent value for money, and the prize money will be used to share the story of another pioneering childcare facility from the Holding the Baby archive they have collected: the story of first children's centre in Newham, which was created by a group of women in the late 1960s and grew into an independent children's centre that pioneered inclusive services for disabled children and their parents. They will produce a podcast and digital exhibition to share this story.

We were delighted that Rosa from On the Record together with some of the team involved joined the AGM for the prize giving.

Elspeth King, Chair of judging panel for Community History Prize



People chat at one of the events held during the exhibition at The Mill.

WHN Book Prize, 2020

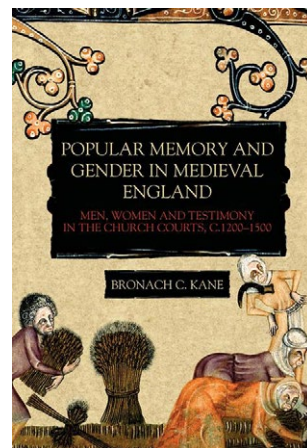
The judges for the WHN Book Prize 2020 were Dr Paula Bartley (Chair), Prof Barbara Bush, Prof Ann Hughes, Prof Sue Morgan and Prof Emily West. The WHN only received half the number of entries as last year. This was because 2018 was the centenary of women's suffrage and was an unusually abundant year. This year all the entries focussed on British history. Just to remind everyone – the WHN warmly welcomes books with an international focus, and books which acknowledge the BAME community. Nevertheless, we had a number of fascinating and wide-ranging topics such as a local study of suffragettes, a study of some key female industrial disputes in twentieth-century Britain and a biography of Mary Ward and the influence of the moral philosopher T H Green upon her.

The study of religious history and gender gathers apace, a study largely sparked off by the work of one of our judges, Sue Morgan. The judges commended one of them: Anne Thompson's *Parish Clergy Wives in Elizabethan England*. Anne's is a richly researched book detailing in depth the lives of parish clergy wives. The judges all agreed that it must have been a challenging task to re-create the story of these wives given the lack of easily available evidence. Anne had to think imaginatively even to discover source material, trawling through endless English archives to find a trace of a parish wife, or a mention of a clergy marriage. The right of clergy to marry, of course, was a new and significant departure from the celibacy insisted on by the Roman Catholic Church. Clergy marriage, as Anne points out, was one of the most contested aspects of the Reformation: not everyone approved and different monarchs took their own unique approach to the issue, often changing the law from the previous incumbent. As well as being a comprehensive

treatment of the expectations and experiences of the women who married ministers, Anne makes a significant contribution to understandings of religious change.

The winner of the award was Bronach Kane for her book *Popular Memory and Gender in Medieval England*, published by Boydell Press. The judges agreed that Bronach's book is a highly original, ambitious, erudite and theoretically sophisticated study which combined theory and

empirical evidence extremely creatively. Firstly she has a keen awareness of a wide historiography, locating her work firmly within the current theoretical and conceptual developments in the study of gender, sexuality, the body and memory. Secondly the evidence base of *Popular Memory* is equally impressive. The book uses mostly ecclesiastical court records to examine the ways in which both women (and men) negotiated medieval society. There are refreshing insights into the ways that women fought against their accusers in the church courts. For example, an easy way to undermine women's testimony was to accuse her of being sexually incontinent. Women fought back against these accusations and often won. Overall, Bronach's book is an exciting and innovative study of an under-researched area and the judges were delighted to present Bronach Kane with the award.



Paula Bartley, Chair of judging panel for WHN Book Prize

Schools Prize, 2020

We had some fantastic entries for this year's young researchers' competition which had as its theme, 'History's Heroines'. We asked students to research the history of a woman whom they considered to be a hero and to produce a piece of art that represented the woman and her accomplishments. We received entries at both junior and senior school level, spanning ancient through to modern history. The winning entries were a real eclectic mix of designs, so we can all look forward to some vibrant new merchandise. We had one senior, and two junior winners. Each have received money for their school history department and will see their designs featured on future WHN material. All entrants received a token of thanks.

Senior winner: 'Hypatia', William Farr School, Lincoln.

Joint Junior Winners: 'We Stand on the Shoulders of Giants', Millfield Preparatory School, Somerset.

'A Fight on Many Fronts', Craneswater Junior School, Southsea.

Highly commended: 'Ada Lovelace', Haberdashers' Aske's School for Girls.

Amy Dale, Chair of judging panel for Schools Prize



Senior winner: 'Hypatia', William Farr School, Lincoln

Committee News

The Network has a successful but challenging year, our membership figures and our finances remain very healthy which has enabled us to continue to celebrate and support women's history and historians of women in new and innovative ways. These included our first Early Career Fellowships and the decision to join with the Social History Society, Economic History Society, History UK, History of Education Society (UK), History Workshop Journal, Royal Historical Society and Society for the Study of Labour History in funding the BME Events and Activities Small Grants Scheme.

Another innovation was holding our first Women's History Network Writing retreat at Denman College in January 2020 and a Symposium on Writing Women's History in February at the University of Worcester. We will be hosting online fortnightly writing retreats via Zoom on Friday mornings this year, starting on 2 October.

However, since March the Covid 19 pandemic has led to many challenges for the WHN and historians of women more generally. Not only have archives, museums and heritage centres been shut; international, national and regional conferences and events cancelled but many historians on zero-hours, part-time or temporary contracts have faced acute financial difficulties. Consequently, the WHN Coronavirus Hardship Fund was speedily launched in March, a much-needed innovation that has since been replicated by a number of other historical societies.

The applications for the fund reiterated to many on the Steering Committee the precariousness of many younger and early career historians of women. We seek to support and celebrating their work through the Schools Prize, the WHN Small Grants Postgraduate Scheme, the WHN Book Prize and have introduced new Undergraduate and MA Dissertation Prizes and increased the

number of ECR Fellowships from two to three for the 2020-2021 year.

Broadening access to women's history remains a key priority: in the blog, journal and website but sadly, due to the Covid crisis, not for the present at conferences or events. For the first time ever, we had to cancel the WHN Annual Conference in 2020. The WHN Steering Committee therefore decided to initiate a series of fortnightly, online women's history seminars for the 2020-21 academic year. The zoom seminars are to take place via Zoom on Wednesdays. The seminars are free to attend, streamed on Facebook and recordings of past seminars will be available for WHN members to listen to via our website.

The University and College Union's strike and then the Covid 19 crisis has made face-to-face committee meetings very difficult for the Steering Committee. We had one such meeting in January and held three other virtual meetings, using Slack or Zoom. These virtual meetings have both cut the time and cost of travel and consequently, in the future, we will hold only one face-to-face meeting each year with other meetings taking place via Zoom. The cost saving this offers is enabling us to expand the size of the Steering Committee and diversify the range of histories and historians we embrace. We have created a number of new roles and have welcomed a number of new members onto the committee.

The WHN offers warm thanks, for all their hard work, to those members of the Steering Committee who are retiring this year: Amy Dale who, as Schools Liaison, launched the Schools Prize, Gillian Murphy who has edited the newsletter and Zoe Thomas who has worked on the Journal.

Maggie Andrews, Chair of the Women's History Network

Getting to Know Each Other

Name:

Laurel Forster

Position:

Reader in Women's Cultural History at the University of Portsmouth

How long have you been a WHN member?

I've been a member for quite a while, but I became more involved when I helped June Purvis organise the 2018 Annual WHN Conference: 'The Campaign for Women's Suffrage' at Portsmouth University in 2018. I was then invited to work with the team on the magazine and to join the committee.

What inspired your enthusiasm for women's history?

I have always been interested in the lives of women. My PhD thesis was on May Sinclair, the early Modernist writer. When I joined Portsmouth I was part of the AHRC-funded study of the 1970s, led by Sue Harper, and I concentrated on the Women's Liberation Movement and its magazines. Since then I have continued to publish on the WLM and have worked with Sue Bruley on a HLF-funded project which



recovered the 'Hidden Histories' of women's community and feminist activism in the Portsmouth area since 1960.

What are your special interests?

My particular specialisms are in feminist writing and print media and in women's cultures of the twentieth century. My monograph on women's magazines, *Magazine Movements* (Bloomsbury), examines the ways in which women's cultures have been informed and influenced by the concept of the 'magazine' across print and broadcast formats, and I have just finished co-editing, with Joanne Hollows, a large volume of essays on *Women's Periodicals and Print Cultures in Britain, 1940s-2010s* (EUP). I am now starting to work on women's domestic cultures and media in the interwar and postwar periods.

Who is your heroine from history and why?

I often reflect on May Sinclair's achievements. When she started her career she had little education and no money, yet she went on to produce over twenty novels and many short stories, as well as works of philosophy and feminism, earning her living through her own endeavours. She worked hard to achieve her position in the world, believed in herself, and knew she had something worthwhile to say. I think we can all learn from that approach to life.

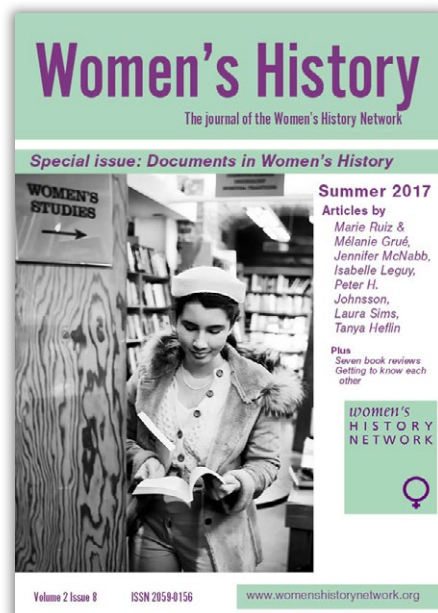
Publishing in *Women's History*

Women's History 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

Please email your submission, as a word attachment, to the editors at editor@womenshistorynetwork.org



Women's History Network National Steering Committee and Other Contacts - 2020

Chair – Maggie Andrews

Charity Rep – Beth Jenkins

Social Media – Sian Edwards

Membership Secretary – Susan Cohen

Blog Editor – Kate Law

Treasurer – Becki Hines

(Archive) Secretary – Lyndsey Jenkins

Conference support role – Alexandra Hughes-Johnson

Website and publicity – Nancy Highcock

Prizes and Grants – Sarah Frank / Anna Muggeridge

Journal – Katharina Rowold / Laurel Forster / Helen Glew

Newsletter Editor – Catia Rodrigues

Community Liaison – Anne Logan / Helen Antrobus

Diversity Officer – Alice Whiteoak / Marine Picard

Schools Liaison – Tahaney Alghrani / Chelsey David

Seminar Organisers – Kristin O'Donnell / Sarah Hellawell

Student Representative – Clare Burgess

Co-opted Members of the Committee

WHN Journal Editor - Kate Murphy

IFRWH rep - Anna Muggeridge

For Journal submissions and peer review, journal/magazine back issues and queries please contact

editor@womenshistorynetwork.org

To submit books for review please email the book reviews editor with details of the book to be reviewed.

bookreviews@womenshistorynetwork.org

Chair of Book Prize Panel - Paula Bartley

bookprize@womenshistorynetwork.org

Chair of Community History Prize Panel - Elspeth King

communityhistoryprize@womenshistorynetwork.org

*To join the WHN just go to
www.womenshistorynetwork.org/join-us/ and follow the instructions.
Donations and Gift-Aid declarations can all be
accessed online as well*

Why not join the Women's History Network?

The **Women's History Network** is a national association and charity for the promotion of women's history and the encouragement of women and men interested in women's history. Following our establishment in 1991 we have grown year by year and today we are a UK national charity with members including working historians, researchers, independent scholars, teachers, librarians, and many other individuals both within academia and beyond. Indeed, the network reaches out to welcome women and men from any background who share a passion for women's history. The WHN is controlled by its members who elect a national steering committee who manage our activities and business.

Conference

The annual WHN conference, which is held each September, is a highlight for most of our members. It is known for being a very friendly and welcoming event, providing an exciting forum where people from the UK and beyond can meet and share research and interests. Each year well known historians are invited as plenary speakers and bursaries are offered to enable postgraduate students or those on a low income to attend.

Prizes and Grants

The WHN offers annual community history and book prizes, grants for conferences and ECR and independent researcher fellowships.

Networking

Of course, talking to each other is essential to the work and culture of the Women's History Network. We run a members' email list and try to provide support for members or groups who organise local conferences or other events connected to women's history that bring people together.

Publication

WHN members receive three copies of our peer reviewed journal, *Women's History*, each year. The content of the journal is wide ranging from articles discussing research, sources and applications of women's history, to reviews of books, conferences, meetings and exhibitions, as well as information on calls for papers, prizes and competitions, and publication opportunities. The journal is delivered electronically in PDF form to all members via email, but members, can elect to receive a printed hardcopy of *Women's History* for an increased membership fee.

WHN membership

Annual Membership Rates (/ with journal hardcopy / with journal overseas delivery)

Student or unwaged member	£15 / £20 / £30
Low income member (*under £20,000 pa)	£25 / £30 / £40
Standard member	£40 / £45 / £55
Life Membership (includes journal hardcopy)	£350
Retired Life Membership(includes journal hardcopy)	£175

The easiest way to join the Women's History Network is online – via our website – go to
<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/join-us/>