

Women's History

The journal of the Women's History Network

Special Issue: Doing Women's History



Community Histories
Sources and Archives
Public Engagement
Writing Women's History

Plus
*Six book reviews
Getting to know each other
Committee Report*



Spring 2021

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Call for Papers

Women's History Network Annual Conference

Homes, Food and Farms

3-4 September 2021

**Due to the ongoing Covid crisis the Annual
Conference will be online - via zoom this year**

women's
HISTORY
NETWORK



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'

Prof. Samita Sen – University of Cambridge who will be discussing Women, Work and Domesticity: Eastern India in Historical Perspective

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 lightning talk or a poster. We invite submissions of *100-200 word* abstracts, stating your preferred mode of delivery.

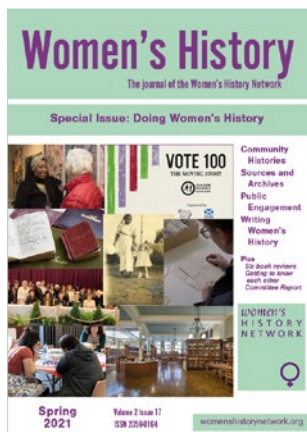
All submissions must be on the form downloadable from
<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/the-womens-history-network-annual-conference/> to conferenceorganiser@womenshistorynetwork.org
by 30 March 2021.

Welcome to the Spring 2021 issue of *Women's History* and this special edition, which seeks to celebrate the excitement of *Doing Women's History*. Edited by Maggie Andrews and Samantha Hughes-Johnson, it is published to coincide with Women's History Month and is intended to illustrate some of the diversity surrounding where and how women's history is undertaken in Britain in the twenty-first century.

This special edition has two aims: firstly, to put the spotlight on women's history carried out in museums, local communities, specialist archives or in collaborations between universities and other communities and institutions. Secondly, we want to stimulate debate and discussion about some of the challenges of 'doing' women's history. For example, the complexities involved in identifying sources, engaging the public, working with different groups, experiencing uncertain funding or actually just sitting down to write women's history.

The style and format of this issue does not follow the journal's usual pattern, in that there are a large number of shorter articles that explore local and individual perspectives on the experiences of researching, writing, sharing, exhibiting or promoting women's history. These have been grouped together under four themes, each with their own introduction: Community Histories, Sources and Archives, Public Engagement and finally, Writing Women's History. We hope these pieces inspire you and that you will consider submitting articles to *Women's History* or contacting us with suggestions for future special issues.

Laurel Forster, Helen Glew, Samantha Hughes-Johnson, Kate Murphy, Katharina Rowold, Kate Terkanian



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Community Histories

Introduction

Anne Logan and Helen Antrobus

The study and the preservation of women's history has often been in the hands of grassroots, community-led projects. From saving the historic homes of culturally significant women, building permanent memorials and unearth narratives critical to the study, community projects have explored the relevance of women's history to people's lives today. What starts as a tour, a blue plaque campaign or a family research project, has helped to challenge and restructure previously-accepted histories.

Since 2014, the WHN Community History Prize has celebrated these approaches and rewarded the efforts undertaken by community groups and organisations. The process of connecting academics, charities and heritage organisations has opened up chances to build new skills, create national networks and access new funding opportunities. We have seen the lasting impact and the potentially life-changing experiences that these projects create. It has opened up endless opportunities to engage new and existing audiences not just with the past, but with their own present.

The very first WHN Community Prize was awarded to St Ives Archives for their exciting project recording the history of the women who worked in textile industries in the town. The archives had organised a series of events that brought together past employees of the industry to exchange memories and share them with the local community. In the years that have followed, the prize has seen entries from a wide range of organisations: museums, heritage centres, film makers, community groups, drama groups, schools, national trust properties, artists and writers, local history groups, girl guides and libraries; many of them funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The most recent prize in 2020 was won by 'Doing It Ourselves', a volunteer-led oral history project that 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.

The four projects which are featured in this section were entries to the WHN Community Prize and were chosen to demonstrate both the breadth and diversity of the competition and to remind us of the selectivity of women's histories and understanding of the past. For example, Farhanah Mamoojee's article charts the campaign to gain Blue Plaque recognition for the Ayahs' Home in Hackney, London. The projects also display the different mediums through which history is now communicated and the growing importance of new media. The Royal College of Nursing project focussed on digitising the scrapbooks of First World War Nurses, whilst the Glasgow Women's Library Project used animations to narrate the achievements of overlooked suffrage campaigners and activists from Scotland and beyond.

These projects also reveal that community history projects are produced by women of all ages and enjoyed by women of all ages. Abergavenny Museum involved students in curating their exhibition, 'Monmouthshire Women Making Change'. Over the years, entries for WHN Community History Prize have included inspirational projects seeking to engage the young in Women's History. In 2016, the joint winners were pupils from Greenhill school who worked with Narberth Museum, to curate an exhibition entitled *Wicked Welsh Women*. The following year, Tyne and Wear Museums were joint winners, having organised 'Tiny Sparks' sessions for 2-4-year-old children to introduce them to inspirational women in history.

The four articles that follow give a flavour of the vibrancy and excitement of women's community history and we hope they may inspire you to undertake such projects yourself in the future.

The Hidden History of the Ayahs of Britain

Farhanah Mamoojee

It is strikingly rare to find blatant records of an ordinary, working-class, South Asian woman in British History - let alone a whole group of thousands of these women who, despite their number, have become so regularly placed in the 'background' of society, literature, art and history, that we have all become culpably accustomed to acknowledging their existence and contributions to the world while subconsciously banishing them as invisible. I can hear the thoughts that many of you may have as you are reading this, 'ayahs'? Why does that word sound so familiar? Ah yes, *The Secret Garden* by Charles Dickens (didn't he mention one in a novel somewhere)? I'm sure Rudyard Kipling mentions something-or-another about... what's the word again? Ah yes... 'ayahs'.

The word *ayah* is Anglo-Indian and stems from the Portuguese *aia* (nurse). The ayahs of Britain are a little-known group of displaced women from South Asia, who worked as

ayahs or *amahs* (the Southeast Asian equivalent) for colonial English families from as early as the eighteenth century. A number of these women accompanied their employers on sea journeys to and from South Asia, Britain and the rest of the Empire. Some *ayahs* and *amahs* were specifically hired for these sea voyages: their promised payments were supposed to include tickets back to their homelands however, many English families reneged on this arrangement, instead opting to abandon these women once they arrived in Britain. Before 1900, many of these women had nowhere to go. Accordingly, the London City Mission set up a large home for them on King Edward's Road, Hackney [Figs. 1 and 2]. The Ayahs' Home became the only named institution of its kind in the United Kingdom. You can walk past both the home's former and latter sites, (26 and 4 King Edward's Road, respectively). Unfortunately, the *Ayahs'* experiences and individual histories



Fig 1 Photograph of the exterior of the Ayahs' Home in Hackney, London
City Mission Magazine
 December 1921
 © British Library Board.
 General Reference
 Collection PP.1041.C.

have never been recorded. We have never heard, nor will ever hear, the authentic voice of the *ayah* in oral or written materials left to us as their individual stories can rarely be found in archives. However, the legacy that these women left behind through second-hand accounts is so alluring, so fascinating and so heartbreaking, that when I stumbled across them in 2018 I could not let them go.

2018 marked the seventy-second anniversary of the partition of India, which today still stands as the most harrowing and largest forced migration of the twentieth century. To mark the occasion, the BBC aired a special documentary series called *Passage to Britain*, in which the historian Dr Yasmin Khan was shown researching the earliest South Asian migration stories (via ship ledgers and passenger lists held by the National Archives) and trying to trace the living descendants of specific individuals. One such story was of a young boy, who had travelled back to England with his *ayah*. Dr Khan interviewed him many years after the voyage and tried to gauge what he could recall of his journey. He remembered he had an *ayah* but had no record or recollection of what happened to her after she was dismissed from her employment. It seems the family did not stay in touch. Dr Khan then briefly mentioned that this was not an irregular occurrence and pointed out that many *ayahs* and *amahs* did find themselves displaced in Britain, until a home in Hackney was set up to shelter them.

As a resident of East London, a well-documented multi-cultural melting pot of the capital, I have become accustomed to the prevalence of migration and the women's history that surrounds me. Stories of the East End suffragettes and those of migrants from the nearby Docklands are readily documented and are mentioned in various publications, street signage and Heritage Trails in the area. Thinking that the site of the Ayahs' Home in King Edward's Road would hold similar information, I took a short walk there in the summer of 2018. However, I was completely taken aback when I found absolutely nothing there: no plaque, no information board... nothing. I immediately applied to English Heritage for a blue plaque. The process itself was a simple one: I basically downloaded and filled in

the application form that is on the English Heritage website. Before that, I was not aware that English Heritage rely entirely on the public to submit suggestions for new potential blue plaques. The applications are then discussed by a committee and maybe shortlisted, pending research. I received news that my application for the Ayahs' Home was shortlisted in March 2020 and got a further update in August 2020. This confirmed the plaque was likely to be granted in six to nine months. My application for a blue plaque met with astounding support from both English Heritage and local academic and non-academic communities alike. Something about these women resonated with everyone. Many of those who have supported my efforts so far have all felt angered, ashamed, displaced, victimised or abandoned by imperialist, colonialist and patriarchal powers. What I had stumbled upon, the thing that was so special, was evidence of a group of women who, despite how history had tried to silence and erase them, refuse to be forgotten.

Who were the *ayahs*? What were their stories? These are just some of the questions that have propelled my research and what has become an ongoing, growing project. I knew there were stories here that needed to be told, not just to the local community where the Ayahs' Home stands, but nationally and internationally too. This was an important part of British History that had been hidden, forgotten, ignored. In order to start sharing stories and constructing an awareness of the building which had been the Ayahs' Home, with the help of my local MP and the Mayor of Hackney, I created a free event on 7 March, 2020 that focussed on the stories of the Ayahs' Home at Hackney Museum.

The event consisted of two parts. The first was an educational panel, which provided the pioneering academic Rozina Visram with a platform to give a short presentation on her research on *ayahs* and their contribution to British History. Now in her eighties, Visram is the only historian to have ever extensively researched and published on the history of *ayahs* and *amahs* in Britain, via her seminal work *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes*, first published in the 1980s. Since then, she has



Fig 2 Photograph of the interior of the Ayahs' Home in Hackney, *Living London: Its work and its play, its humour and its pathos, its sights and scenes*, Edited by GR Sims. Cassell and Co 1904. © British Library Board. General Reference Collection 10349.h.12.

produced a more comprehensive study, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years of History*. However, no-one has undertaken any further primary independent research on *ayahs* since. An enigmatic speaker with astounding perseverance, Rozina Visram shared her enthusiasm for the topic to a room of captivated listeners. The event was at full capacity and English Heritage also attended. The second part of the occasion was a more creative opportunity for the public to engage with the reimagined stories of the *ayahs*. As part of the event, I had commissioned *The Yoniverse*, a poetry collective of South Asian women, to create a series of poems exploring the experiences of the *ayahs*, based on their own readings of Rozina's work, as well as research on individual stories of *ayahs*.

Their poems told of *ayahs* like Minnie Green (I doubt this was her real name). At just 18, this 'coloured girl' from Madras, who worked as an *ayah*, had been treated badly by her master and mistress, Harold and Grace Denton, both of whom drank heavily. After the travelling party arrived in London, the Dentons became inebriated, beat Minnie Green and abandoned her without paying for the cost of her voyage back from England (which they had originally promised to do). Nevertheless, she successfully used the British judicial system against her violent and disrespectful employers. She was described by the *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper's* court reporter as 'an intelligent Hindustani'. On the voyage from Bangalore

and on arrival in London she had been hit and underpaid by Harold and Grace Denton and consequently, Southwark court restored the three shillings wage Minnie was still owed. The records of the Salvation Army Rescue Home record that, '... the [Southwark] magistrate took her away & sent her to us'. Her conduct in the home was described as 'very good,' and her disposition 'good tempered and contented'. Subsequently, Minnie was sent as an *ayah* to a Mr and Mrs Rose, who were returning to India. Another *ayah*, Mrs Anthony Pareira, is famously recorded as making the months-long voyage between India and Britain over 54 times, having chosen to make a career out of onboard childcare. Others were not so lucky.

One *ayah* was found abandoned at King's Cross station in London. The woman's name has never been recorded, but that of her employer was. This *ayah* had been employed by a British family in colonial India to look after their children on the long boat passage to the UK. She was then employed by a Mr and Mrs Drummond, on the understanding they would pay her way home to Mumbai in the same manner. Instead, the Drummonds boarded the ship without her, leaving her at the station with £1 in her pocket. With these stories in mind, the poets re-created searing portraits of lives torn apart by the empire, exploring the loss of family, country and identity. 'Memsaab, did you always see me less than', asked Shareefa Energy in her soliloquy in which an *ayah* comes to terms with her abandonment: 'is the dark in my skin, once a trophy of your wealth, now embarrassing?'

The event at Hackney Museum was a huge success and set the tone for further research. Niti Acharya, a member of staff at the museum, has since started a similar project documenting the names of every single *ayah* that travelled to the UK. This work is instrumental in ensuring their stories are not lost with the passage of time. She noted that she had been waiting her whole career for someone to pick up the baton from Rozina Visram. The audience members who hailed from all generations also became enthusiastic to start digging into their own histories and the past stories of *ayahs*, in order to bring them to light and commemorate them. I have been assembling all the stories I uncover, via my own research and those put forward by others, on an Instagram page



Fig 3 Evelyn Loudon with her Ayah in India in 1926, with permission from Charlotte Loudon.

@ayahshome, which now has close to 1000 followers.

One of the personal histories that emerged was that of Evelyn Loudon, whose granddaughter got in touch and shared an image of Evelyn in India with her *ayah* in 1926 [Figs. 3 and 4]. Evelyn, now elderly, does not remember much, but does recall that she had one *ayah* when she was a baby and another one later who looked after her every day and frequently met up with other *ayahs* whilst their European children played. Her Nepalese *ayah* was married to the *chiprati*, the night watchman who looked after the house and who was an ex-Gurkha soldier. The couple lived in the services quarters on the property. Aged seven, Evelyn was brought back to the UK by ship with her mother, in order to start school in Scotland. Her *ayah* stayed behind.

Since the event at the museum, the project has received international coverage from newspapers such as *Business Insider Mumbai* and the BBC World Service radio station. There are nuances in the stories of the *ayahs* which link to contemporary issues of homelessness, migrant labour and racism. These issues have been picked up on by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, who encouraged their civil servants to join a seminar I put together in August 2020. This gave me an opportunity to speak about the project to key educational policy makers and allowed me to highlight the importance of introducing a broader range of historical material into the national curriculum that would encompass the marginalised stories in British history, which are usually those from BAME communities.

The legacy of my project will be literally set in stone if we achieve a Blue Plaque for the site of the former *Ayahs' Home* at King Edward's Road, Hackney. It will ensure the stories of the *ayahs* will be preserved for all generations to enjoy, look up to and continue to spark enthusiasm for marginalised BAME stories, which are crucial aspects of British history. The former site fits all the criteria set by English Heritage, including its external structure remaining the same as when it was an *Ayahs' Home*. This is in itself extraordinary, considering the amount of regeneration that has taken place and is ongoing in East London. English Heritage commented that, 'the English Heritage Blue Plaques Panel thought that the nomination for commemorating the former *Ayahs' and Amahs' Home* – a unique institution – was a good one'. Whilst the panel have not completed all the stages of their research into the site, there is a consensus that awarding 'a blue plaque to this remarkable institution could become a reality before not too long'.

This project has touched the hearts of so many people, and the response from the press and the general-public worldwide has been overwhelming. There is still scope to do so much more, including working with local schools to increase their coverage of stories of South Asian women throughout history in local curriculums: something that should be extended so that the history of South Asian women has a place in university lectures and is the focus of academic research projects. Further work could also be accomplished by collaboration with the India Office, to extend knowledge and engagement with the history of the *Ayahs' Home* to people in India. I think this is a crucial step in uncovering the authentic voices of the *ayahs* and their lives, as many of their descendants are more likely to be in India than the UK. Lastly, I hope to continue to work closely with English Heritage on their aim to improve the representation of women and women of colour in their blue plaques scheme. The first non-English woman to

receive a blue plaque was SOE agent Noor Inayat Khan, in August 2020.

So much of British history is geared towards black and white audiences, with much of Asian British history overshadowed by colonial triumphs. Accordingly, many South Asians do not feel an affinity with much of British history as it is currently portrayed. I truly believe that British Asians need to do their part to ensure that our history is more accessible and represented in mainstream discourse. Whether that is achieved by establishing cultural



Fig 4 Evelyn Loudon with her Ayah in India in 1926, with permission from Charlotte Loudon.

events, such as the recent South Asian Heritage Month UK, or by encouraging more young Asians to consider studying history, which currently attracts predominantly white students. The Royal Historical Society's 2018 research report on Race, Ethnicity and Equality in UK History found that only 3.8% of university history students were Asian.

I have been asked many times what inspired me to start this project and to continue with it. The answer is simple. These *ayahs* were multi-dimensional: adventurous, loving and sometimes murderous women, who were crucial to the fabric of British history. The stories of the *ayahs* also transcends borders. These women travelled from far and wide to make a living and their legacy is global but, they have been sidelined so often that they were at risk of being completely forgotten. My project simply seeks to remedy that.

Further Recommended Reading and Resources:

R. Visram, *Asians in Britain: 400 Years History* (London: Pluto Press, 1997).

R. Visram *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: The Story of Indians in Britain 1700-1947* (Oxford: Routledge, 1986).

The Salvation Army London Rescue Home "Girls' Statement Book VII (London).

Sita Brahmachari, *When Secrets Set Sail* (London: Hachette Children's, 2020).

Thushani Weerasekera, *Ayah* (London: Jmendel Books, 2015).

Instagram: @ayahshome <https://www.instagram.com/ayahshome/>

Twitter: @ayahshome <https://twitter.com/ayahshome>
Hackney Museum website <https://hackney-museum.hackney.gov.uk/>

English Heritage Blue Plaque applications <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/blue-plaques/propose-a-plaque/>
Resources from Hachette Kids for schools about the project see - <https://www.hachetteschools.co.uk/landing-page/when-secrets-set-sail-by-sita-brahmachari/>

Vote 100: The Moving Story

Donna Moore



Fig. 1 - Final slide included in all animations of Vote 100: The Moving Story

Glasgow Women's Library (GWL) is somewhat of a misnomer. Although based in Glasgow, we work all over Scotland, delivering learning opportunities and events in a range of urban and rural locations up and down the country and in a variety of contexts including prisons. Increasingly our reach is both UK wide and international. Access to the GWL collections and to our extensive programmes of public events is for all, not just women; and we are much more than a library. For instance, GWL is the only accredited museum dedicated to women's history in the whole of the UK and the museum and archive collections are designated as a Recognised Collection of National Significance.

Since 1991, GWL has grown from a grass-roots community group with no funding entirely reliant on volunteers, into a multi-award winning, unique organisation with twenty-three employees and supporting eighty volunteers per year. GWL's vision is of a world in which women's historical, cultural and political contributions to society are fully recognised, valued and celebrated by all. Its mission: to celebrate the lives and achievements of women; champion their historical, cultural and political contributions and act as a catalyst to eradicate the gender gap that contributes to widespread inequalities in society. GWL fulfils its vision and mission in two ways: through collecting and making accessible an outstanding collection of museum, archive and library materials and via the delivery of vibrant and creative programmes of public events.

GWL workers are often invited to deliver talks about the work of our unique organisation. From small community groups to conference delegates, through to schools and academic institutions, we always relish the opportunity to tell people more about what goes on and who our heroines are. We like to play an icebreaker game, where we talk about the work we do and why we do it. And we often throw out the question, 'Can you name a Suffragette?' Cue the confident chorusing of 'Emmeline Pankhurst' - every time, universally and without hesitation. Sometimes people mention Emily Wilding Davison, the Suffragette who intentionally or otherwise was caught under the hooves of the King's horse during the 1913 Epsom Derby. Only infrequently, even when we are speaking to groups in Scotland, do we hear the names of the many amazing Scottish women who fought for the cause (either as

Suffragettes or, as their less militant - but equally determined sisters, the Suffragists). And there were thousands of them; ordinary women who did extraordinary things and who were imprisoned, force-fed, sexually and physically assaulted, verbally abused and vilified. Often their physical, emotional and mental health suffered. Some lost their jobs, their children, their families; and a few lost their lives. But, so few of us can name even one of them.

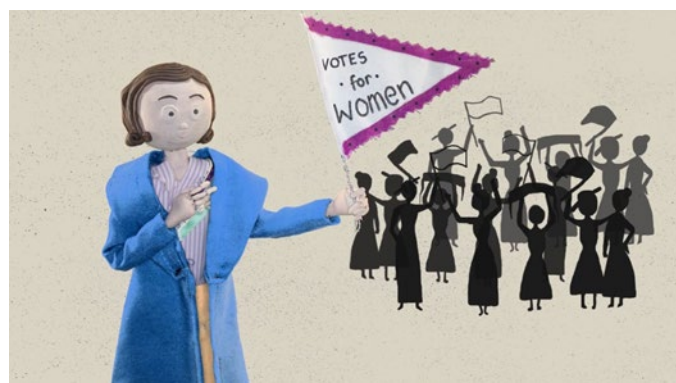


Fig. 2 - Still from animation featuring Suffragette Ethel Moorhead

Women have always been involved in campaigns for equality and the right to vote in countries across the world and to celebrate the centenary in 2018 of the Representation of the People Act in the UK, we wanted to do something to highlight the forgotten heroines. Those women who campaigned for others across the world to have the right to vote, as well as those who fought (and in some cases are still fighting) for equal rights. We were lucky enough to receive funding from the Scottish Government, as part of a package of funding to celebrate 100 years of the Representation of the People Act 1918. The budget was very small for the ambitious project we had in mind, but we approached it with our usual flexibility, creativity and enthusiasm. Our aim was to develop an animated web resource to shine a light on some of the amazing women campaigners and activists from history. We researched Scottish and international women and developed a list of nearly 400 inspirational women. Our list includes women from at least six of the seven continents. Sadly, I don't think we found any from Antarctica!

From September 2018, we worked with GWL's learners, volunteers and visitors to achieve the following: research 101 neglected activists, to write two or three facts about the amazing things they did and then to record audio versions of the resulting scripts. Women from across the world participated in the project and were part of the recordings. Visitors to Glasgow Women's Library were told about the project and offered the chance to participate. For example, we told them a little bit about some of the amazing women on the list and they chose a name. I would then whisk them off to my 'studio' (aka The Cupboard Under the Stairs Where We Store the Chairs and Tables) and record them reading the intriguing snippets of information about their chosen woman.

We had visitors from countries including Finland, America, France, Japan, Sweden, Spain, Turkey, Pakistan,



Fig. 3 - Still from animation for *Muriel Matters*

Switzerland, South Africa and Tanzania recording voiceovers. In many cases, we were able to provide them with an activist from their own country to record. What that often meant, in practice, was that I would sidle up to visitors and ask them where their accent was from. Then I would scurry away, check the spreadsheet and if we didn't already have an inspirational woman from that country, I would find one and write a little script about her. Many of the women we approached at GWL were unaware of those particular activists and went away inspired and wanting to find out more!

The scripts and the audio recordings were then sent to students from six colleges, universities and art schools across Scotland, as well as to individual animators, who then worked to produce short animations of each of the scripts and recordings. The idea of involving students provided us with a further positive outcome for the project, in that we have been able to showcase the huge range of talent across further and higher education in Scotland as well as providing them with an interesting project as part of their courses. We were told by one of the colleges, that ran a Master of Arts animation course, that undergraduates had used their *Vote 100* animations as part of their portfolios when applying for the Masters courses. All the colleges have told us that students have really enjoyed working on the project and that some have produced their best work on the course whilst undertaking this venture.

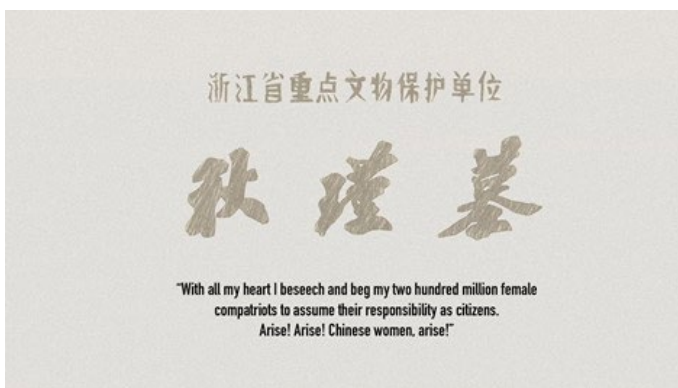


Fig 4 - Still from animation for *Qiu Jin*

The resulting *Vote 100: The Moving Story* films are unique animations lasting between 20 and 40 seconds that highlight not only the achievements of 101 often overlooked campaigners and activists from Scotland and beyond, but also showcase the rich talents of up-and-coming animators from across Scotland. Our aim was for them to be interesting, entertaining, educational, inspirational and intrigue people into finding out more about these remarkable women from

history. In addition, we also developed a downloadable toolkit for schools as a multimedia approach to the history of suffrage. Aimed primarily at students aged 14-16, it offered a range of activities (from research through to debate and on to creative writing, arts and design) to encourage students to engage more actively with the topic. The subsequent animations are presented on our website and on a separate Vimeo site. All of the films are subtitled for accessibility and are tagged so that specific topics (such as hunger strikes, locations, suffragette or suffragist) can be searched for. There is also a map and further information about the project. The website is a permanent legacy of the project and it is available to all, enabling the names and stories of our 101 amazing women to be seen and heard. In addition, we use it as a resource for workshops, events, talks and presentations.

The website was launched at a special event – a Suffragette Games Afternoon. Here the digital resource was showcased and original Suffrage games were played, including *Panko* (which we have in our collection). Named for Emmeline Pankhurst, it is a card game (similar to both Rummy and Happy Families) that pits opponents and supporters of suffrage against each other. The advertisement for the game claimed, 'not only is each picture in itself an interesting memento, but the game produces intense excitement without the slightest taint of bitterness'. We also played a strategy game called *Suffragetto*, where the goal of the Suffragettes is to break through Police lines and enter the House of Commons. At the same time, the Suffragettes have to stop the Police from entering the Albert Hall. Our third game was the snappily titled *Suffragettes In And Out Of Prison*, a game a little similar to Snakes and Ladders, where the ladders are open doors and the snakes are policemen, walls and wardresses. Fun for all the family!



Figs. 5/6 - *Vote 100: The Moving Story* Launch and Suffrage Games Afternoon



Fig. 7 - Card from Panko game

Over one hundred women of the present were involved in researching, writing and recording scripts about their chosen historical women. Some women were involved in all three aspects, while others wanted only to research or only to read and have their voices recorded. In addition, ninety-five individual students from various colleges made the animations, the rest being drawn by a local artist. A core team of eight staff and volunteers participated in the management, administration, co-ordination and facilitation of the project and twenty people attended the launch and suffrage games afternoon. In total, around 100 people have attended presentations where the project has been presented and demonstrated, while hundreds of visitors to GWL have been engaged with the venture in some way. Schools across Scotland have used the toolkit and the films are freely available to anyone who accesses the website.

We were honoured to win the WHN Community History Prize for *Vote 100: The Moving Story* in 2019, when the project was praised for being an 'excellent and permanent resource for the centenary, very moving and direct, and a great showcase for local talent. The project clearly instilled a sense of local pride whilst the breadth and reach of the project extends knowledge and interest in the achievements of women.'

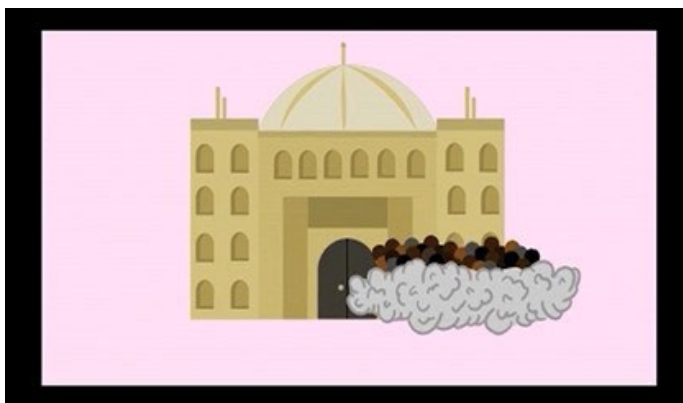


Fig. 8 - Still from animation for Doria Shafik

Presently, the impact of the project endures. The animations are still being uploaded onto the website as they come in from the colleges and universities. Women from all backgrounds have engaged with and been involved in the project, including those who struggle with their reading and writing or would traditionally be classed as lacking cultural capital. Our resources also include the full list of all the women on whom we conducted our initial research and we invite people to take a look at the names on this list and undertake research on some of the other women; talk and write about them, give them a page on Wikipedia and tell us about them. This will ensure a wide spread to the project, which is truly a local, national and international venture. We hope you enjoy it as much as we do.

Further Information

To find out more about Glasgow Women's Libraries, including opening times etc see <https://womenslibrary.org.uk>

Scottish Government report on 100th Anniversary of Women's Suffrage can be found at:

<https://www.gov.scot/news/action-to-improve-womens-representation-in-politics/>

The animations can be accessed via - <https://womenslibrary.org.uk/discover-our-projects/vote-100-the-moving-story/> and <https://vimeo.com/womenslibrary/videos>

Vote 100 ; The Moving Story - Toolkit for Schools can be downloaded here: <https://womenslibrary.org.uk/discover-our-projects/vote-100-the-moving-story/vote-100-toolkit-for-schools/>

Announcement of the 2019 WHN Community Prize can be found at

<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/2019-wnh-community-history-prize-winner/>

Monmouthshire Women Making Change, Abergavenny Museum

Rachel Rogers

Abergavenny Museum's exhibition, 'Monmouthshire Women Making Change', ran from March 2017 to March 2018. The project aimed to use our collections, in conjunction with research into local stories, in order to demonstrate and more fully understand the value of women's campaigning in the past. Our exhibition explored the contributions that local women made to suffrage, the war effort, agriculture, the peace movement and how they worked towards improving women's lives locally and globally. The exhibition was curated by an intergenerational group of volunteers: made up of a recent History graduate; two university students and a member of the community. Furthermore, by working together with a number of different community organisations, we hoped that these collaborations would open doors and encourage young women particularly to become engaged in campaigning and be inspired to take action in the present day.

The idea of an exhibition was initially motivated by a collection of artefacts relating to women's history that Abergavenny Museum holds. And we wanted to show them to the public. These objects included materials deposited by the Women's Archive of Wales (related to the town's Women's Peace Group, founded in the 1980s). Abergavenny has a strong tradition of influential women's groups, starting with those involved in the agricultural and produce markets in the nineteenth century and moving onto a branch of the Women's Co-operative Guild, started in the town in the 1920s. More recently, the peace movement of the 1980s was linked with the town, when Abergavenny Women's Peace Group were involved in the Greenham Common Peace Camp: a chain of protest camps that were set up at RAF Greenham Common during a campaign against the storage of nuclear weapons there. There are also important individual stories that deserve to be told. For example, those of local women and women's organisations that became involved in the suffrage movement, politics, culture and international and humanitarian activities, many of which are not as well-known as they should be.

In early 2015, representatives from the Abergavenny Women's Peace Group made an approach to Abergavenny Museum: to see if they could work together with us, in order to share their stories and part of the museum's collection of documents with the wider public. This seemed particularly

pertinent as, at the time, there were many women's groups still active in the town. Monmouthshire, as a whole, is a great example of a county with politically and socially active communities. Accordingly, we felt that this was a great opportunity to share these many and varied stories of women making, leading and inspiring a new generation of social change.

The overall project budget was small: only £2175, raised through a combination of internal museum funds and external funding from the Nevill Estate (who own the building and grounds that the museum sits within). The Hartsheath Trust (a Wales-based charitable trust) and Gabb and Co. (a local solicitor, whose ancestor featured as one of the women in the exhibition) also gave financial support. We likewise relied on the efforts of our volunteers and worked with a variety of community groups, who either provided information for the panels or loaned items. These groups included: Abergavenny Women's Community Project; Soroptimist International Abergavenny Group; Midwives Ethiopia Organisation; Abergavenny Crafty Women; Coffee and Laughs Interfaith Group; Merched Y Wawr; Women's Aid; Six Quilters; Love Zimbabwe and Zimele.

One of our aims was to encourage volunteers to co-curate the exhibition and consequently gain the opportunity to learn new skills. These included researches, exhibition curation, customer service and working with local community groups. We engaged three young, female volunteers, who carried out historical research into stories relating to local women and who also re-discovered little-known tales of significant women. They also liaised with and captured the achievements of local groups, giving them the opportunity to tell their stories. During this process, these volunteers were able to work with Katrina Gass and Caroline Fairclough, who were themselves campaigners. They also met with Martha Muzonza Holman, one of our 'significant women'. These meetings gave the volunteers the rare opportunity to gather first-hand accounts of contemporary heritage, which were then translated into content for the exhibition. The volunteers were also responsible for carrying out the practical planning and execution of the exhibition.



Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 - Images from the opening of the Monmouthshire Women Making Change exhibition.

The presentation provided a narrative of activities carried out by women in Monmouthshire, who have made a difference to the way we live, think or feel. It also told the stories of historical and current women's movements in the town and its surrounding area. Topics that were covered in the exhibition (and were illustrated further using bilingual text panels) included: The Suffrage Movement, Women in War, Women in Farming, the Peace Movement and projects being carried out by local groups and significant women in Monmouthshire. There was so much information, that it could not all be included on the exhibition panels. Accordingly, we created a number of accompanying folders, which were also on display in the gallery. Within and alongside these folders, we provided opportunities for organisations who had taken part in the project to publicise and promote their work and achievements.

Creating the exhibition was, as we had hoped, an exciting and valuable experience for our volunteers and their words, comments and reflections on the experience sum up the value of projects like 'Monmouthshire Women Making Change'. For example, Laura Dixon (who had recently graduated university with a degree in History) noted,

'I really enjoyed the experience: working in a small team; carrying out research and putting together the final product. It's something I wouldn't mind doing in the future'.

Other participants included two English and History undergraduates from the University of South Wales. The pair were undertaking work experience, as part of the work-based learning aspect of their degree courses. The first, Beth Hopkins, reflected:

As part of my degree I was required to undertake a work placement relating to either of my degree subjects, English and History. And Abergavenny Museum was kind enough to take me on. ... Working on the 'Monmouthshire Women Making Change' exhibition was an amazing experience. Although ... [it] was stressful at times, the end result has made it all worth it. After months of planning and feeling like nothing would be ready on time, everything fell into place and seeing members of the community engaging with the displays during the official opening, really made me feel like I had been involved in something important. ... The exhibition was created not only by a team at the museum, but also with contributions from various members of the local community. They helped to reveal histories unknown to us and provided us with the stories and experiences we needed to construct the exhibition. However, the exhibition is not only about the past, but about the present. We worked with local women's groups and individuals, to bring to light the amazing work members of our community are involved with. Those of us in the museum felt that these people deserved more recognition and hopefully the exhibition provides this ... I hope that others find the content of the exhibition to be as interesting and important as I do and hopefully, they will realise

that they too can make a change.

Similarly, the second undergraduate, Hannah James, remarked:

At times, when working on the exhibition, it felt like we would never get the information to enable us to complete the exhibition by the opening deadline. ... On the open evening, it was lovely to see all the different groups who were involved coming together. We were lucky to have such positive feedback from these groups and to have so much support and help from them throughout the research process. ... There was a lot that I learnt from working on this exhibition and it was lovely to learn more about the area that I live in, especially the lengths that women (both past and present) go to, to make a change.

Ultimately, inspiring change was the goal of the exhibition. We had wanted to present the stories of ordinary people making a difference and standing up for what they believed in, so as to inspire our visitors and encourage them to consider the differences that campaigning can make to their lives and that of the communities around them. As well as the will to change people's lives, we believed this would also have a positive effect on people's own self-esteem. We organised a number of different activities and utilised a varied range of media, in order to reach out to people in the local community. These vehicles included a short film made at the gallery opening, which included an interview with one of the Significant Women featured in the exhibition. The film was then uploaded to Facebook. We also encouraged public engagement and a wider discussion through the posting of information on Twitter (@Mon_Heritage) and Facebook (@MonLife Heritage Museums). Further still, our 'Activity Programme' engaged people who might not otherwise have seen the exhibition. For instance, we created a Welsh Baccalaureate activity pack for sixth-form students. The dossier focused on campaigning and supported the Global Citizenship Challenge, which is part of their qualification. We also supported activities that took place at other locations: a day-school in May 2017 entitled, 'Women and Peace 1914 -2017' and an event concerning Monmouthshire Women in Agriculture. There was also an art exhibition at Abergavenny Community Centre, celebrating local artist Agnes Beverly Burton on 16 July 2017.

Organising and curating exhibitions is always challenging, as is seeking to tell rich and varied stories in an engaging manner. Also, ensuring that there are the right objects to support the stories that you want to tell, whilst making sure that it remains people-centric is equally demanding. For this particular exhibition, we wanted to ensure that we included both women from the past and women from the present. We wanted to ensure that we were not just chronicling the contributions that local women made as we also wished to demonstrate how relevant their stories remained. There were also ethical observations to be made. We were also acutely aware that we were telling the stories of parts of people's lives that they felt strongly about. Consequently, it was important that we were respectful of how we told these stories while retaining research integrity. We also knew how essential it was that the young women volunteering with us (as part of their degree work) had an enriching yet authentic experience. For instance, it was significant that they understood the frustrations of trying to say everything that was necessary,

using a limited amount of space, while producing information that was simultaneously challenging and accessible. Overall, the overwhelming feeling about the exhibition was that it was great fun to do. And that always makes it easy to forget any challenges there might have been!

Three years on from the exhibition, one memory in particular stands out for me. During the research phase, we invited one of the women featured in the exhibition to be interviewed. The two students and the graduate-volunteer carried out the interview. Beforehand, we had discussed the sort of questions to ask and the critical importance of recording what was said, as we were going to use the material from the interview as the basis for an exhibition panel. I sat in on the meeting however, I felt it was important that the volunteers saw the interview as their responsibility and that I should not get too involved or micro manage. I really knew how powerful this project was when, part of the way through the interview, I looked up to see our volunteers absolutely captivated by what the interviewee was saying. Her narrative held their attention and demonstrated just how impactful her story was and in turn, why this project was so important. However, I immediately spotted a problem. They were so enthralled that

all three interviewers had stopped writing down what she was saying! I had an inward chuckle and thought that perhaps I did need to intervene. Accordingly, I left them enjoying and learning from the story and hurriedly began to take up the note taking!

Further reading or references

<http://www.abergavennymuseum.co.uk> (accessed 28 October 2020).

<https://www.facebook.com/MonmouthshireCC/videos/1496505690383864/> - short film about the exhibition (accessed 28 October 2020).

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/greenham-common-peace-camp-march-15042053> (accessed 28 October 2020).

<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/womens-history-network-community-history-prize-2017-2/> (accessed 28 October 2020).

Service Scrapbooks: Nursing, Storytelling and the First World War

Frances Reed

Nurse Beatrice Tanner kept a detailed diary of her experiences during the Great War. Her writings, held at the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Archive, span 1914 through to 1916. The day war broke out, she was contacted to 'hold herself in readiness to be called up at any minute'. Not long after, she received a letter and a cheque from the war office and got her uniform and kit ready. She was going to war. Her diary goes on to give an account of a fascinating and varied couple of years that followed. When she found herself in a convent in Rouen, she wrote in her journal, 'I feel as if I am in a prison'. She met refugees fleeing Paris on a train to St Nazaire and nursed the wounded on a hospital barge collecting casualties from the Battle of the Somme. Many First World War stories like Tanner's are held by the RCN Archive in various formats. Whilst Tanner's diary is a collection of typed pages, other diaries and scrapbooks are filled with handwritten poems,

drawings, photographs, newspaper cuttings and signatures from soldiers and nursing colleagues. One fabric bound scrapbook belonging to Josephine Angois, a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD), has her Joint War Committee brassard stitched to the cover.

In 2017, the RCN Library and Archive Service received a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF), to conserve, digitise and research ten First World War nursing scrapbooks, including Tanner's diary (Figs. 1 & 2). The collection provides fascinating insights into the often ignored, nursing experiences of the war. We wanted the project to acknowledge the role played by the nursing profession, past and present. We also wished to fill in gaps within the historical record. The First World War placed many women into extraordinary circumstances. However commemorations have often neglected women's experiences, especially those on the front line. These stories resonate with people today and, as we found out, many people's family histories include those of First World War nurses. Yet these histories are easily-lost amidst military and medical history records. Working with a dedicated team of volunteers, we were able to transfer the rich contents of the archived diaries and make them available to the public online. Accordingly, all of the diaries were digitised and transcribed and in the spirit of public engagement, we held events and workshops. We now have a fantastic website (www.rcn.org.uk/servicescrapbooks) available for all to access.



Fig. 1 - Service Scrapbooks collection. RCN Archive.



Fig. 2 - Battle of the Somme illustration Jessie Akehurst scrapbook, 4 Dec 1916. RCN Archive.

The £60,000 funding from the NLHF enabled us to do so much over the course of the year, that we would not otherwise have had the time and resources to accomplish. It paid for the conservation of the diaries (many of which were extremely fragile), provided travel expenses for volunteers (who dedicated their time to the project), funded a Writer in Residence and also a number of poetry and text-writing workshops. Additionally, the grant covered the cost of setting up the website, enabling us to share the scrapbooks with audiences across the world. Further still, the funding also enabled us to employ a Graduate Trainee in Heritage: an individual who was dedicated to working on the project. Having a paid member of staff occupied on the project full time was invaluable and helped the rest of our team continue with business as usual. It also gave our Graduate Trainee valuable experience in funded project work and the supervising of volunteers.

One of the wonderful things about this project, was the way that it brought a group of enthusiastic and dedicated researchers together. It was the first time we had put a call-out for project volunteers, via our History of Nursing Forum, and we were overwhelmed by the response. Initially, we had hoped to involve eight nurses in the project: in the event, thirty signed up. All were healthcare professionals, some were retired and around half were still in work. To involve the nurses more closely in their history, we put together a detailed volunteer induction programme. And a number of those volunteers have continued to support other projects within the RCN Library and Archive Service. The Service Scrapbooks project really highlighted the potential for volunteer engagement in future



Fig. 3 - Service Scrapbooks volunteers and Graduate Trainee in Heritage. RCN, 2018. Photo Justine Desmond.

projects (Fig. 3).

Before we began uploading the contents of the scrapbooks online, we had to make sure that the physical items were stable and could withstand handling and digitisation. The National Conservation Service (NCS) did a superb job with all the scrapbooks, tidying them up and reinforcing weak spines and fragile pages. This preservation work ensured that the materials were fit for the project and prolonged their lifespans as objects for future research. Simultaneously, we were rapidly expanding our digital repository at the RCN by making an increasing number of historic records available online, work which continues today. The Service Scrapbooks Project was a real success, in terms of developing this online access and highlighting our amazing collections. The project also pushed us as a team - to deliver online content in a more engaging format. Appropriately, we worked closely with our web team and a digital content creator to build a new mini-site: one that could showcase the content in exciting and creative ways. The result is a smart, engaging and rich digital resource of First World War nursing stories.

An important part of the volunteer role was transcribing the contents of the diaries and scrapbooks, which amounted to around a thousand pages of reproduced information, with more than 83,000 words transcribed. Volunteers quickly became very familiar with the penned hand of their nurse, developing expertise in palaeography. Typing up the diary entries, letters, poems and organising the many files of data, boosted volunteers' confidence in Information Technology, as some of the helpers did not use computers in their daily working lives. Similarly, volunteers who worked on the on-site digitisation of the scrapbooks gained expertise in using the BookEye scanner, a brand-new technology for everyone (Fig. 4). A few helpers quickly became more familiar with the scanner's quirks than the library staff! Volunteers also supported each other when faced with various technical challenges. This proved an important learning experience for them, given that several admitted digital technology was not their strong point at the outset of the project.

Our willing conscripts often became very attached to 'their nurse', as they delved deeper into the lives of past caregivers. Watching these relationships emerge between nurses past and present, was a real joy for us as a project team. For example, Julie, who was the volunteer who researched nurse Hilda Hand, found a matron's report stating that Hand 'has never been too satisfactory and has always had some grievance'. Reflecting on these records, Julie wrote, 'stories like this remind us that the nurses we are researching were real people, complete with faults and eccentricities... not the angelic figures nurses were often held up to be'. Another volunteer, Pat, conducted extensive family history research into a Voluntary Aid Detachment worker named Josephine Angois. Pat made contact with some of Josephine's descendants, who were able to add more detail to the story. Several of Josephine's family attended the celebratory event (held towards the end of the project) and saw their relative's scrapbook up close. They also shared photos and information

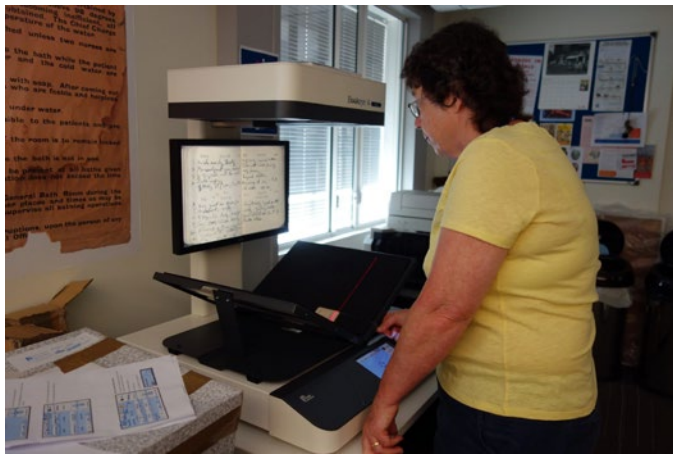


Fig. 4 - Jill Bowman (volunteer) digitising on the BookEye. Service Scrapbooks project, 2017. RCN.

relating to Josephine from their own family albums, adding them to the project. The family had not known the scrapbook was in the RCN collection. Consequently, it turned out to be an emotional event for the family as well as for the volunteers.

It was hard to pin down exactly how many volunteer hours were dedicated to the project. For many, the research into their nurses continued far beyond the project timeline. On top of the digitisation, transcribing and events support, volunteers were researching from home and visiting other archives and collections. The archive visits were particularly popular, as one volunteer Lesley shared following a trip to the Lothian Health Service Archives. 'Like kids in a sweetie store...we were taken to the locked archive stores. It was all so interesting and the staff so knowledgeable and enthusiastic that on leaving, several of us expressed the view that we'd like to retrain as archivists'.

Central to the project was developing the skills and knowledge of everyone involved (Fig. 5). Creative writing, storytelling, heritage and family history were all areas in which the project team gained confidence. We also saw our public audiences gaining knowledge in these fields, through workshops with our Writer in Residence (the nurse and poet, Molly Case). The workshops drew on the creative content of the scrapbooks themselves, offering a new way to appreciate these historic artefacts. Molly held poetry drop-in sessions and creative writing workshops, which encouraged attendees to engage with the history of nursing and reflect on their practices today. One nurse-attendee told us, 'my mind has been whirring ever since, with stories and poems from forty years of nursing.



Fig. 5 - Volunteer training at RCN Archives Edinburgh - 26.07.17

I am more convinced than ever now to continue writing.' Molly went on to perform her poem, *Women's Work*, for a film made by the Imperial War Museums (IWM). This linked the Service Scrapbooks project with wider commemorations through the IWM's Women's Work 100 project, which explored and promoted the working lives of women during the First World War. Our volunteers attended a visit to the archives and reading room at the IWM Library and the project team showcased the scrapbooks at a 'Conflict Café' event hosted at IWM London.

Using digital technologies and developing IT skills was a significant learning curve for many in the project team. Everyone had something new to get their head around, whether operating the BookEye scanner, working with new website components, or even just using Microsoft Word. Having so many different levels of expertise across the team meant we had a diverse pool of skills to make use of. However, we also needed to be patient and flexible. The web resource itself requires continued care as well. In the months following the end of the project, we quickly learned how much ongoing development and maintenance the website needed. With a large fund of rich and varied digital content, bugs and quirks are bound to arise. As a team, it is something we still need to keep on top of – even two years later.

Managing a team of thirty-plus volunteers from around the UK was a huge challenge: particularly as the project was brand new for us all. At the beginning, there was a lot of learning together as the project progressed. As a new member of staff, our Graduate Trainee did an incredible job of getting stuck-in straight away and capably supported volunteers from the outset. Ensuring that everyone felt involved, valued and supported was essential (and no mean feat). Volunteers felt it was a real privilege to work with the historical materials and were proud of their roles in creating something important for future generations. With volunteers so geographically widespread (from rural Scotland through to London) and some working remotely from home, it was a real achievement to receive positive feedback from all involved.

Consequently, it is a real pleasure to have such a wonderfully rich web resource as an online legacy for the project. And as a library and archive service, one of our key goals is to engage people with nursing and its history. The resource has now become part of this objective, alongside our family history service, historical book collections and the work of the RCN's History of Nursing Forum. Since access to physical collections is currently very restricted, our resource means that people can research and explore nursing history from home. Furthermore, being awarded the Community History Prize in 2018 by the Women's History Network was a wonderful boost to this legacy of public engagement. The award was also testament to all of the hard work invested into the project by our volunteers.

And what of the nurses who served during the First World War? Well, the lives of these women, who lived through such extraordinary times, are now available for all to discover. The project then, not only enhanced the representation of nursing in war history, it also gave these personal stories the recognition they deserved. We are not sure what happened to Beatrice Tanner in the final years of the war. We do however, know that she received the 1914 Star, the British War medal and the Victory medal. Additionally, she was awarded the Royal Red Cross (first class) in the New Year honours of 1919. The last episode in her diary is dated 1916 and details her time

travelling the river Somme on a barge.

Despite the horrors she describes, as they cared for the wounded and dealt with twenty-one case of dysentery, her stoicism remains. On 3 October of that year, she wrote, 'we reached Abbeville at 4pm. To be told that the barges were to be tied up for the winter. After visiting the House we returned to

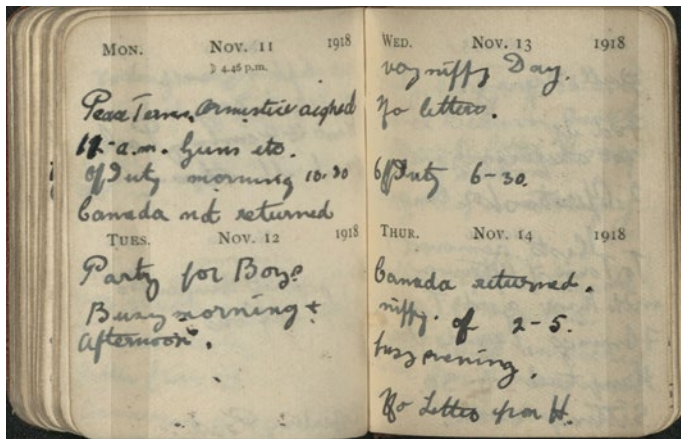


Fig. 6 - Armistice signed Florence Blythe-Brown diary, 11 Nov 1918. RCN Archive.

pack up all our belongings and left the barge for good at 9-p.m. after having had a very happy time' (Fig. 6).

Further reading and useful links

Service Scrapbooks web resource <https://www.rcn.org.uk/servicescrapbooks> (accessed 28 October 2020).

Royal College of Nursing (RCN) Digital Archive <https://rcn.access.preservica.com/> (accessed 28 October 2020).

RCN Libraries Events and Exhibitions <https://www.rcn.org.uk/library/exhibitions-and-events> (accessed 28 October 2020).

Imperial War Museums Women's Work 100 <https://www.iwm.org.uk/partnerships/first-world-war-centenary/centenary-partnership/womenswork100> (accessed 28 October 2020).

Molly Case spoken word poetry including *Women's Work* <http://www.mollycasespeaks.com/commissions> (accessed 28 October 2020).

Twitter and Instagram: @RCNLibraries

Sources and Archives

Introduction

Samantha Hughes-Johnson

Since the rise of second-wave feminism in Britain, there has been a steady and increasing surge of historical studies that seek to challenge and re-fashion the grand male narrative that history once was. However, while practitioners of women's history and feminist history work to re-focus the lens of historical scrutiny, to make women visible, audible and emissaries of their own narratives, researchers often find tracking down the primary sources to do this both demanding and problematic.

The practice of archiving documents began in the late-eighteenth century but the creation of specialist collections that focussed on women did not occur until the late 1890s, earning more popularity as the twentieth century dawned and the women's suffrage movement gained momentum. More than a century on from first-wave feminism, individual and institutional perseverance and modern technological advances have allowed these disparate, initial materials to evolve into a vast, ever-increasing global network of actual and digital resources. These include those that can be found at, for example: the Women's Library, London; the Chawton House Library; The Glasgow Women's Library; the Netherlandish Atria Online Library; the Schomburg Digital Collection in New York; the Global Feminisms Project and the India Women's History Museum archive in Jaipur.

Yet, despite the impressive number of diverse collections that can be accessed both in person and online, many women's voices remain hidden within larger, more generic collections or are muted amongst the abundance of materials that primarily

articulate the views of men.

Other important documents and materials remain in the possession of individuals who are unaware of their importance as primary sources. Oral histories, household and personal accounts, crafted objects, correspondence, diaries and various personal anthologies can all be employed to illustrate the complexity of women's lives, reveal accurate power dynamics between men and women of the past and allow us to discover the personal, intimate and often unguarded thoughts of women. The articles that follow, by Janis Lomas, who relied on a number of unarchived sources to research the history of war widows, and Beverly Ronalds, who used a recipe book to explore the life of one of her ancestors, provide excellent examples of the significance of such sources for women's history.

While it will always remain a difficult task to encourage the passage of primary source materials from private hands into those of a researcher or an archivist, there has however, been a move toward rectifying other problems that researchers experience. For instance, the lack of formal inventories, search engines and scholarly networks that openly share archived sources (critical to the study of women's and feminist histories) are matters that have previously been identified and are currently being addressed. By the 1980s, the historian Gerda Lerner had already remarked on the advances made with regard to the accessibility of materials, citing the *Women's History Sources Survey*. Furthermore, during the same decade, a number of publications that discussed the state of the discipline of women's history were released, one of those number being *Current Issues in Women's History*, edited by Arina Anherman, Geerte Binnema, Annemeike Keunen, Velfie Poels and Jacqueline Zirkzee. In the 1990s, June Purvis (a

specialist in women's and gender histories) provided further insight into the 'methodological problems encountered when researching women's past[s]'. Moving onto the twenty-first century, the National Archives of the USA created a *Pathfinder for Women's History Research* while in the UK. The Women's History Network, Historic England, English Heritage and The National Archives all either produced source inventories or subscribed to the digitisation of materials centred on making research into women's history less problematic. Furthermore, the present pandemic appears to have heralded an additional surge in the digitisation of records, because it is not yet clear when in-person visits to archives can safely recommence. For example, The National Archives have made a huge number of digitised documents available at no charge; Oxford University have introduced a new digital archive entitled, *Education and Activism: Women at Oxford*; and the Renaissance Society of

America premiered their *Humanities Commons*, a member-curated digital resource that includes the Project Vox library (an extensive collection of Early Modern women's writings).

However, despite recent progress, the deft techniques of researchers, innovative methodological approaches and a great deal of source-sleuthing are still required to encourage the amplification of women's historical intonations. The articles that follow in this section on 'sources and archives' reflect some of these inventive approaches to identifying sources for writing women's history. Simultaneously, with Liberty Martin's view into the Black Cultural Archives and Barbara Vessey's discussion of the Bishopgate Institute, we are seeking to showcase the glorious diversity of materials contained in some of the UK's smaller archives. But this is the tip of iceberg as a multitude of other archives and source materials lie waiting to be explored by those interested in women's history.

Sources for Writing the History of War Widows

Janis Lomas

When I was at University in the late 1980s and just beginning to look for a topic to work on for my PhD, I was told by a male lecturer in history that, 'there's no such thing as women's history, all history was made by men'. He should have perhaps known better. In past centuries, the history of women had largely been confined to the history of royal women, aristocrats and of scandalous women who broke the law or transgressed the norms of society, with the lives of millions of 'ordinary' women remaining largely invisible and unrecorded. However, the suffrage campaigns of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries gave a new impetus to studying the history of such women and led to ground breaking texts, notably Alice Clarke's, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*¹ (published in 1919) and a decade later, Ivy Pinchbeck's book on *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution*.²

I was not put off by the comment of the misguided male lecturer coming to the end of his career. Instead, I looked to the work of historians influenced by second-wave feminism and the women's movement, such as Louise Tilly and Joan Scott, Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield and Sheila Rowbotham.³ Accordingly, I decided to research Britain's war widows during the twentieth century and the government policies that dominated their experiences after widowhood. Government sources were not easily available, and it was largely a matter of archival searches, consulting *Hansard* and the occasional *War Pensions Gazette* when I could find copies. But luckily, the Ministry of Pensions did produce an Annual Report every year from the end of the First World War, which gave statistics about the numbers of war widows' pensions being paid and the amounts of individual pensions depending on the rank of the serviceman at the time of his death. Overall however, I was struck by the paucity of written evidence about the lives of the war widows themselves as there was little trace of them.

Like many other historians in the late twentieth-century, I reached the conclusion that I would need to use more personal and inter-disciplinarian sources to uncover these women's lives and understand their experiences. These included biographies, poems, diaries, songs, wills, newspaper stories and oral testimonies passed down in families. The sources that I found then and have collected since, provided

useful insights into the lives of widows when I came to co-write *Widows: Poverty, Politics and Power* years later.⁴ For this book, I was able, for example, to use Katherine Graham's Pulitzer Prize winning *Personal History*.⁵ This autobiography provided a starting point, as it investigated how the death of her husband catapulted one woman out of her life as a stay-at-home wife, mother and socialite and into the cut-throat world of the newspaper business, which led her to become one of the most successful and powerful women in America in the 1970s-1980s.

In the very early stages of my PhD research, I had the huge advantage of discovering that a War Widows' Association (WWA) had been formed in the 1970s and was still going strong. In 1991, I contacted the association and asked if they would put out an appeal in their newsletter for any war widows who were prepared to fill in a questionnaire and be willing to be interviewed at a later date. I thought that this was the only way I would be able to access the lived experience of the majority of these women. I eventually received 62 replies to the very basic, rather naive questionnaire I compiled. I also met one of the founders of the organisation, Iris Strange, who had been the group's secretary for most of its existence. As she was happy to help me, I went to her home in High Wycombe and taped a long interview with her. She told me how difficult life had been for her and other war widows after the Second World War. Iris had faced a constant struggle to retain the house that she and her husband Robert (known as Bob) had purchased shortly before the war. For Iris, the house was her link with Bob and she was determined to keep it at all costs. She had trained as a secretary before the Second World War. After the conflict, she found a low-paid clerical job in a company that manufactured pet food and ran her own secretarial agency, teaching typing and shorthand to try to make ends meet. She struggled to combine bringing up her son and working very long hours, especially as she had no family nearby to help. Her son joined the Fleet Air Arm after leaving school and was tragically killed, at age twenty-three, in a motor cycle accident while serving abroad.

Over the following months I conducted interviews with several other Second World War widows, who told similar stories of the poverty that they too had experienced. Many

relied on help from family, as work for women in the post-war years was frequently in poorly-paid menial jobs. One war widow's daughter recalled how her mother had run a busy sub-post office during the war but, after the servicemen returned home, her job was given to a man. Subsequently, the only work she could get for years was washing in the North Staffordshire Hospital's laundry.⁶ Oral evidence such as this is invaluable for a budding historian exploring, what was at that time, an un-researched group of women. The use of oral history had only gradually developed in the USA and in the UK from the mid-twentieth century onwards. The pioneer in this country is usually recognised as being George Ewart Evans, who had travelled around interviewing elderly inhabitants of Suffolk villages about their lives and work. He predominantly questioned men and published his first book, called *Ask the Fellows Who Cut the Hay*, in 1956.⁷ He followed this with a further ten collections of oral histories and his work is continued in the George Ewart Evans Centre in the University of South Wales. In 1975, Paul Thompson's project on the Edwardians broke new ground by interviewing 500 people from all walks of life born between 1872 and 1906.⁸

A few pioneering women had also already used oral testimonies and interviews for research. For example, Maud Pember Reeves collected spoken statements in the years before the First World War, published in her book *Round About a Pound a Week*.⁹ In 1915, Margaret Llewelyn Davies collected working-class women's experiences of childbirth and child rearing in *Maternity: Letters from Working Women* and later published *Life As We Have Known It: The Voices of Working-Class Women in 1931*.¹⁰ Although the use of Oral History has been contentious and some historians question the reliability of evidence gathered in this way, it is often the only source available for historians exploring women's personal, emotional or domestic lives and the mundane activities of women's everyday experiences. Its use was the foundation of many exciting and ground breaking women's history books in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, including Mary Chamberlain's *Fenwomen*, the first book published by Virago Press.¹¹ Elizabeth Roberts was equally a pioneer of oral history with her books such as *A Woman's Place*, *Women and Families* and *Women's Work*.¹² Likewise, other historians in collaboration such as Jill Liddington and Jill Norris in *One Hand Tied Behind Us* and Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield in *Out of the Cage*, interwove oral history with other sources to produce ground-breaking works of women's history.¹³ Like all sources, oral history has its limitations and questions about the subjectivity and selectivity of oral testimonies has led to accusations of bias. Whilst for others, the ways in which people narrativised their lives, those cultural and individual memories became areas of study in their own right during the late 1990s. This led to publications such as Penny Summerfield's *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* and Lucy Noakes' *War and the British: Gender and National Identity*.¹⁴

So, what did I discover from my experience of utilising letters and oral history interviews in the 1990s? Firstly, interviews are time consuming. To arrange visits, find the location and to set up (at that time) a tape recorder and cassette and then to transcribe the resultant tapes, involved a massive amount of time and effort. As I gathered the testimonies of war widows, my concerns were often shaped by practical concerns. Given the time-consuming nature of gathering, recording,

transcribing and publishing oral testimonies, how would I be able to interview a sufficient number of respondents? This led to my questioning whether my responses were atypical, especially as often the most committed and vocal individuals respond to an invitation to tell their stories. I also had to battle with thorny ethical considerations myself. The design of my study involved obtaining the subjects' informed consent to participate, securing confidentiality and a consideration of the possible consequences concerning the interviewee and perhaps their wider family. Oral historians nowadays have the benefit of the material and sources available on the internet, in addition to the guidance, best practice and training sessions available from the Oral History Society website.¹⁵ The storage of recordings and transcriptions was also much more challenging without the benefits of new technologies.

Nevertheless, the testimonies that I obtained were unique records of war widows' experiences; they often said that it was the first time they had spoken about this subject to anyone outside of their immediate family. I will never forget one widow's story of how, when her husband was sent home from World War Two severely injured, he was so proud that he refused to have his bed downstairs in the living room. So, every night she carried him up the stairs on her back until his early death twenty years later. Another woman recalled how she received the letter telling her of her husband's death as she emerged from the wreck of her house, which had sustained an indirect hit during a bombing raid. Her husband had been killed two weeks earlier in Normandy. Her mother-in-law, father-in-law and young brother-in-law were all killed in the air raid that damaged her house and the shock caused her to have a miscarriage. Four months later, her brother was also killed and a short time following, his wife and their baby died in childbirth. She had lost almost all of the people she loved and to whom she was closest. She added, 'it was said years later that no one could reach me. I was like a sightless, stricken animal screaming in soundless pain'. She ended with the French word *finis* (meaning 'the end') and signifying that it was the end of the life she had known. She was given £20 and housed in a 'rest centre' as she had no home and never had any more children.¹⁶

Although the letters and interviews produced some unique insights, there were problems associated with the interview process. In the case of war widows, I was asking them to recall traumatic events in their lives that had taken place over fifty years before. The vagaries of memory meant that any details they recalled, such as the exact amount of pension and financial help they received, had to be checked and were often found to be incorrect. Hindsight also had to be considered and there was a particular reason that this proved to be a problem. From the 1970s onwards, war widows had become more visible as the deaths of soldiers, firstly in the Northern Ireland Troubles then in the Falklands War, often dominated the news media. These deaths combined with the increased visibility of women, because of the women's movement and the formation of the War Widows Association, meant that often something that elderly war widows had seen in newspapers, on television or on the radio, impinged on their personal recollections of their stories.

My intention was to visit and conduct oral history interviews with a large number of the war widows who had responded to my questionnaire and base my PhD thesis on these interviews. However, events overtook me. Iris Strange

died fairly suddenly. I had met her a few times, corresponded with her and I attended her funeral. Although she could be extremely prickly, I had become very fond of her. I always thought she just put up with me and my sometimes-stupid questions and was therefore amazed to discover that when she was dying, she had left instructions with her niece that all her papers were to come to me. Once again, I drove down to High Wickham, this time, not knowing what she had wanted me to have. It was then that I discovered the volume of papers. The entire loft of her three-bedroom house was completely filled with dozens of boxes. It took me a year to go through them and discard all the thousands of subscription receipts and acknowledgements collected over the first twenty years of the Association's existence. The sheer volume of letters was overwhelming. At the end of the sifting process I was left with 8,000 documents, around 5,000 of which were letters from war widows.

Letters however, almost always gave an incomplete story. I often longed to know more, but many of the letters were twenty years old when I received them and were recalling husbands' deaths in the decades previous to the dates that the letters were written to Iris. These correspondences, which finally found their way into my possession, were also often dominated by campaigns and events that took place years after women had been widowed. For example, the WWA had begun campaigning for higher pensions after discovering that the widows of servicemen killed in later wars were given a pension twice that of the widows of the two World Wars. Nevertheless, the stories revealed in these letters were frequently harrowing and also often fragmentary. It was frustrating to have no way of knowing what happened next. Did these women remarry? Did they have children? What occupation did they find after widowhood?

Nevertheless, I was able to combine the oral testimonies and the Iris Strange letters with evidence from official reports from government departments, copies of the War Pensions Gazette, Hansard, newspaper cuttings, radio interviews (which Iris Strange had taped) and documents held at The National Archives, to try to produce a more nuanced view of how war widows were treated during and after both World Wars. After completing my PhD and following a consultation with Iris's niece and her son, I decided to donate the collection of letters to the university where I had studied. Accordingly, they are now securely housed at Staffordshire University and form the *War Widows' Archive: The Iris Strange Collection*.

In August 2018, Middleport Pottery was host to a display of 11,000 ceramic poppies. These poppies had originally formed part of the installation of 888,246, one for each British soldier killed in World War One, which had begun in the Tower of London four years earlier. The Middleport installation, called *The Weeping Window*, drew 65,000 visitors. To coincide with this event, I assisted Staffordshire University in the staging of an exhibition of some of the most memorable letters from the War Widows' Archive and the public were encouraged to view the exhibition as part of The Poppy Trail. In addition, in 2018 the War Widows' Association also decided to donate all of their archived material to the university and that has now joined the collection. The archive has gradually become more widely known and scholars and researchers from the UK and many other parts of the world, including America and Australia, have

used the archive in their work.¹⁷

Notes

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15. www.ohs.org.uk
16. e.g. Questionnaire reply, Janis Lomas private collection, May 1992.
17. The archive is only available to scholars by appointment after a signed undertaking that the letters are cited anonymously. Further details from jan.lomas@gmail.com. For an appointment to visit please contact Alison Pope at A.J.Pope@staffs.ac.uk.

An Ancestor's Life seen through her Recipe Book

Beverley F. Ronalds

I was fortunate to discover that a recipe book in the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto was created by my great-great-great-grandaunt. The leather-bound manuscript was gifted to the library by the Harris family in 1956 and 'Lucy Harris, Eldon House, London, Canada' is written on the inside cover. It was believed by the family and assumed by the library to be largely the work of Lucy (1845–1901), who lived in Ontario and is known to history through *The Eldon House Diaries*.¹ The recipe book has been digitised and featured in a 2018 exhibition entitled 'Mixed Messages: Making and Shaping Culinary Culture in Canada'.² I was alerted to the existence of the manuscript at that time, by Lucy's great-grandchildren Anthony and Betsy Little.³

The value of recipe collections, in illuminating the lives of their writers and users, has been explored by researchers such as Michelle DiMeo and Sara Pennell.⁴ Analysing the content of this particular recipe book shows it to have been produced in England by Lucy's (and my) forebear, Elizabeth Ronalds née Clarke (1758–1823). With the aid of widely-dispersed archived resources and through the study of key characteristics of the book, significant details of Elizabeth's day-to-day activities have been revealed. Furthermore, when, where, how and why she created and used it have also been clarified. The recipe book contains ninety-nine recipes over eighty-eight pages (only the first twenty of which are numbered). There is no title page or index and there is only a little sorting by recipe type. For nearly half of the recipes a contributor is acknowledged, for example, 'Mrs Johnson'; however, no dates or other suggestions of ownership are given. The manuscript is written in three main hands, each being quite distinctive in style. The first compiler penned most of the first third of the book and also made a few entries near the end. A second compiler completed the book

and a third also made some entries in the middle section.

A variety of additional materials have been of assistance in unravelling the story behind the primary manuscript. One key source is the extensive collection of correspondence and journals of the Harris family, located at Western Archives, Western University, in London, Ontario. This fund has enabled the three compilers to be positively identified by their handwriting. Accordingly, the book appears to have been instigated by Lucy's great-grandmother, Elizabeth Ronalds, who was later aided by her two daughters, Betsey Ronalds (1788–1854) and Mary Ronalds (1787–1862).⁵ The initially immature, but gradually improving penmanship (which began one third of the way into the book) would have represented Mary's and Betsey's early opportunities to participate.

Other conventional resources, used by family historians, enabled an initial sketch of Elizabeth Ronalds née Clarke (Fig. 1) to be made. Elizabeth came from a middle-class family involved in the silk trade and she was born to Francis Clarke and Mary née Taylor on 28 February 1758. Francis's business was in the City of London, England, where he bought raw silk and sold its products. His relatives managed the manufacture of silk ribbons in the city of Coventry, where the family had been weavers and silkmens for a number of generations.⁶ On 9 September 1784, Elizabeth married her cousin, Hugh Ronalds, who ran a large garden nursery which had been established by his father in the town of Brentford.⁷ Hugh's mother, Mary née Clarke, had grown up in Coventry and returned there from Brentford after her husband died. The close ongoing interaction of the branches of the family in London, Coventry and Brentford is further illustrated in correspondence held by the Coventry History Centre and in their wills, commercial papers, and other materials.⁸

Elizabeth and Hugh lived in the Elizabethan terraced house (Fig. 2) in which Hugh had been born. The property was situated on the Brentford High Street, next to the vicarage of St Lawrence's church. They had ten children, most of whom did not marry and also lived their lives in the family home. All were active in the local Society of Protestant Dissenters, which followed the Unitarian faith (even though it was not officially legal until 1813).⁹ The family attended worship twice each Sunday and Hugh served as trustee and treasurer. The chapel, that his father had helped build, is still on Boston Manor Road.

Elizabeth's younger daughter Betsey (Fig. 3), who largely took over the compilation of the recipe book, was a neater, more legible writer than her sister Mary. The former was also a horticultural illustrator. She painted watercolours of the fruit and flowers grown at the nursery to encourage sales and promote its reputation. Later, she illustrated her father's book *Pyrus Malus Brentfordiensis: or, a Concise Description of Selected Apples* (1831), which delineated many of the 300 types of apples they cultivated.¹⁰ Fruit had long-been a speciality of the nursery.¹¹ Mary (Fig. 4) increasingly managed the other



Fig. 1: Miniature of Elizabeth Ronalds née Clarke (c. 1810).

Source: Eldon House museum, London, Ontario.

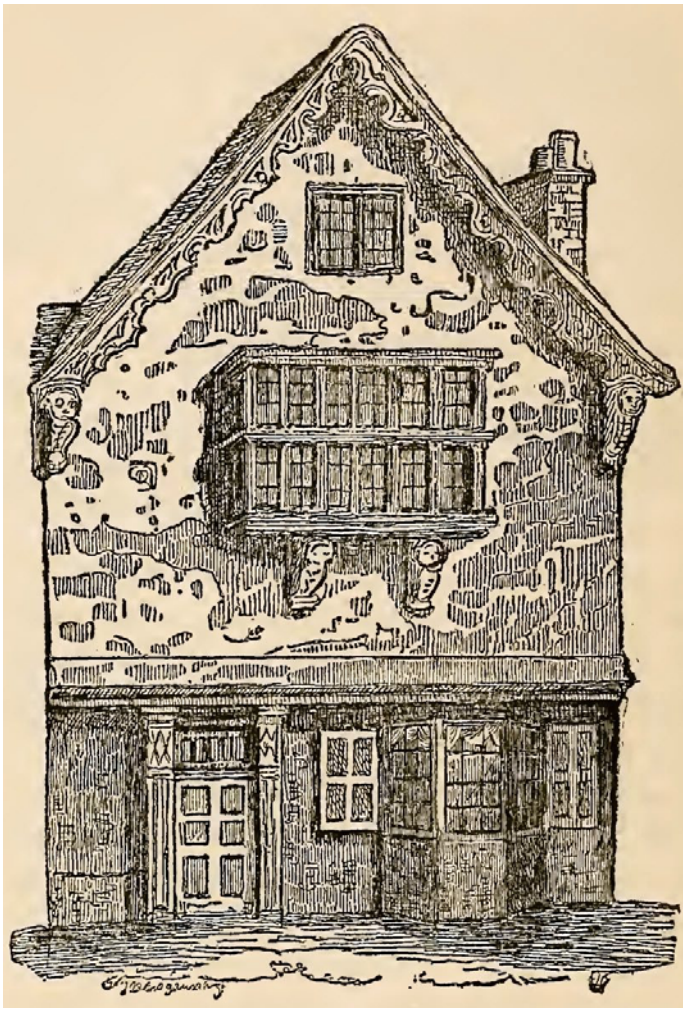


Fig.2: Ronalds family home in Brentford in the period 1756–1880.

domestic duties when Elizabeth became older, with family letters at Western Archives showing that domesticity was a role both sisters enjoyed.¹² Their correspondence and later census returns indicate that the family was assisted by one or more household servants. There were also numerous workmen employed on the nursery site.

Returning to the recipe book, it is evident that the formulas address a range of purposes, although with clear priorities in favour of fruit and health. A quarter of the entries are for alcoholic beverages, many being of a scale to use and preserve the large quantities of fruit grown at the nursery. For example, the currant rum formula (on page 29) starts with two hundred weight of sugar (102 kilograms) to make 63 gallons (286 litres) of rum. The family was therefore accustomed to sweet tastes: when Betsey travelled to the continent for the first time, she described French wine as 'sour nasty stuff'.¹³ Another quarter of the entries are medicinal, and these remedies include the first eight recipes in the book. A further prescription for worms is found on page 82. The recipe recommends a mixture of tin filings, jam and castor oil to be taken twice a day. The remaining recipes relate to diverse domestic concerns. Around ten percent are household products. These include an 'infallible cure for Buggs' (containing mercury) with which the bedstead is to be washed 'with a feather'. The reader is also reminded, 'Note – tis rank Poison'.¹⁴ Another tenth of the entries concern preserving vegetables (particularly through pickling) and there are a handful on keeping meat, such as curing ham and

beef. Several entries address personal appearance, including one for pomatum (hair gel) made with hog's lard.¹⁵ Relatively few of the recipes are for dishes to be served at the table. Accordingly, with the care of her children being imperative for Elizabeth, and the utilisation of ripe fruit a distinctive task, it is apparent that she made the book for her own practical use. Unlike numerous older, extant recipe books, it was not created to be a record passed on through the generations.¹⁶

Having developed this broad picture of Elizabeth and her book, it is possible to identify almost all of the contributors (mostly women) of the recipes. A number of them appear in the records of the Society of Protestant Dissenters of Brentford held in the London Metropolitan Archives.¹⁷ The suggested relationships are confirmed in evidence such as intermarriage, wills, property conveyances, letters and diaries, and collaborative charity activities. The husbands, sons and fathers of these women ran commercially successful businesses including a timber yard, a soap factory and a starch mill.¹⁸ Also included were a wholesale cheesemonger, a merchant and a physician.¹⁹ The chapel's minister and his wife feature in the recipe book as well.

In addition to these Brentford residents, family contributors from further afield are also named in the book, with various later recipes being donated by recent additions to the family. For instance, Elizabeth's daughter-in-law and the young wife of one of her nephews contributed, whilst her son provided several health remedies after he graduated in medicine. It is personal details of the contributors, such as these, that enable the age of the recipe book and its development to be ascertained. Date limits are provided by marriage and death, as well as arrivals and departures to and from Brentford. The story of 'Mrs Rowe' serves as an illustration. Appearing on pages 36 and 66 of the book, particulars of her life provide time boundaries for this segment of the book. Anna Rowe (née Berry) had already married Laurence Rowe when they moved to Brentford in 1798 in order to establish



Fig.3: Elizabeth's younger daughter Betsey Ronalds, painted by Charles D. Langley (1842).

Source: Eldon House museum, Tara Wittmann photography.



Fig.4: Elizabeth's elder daughter Mary Ronalds, painted by Charles D. Langley (1842).

Source: Eldon House museum, Tara Wittmann photography.

their large soap works. Their home on Soaphouse Lane still survives.²⁰ Laurence became a trustee at the Unitarian chapel and the family interacted closely with the Ronalds. Anna was buried at the chapel on 27 March 1816. Accordingly, there was a window of only eighteen years in which Anna's contributions could have passed from her to the Ronalds women. Some months after Anna's death, Betsey and her aunt, Sarah Clarke, accompanied the deceased woman's family on a trip to France, Belgium and Switzerland to help them recover from their loss.

The commencement of the book can also be assumed from an early entry for treating costiveness (constipation) and wind in infants 'from Dr Underwood'. Michael Underwood wrote a popular book on children's health in 1784, which rapidly went through numerous editions. In the recipe book, Elizabeth quoted verbatim the wording of the version published in 1795.²¹ At this time she had children aged ten, eight, seven, five, four, three, and one. Subsequent limiting dates show that compilation of the book progressed steadily through a twenty-five-year period, *circa* 1795–1820. Thus, it was essentially full just a few years before Elizabeth died on 13 January 1823.

The recipe book continued to be consulted by subsequent generations. After Elizabeth's death, her daughters Mary and Betsey kept house for their widowed father and unmarried brothers for the rest of their lives. Later, the name John Ronalds was written on the initial page of the book; John was one of Elizabeth's grandsons and spent his last years in Brentford. He was outlived, however, by Elizabeth's youngest son, Robert, and when he died in 1880, the family's possessions were shipped to her only great-grandchild, Lucy, in Canada. Lucy made use of many of the items sent and carefully preserved others, as did her children and grandchildren.²² It

was probably one of these later users who loosely inserted a final recipe for 'Acidulated Gargle' at the end of the book.

With the context of the recipe book now understood, new details about the daily life of Elizabeth and her associates can be gleaned from it. A first observation is that several of Elizabeth's roles are reflected in the book. Not only did she have the hands-on management of a large household, but she participated in the efficient operation of the nursery business, not least in maximising the benefits of its fruit production. It seems that she continually sought out and experimented with new beverage recipes, the results of which would have been enjoyed across her community. Another major scrutiny was, very naturally, the health and wellbeing of her family and her medicinal care would likely have extended to the servants and workmen. A further use of the book was in training her daughters in handwriting, simple composition, writing layout, as well as housekeeping.

Looking beyond the large, busy home, the recipe book indicates that Elizabeth's existence was quite an insular one, albeit amongst extended family and a close and homogeneous circle of women in Brentford. Betsey's and Mary's correspondence hints at outcomes of the cloistered upbringing they experienced. This is illustrated by their rather timid and conservative outlook and their ethos of working hard and living economically.²³ A tight circle was almost inevitable when group members shared a similar social class and a religion that was unlawful. Indeed, the women's interactions would have helped in maintaining unity across the commercial sector of the town. By Elizabeth acknowledging her circle's contributions, the recipe book maps and (in a sense) represents this close-knit community of Brentford women. Furthermore, it was probably a tool of the community, being consulted within the circle, while its informal layout confirms that it was not intended for wider distribution. Overall, the interpretation of the recipe book sheds new light on life for Nonconformist women in England during the Regency period and illuminates commercial interrelationships in Brentford, while helping to appreciate Elizabeth, an important matriarch of the Ronalds family. More broadly, the book also adds to the body of knowledge concerning this genre of literature.

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8. See the sequence of letters between London, Brentford and Coventry from John Clarke and his daughter Sarah to her husband John Carter, Coventry History Centre (CHS), PA14/4/1–26 and PA14/4/36–43, 17 Nov 1801 to 5 Dec 1802.

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The Women Who Built Black Britain: A Look into the Black Cultural Archives

Liberty Martin

We don't remember enough Black British history, even the recent events. The twentieth century (particularly the seventies and eighties) was filled to the brim with Black uprisings, protests, battles and radical politics that spilled onto neighbourhood streets, but we do not remember the Black Britons who fought for their space and civil rights on this small island. And when we do not remember history, we certainly forget the women who made history. This is where we find Black British women who were pioneers: lost in the cracks of our national memory despite their important contributions.

Nevertheless, institutions like the Black Cultural Archives (BCA), the only national heritage centre dedicated to preserving the histories of African and Caribbean people in Britain, hold an incredible reserve of resources that are open for public access.¹ To put it simply, the BCA is the home of Black British History. Accordingly, our mission is to collect, preserve and celebrate the histories of people of African and Caribbean descent in the UK. We also aim to inspire and give strength to individuals, communities and society. At our headquarters on 1 Windrush Square in Brixton, London, we run a series of gallery exhibitions, educational programmes and public engagement events. We provide free access to our unique set of archives, museum objects and the reference library.

Since 1981, the BCA has embarked on a journey to collect and preserve materials that redress the historical balance and representation of people of African and Caribbean descent in Britain. Our archive collection is now one of the most comprehensive collections that documents the history

and cultural heritage of Black Britain. So, in an effort to shed light on the histories hidden in plain sight, I have searched through the archives and pieced together a mosaic of a few women who helped to build Black Britain: three radical activists who dedicated their lives to the international struggle against racism and to the welfare of their local communities. These women are Claudia Jones, Olive Morris and Stella Dadzie; each one of them has made a profound impact on the Britain of today.

In 1955, Claudia Jones had just been deported from the United States where the anti-Communist McCarthy era was rife. Jones had recently been incarcerated in a federal prison for her active membership in the Communist Party. Born Claudia Cumberbatch in Trinidad in 1915, Jones moved to the US as a nine-year-old and became deeply involved with Communism and other liberation movements as an adult. Her tireless work revolved around anti-racism, anti-imperialism, feminism and socialism. She was also active as a writer, editor and journalist, contributing to Communist newspapers such as *The Weekly Review* and *The Daily World*.

During the McCarthy era, the stakes involved in advocating for racial equality and socialism in the US were high. Jones was a heavily surveyed individual (there are currently over 800 pages of publicly accessible files about her in the FBI digital vault) and she had also been previously incarcerated, for six months, in 1948.² Under these circumstances, Jones changed her surname from Cumberbatch to Jones in order to protect her identity. After her second imprisonment in

1955, Jones faced deportation, after having been denied US citizenship and refused entry to her homeland of Trinidad by the colonial governor Hubert Rance. Consequently, she found herself in a different hub of the Caribbean diaspora: London.

Jones' incarcerations and deportation did not deter her from political activity. Far from it. Instead, she joined the Communist Party of Great Britain and refocused her work on the communities of Caribbean and African descent in the UK and across the world. In 1957, just over two years after her arrival in London, she established Britain's first Black newspaper, the *West Indian Gazette*. The paper featured esteemed Caribbean writers such as George Lamming and Jan Carew. Jones was determined that the *Gazette* would become a 'major effort designed to stimulate political and social thinking'.³ The publication soon also focused on issues and debates relating to African and Asian communities, drawing on political movements such as pan-Africanism, independence struggles, anti-apartheid, and anti-imperialism, as well as more light-hearted subjects such as sports and culture. Jones' ambitious, community-driven journalism helped to cultivate a new Black British identity in the wake of mass migration and racial tension.

The *Gazette* was expectedly staffed by Black Britons, one of whom was a keen young freelance photographer, a boy who, like Jones, was born in the Caribbean and found his way to the metropole because of his parents' migration. His name was Lenford Garrison, commonly known as Len. He would later go on to co-found the BCA in 1981. Garrison and others were also inspired to form the African People's Historical Monument Foundation (APHMF), following a visit from Queen Mother Moore, a Black woman activist travelling from the States, who called for Black Britons to create their own monument when she visited the UK that year. The BCA began as the foundation's archival project and APHMF is still the BCA's official charity name.

Coming full circle, you can now view issues of the *West Indian Gazette* yourself at the BCA and read some of Jones' work in the collection of Len Garrison's papers. However, Jones' impact on Black (British) history doesn't stop there. During the 1950s, racial tensions across the nation were high because of the influx of Caribbean migrants who are otherwise known as the Windrush generation. These Black British citizens (who travelled from one part of the Empire to another looking for work) were greeted by police brutality, unacceptable housing standards and hostile white neighbours who viewed them as competition for jobs. As a result, civil unrest consumed the West London district of Notting Hill in 1958. White "Teddy Boys" began to violently attack Black families and their homes and eventually a week-long riot broke out (between 29 August and 5 September) with over 400 people participating.

Jones was deeply disturbed by the violence and decided to take action. A believer that the arts are powerful forces for good, she set out to organise a community event to uplift Black British people through the celebration of West Indian cultures. Originally dubbed by locals as 'Claudia's Caribbean Carnival', the inaugural celebration debuted in St. Pancras Hall in 1959 and was broadcast by the BBC. And that hall party filled with dancers, singers and steel pan drums was the original Notting Hill carnival, a celebration that developed, in the years that followed, to become the UK's biggest street party.

Unfortunately, Jones did not live to see Notting Hill carnival take to the streets of London in 1966 as she had died

two years previously. Her life was cut short by tuberculosis at the age of 49 years old. Having lived in poverty in Harlem as a youngster, Jones had experienced bouts of the illness her entire life. She is buried in Highgate Cemetery on the left of Karl Marx, a flat headstone marking her grave. Nevertheless, Jones' legacy lives on every August Bank Holiday weekend, in the form of a three-day celebratory event. Her final resting place (in close proximity to a socialist revolutionary and thousands of miles from her birthplace, like many others of the Windrush generation) symbolises and foreshadows how Black British women like Olive Morris, would push the boundaries of radical left politics and build upon Jones' life's work.

On 15 November 1969, Olive Morris sat in King's College Hospital, her face and body swollen from an incident of police brutality. Earlier that day, a Nigerian diplomat named Clement Gomwalk was outside of Desmond's Hip City (the first Black record shop in Brixton) when he was accused of stealing a car by the police. The car was in fact his, but the police refused to believe that he was a diplomat and proceeded to arrest him under the 'sus' law: a clause in the Vagrancy Act of 1824 that allowed the police to arrest anybody they deemed as 'suspicious'. The police began to beat Gomwalk and a scuffle ensued, stirring up commotion on the street. Morris happened to be passing by with some friends (as this group intended to visit Desmond's Hip City) and they all became swallowed up in the turmoil. The police beat Morris, arrested her and also threatened to rape Morris whilst she was in their custody. Morris returned home to her mother with criminal charges, a fine of £10, a suspended sentence and a face so badly beaten that she was almost unrecognizable. She was 17 years old.

The England that Claudia Jones had left behind had become more fraught with racial tension and in 1968, the year prior to Morris's assault, Enoch Powell delivered his infamously racist 'Rivers of Blood' speech. Morris's traumatic experience therefore, was not uncommon: the police routinely used the sus law to harass Black people; the British education system often failed Black pupils, neglecting to teach their history and not pushing them to their full potential and Black Britons were disproportionately affected by unemployment and poor housing. These social injustices and her own personal experience with the police, propelled the teenage Morris into a network of trailblazing activists and organisations.⁴

Morris started her radical political journey by joining the youth division of the British Black Panthers (BBP), who were based in Brixton. She reconnected with Beverly Bryan (who she had gone to secondary school with) and encouraged Bryan to also join the BBP. Like Bryan, Morris was born in Jamaica and moved to London with her parents as a young girl. The pair soon became frustrated with the patriarchy within Black Power groups and, like African American women across the pond, they felt that these male-dominated organizations did not address their unique needs as Black women and disregarded their skillset and leadership. Feminist groups, on the other hand, were led by white women who did not acknowledge racism. So, Morris and Bryan left the BBP and went on to champion the Black Women's Movement in the UK with other like-minded women.

In 1973, Morris founded the Brixton Black Women's Group, a collective that fought for social issues that affected all of the Black community. These matters included educational reform and concerns that were specific to Black women, for example, doctors prescribing the contraceptive injection

Depo-Provera to Black women in order to test the drug. Through her work, Morris met Stella Dadzie, a Black female student who organized with the African Students Union (ASU). Together, in 1978, they co-founded the Organisation of Women of Africa and African Descent (later changed to Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent). Better known as OWAAD, the organization was a ground-breaking umbrella group that connected Black feminist groups across the country. The Black Women's Movement was now in full swing. Between 1973 and 1979, North West London's 'Southall Black Sisters', Manchester's 'Black Women's Co-operative' and the 'Black Women's Mutual Aid Group' emerged. OWAAD also began to publish their biweekly newsletter, *FOWAAD!* and the Brixton Black Women's Group opened the Abeng Centre on Gresham Road, the first centre for Black women in London. This hub became the venue for OWAAD's inaugural annual national conference in 1979 and held a gathering of 300 Black and Asian women.⁵

Morris' activism continued to grow, intertwining with other causes. Armed with a degree in economics and social sciences from Manchester University, she began to work in the juvenile department of the Brixton Community Law Centre. There, alongside OWAAD, she joined the campaign to scrap sus laws for good. Morris was also central to the squatters' rights movement in Brixton, which highlighted the futility of homelessness and housing inequality at a time when so many habitable buildings lay empty. She took up residence at 121 Railton Road, London with Liz Obi (a friend who often joined Morris to squat) and together, they transformed the house into a Black bookshop called Sabaar. The bookshop also served as a venue for self-care workshops and BBP meetings, as well as a place to share literary knowledge. The formerly derelict, abandoned building became a nexus of education, camaraderie and radical empathy in the heart of Brixton.

Like Claudia Jones, Morris died before her time, experiencing an even shorter life than her predecessor. In 1979, she passed away from non-Hodgkin's lymphoma at the age of 27. The Black Women's Movement grieved deeply for her. In the ten years between the attack that radicalized her and her unexpected death, Morris had left an 'indelible, if anonymous mark' on the Black British community.⁶ You can find physical signs of this mark if you know where to look: her image on the Brixton pound (a local currency to help stimulate Brixton's economy) or her name on a children's playground in Myatt's Fields and Lambeth council's offices. But most importantly, Morris's mark is evident in the way that Black British women commune together, politically organise and fight for their own wellbeing and the welfare of those around them.

Several of the activists of the Black Women's Movement counted Morris as a personal friend. Among those who profoundly mourned her was Stella Dadzie, co-founder of OWAAD. Dadzie travelled to the United States in an attempt to escape from the sorrow. There she visited different Black women's groups across the country, along with a British friend who lived in the US. She returned to the UK with a better understanding of her identity as a Black British woman and a renewed sense of purpose. Dadzie and Morris were both born in 1952, although Dadzie was born to a Ghanaian diplomat father and a white English mother in London. Dadzie came of age in the seventies, the era of protests and Black Power. She became radicalised after studying for a year abroad in Germany, as part of her university course. As a language student with a

newfound Marxist ideology and rage against global racism, she became involved with Black socialist journals such as *The Black Liberator* and *African Red Family*. However, Dadzie soon became frustrated with the opaque academic language of those publications. Consequently, she left the journals to focus on grassroots work that was more accessible to the communities she grew up with and lived in, thereby becoming part of organizations such as the ASU and OWAAD while she worked as a teacher and developed her Black feminist politics.

OWAAD had a relatively short lifespan, despite its significant impact on the Black Women's Movement. Similar to Claudia Jones' *West Indian Gazette*, OWAAD focused on the African diaspora inside and outside of the UK and continued to protest against women's rights violations, such as virginity testing of Asian women at airports. The organization had three more annual conventions before folding in 1983, due to disagreements on how to move forward. Nonetheless, by then, Dadzie was already involved in another project that would become a cornerstone in Black British feminism.⁷

In 1980, the feminist publisher Virago commissioned Stella Dadzie to write a book about the experiences of Black British women. Originally, OWAAD was going to complete the project but, in the end, Beverly Bryan and Suzanne Scafe teamed up with Dadzie as co-authors. The three women set out to record oral histories, spanning forty years and focussing on the everyday lives of African and Caribbean women in the UK. The study would be called *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain*. This endeavour was revolutionary, because no one had ever dedicated a body of work to voicing Black British women's circumstances. Previously, writings and documentaries about Black women had generally focused on African Americans. Although Black women in the UK could relate to these women, their specific experiences of living peripherally in the centre of the British empire were unaccounted for.

Through the interviews of over 100 women, *The Heart of the Race* explored Black women's migration to the UK and how they navigated employment, health, their sense of self, family and relationships with men. Dadzie, Bryan and Scafe wrote chapters either separately or collectively, sending each other hand-written notes and transcripts of the interviews. None of them were historians nor had they conducted an ethnographic study before. However, they knew the unprecedented value of capturing the stories of Black British women on the page. They decided on the title, '*Heart of the Race*' because, as Dadzie explained in her own oral history interview, 'women [are] the preservers of history, the preservers of culture, that same hand that rocks the cradle rules the world... it was the grandmothers and the mothers and the aunties who told the stories and kept stuff around'.⁸ Dadzie also drew a Black matriarch for the book's cover, depicting her gazing across ocean waves at a white, worn stone building that could be one of Ghana's slave castles.

The Heart of the Race was published in 1985 to critical acclaim, winning the Martin Luther King Memorial Prize that year and quickly becoming a feminist classic. Because Dadzie was the typist of the group, she had all the various drafts, notes, transcripts and more stored in her house. She later donated 36 boxes of these papers (along with artefacts from OWAAD, student organizations and campaigns during the Black Women's Movement) to the BCA, as a collection under her name. Now the personal papers of Stella Dadzie are available

for research and are one of the BCA's most visited collections. Dadzie lives on today a walking embodiment of the Black Women's Movement. And she still practices, through her work as an author and a teacher to adult learners. Her dedication to anti-racism has sent her around the world and she has written eight books, the latest of which, *A Kick in the Belly: Women, Slavery and Resistance*, was released in October 2020.

Jones, Morris and Dadzie are exceptional historical figures, however, this essay could have focused on any three Black women activists and community leaders. It could equally have explored the lives and work of Beverly Bryan, Suzanne Scafe, Elizabeth 'Liz' Obi, Gerlin Bean, Gail Lewis, Leila Hassan Howe, Althea Jones-LeCointe or Barbara Beese, the list of unrecognized women goes on and on. The BCA plays a crucial role in preserving and advancing their work through exhibitions, educational workshops, events and the collecting of oral histories, documents and images that can be used for historical and personal research. But the BCA can only do so much. We must actively celebrate the contributions of Black British women of the past and present in our daily lives, passing their legacies from generation to generation. And when we retell their stories, remembering that their activist work is still incomplete, we must continue their fight for racial, gender and socioeconomic equality.

There are many ways that you can support the BCA: donations, volunteering, attending events and purchasing books and merchandise (many of the referenced further readings are available at the BCA's online bookshop). As a charity and Britain's only national Black heritage centre, we are only as strong as our support and value any contribution you can make to us.

Notes

1. For information about the Black Cultural Archives, opening times etc. see <https://blackculturalarchives.org> (accessed 2 December, 2020). A download on the Black Women's Movement is available at <https://blackculturalarchives.org/subject-guides> (accessed 2 December, 2020).
2. FBI files on Claudia Jones available at <https://vault.fbi.gov/Claudia%20Jones%20/> (accessed 2 December, 2020).
3. Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).
4. Further reading on this subject includes: Bernard Coard, *How the West Indian Child is made Educationally Sub-normal in the British School System* (London: New Beacon Books, 1971); Renni Eddo-Lodge, *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017); Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1987); Colin Grant, *Homecoming: Voices of the Windrush Generation* (London: Penguin, 2019).
5. Tanisha C. Ford, 'Finding Olive Morris in the Archive: Reflections on the Remembering Olive Collective and Community History', *The Black Scholar*, 46/2 (2016), 5-18; Rahila Gupta, ed., *From Homebreakers to Jailbreakers: Southall Black Sisters*. (New York: Zed, 2003); Heidi Safia Mirza, ed, *Black British feminism: A Reader* (London: Routledge, 1997).
6. Beverly Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe, *The Heart of the Race: Black Women's Lives in Britain* (London: Verso, 1985).
7. Sophia Siddiqui, 'Anti-Racist Feminism: engaging with the past', *Race and Class*, 61/2 (2019), 96-104. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0306396819875041> (accessed 2 December, 2020).
8. Interview of Stella Dadzie by Ego Ahiawe for Heart of the Race, Oral Histories of the Black Women's Movement, BCA, 18.

Bishopsgate Institute: Library, Archives and So Much More...

Barbara Vesey

On New Year's Day 1895, a long queue of people snaked along Bishopsgate waiting for the doors of the brand-new Bishopsgate Institute to open. The purpose-built institute was the inspiration of the Reverend William Rogers at St Botolph's-without-Bishopsgate, three streets away, and funded by the Church of England. It resembled the institutes created in Manchester and other cities throughout the United Kingdom in the late nineteenth century and provided a place where working men and women could come and use a free library and attend concerts, classes and lectures. Eight years earlier, a competition, held to find an architect by anonymous submissions, had resulted in a clear winner, Charles Harrison Townsend, who went on to design the Whitechapel Gallery and the Horniman Museum. Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau motifs can be found inside and outside the building, which boasts two large halls, a boardroom, smaller meeting rooms and, of course, the Library and Special Collections and Archives on the ground floor.

The ceremonial opening of Bishopsgate Institute took place on 24 November 1894, in the presence of then-Prime

Minister Lord Rosebery. Today's visitors to the beautifully tiled entryway can see the foundation stone, which lists the names of the Trustees of the Bishopsgate Foundation; in the archives, we have the purely ceremonial engraved silver trowel in its velvet-lined case, presented to the Reverend Rogers at the foundation stone-laying ceremony. The main Library still has its original shelves. Other features including the lighting and colour scheme were carefully refurbished in the early 2010s. There are four long wooden tables where casual visitors can sit and read the papers (we 'take' the *Times*, *Guardian*, *Financial Times*, *Telegraph* and the *I*), study, work at their laptops (using the free Wi-Fi) or just sit and soak up the atmosphere. The impressive and eye-catching stained-glass dome has had to be replaced twice in the Institute's 125-year history: once during the Blitz and once in 1993, after the IRA bombing of Bishopsgate. The rear library has more tables and chairs for visitors and a collection of current journals and local papers, such as the *Hackney Gazette*, the *Spectator*, *Private Eye* and *Diva*. At the very rear of the Library, separated by glass panels, is the reception desk for the Special Collections and Archives.



Fig 1 Bishopsgate Institute Library [interior]

The Institute's archive collections owe much to the dedicated and diligent work of two visionaries. Firstly, Charles F W Goss, the second Librarian (from 1897 until 1941). He first began collecting the archives of political figures such as George Holyoake, George Howell and Charles Bradlaugh, as well as the papers and rare glass slides of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society. Secondly, Stefan Dickers, the Institute's current Archives Manager, who has, since 2011, overseen an explosion in the Institute's feminist, LGBTQ+, kink and fetish, Humanism, Co-operative Movement, Labour, Socialist, protest and political collections. The archives of individuals and organisations such as Bernie Grant, Narendra Makanji, the Troops Out Movement, Stop the War Coalition, Frank Crichlow, Dr Richard Stone, Centerprise, Eton Manor Boys' Club, Nettie Pollard and Paris Lees, represent just a small sample of the Institute's varied and important holdings.

The Lesbian and Gay Newsmedia Archive (LAGNA) includes over 350,000 press cuttings from the straight press about LGBTQ+ issues, from the early 1900s to the present day. This collecting area also has material from Switchboard, Act Up!, Stonewall, the Campaign for Homosexual Equality, Outrage, the life and work of film-makers Paul Hallam and Ron Peck and the artefacts donated by Queer Tours of London and the UK Leatherman Archive. Drag artistes including the Bloodlips Troupe and Ivan Cartwright rub sequinned shoulders with activists such as Sue Sanders (founder of Schools Out

and LGBT History Month) and Shaun Dellenty (educator and founder of Inclusion for All).

The London Collection includes thousands of books, illustrations, pamphlets, maps, guidebooks, photographs and ephemera covering all things London, including the Sandys Row Synagogue, the Swadhinata Trust, London History Workshop, London Collection Manuscripts, Liverpool Street Station Campaign, City Music Society, Brookfield Manor Girls' Club, artist Hester Mallin, the collection regarding detective Frederick Wensley and the papers of historian and author Gilda Ann O'Neill. Our collections on Cooperation also include the London Cooperative Society collections and over twenty beautiful handmade banners deposited by The Women's Cooperative Guild.

Our Labour and social history collections embrace the work of Raphael Samuel and the History Workshop Collective, Peter Sedgwick, the Rationalist Association and a complete set of Andrew Roth's Parliamentary Profiles. Other collections include those of the Advisory Service for Squatters, Shelter, Clapton Football Club, Kensington Narrators (Grenfell group), and Suresh Singh. Photographic collections include the Morning Star Photographic Archive, and photographs by Phil Maxwell, Angela Christofilou, Elainea Emmott, Robert Workman and Colin O'Brien. Bishopsgate Institute also holds the papers of the National Union of Teachers, Gratton Puxon and the Working Class Lives collection of books and pamphlets.



The Institute's feminist and women's history collections are equally varied and comprehensive, containing the books, papers, press cuttings, magazines, journals, publications, posters, t-shirts, badges, ephemera, artwork and creative and intellectual output of individuals and organisations. These feature women-only photography collectives such as Format and Hackney Flashers,

Fig 2 Dawson Family Archive [Suffragette tea set]



Fig 3 Morning Star Photographic Archive [the women with the equal pay placards]

singing group the Pre-Madonnas, Kensington Ladies Pond Association, poet and sculptor Astra Blaug, film-maker Penny Ashbrook (founder of LGBT film festival at the British Film Institute), Patricia Faulkner (artist on the first edition of *The Joy of Lesbian Sex*), the Dawson sisters (suffragettes and teachers whose family have deposited their suffragette tea set with the Institute), the Lewisham Young Women's Resource Project, English Collective of Prostitutes, Urban Chick Supremacy Cell, Roman Catholic Feminists, and the papers and photographs of dancer and teacher Peggy Spencer.

The Institute also looks after much of the Feminist Library's holdings, consisting of pamphlets, books and ephemera of feminists and feminist organisations such as Eileen Cadman, Rowena Clayton, the Campaign Against Pornography, Four Corners Film Workshop, Eve Goss, Margaret Green, the women of Greenham Common, Hermione Harris, the National Alliance of Women's Organisations, National Women's Network, Women Against Violence Against Women and Women in Entertainment. Other important figures who feature in our feminist, political and protest collections are Diana Leonard, Mary Turner, Muriel Lester (Christian pacifist and friend of Mahatma Gandhi), Libby Hall (whose collection of vintage *cartes de visites* featuring family pet dogs we have christened the 'barkive'), and peace activist and campaigner Mavis Middleton.

The papers of Amanda Sebestyen merit special mention, as organisations referenced in her papers include: RadFem, *Sisters* magazine ('the magazine of fabulous Muslim women'), Festival of Older Women and Friends, Reclaim the Night, London Feminist Network, Glasgow Women's Library, Woman Kind, 8 March Women Organisation (Iran-

Afghanistan), Femi Fest, My Belly is Mine campaign (Spain), The Feminist Archive, Women for Women Refugees, Workers' Liberty Women, Women Asylum Seekers Together in Greater Manchester (WAST), Older Women's Co-Housing, Women for Women International, Gender Action for Peace and Security, UK Feminista, Go Feminist, Feminist Archive North, Abortion Support Network.

Our collecting continues apace. Recent additions to the archives are the papers, photographs, original publicity materials and recordings of the Clean Break Theatre Company; numerous placards from the Women's March on London and the Doing It Ourselves archive. These were collected from former members of the First Neighbourhood Co-operative Nursery in 2018-2019 by the oral history organisation On the Record, who worked with Eva Turner, a former member of the co-operative, to record the history of the nursery. The archive contains documents, photographs, ephemera, a collection of oral history interviews recorded by the project, and a record of the project's activities including audio recorded at events and photographs of the project's exhibition. The First Neighbourhood Co-operative Nursery was a parent-led co-operative nursery that grew from a group of parents who met in Walthamstow in the late 1970s, and the On the Record Project of the Nursery's history won the Women's History Network Community Prize in 2020.

The Institute continues to offer lectures, concerts, theatrical performances as well as a full programme of courses ranging from London History, languages and LGBTQ+ history to creative writing, yoga and photography. Our Interpretation



Fig 4 Feminist Library Archive [Greenham poster]

Manager and history tutor, Dr Michelle Johansen, leads many of the history courses and is our resident expert on Charles Goss and the beginnings of the Institute itself. At the time of writing, due to the coronavirus, the Library is closed to casual visitors but the Special Collections are open and available by appointment for up to eight researchers per day, Mondays-Thursdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. For details about how to book a place and more about the Institute's history, courses, concerts and lecture series, please visit our website at <https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/>

Further reading and information

<https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/archives-1/accessing-the-archives/our-archives-online>
<https://feministlibrary.co.uk>
<https://on-the-record.org.uk>
<http://www.schools-out.org.uk>
<https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/collections/history-workshop-events-archive>

Public Engagement

Introduction

Anna Muggeridge

A tradition of public engagement within history stretches back to the ground-breaking research of those working in adult and continuing educations in the sixties, seventies and eighties. Most recently funding for public engagement work associated with historical centenaries, such as the commemoration of the First World War and the celebration of the passage of the 1918 Representation of the People Act, has provided new openings for postgraduate students and early career researchers. They have been able to work with heritage organisations and community groups to create and disseminate women's history and engage new and diverse audiences with their research. In an increasingly challenging job market, increasing numbers of younger scholars look to forge careers outside the academic world, public engagement offers both opportunities, occasional challenges and scope to develop skills as researchers and communicators.

Significant funding was provided for the First World War centenary commemorations via the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Heritage Lottery Fund, and the articles in this section draw on papers given at a panel at the Legacies of the *First World War Festival: Women & War Conference*, held at Glasgow Women's Library in August 2019. This was organised by AHRC funded First World War Engagement Centres, established in 2013. Each of the five Centres, led by the Universities of Birmingham, Kent, Hertfordshire, Belfast and Nottingham, sought to act as hubs to stimulate and support activities connected to the centenary of the conflict. They also offered opportunities to postgraduate and early career researchers to undertake public engagement work. The presenters on the Glasgow panel had not all been directly involved with the First World War centres; some had worked with the significantly less well funded commemorations of the centenary of women's suffrage.

All the panellists have engaged with a range of audiences and different mediums through which to portray the past including for example films, plays and re-enactments. Hayley Carter discusses how sharing her doctoral research on how couples used letters to build and maintain relationships in wartime has enabled her to become a more effective communicator to a diverse range of audiences. Alternatively, Alexandra Hughes-Johnson explores how her doctoral research into Rose Lamartine Yates of the Wimbledon Women's Suffrage and Political Union was used by the Attic Theatre Company to develop a stage play about women's suffrage in the local area. This led to a career working with heritage organisations and universities seeking to bridge the gap between specialist and non-specialist audiences for women's history. Both Carter and Hughes-Johnson discuss how their own research informed the public engagement activities which they then undertook. In contrast, public engagement was integral to the design of Kristin O'Donnell's doctoral research. Her article discusses how this developed, including reflecting on how—and why—she herself 'performed' community engagement, and the impact this has had on her research.

Each article sheds light on some of the positives and pitfalls, of public engagement for postgraduate students and early career researchers. All three authors have developed confidence, communication and networking abilities, and other skills that may open up new career paths. Perhaps most importantly, however, all three articles highlight the importance of continuing the longstanding tradition of sharing women's histories with as diverse an audience as possible.

Performing Community Engagement: The Challenges and Benefits

Kristin O'Donnell

From the very outset, the centenary commemorations of the First World War in Britain had community engagement as one of its core ambitions. In his speech launching the plans for the centenary, then-Prime Minister David Cameron shared his government's ambition to create:

A truly national commemoration, worthy of this historic centenary... a commemoration that captures our national spirit, in every corner of the country, from our schools to our workplaces, to our town halls and local communities. A commemoration that ... says something about who we are as a people.¹

Using the First World War centenary as a case study, my doctoral research examines the role of commemoration in constructing a relationship between the past and the present. The question of community engagement is central to my research, which seeks to explore what engagement with the history of the First World War reveals about the culture and politics of commemoration. I am interested in the way that individuals, groups and the nation-state use the past to inform a sense of present-day identity and construct boundaries of belonging. In addition to my academic interest in the practicalities of community engagement, my PhD funding also foregrounds the relationships between academia and partnership work with organisations and community groups.

From the outset of my doctoral research, I have been interested in the way community groups have chosen to engage with the centenary of the First World War however, I had not planned to work directly with them. In a way, I was forced to perform community engagement in order to receive my funding. When my initial PhD funding application to research the politics of First World War commemoration was unsuccessful, I was advised to add in an element of community engagement and reapply for a newly-released National Productivity Investment Fund (NPIF) scholarship: a scheme developed as part of the UK Government's Industrial Strategy, designed to strengthen engagements between creative industries, policy-making and academia. Through the Gateways to the First World War Public Engagement Centre, I was put in touch with the Clapham Film Unit and submitted a bid to work with them on the final instalment in their series of films exploring women in peace movements during the First World War.

Consequently, I was fortunate enough to receive funding for my doctoral research. However, the precarity of funding for small arts organisations was an issue that emerged before my research had even begun, as these bodies often subsist on short-term funding from organisations such as the Arts Council and Heritage Lottery Fund. Just weeks before the start of my research, my initial partner (Clapham Film Unit) found out their bid for Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) funding had failed. This left us both devastated and searching to mitigate our funding crisis. The Clapham Film Unit eventually received funding for their project from The European Commission, but this came too late for my PhD funding. Accordingly, I was

forced to find another partner at extremely short notice and consequently, worked with Dover Arts Development (DAD) on a range of projects throughout the centenary. The largest of these, *The Return of the Unknown*, was a collaboration between The Marlow Theatre in Canterbury, DAD and local communities. The project sought to 'explore how World War One [was] commemorated across five towns in Kent: what we remember, how we remember and what is forgotten'.²

Working with small arts organisations and community groups has been challenging, but also hugely rewarding both socially and academically. The networks built through my partnership with Dover Arts Development have encouraged me to become involved with several other organisations, beyond the original remit of my research. Consequently, I have engaged with individuals and groups that examine radical histories relating to the First World War, sometimes carrying out reflective interviews with them that have shaped my military-critical approach to commemoration. For example, The Haringey First World War Peace Forum's focus on conscientious objectors and anti-war protesters, demonstrated how community-based commemoration could be centred around peaceful resistance to war. Both *This Evil Thing* (written and produced by Michael Mears) and *Devils on Horseback* (written by Tim Crook and performed at Fort Burgoyne in collaboration with Creative Vortex and Dover Arts Development) brought lesser-known narratives concerning state treatment of conscientious objectors to light and prompted reflection on present-day cases of unjust incarceration. Furthermore, taking part in projects exploring the foundation of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and considering other, lesser-known contributions from Britain's empire, have inspired me to examine the role of the arts in fostering social cohesion and also the reparative potential of confronting difficult histories.³ I have seen the confidence and resilience of myself and my collaborators grow. We have exchanged differing perspectives and held constructive dialogue on how a focus on radical histories can be mobilised, in order to combat the rise of nationalistic narratives while simultaneously informing more ethically inclusive commemorative practices. My collaborators and I have developed a range of transferrable skills, ranging from archival work and specialist historical knowledge through to the broader skills of public speaking, problem solving and critical thinking. Nonetheless, it hasn't always been easy.

Engaging with these projects as a researcher has thrown up a range of issues: from the precarity of arts funding to the politics of representation. However, all of these matters have been overshadowed by a shift in cultural policy whereby (to justify the investment of public money) both academia and the arts, increasingly have to produce evidence of their projects' demonstrable 'impact' on society at large. In my experience, academics, arts organisations and community groups can find themselves strategically 'performing' collaborative work and a range of issues emerge. My own research is rooted in a political climate that has seen both universities and cultural institutions increasingly required to



Figure 1. Zurich Peace Conference, 1919. Image Courtesy of The Women's Library at the London School of Economics.

legitimise their entitlement to public funds with quantifiable outputs: the so-called 'impact agenda'. The irony that I am being funded by an initiative to improve economic output in the creative industries, while simultaneously critiquing the creative economy, is not lost on me. In this article therefore, I am reflecting on the economic, ethical and methodological challenges that my collaborators and I faced, while performing community engagement during the centenary of the First World War. The complexity of these issues, combined with the fact that my research is still ongoing, means that I have posed more questions than I can as yet answer. However, I hope that these observations stimulate further discussions around collaborative work in the future. Despite all my critiques, I do not mean to suggest that community engagement work is not worthwhile. Therefore, I conclude my reflections with a short case study, which gives voice to some of my collaborators and explores the social, political, and educational potential of community heritage collaborations.

While working with community groups, a number of challenges emerged. I often felt that rather than engaging in productive exchange with other participants, I was more of a spectator who was 'performing' engagement, in order to fulfil a condition of my funding; like some sort of box ticking exercise. I was helpful where I could be, but I often found myself watching from the side lines, rather than being involved in planning, bid writing, training, workshop delivery or research. Perhaps this was because my involvement in *The Return of the Unknown* project was not planned from the beginning and I was parachuted in mid-project. However, I think there were other factors at play. For instance, it was difficult to foster long-term collaborations with busy or changing project leads from multiple organisations, who were working together on more than one project. This was compounded by the reality that funding for arts and heritage projects is often very precarious, with producers regularly find themselves very stretched balancing several small projects at once, while also trying to plan their next bid. Furthermore, although (for ethical reasons) I do not want to name any of the organisations involved, I had first-hand experience observing the economic pressures experienced by small organisations. Long-term arts and heritage projects are often subject to several staged rounds of funding applications. This means that sometimes, smaller partners (who have put months, or even years of work into earlier stages of a project) can find themselves excluded from later stages of the bid. Another project I worked on experienced financial hardship, when the organisers had to

pay upfront for expenses incurred by the project before they could claim them back from the funding body. My deliberate decision not to name these organisations specifically links to another core challenge of community engagement the ethical responsibility academics owe to their research participants.

I am acutely aware of what Katherine Borland has referred to, in the context of oral history, as 'our responsibility to our living sources' and the fear of misrepresenting them in my writing is an ongoing challenge.⁴ I have struggled, as I tried to navigate the perceived expectations of individuals: namely those who have given their time and expertise in interviews and allowed me to participate in their projects but who will not ultimately feature as case studies in my final thesis. There is also an economic aspect to this ethical anxiety. I am acutely aware that I am being paid to do this research, while others often generously give their time for free. As Maggie Andrews points out, Heritage Lottery Funding (in particular) has come under fire for redistributing funds from largely working-class lottery players to largely middle-class arts and heritage professionals.⁵ As someone interested in both the politics of history and in cultural policy, I find it problematic that many community-based projects have paid academics, artists, or producers at their core and yet continue to rely on the unpaid labour of volunteers. Many of these projects have been evaluated through a lens of 'public good', which paternalistically positions participants as getting involved for their own benefit, be that fostering a sense of community, a feeling of belonging or learning new skills. This particular lens however, elides difficult questions regarding the power dynamics of partnership work. Projects are often funded and evaluated on their ability to engage 'those less likely to engage'. And as Leila Jancovich has pointed out, professionals in the arts and humanities have a vested interest in maintaining this status quo, particularly as funding in the cultural sector is ever-squeezed by austerity and demands to justify its value.⁶ Many practitioners appeal to an admirable rhetoric of 'co-production' and 'knowledge exchange' between academia and community groups, but the economic realities of these situations tend to evoke a hierarchy, which clearly values some types of input over others. My work as a paid doctoral researcher underlined the economic inequalities and implicit hierarchies in much community engagement.

A closer look at the aim of engaging those considered 'less likely to engage', which occurred regularly in the rhetoric surrounding the centenary, belies a tacit view that certain communities will be better integrated members of society through their involvement in commemorative projects. In my research, for example, I have observed the contributions of First World War soldiers from the Indian sub-continent being mobilised in order to create a sense of British identity among young British Muslims in an attempt to combat terrorism.⁷ As an interdisciplinary cultural historian and arts producer, I have seen first-hand the power of engagement with the past and through the arts to build communities. However, when notions of citizenship and belonging are constructed through appeals to a militarised past, it is our duty to critically examine these uses of history.⁸ This responsibility is further compounded by a political climate, which has seen politicians (such as Nigel Farage) situating immigrants at the root of economic problems and appealing to ever-more exclusive notions of who can be British.⁹

This leads to further concerns that I have encountered



Figure 2. Re-enactment of the Zurich Peace Congress, Zurich 2019. Image: K. O'Donnell.

throughout my engagement with community arts projects during the centenary. Do the community groups accessing funding accurately represent twenty-first century Britain? Are certain voices not contributing? If so, is this due to a lack of time and/or money? Alternatively, are there more complex issues at play? Maggie Andrews has highlighted how 'feeling entitled to construct the past, to write history, rests on both access to resources and a sense of cultural belonging'.¹⁰ Accordingly, these concerns can be deeply tied up with issues of class and ethnicity. Difficult histories around colonialism and empire also intersect here. When remembrance politics become so entwined with national identity construction, the perception of low engagement by particular individuals or communities can result in attacks questioning their very entitlement to citizenship. This was the case when controversy erupted over the England cricketer, Moeen Ali being pictured without a poppy in an England Squad photograph. This was despite earlier images showing he was wearing a poppy that had simply fallen off.¹¹ The incident illustrates that those from minority ethnic communities are under ever-increasing pressure to perform their patriotism through remembrance culture and failure to do so is sometimes interpreted as a threat to the nation. This topic also emerges in Northern Ireland, where poppy wearing is often a device issue that falls along sectarian lines.¹²

Participating in remembrance culture can also help to foster a sense of belonging. Uncovering previously unknown facts surrounding one's family history can play an important role in creating a sense of shared identity and social cohesion for communities that have been previously underrepresented in public histories of the First World War. The centenary saw an increased focus on the role of 'Commonwealth' contributions and as Baronese Warsi stressed, 'our boys weren't just Tommies, they were Tariqs and Tajinders too'.¹³ However, drawing boundaries of belonging based on a militarised past is deeply problematic.¹⁴ What about those individuals whose relatives did not serve, or those whose kin actively fought against Britain and her allies? What are the consequences of drawing attention to the allied contributions of the 'Commonwealth' at the expense of acknowledging difficult legacies of colonialism? As a white Canadian scholar living in Britain, is it my place to ask these difficult questions of people from ethnic minority communities who just want their ancestors' contributions recognised in the national narrative? Who is such critical history for and what aims does it serve? In the face of all these ethical, interpretative and methodological

concerns, it is tempting to retreat deep into the archive, safe from accusations by the living that you have misrepresented them or brought difficult or unwelcome questions or interpretations to the table.¹⁵ At times, I have found this kind of self-imposed ethical reflexivity, compounded by feelings of imposter syndrome, paralysing and challenging to navigate. At other times, community engagement work provided valuable social and professional connections. Suitably, I would like to conclude with an example of a project that demonstrates the significance and meaning these projects can have for participants.

In 2019, I worked with the Clapham Film Unit and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) on a project that recognised the founding work of WILPF as a transnational network of women peace and suffrage campaigners during and after the First World War. The *Women Vote Peace* project brought participants together to research the women involved in the 1919 Zurich Peace Congress and culminated with a re-enactment of the Congress at a conference marking its centenary.¹⁶ The project saw '172 women from 22 countries gather to remember and celebrate the brave women who went before them'.¹⁷ This resulted in the production of a book that charted the history and biographies of some of the women and a film, documenting the centenary re-enactment.

As we travelled home across Europe on a minibus, I conducted a group interview with other participants; I wanted to capture the social aspect of the project and how we were all making meaning together. The interview revealed a complex range of motivations: from the social and emotional, to the educational and political. For Alison Ronan (who researched and represented Scottish suffragette and pacifist Annott Robinson in the film) there was a deep emotional connection to the women she was investigating. She spoke of the emotive power of 'actually hearing their words and seeing them re-enacted'.¹⁸ She also revealed 'getting that sense of women coming from across Europe and from America and from parts of the Empire, which it would have been in those days, I think was really very ... I found it very moving'.¹⁹ The physicality of participation undertaking the journey overland and sea as the women before us had done added a layer of understanding to the task that archival research alone could not convey.

For another participant (Jenny Engledow, a life-long activist and campaigner) engagement with the women, both past and present, provided a sense of historical continuity. By situating her work with WILPF in the present, as the legacy of the women that came before her, she found both social and political value in participation. Jenny, who represented Charlotte Despard, was fascinated with 'the interrelationships of all the different women and how they were already influencing much of the world... working so hard and building those networks... it was going to be fun first if I'm honest: a bit of a discovery, a bit of fun and very much about meeting the other women from the other countries'.²⁰ Through taking part in the re-enactment, Jenny not only found social fulfilment but had the opportunity to forge further networks of transnational feminist activism.

Although everyone enjoyed the social aspects of taking part, for Helen Kay (who represented Chrystal Macmillan) her motivations for participation were firmly rooted in the educational and the political spheres. Helen saw the project as a chance to inform and engage other women, observing that

'it's different for me. For me it's about recording WILPF history to sell it to other women... the emotional impact, there were moments of it that had an emotional impact... but the purpose of it was education.'²¹ Echoing earlier forays into women's history, Helen viewed the resulting book and film as valuable tools for teaching women's history and supporting broader feminist education.

Lydia Merrell was drawn into the project through the character of pacifist, suffragist, and WILPF Manchester branch founder, Margaret Ashton. Lydia found Ashton's 'transgressive' radical politics an inspiration for her own, present-day battle with a 'dominantly male local council' to re-establish the demolished Manchester Peace Garden. Lydia was incensed that the council 'didn't want to have to think about a Peace Garden when they'd got a war memorial and actually it just made me so cross'.²² For Lydia, and many of the others involved in the project, war commemoration must be centred around peace campaigning if it is to avoid militaristic ideology.

The one aspect of our conversations that struck me the most, was how our collective recuperation of these women's stories inspired the participants in their present political struggles. Both Lydia and Jenny spoke of 'borrow[ing] some of the courage' and the 'profound determination' of the women they researched and represented. Valerie Bossman-Quarshie (who represented Mary Church Terrell, the only Black woman at the original Zurich Congress in 1919) spoke about the importance of the visibility of women in public history. From the statues on Parliament Square, to the history curriculum, Val felt that it was important for the historical struggles and achievements of women to be recognised in the public sphere.²³ Val, like so many of us, found the shared experience of celebrating women's emancipation and political engagement, with all its shortcomings and divisions, was something that had the potential to unite women across class, colour and country.²⁴ Ultimately, taking part in this project allowed us to celebrate the work of these pioneering women, whilst acknowledging the problematic aspects of this history. And after all, isn't that what good community history should do?

Notes

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5. Maggie Andrews, in conversation with the author on 29 October 2020.
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17. Charlotte Bill, 'Versailles 1919: Return of the Dangerous Women', 2019, <https://www.claphamfilmunit.com/projects/peace-and-womens-rights/> (accessed 18 August 2019).
18. Alison Ronan, 'Group Interview: reflections on the Zurich Peace Congress', interview by Kristin O'Donnell, 12 May 2019.
19. Ibid.
20. Jenny Engledow in 'Group Interview'.
21. Helen Kay in 'Group Interview'.
22. Lydia Merrell in 'Group Interview'.
23. Valerie Bossman-Quarshie in 'Group Interview'.
24. Our conversation in the minibus home included much myth-making and myth-busting regarding the unity and disunity of the women's peace and suffrage movements, notably how these histories help us confront uncomfortable aspects of these women's lives which could include racist and classist viewpoints.

Love Letters from the Front: Taking Post Graduate Research into the Public Arena.

Hayley Carter

The emerging and ever-evolving study of the History of Emotions is one that continues to fascinate and engage both academics and the general public alike. Its ability to create inter-generational links and emotionally poignant attachments to ordinary people in the past is the primary reason why it forms the foundation of my PhD research at the University of Worcester. My thesis aims to investigate into how certain couples built and maintained their relationships during either the First or Second World Wars, by identifying and evidencing their emotional responses to their developing romantic partnerships, as revealed through their personal letters.

From the beginning of my PhD research, my studies have been carried out in an apprenticeship style.¹ The aim of this approach, is that I will learn not just to be a researcher, but to be a historian in the widest sense: a communicator, critical thinker, an educator, an organiser, a writer and someone who can potentially inspire others to love history the way that I do. Thanks to the unique opportunities provided by the funding for the commemoration of the Centenary of the First World War and the support and active encouragement of my supervisor, I have been privileged to be given a variety of opportunities to give conference papers, engage with local community projects and disseminate my research to the public. I have been made aware that in order to make a real contribution to my area of study, I need to gain a variety of experiences relating to where and how history is produced and consumed, as well as grasping as many opportunities as possible to acquire a wide range of transferable skills. This has often involved stepping out of my comfort zone and taking on new challenges.

Today, many people's knowledge of the past comes from what they can see, hear or touch. Accordingly, the need for instant and easily-accessible information about historical events seems paramount. With few people likely to pick up an academic history book and read it cover to cover, any academic work within the public arena is required to be convenient, understandable and inviting to a wider audience.² Many areas of academic study are worthy of research however, for them to become relevant to a non-academic audience, an appeal and a direct link to people's lives needs to be created.³ This is what I have been encouraged to do: to be persistent and open to opportunities where I can place my research. The idea is to present what fascinates me as a useable medium and filter my studies into the public domain, with the intention of informing, educating and inspiring audiences. I have seen the success of this method first-hand, the example being, *World War One in the Vale: WWI Home Front History in the Vale of Evesham and Pershore*: a community and heritage project led by the University of Worcester.⁴ This project was supported through funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC): Voices of War and Peace WWI Engagement Centre and Wychavon District Council.⁵ It provided an opportunity for the people of Pershore to engage with and immerse themselves in the experiences of their town and community during the First World War. As well as learning that their town grew the fruit and made the

jam that was consumed by the troops on the front line, they also researched and helped to co-write a book entitled *How the Pershore Plum Won the Great War*.⁶ This volume detailed how the town's people lived their everyday lives and '[kept] the home fires burning' during this period.⁷ It was clear that this project filled all of the participants with great pride and as a result of this, a number of events and exhibits were organised, in order to display their findings at local events. Many of these, I have been involved in.

Initially, I worked with Pershore Heritage and History Society on their Heritage Lottery funded First World War Project.⁸ For this, I helped the society create reminiscence boxes. These were taken into local nursing and care homes, in order to stimulate senses, inspire memories and encourage conversation with and amongst the residents. I also helped to create a town trail map that pinpointed the most significant First World War locations within the locale. I distributed these by approaching and liaising with shopkeepers regarding their displays and I also handed out posters and trail maps to the public. Further to this, I took an active part in the 2016 Festival of Humanities by helping to research and design an exhibit for the '1916 Foodfest: Bread, Jam and Christmas pudding' event, held at the Avoncroft Museum, Bromsgrove.⁹ Another project I assisted with was the Plumfest exhibition at Croome Park. This undertaking (as well as allowing me the opportunity to taste local jam and First World War cakes) provided information on land girls and boy scouts, who helped to pick fruit and make jam for the soldiers fighting on the front line. There was also an exhibit for the hundred years' anniversary of the formation of Pershore's Women's Institute. In association with the Being Human Festival, this event supported the launch of the National Trust's Plumlines exhibition.¹⁰

I was also part of the research team on the AHRC-funded project called Patriotism or Pragmatism: Children and Young People on the Rural Home Front in Worcestershire and Surrounding Areas.¹¹ For this task, I undertook primary source research (alongside my fellow post graduate colleagues). Highlights of this project included: examining Worcestershire School Log Books, helping with a study day for home-educated children and assisting in the creation of a display within the Childhood Interrupted exhibition at Hive Library, Worcester (Summer 2017).

In relation to my own research, in February 2018 I produced a short piece concerning women's letters and communications, which is included within the published book *Women in 100 objects*.¹² Although initially daunting, each of these projects has resulted in me gaining a great deal of relevant experience. They have helped to fund my PhD studies, improved my CV considerably and enabled me to learn and practise the flexibility that is required within today's academic world. These experiences have also provided me with the motivation to reflect on how to communicate with different audiences through diverse media.

For me, the relationship between academic research and public engagement is significant. Not only for commemoration purposes, but also because this approach opens up new



Fig 1 and 2 Hayley Carter filming *Love Letters from the Front* in Worcestershire Archives.

and emerging areas of academic study and allows archived documents and previously neglected resources to become visible. Behind every local or community project are untold stories: these tales provide insights into a much wider shared experience. The creation of tangible links between the public and the past, in addition to the creation of emotional bonds (that can connect the people of today to the events and people of the past) are essential to my investigations. Furthermore, these are the types of connections that I attempted to create, when I researched, wrote and presented a short film and a three-podcast series for History West Midlands in 2018. History West Midlands is an independent, free website, providing access to programs and resources dedicated to the people of the West Midland's region and their ideas, innovations and industrial experiences.¹³

The Hidden Homefront series was a sequence of seven short films, created to give voices to the women and children of the First World War. Its aim was to uncover the everyday realities of working within the fields, factories and kitchens of the Worcestershire Homefront during the conflict. It was within this series, that I was given my first opportunity to introduce my research into the public domain by researching, writing and presenting the second episode from the series, entitled 'Love Letters from the Front'.¹⁴ There were many reasons why creating this film seemed like the perfect challenge to me. Firstly, as a part-time, self-funded PhD student, the small sum of money that I received at the end of the task (which would go towards paying my fees) was always going to be greatly appreciated. In addition to this, my hopes of potentially carving out a future career, where my research and media are linked, meant that developing new skills and gaining experience (which would expand my CV) made the challenge appealing. Further still, the project would give me the opportunity to expand my communication proficiencies, write for a different audience and maybe, if all went well, would result in a small boost in confidence. So, although I felt very much out of my comfort zone, I began the task. And despite my experience of working on other projects, I was immediately struck by the different communication skills required for academic and public writing. Within academia, there is a particular writing style that students have to apply to their work and specific rules to abide by. Correct and consistent referencing must be used, preferred essay formats need to be followed and a knowledge of 'academic' language demonstrated. A critical understanding of historical debates, expert opinions, subject knowledge and

the formation of an evidenced academic argument must all be established. Initially, I believed that being freed from many of these academic constraints would make the writing process quicker and easier. I was wrong. The structures, rules and regulations behind academic writing, especially for students like myself, form comforting boundaries, informing me what I can and cannot do. Writing for the media and the general public, meant transferring my knowledge into an informative and more easily-understandable format, with the ultimate aim of appealing to and inspiring a wider audience. After years of trying to learn, understand and abide by the academic rules, letting go of them proved tricky. This in turn made the writing process more time consuming than originally anticipated.

With the understanding that I would tell the stories of three different letter collections, I was given the brief of writing the interweaving narratives of all of the couples whose letters I had researched into one chronological account. The first letter collection was a set of correspondence between Alice Amelia Brown Constable and Cyril Sladden of Badsey Worcestershire.¹⁵ Engaged in 1913, this couple had not yet married at the outbreak of the First World War and were separated for its duration. Cyril became an officer (located in the Far East) and Mela became a nurse. Later, she acted as a Unit Administrator in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC). The couple were parted during the conflict and unusually, the vast majority of letters, sent by both parties, have been preserved within the Worcestershire Archives. The second fund were the private collections of Fanny Cole, from Pinvin, Worcestershire and Tom Slaney of Birmingham. This couple met while Tom was convalescing from an injury he had received (inflicted during front-line combat in the winter of 1914) and while Fanny was working as a children's nurse in Birmingham. Their romance blossomed through letters, poetry and brief outings. The final couple were Fred Marriott and May Darke. The pair were brought together by war and soon separated by it. Fred and May met only a handful of times and married quickly. Thus, they were forced to conducting their courtship and marriage almost entirely through written correspondence.

Once I was satisfied that I was portraying the significance and diversity of these couples' stories, the script was sent off to be learnt, in advance of filming. On the day of filming, however, the director decided he wanted a last-minute, drastic change of structure. Instead of a script that weaved together various events from the couples' lives in chronological order, he now wanted the story relating to each individual couple to be told

in its entirety, before moving onto the next tale. This required a total rewrite of the script, minutes before presenting it in front of a camera. This was intensely challenging and resulted in many a 'fluffed' line, a long day's shooting and the need to film an introduction sequence at a later date. Although the end product was smooth, clear and informative, it was a nerve-racking and very different way of working. However, the final cut received positive feedback from professionals, copyright holders and viewers alike. Additionally, the experience (as a whole) taught me a great lesson regarding the permanency of material released into the public sphere. For example, one particularly extensive letter collection was relatively new to me and when I studied the wedding of Alice and Cyril, who married in 1919, I mistakenly stated the wrong wedding location in the film, despite having consulted the local newspaper archive. Although this is not a particularly significant mistake and the film was researched, re-scripted and created at speed, the inaccuracy is now permanently recorded and available to misinform anyone who watches it. Within the comforting boundaries of university writing, any mistakes like this would only reach a limited audience before fading into the abyss, unlike content that is publicised and promoted in the world of media.

My second attempt at engaging the public with my work, came in the form of researching, writing and presenting a three-episode podcast series on First World War Letters, again with History West Midlands.¹⁶ Approaching this new challenge, the same fears concerned me, especially as it was to be a more extensive and highly-detailed project: one that included collections from outside of my 'romantic' framework. The running time of the short film was ten minutes, whereas the podcasts were to be between fifteen and twenty minutes each. Two of the hardest challenges to overcome were the short time-frame and the extensive amount of writing. Consequently, I researched and produced over twelve thousand words in the space of just four weeks. As a dyslexic, many of the difficulties that accompany extensive writing projects can become more intensified, and indeed they did. Feelings of being overwhelmed and daunted by the sheer volume of words needed (coupled with the anxiety and stress of making sure that every word was required, not repeated and in its correct grammatical place) caused many sleepless nights. Furthermore, the time necessary to carry out this research, which was outside of that allocated to my PhD topic, meant that I was distracted from my core investigation. I was also overly-anxious to make certain that all of my facts and details were correct, so as to avoid repeating any of the mistakes I had made when creating the short film.

In some ways, this project highlighted how carrying out research can be isolating. Although I was well supported when seeking out the new letter collections and was always encouraged, reassured and helped by my supervisor (no matter the hour of the night I was up until) anxiety and a lack of self-confidence seeped in. The lengthy writing process and sheer volume of work, to be produced in such a short space of time, was highly intense and allowed this permeation. When I eventually acknowledged this and verbalised my concerns, I was quickly reassured and reminded that I was capable of producing work to be proud of. After this, I found that I was able to refocus and became even more determined to see the project through to its conclusion, to the best of my ability. The support I received was unwavering and I was lucky enough to have proof-readers, who taught me the importance of editing

and making sure that I thoroughly understood and meant every word I wrote. This advice has stayed with me ever since. The recording of the podcasts gave me the opportunity to have my work heard by others: their positive comments and interest in the subject matter also reassured me that my research was important and worthy of publication.

Both of these projects provided me with opportunities to use various media, which have the potential to reach far more people than any history book or article I could have written. Although much of the process was not smooth and I questioned why I had been given this opportunity, rather than someone I would consider to be more naturally competent academically, the pride that I felt, for what I had achieved, was boundless. It still amazes me. What I have learnt since, is that even with all of the challenges and complications I encountered, what really matters, is how proud I am that part of me and my research is out in the public domain, readily available to anyone who is willing to watch the film. There it stands, ready to inspire, provoke emotions and alter or cement the current knowledge of viewers. Furthermore, the project has received positive comments, regarding the film and podcast's sensitivity and clarity on such delicate subjects.

When the three podcasts were commissioned, the intention was that they would further expand understanding on the intimacies of wartime relationships by incorporating non-romantic connections. Further responses to the film and podcasts have been favourable and commented that the research was wonderfully presented and evoked many emotional reactions to the stories being told, which allowed the audience to experience the realities of war from a different perspective. Consequently, these reactions have allowed me to realise that even though you may always be willing for your work to be viewed by more people, ultimately, the number of viewers involved has limited relevance. What matters most, is the impact of work upon those who happen to view it and crucially, how those individuals employ that acquired knowledge, once the work has been seen.

In August 2019, I was among four other early-career researchers who were given the opportunity to speak at the Legacies of the First World War Festival: Women & War Conference.¹⁷ The panel presentations allowed us to share our experiences of engaging with local community history projects and to reveal our practices of interacting and sharing our research with the general public. This stimulating and thought-provoking event was hosted by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) WW1 Engagement Centres and was held at the wonderfully intriguing, Glasgow's Women's Library. The opportunity also gave we new researchers, a chance to share our thoughts and observations regarding career experiences so far. We were able to show and discuss (as a group) just how varied our opportunities and approaches have been. In addition, there was further discussion, which included the attendees debating the future prospects of academic interactions within the general public and this conversation helped to form the basis of this article.

As I and others have found, collaborations between academics, the public, the heritage sector and community organisations are filled with many complexities. However, if performed successfully, they can be rewarding and satisfactory. These collaborations have the propensity to give researchers, like myself, the opportunity to use, practice and develop the skills required to be successful within academia and perhaps

equally as importantly, inside of other professional arenas. Alliances can provide a valuable insight into the challenges and advantages of attempting to place our research into a wider framework outside of university confines. Furthermore, partnerships provide us with the chance to evolve, develop boundlessly, find our niche and hopefully, give thanks to those who supported our research so tirelessly, while confirming that they were right to believe in us.

Notes

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From Women's Suffrage to Degrees for Women: Bridging The Gap Between Academic History And Public Engagement Through Centenary Commemorations

Alexandra Hughes-Johnson

In recent years, historians have explored the varied ways in which scholars can move beyond the confines of universities, diversifying their academic skillset and engaging with non-academic organisations, individuals and communities.¹ The recent centenaries commemorating the Representation of the People Act (1918) and the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act (1919) have encouraged feminist historians to consider how collaborations between scholars and those outside academia can be used to highlight women's history. The centenary commemorations particularly, offered historians and professionals across the cultural and heritage sectors, opportunities to shape the interpretation of key aspects of women's history through collaboration, commemoration and

engagement with wider communities.²

As an Early Career Historian (ECR) of the British women's suffrage movement, who had completed a PhD in 2018, the suffrage centenary offered unique opportunities to engage with audiences and communities outside of academia. However, what this would entail was not initially clear. This article explores how the suffrage centenary both introduced me to the world of collaborative public engagement and acted as a launchpad to further initiatives connected to the centenary of the First World War (1914-18) and women's formal admission to the University of Oxford (1920). By examining my personal experiences of collaboration with individuals and organisations across the academic, cultural

and heritage sectors, this article will illustrate the many and varied ways in which commemoration and public engagement has the potential to shape and enhance interpretation and understanding of women's history, whilst stimulating broader contemporary conversations surrounding women's equality.

The 6 February 2018 marked 100 years since the passing of the Representation of the People Act, which gave votes to some women over the age of 30. The centenary captivated the public's imagination and led to a yearlong series of events across the length and breadth of the country. On the 24 April 2018, the first statue of a woman (constitutional suffragist, Dame Millicent Garrett Fawcett) was unveiled in Parliament Square and on the 10 June, women and girls in Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh and London 'came together as part of a celebratory mass participation artwork'.³ Meanwhile, *Sylvia*, a funk, soul and hip-hop musical, captured the 'internal and external struggles women faced in campaigning for the vote' and the BBC highlighted the militant suffragettes in a BAFTA award-winning series presented by Lucy Worsley.⁴ Furthermore, local museums, heritage organisations and a range of cultural and educational institutions, worked at local and national levels to engage multiple generations with the centenary. Immersive and engaging exhibitions such as; *Suffragette City*, Parliament's *Voice and Vote*, The Bodleian's *Sappho to Suffrage*, *Represent at The People's History Museum* and The Women's Hall exhibition in Tower Hamlets, showcased women's long and diverse fight for enfranchisement often reflecting the richness of suffrage scholarship and illustrating how the suffrage movement was not a single-issue campaign but a complex movement that sought broader equalities for women.

While commemorative events were wide-ranging, at both local and national levels, press coverage and media responses to the centenary were often limited – focusing on the purple, white and green of Emmeline Pankhurst's militant Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). Nevertheless, scholars, heritage professionals, artists, activists and community groups worked to create public histories and events that moved beyond such confines. Commemorations demonstrated not only the high level of engagement and inspiration within a range of communities, institutions and professions, but also, the crucial role of the suffrage centenary in cementing the fight for female enfranchisement in both women's and British history. However, many of these commemorations were only made possible through collaboration with and between scholars, museums, heritage institutions and creative industries. In my own experience, collaboration often occurred through the development of knowledge exchange partnerships.⁵

At the beginning of 2018, I completed my PhD thesis, entitled 'Rose Lamartine Yates and the Wimbledon WSPU: Reconfiguring Suffragette History from the Local to the National'. My research focused on the little-known history of the suffragette movement in Wimbledon and the suffrage and political career of Rose Lamartine Yates – the Organising Secretary of the Wimbledon branch of the WSPU. Rose Lamartine Yates was the mainstay of the Wimbledon WSPU from 1908-1915, she established a wartime suffrage organisation (the Suffragettes of the WSPU) in 1915, became a London County Councillor in 1919 and was one of the founding members of the Women's Record Room (a repository that now forms part of the Suffragette Fellowship Collection). As such, Rose's life story functioned as a lens through which a local

suffrage history of Wimbledon was created and where broader issues surrounding women's daily lives during World War One and political activism through and beyond the extension of the franchise, were critically examined.

As a consequence of this PhD research, much of the public engagement work that I was initially involved in centred on community history projects, which sought to highlight local women's contributions to the suffrage movement. For example, I was asked by various museums and local history centres to write brief biographies on Rose. In the context of the centenary year, I was unsurprisingly encouraged to emphasise her pre-war WSPU career and wider militant activism. While I was committed to showcasing Rose's suffrage career to local communities and thereby potentially engage new audiences, I consciously tried to avoid creating a one-dimensional historical character that failed to show how Rose's significance extended far beyond her work for women's suffrage. Nevertheless, trying to get the whole story, the complete history, across during a year where organisations were so invested in suffrage, was incredibly difficult and at times just not possible. Accordingly, writing for a public audience in this climate had its own specific requirements, set agendas and themes.

The first partnership I was engaged in during the suffrage centenary was a Heritage Lottery Funded (HLF) project entitled, *Citizens: 800 years in the making*. The partnership was a collaboration between academics and organisations such as: the National Archives, AQA Exam Board, The People's History Museum and the UK Parliament. The task was to develop virtual resources that would 'explore', 'research' and 'map the history of liberty, rebellion and reform from Magna Carta to the Suffragettes and beyond'.⁶ For the project, I collaborated with the Citizen's 800 team on a script for a video resource aimed at school-aged children, which focused on the question: 'what difference did the war make to women's suffrage?'

In writing the script and delivering the video-resource on camera, *Citizens: 800 years in the making*, offered me an opportunity to make suffrage history engaging for schoolchildren and introduce new research on wartime suffrage societies (connected to my PhD) to fresh audiences. It also introduced me to writing for non-specialist audiences and provided a platform to challenge conventional historical narratives that have permeated into public history. For example, popular narratives which suggest that the First World War was a stagnant period for suffrage activism and some women got the vote in 1918 as a reward for their war work. This was done by writing a video script that emphasised the limited number of working-women who were enfranchised in 1918 and highlighted the continued wartime campaign for women's suffrage (by new and existing suffrage societies including, the Suffragettes of the WSPU and the Independent WSPU).⁷ In challenging dominant and misleading narratives in resources aimed at school and college children (and adult learners) it was hoped that more historically accurate arguments would eventually become imbedded into public history.

A further public engagement opportunity that arose during the suffrage centenary was a community-focused collaboration with Merton production company, *Attic Theatre Company* (ATC) and historical dramatist and playwright, Beth Flintoff. She proposed a dramatic reconstruction of the historical narrative of the suffragette movement in Wimbledon, entitled *The Rebellious Women of Wimbledon*. The play, which was funded by the Arts Council Lottery Fund, would focus on

the story of Wimbledon resident, Rose Lamartine Yates; and due to the nature of my PhD, I was approached by the Artistic Director of ATC, Jonathan Humphries, to advise on some of the historical content for the play.⁸

The collaboration began very informally. I shared some of my research knowledge with the playwright: sending Beth narrative-based extracts of my PhD thesis and suggesting some very general suffrage histories and archival collections that might help with the scriptwriting. Conversations also focused on specific aspects of Wimbledon's suffrage history. These included the relationships between constitutionalist and militant suffrage activists and organisations, violence and brutality on Wimbledon Common and the radicalisation of young women in a historically conservative local area.

From a historical perspective, this collaboration was incredibly engaging and exciting, it was an opportunity for me to help shape (if only in a very small way) the narrative that would be presented to local communities and also to engage with creative professionals in a way that I had no previous experience of. Yet during the initial stages of collaboration, I found myself afraid of sharing aspects of my unpublished PhD thesis. I was also very conscious of ensuring that any content that I did share with Beth reflected how broad and expansive the suffrage movement in Wimbledon was and also, that it was located within a wide range of suffrage societies not simply the local WSPU. Throughout my PhD research, I had used Rose's life as a lens through which to explore the Wimbledon suffrage movement and also the broader issues that affected local women's lives through and beyond the extension of the franchise. While Rose and the Wimbledon WSPU were going to be the focus of the play, I was worried that the nuance of the movement would be lost and that Rose would be presented an 'exceptional woman' and in turn, compromise the visibility of other local women's histories. Nevertheless, it was not until the opening night that I found out how this local history had been interpreted. To say the interpretation by ATC and Beth Flintoff was highly impressive, would be an understatement. It was extraordinary.

On opening night, audience members gathered in Wimbledon Library and took their seats at what would soon be a suffragette meeting! They were given tea and cake by the three actors in the play, before being taken on the suffrage journey of Wimbledon activist Edith Begbie, who, after attending a WSPU meeting and hearing the educational speeches of Rose Lamartine Yates, slowly converted to the militant movement. Edith Begbie was a complex compilation character for the purposes of the play, but historically, she was Wimbledon WSPU's Chief Shop Steward and a widowed militant activist who was imprisoned and went on hunger-strike for the cause. While the play focused predominantly on the suffragettes (especially Wimbledon WSPU's leader Rose Lamartine Yates and Edith Begbie), the richness and diversity of the Wimbledon movement was eluded to by references to alternative suffrage activities throughout the play. The dramatization portrayed the growth of the movement locally, illustrated how militancy in Wimbledon ebbed and flowed and how women might have 'bonded together, urged on by faith, loyalty, and friendship', united under votes for women.⁹

For the purposes of the drama, timing was condensed, events juggled and prison stays conflated. Nevertheless, the difficulties of being a militant activist during the Edwardian period was alluded to, as was the impact of militancy on

friendship, familial networks and women's physical and mental health. The play concluded in 1918 with Rose Lamartine Yates and Edith Begbie reflecting on their suffrage years, before moving to the present day to deliver the following monologue:

When you walk into a polling station with your voting slip in hand, listen out for the voices of the women who went before you. The women that sat in a prison cell dreaming of the women of the future who would be allowed to mark a single cross in a box on a ballot paper. We want you to know that you count. We want your opinions to be heard and want you to know that dawn will break in the end!¹⁰

The monologue was followed by Ethyl Smyth's *March of the Women* and when I looked around at all the women and girls in the room there was not a dry eye in the house. The suffrage meeting had finished however, in that moment, we were reminded that we stand on the shoulders of giants and that with our voices and votes, we have the power to enact change in the twenty-first century.

While the play ended with the passing of the Representation of the People Act, ATC gave me the opportunity to highlight some of my PhD research findings by commissioning a short history on Rose Lamartine Yates and the Wimbledon movement, which was included in the theatre guide. Here, I was able to write about the broader trajectory of the Wimbledon movement and include further details on the life and political career of Rose. Within the program, I detailed her wartime suffrage activism and role in establishing the Suffragettes of the WSPU in 1915, her contributions as a London County Councillor for Lambeth in the interwar period and her post-war role in memorialising the suffragette campaign.

Before this experience of community-based public engagement, I had perhaps underestimated the power of creative historical interpretation. One of the greatest lessons from this collaboration was how this production engaged local communities and new audiences across South London and beyond. *The Rebellious Women of Wimbledon* connected the local community to the suffrage centenary in a way that other forms of commemoration may have not. The audience, invited to go on a 'suffrage journey' with the characters, were able to immerse themselves not just into the story, but the history too.¹¹ They were familiar with the location of Rose's home, Dorset Hall, knew the position of the WSPU shop where Edith Begbie worked and many had spent their evenings and weekends on Wimbledon Common, where the suffragettes held their meetings. Through this collaboration and creative example of commemoration, the audience were not only able to relate to the suffrage movement at a local level, but many became proud of their history and left the play wanting to know more.

Alongside these initial experiences of public engagement, my role as the former Research Coordinator for the University of Oxford's Women in the Humanities Research Centre (WiH) provided further opportunities for public and community engagement. Within WiH, I worked alongside the research centre's former Co-Directors, Professors Senia Pasëta and Selina Todd, on a range of public engagement events that used the suffrage centenary as a backdrop to present important and engaging suffrage histories and also to explore

women's progress towards equality.

These public engagement events began with the Bodleian's launch of the *Sappho to Suffrage: Women Who Dared* exhibition. Curated by Professor Pasëta, the exhibition highlighted items that were 'written, owned and commissioned by women' and showcased the Bodleian's incredible suffrage collection, which includes local minute books, petitions and even a complete version of the *Suffragette* board game.¹² Here, people within the Oxford community and beyond could engage with the suffrage centenary by learning about pioneering women from across the decades – from Sappho, through to Mary Shelley and on to Emmeline Pankhurst. School groups were offered guided tours of the exhibition and one local school even created their own alternative guide to the exhibition.¹³ Crucially though, while this exhibition marked the start of the WiH public engagement events for the suffrage centenary, it was by no means the end. The exhibition launch was followed by a series of events that encouraged attendees to use the centenary year as a time to reflect on women's progress towards equality and the challenges that still lay before women. For example, WiH's International Women's Day event focused on the theme of 'One Hundred Years of Women's Suffrage, How Far Have We Come?' Here, leading figures from business, the arts and education led an engaging discussion on the status of gender equality today and in the future. Similarly, in May, WiH co-hosted an event that brought together activists and historians to discuss reproductive rights in Ireland, in advance of the referendum on the 8th Amendment of the Irish constitution.¹⁴ Here, leading figures from the 'Repeal the 8th', and 'Together for Yes' campaigns discussed the dangers of Ireland's 8th Amendment and recognised 'the right to life of the unborn and with due regard to the equal right to the life of the mother'.¹⁵ The restrictions that the amendment placed upon women's bodies, health and rights, was exemplified in the panel's discussion of several 'cases' which reflected on women's lived experiences – including the case of Savita Halpanavar, who tragically died of septic shock as a consequence of an inevitable miscarriage in 2012 and restricted access to an abortion in Ireland.¹⁶ Fortunately, Ireland voted overwhelmingly to overturn the 8th Amendment on 26th May 2018.

These events encouraged participants and audience members to consider that while 2018 may have been the year in which communities commemorated the work of suffrage pioneers, it was also a year in which a huge amount of debate centred on not just how far women had come, but on how far they still had to go. Furthermore, one of the recurring themes from public engagement events across the country, was the notion that if the past one-hundred years had taught us anything, it was that the goal of equality and the dreams of the suffragists and suffragettes still lay before us. This was more pertinent than ever within the context of 2018, where conversations and debates often centred on the impact of issues such as #metoo, #timesup and disputes surrounding equal pay.¹⁷ These conversations generated a momentum, invigorating women to press forward and continue the fight for a better and more equal world for women and girls. This inter-relationship between the past and present and the way in which the suffrage centenary encouraged broader conversations around women's equality and representation was highlighted at The National Trust's 2019 *Women and Power* conference, convened in partnership with the University of

Oxford. Here it was noted that:

The suffrage centenary encouraged broader conversations about contemporary feminism, equality and representation...It has also inspired a series of questions and challenges about the legacy of the centenary year including: how can we maintain this momentum, and how can we continue to challenge the stories of women, encourage debate and inspire change?¹⁸

One of the ways of ensuring that the momentum and legacy of the suffrage centenary was maintained was through institutional commitment to funding research into diverse and representative histories that had the potential to engage a range of communities. For me, the suffrage centenary acted as a launchpad into public engagement roles that would seek to harness these things. One role that did this, was a Knowledge Exchange Fellowship that operated in partnership with the National Trust and The Oxford Centre for Research in the Humanities (TORCH).¹⁹ The fellowship enabled the National Trust and I to foster ongoing research linked to the suffrage centenary and the Trust's 2018 *Women and Power* programme (a cross-property programme that showcased hidden and challenging histories, connected to women's suffrage, in various historic sites across the UK).²⁰

In building on previous research conducted for the *Women and Power* programme, I engaged in a project that prioritised women's suffrage and women's politics in the context of empire. The project focused on four National Trust properties (Dunham Massey, Kedleston Hall, Wightwick Manor and Mount Stewart) and the colonial and suffrage histories connected to the men and women who lived in these properties. Having visited many National Trust properties over the years, I experienced, first-hand, the ways in which the Trust has both protected and preserved their properties for present and future generations and also curated histories that are engaging and accessible for various audiences. Therefore, the opportunity to collaborate with a national institution and use my research skills to connect academic research on women's suffrage and colonialism to people and places associated with the Trust, was an opportunity not to be missed. The fellowship not only enhanced my experience of writing for both specialist and non-specialist audiences, it also opened my eyes to the important work of heritage institutions in communicating difficult and challenging histories to the public. The National Trust's commitment to tell 'historically accurate and academically robust' histories that are representative of our nation, is clear not only in the research partnerships that they support, but in the reports they commission.²¹ Support, commissioning and funding for research that seeks to address prevailing inequalities within public history – whether this be by highlighting women's inequalities or legacies of empire and colonialism – is crucial. As it is this research that can help shape diverse historical interpretations that have the potential influence public knowledge.

Just as the suffrage centenary offered opportunities to engage with a range of audiences and communities that might not have been possible outside of the commemorative year, the centenary of women's formal admission to the University of Oxford offered similar opportunities. Accordingly, funding was sought for a collaborative research and engagement project entitled *Education and Activism: Women at Oxford, 1878-1920*.

This project brought together a team representing the History Faculty, the Bodleian Libraries, the former women's colleges (Lady Margaret Hall, Somerville, St Anne's, St Hilda's and St Hugh's) and the Oxford Martin School Programme on Women's Equality and Inequality, to commemorate the centenary of women's formal admission to the University of Oxford. The main output was a research and engagement website – a resource that facilitates and contributes to research on women, education and political activism in Oxford and beyond.²²

From the outset, my colleagues and I sought to create a resource that would engage those across academic, heritage and cultural communities, as well as those within school and college environments. This was done by ensuring that the website content was wide-ranging and included everything from digitised archival material and commissioned academic articles, to an interactive timeline and a women's history walking app. Presenting historical content in such a format ensures the resources can be easily interpreted by both specialist and non-specialist audiences, maximising the impact of the research. Nevertheless, *Education and Activism* does not simply engage in a one-way transfer of historical information. Like so many collaborative projects I have been involved in, it benefitted from the research knowledge and expertise of individuals from across the academic sector and beyond. Furthermore, it encouraged Oxford communities to contribute to the history of women's education and activism by sharing their own experiences of university life via a crowdsourced archive.

My experiences of public engagement and collaboration during the centenary of women's suffrage and beyond, suggests public commemoration and community engagement has the potential to shape the historical interpretation of key moments in women's history. As an ECR, I found that working to bridge the gap between academic and public history was both a fulfilling and enriching experience. Perhaps most significantly, it illustrated how women's history can not only stimulate broader conversations about women's equality and contemporary feminism, but also how new experiences of public engagement can open one's mind to the importance of history in shaping and influencing public knowledge.

Notes

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2. The Representation of the People Act in 1918 gave the vote to women over the age of 30 who met a property qualification. The same Act gave the vote to all men over the age of 21. The Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act in 1919 was legislation that stated that a person couldn't be disqualified by sex or marriage from any public function or from being appointed any civil profession, vocation or judicial post. See also: June Purvis and June Hamman, 'The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain and Ireland: new perspectives', *Women's History Review*, 29/6 (2020), 911-915; <https://first100years.org.uk/> (accessed 9 Nov. 2020). For earlier reflections on public suffrage history and

memory see: Hilda Kean, 'Public History and Popular Memory: issues in the commemoration of the British Militant Suffrage Campaign', *Women's History Review*, 14/3&4 (2005), 581-590.

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4. See www.zonation.co.uk/production/Sylvia/ (accessed 20 Oct. 2020).
5. Knowledge Exchange is the mutually beneficial sharing of ideas, experience and expertise and involves collaboration between academic researchers and individuals and organisations outside of the university sphere. For more information see: www.torch.ox.ac.uk/knowledge-exchange.ox.ac.uk and <https://re.ukri.org/knowledge-exchange/knowledge-exchange-framework/> (accessed 5 Nov. 2020).
6. See www.royalholloway.ac.uk/research-and-teaching/departments-and-schools/history/what-will-i-study/citizens-project/ (accessed 20 Oct. 2020).
7. For more information on the Suffragettes of the WSPU and the Independent WSPU see: 'Keep your eyes on us because there is no more napping: the wartime suffrage campaigns of the Suffragettes of the WSPU and the Independent WSPU' for *The Politics of Suffrage*, eds. Alexandra Hughes-Johnson and Lyndsey Jenkins (London, New Historical Perspectives, forthcoming 2021).
8. Please note that historical advice was sought from a range of both academic professionals and those with extensive historical knowledge of the Wimbledon Suffrage movement, including Merton's Heritage Officer, Sarah Gould.
9. Quote from Beth Flintoff. See: <https://www.attictheatrecompany.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Rebellious-Women-Programme.pdf> (accessed 17 Nov. 2020).
10. Quote taken from the audio version of the play. Listen to an audio version of the play here: <https://attictheatrecompany.com/whatson/rebellious-women-wimbledon-2/> (accessed 29 Oct. 2020).
11. The term 'suffrage journey' was created by Karen Hunt. Hunt implies that suffragism should be seen as an evolving process rather than a static and stagnant position. With regard to Dora Montefiore, Hunt argues that her suffrage politics were expansive and evolving and that in order to understand more about individual women's suffragism that we must consider their 'suffrage journey'. See: Karen, Hunt, "Journeying through suffrage: the politics of Dora Montefiore" in *A Suffrage Reader: Charting Direction in British Suffrage History*, eds. Claire Eustace, Joan Ryan and Laura Ugolini (London: Leicester University Press, 2000).
12. To read more on the exhibition see: <https://www.firstwomenatoxford.ox.ac.uk/exhibitions-remind-us-all-history-doesnt-just-happen-it-made-we-live-it-and-shaped-ho> (accessed 5 Nov. 2020).
13. See here for the Cheney's alternative exhibition guide: <https://rumblemuseumssuffrage.wordpress.com/2018/02/25/from-sappho-to-suffrage-exhibition-project/> (accessed 5 Nov. 2020).
14. The Eight Amendment was introduced in 1984 and recognised 'the right to the life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to the life of the mother'.
15. See: www.irishstatutebook.ie (accessed 9 Nov. 2020). See also: <https://www.togetherforyes.ie/> (accessed 9 Nov. 2020).
16. For more on the history of abortion in Ireland see: Lindsey Earner-Byrne, Diane Urquhart (eds), *The Irish Abortion Journey, 1920-2018* (London, Palgrave: 2019).

17. Carrie Gracie, *Equal: a story of women, men and money*, (London: Virago, 2019). See also: <https://timesupnow.org/>; <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/06/29/carrie-gracie-wins-back-pay-bbc-asbroadcaster-apologises-unequal/>; <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2018/jan/08/bbc-carrie-gracie-praised-as-brave-and-brilliant-for-quitting-over-unequal-pay>; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42611725> (accessed 9 Nov. 2020).

18. *Women and Power: Redressing the Balance*, 2019 Conference Guide.

19. This role was funded by The Oxford Centre for Research in the Humanities via a Research England grant. See: <https://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/event/2020/2021-knowledge-exchange-fellowship> (accessed 9 Nov. 2020).

20. *Women and Power* was a National Public Programme that uncovered previously untold stories of the women who shaped our National Trust places and who fought for and against female suffrage. Sophie Duncan and Rachel Lennon, *Women and Power: the struggle for suffrage* (National Trust, 2019). See also: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/women-and-power-exploring-womens-history-at-our-places> (accessed 9 Nov. 2020).

21. See: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/addressing-the-histories-of-slavery-and-colonialism-at-the-national-trust> (accessed 29 Nov. 2020).

22. To view the resource visit: <https://www.firstwomenatoxford.ox.ac.uk/> (accessed 29 Dec. 2020).

Writing Women's Histories

Introduction

Maggie Andrews

Within this special edition of *Women's History*, there have been references to a multitude of ways in which research into women's history is disseminated and communicated: exhibitions, plays, events, animations, films, websites, re-enactments, workshops, talks and lectures. Arguably however, the written word, whether in books, blogs, magazines, academic journals or on websites, remains fundamental to how women's history is shared. This is particularly the case now, during the Covid-19 pandemic, when reports suggest that people are reading more.

Feminist scholars in the nineteen seventies and eighties argued that writing women's history is intrinsically tied up with politics, the need to question assumptions about gender, to understand oppression in the past and present and to shake-up the discipline of history. The project of rewriting history has turned out to be both complex and challenging. It raises questions, for example, about how it should be done

and what are the priorities? In the eighties, my undergraduate dissertation tutor was adamant that rewriting history involved a reworking of the style of writing, not just the topic that was being written about. To this feminist economic historian, women's history had to be clearly articulated, engaging for other researchers but, just as importantly, accessible and readable by those who were not historians - an approach which has perhaps lost traction in the new millennium.

Moreover, if writing women's history is a political project, it is also a personal one. What we write, how we write, when, where and whether we write women's history, are shaped by a multitude of personal factors. Thus, the articles below are personal reflections, the beginning of deliberations, discussions and debates, which arguably need to occur around women's history writing. They include: Paula Bartley's thoughts on how she accidentally became a biographer and my own thoughts about many years of struggling with writing. They are shared to encourage others to write and are part of the process of developing ways of supporting the writing of women's history.

An Accidental Biographer

Paula Bartley

I came to writing biographies by accident. When I was a young teacher in the 1980s, I used to have lines in very large script from this 1935 Brecht poem, *Questions from a Worker who Reads*, circling my classroom walls:

*Who built Thebes of the 7 gates?
In the books you will read the names of kings.
Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?
Where, the evening that the Great Wall of
China was finished, did the masons go?
Caesar beat the Gauls.
Was there not even a cook in his army?
Philip of Spain wept as his fleet
Was sunk and destroyed. Were there no
other tears?*

As a socialist I wanted to break away from the 'great man' theory of history. As a feminist and a Brecht fan, I had no wish to replace it with a 'great woman' theory. Unfortunately, there were few academic books on women's history, and none appropriate for school students. So, Carol Adams, Cathy Loxton and I wrote our own. These developed into the Cambridge Women's History series, which focussed on the lives of women across the centuries and broadened the history syllabus beyond Britain.¹ I unexpectedly changed direction when I was invited to write a biography of Emmeline Pankhurst by Robert Pearce, editor for the Routledge Historical Biographies series. I approached it quizzically, with a mixture of enthusiasm, trepidation and downright fear. I was a historian who researched the not-so-famous, the grass-roots, the forgotten. I was certainly not a biographer, let alone an adherent of the view that individuals made history. It was a bit

of a challenge as Emmeline Pankhurst had left no records and all her life was in the public domain. And she was certainly not my favourite heroine. As ever, I enjoyed the historical research, the piecing-together of all those traces of the past, the writing and the acquisition of (albeit quickly forgotten) knowledge. The book was published and much to my amazement, is now being translated into Japanese.²

Shortly after, I took voluntary redundancy and headed off to Hungary for nine years. When I returned, I was a bit in the doldrums and my lovely friend Sue Morgan suggested I return to writing and to look at the newly-established series by Pluto called *Revolutionary Lives*, because they were asking for proposals. I knew a little about Ellen Wilkinson: she was always popping up in various history texts and thought she would be somebody I might like to explore. Pluto liked the proposal and off I went. I had not expected to fall in love. I had always kept a respectable and respectful distance from my subjects – I was after all researching in a professional capacity and as such, not expected to become emotionally involved. Yet how could I remain dispassionate about this 4'11" fireball, a high-octane politician who, in spite of constant ill health, drove herself to beyond the limits of her physical capabilities? I loved her passion, her mischievous nature, her unpretentiousness, her emotional outbursts, her warmth and her impulsiveness. Ellen's first reactions were emotional: only then would she think.

Ellen had been born into poverty. She knew what it looked like, what it smelt like, what it felt like. And she did not want anyone to have to endure its debilitating effect on the human psyche, spirit and body, sapping energy day-by-day until there was no optimism, health or self-worth left. Ellen loathed poverty. She said, 'I don't just mean being hard up and having to do without things for a bit. I mean poverty as an institution, the deep grinding health-destroying poverty in which 70% of the people in this country live'. All her life she campaigned against it. I was researching her response to the 1929 Wall Street crash and the ensuing Depression, just as David Cameron's government was introducing its austerity programme: punishing the most vulnerable, giving tax cuts to those on higher incomes and rewarding bankers who had caused the economic crash in the first place. Ellen's words echoed across a millennium; she knew exactly where to place the blame for the economic crisis, the greed of the bankers. In the 1920s, the City of London had loaned money in order to reap immense and ultimately, unsustainable profits but had 'been caught out with heavy losses in speculation'. Once again, it was confirmed that there was as much continuity in history as change.

I admired Ellen's fights against fascism in Spain, Germany, Italy and her support of Indian independence and other anti-colonial struggles. Her commitment to anti-fascism brought her in contact with some Russian spies, notably Otto Katz, a very attractive man who was willing to use his looks and natural magnetism to further his political cause. Ellen worked closely with Otto on numerous projects. He was, in effect, her controller; she was his inadvertent spy and maybe his lover. Undoubtedly Otto Katz used his good looks and charm to woo Ellen and maybe, in true spy fashion, to seduce her.³ It was an intrigue straight out of a John Le Carré novel, though more frightening because it was real. Katz was a dangerous man and he may even have been the 'Otto' who recruited the notorious spy Kim Philby. Was Ellen a Russian spy too? Certainly, Ellen had a track record of sympathy towards Russia: she was one of

the first members of the British Communist Party, had been financed at least once by Russia and had joined numerous communist-front organisations. We may never know however, if she was involved in espionage and this is one of the many frustrations for biographers keen to dig around someone's private past. Ellen had her papers destroyed. What was there to hide?

By this time, my husband was calling me a 'heroine addict'. My biography of Ellen Wilkinson is certainly the most 'biased' biography of her.⁴ Subsequently, two full-length biographies of her have been published: academically credible, thoroughly researched, neutral in their analysis. Works of historical merit. No sides taken. Since then I have written two more biographies, one of Queen Victoria (once again invited by Robert Pearce to submit a proposal for his Routledge series) and one of Labour Cabinet Ministers.⁵ Numerous books had been written on Queen Victoria already, mostly about her domestic life. My focus was on her political machinations, her interference in parliamentary government and her misuse of power. I returned to my roots for *Labour Women in Power*, the story of five remarkable Cabinet Ministers. I discovered that group biographies demand extensive research for every individual and that each of these extraordinary politicians deserved a book of her own. I didn't fall in love with Queen Victoria, but Ellen Wilkinson occupies a special place as one of my five Cabinet Ministers. Maybe an accidental biographer like me can think herself lucky to fall in love at all, and once is quite enough!

Notes

1. We were contracted to produce six books. In the end we edited – and sometimes wrote – ten: Paula Bartley, Cathy Loxton *Plains Women: Women in the American West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Carol Adams, Paula Bartley, Hilary Bourdillon, Cathy Loxton *From Workshop to Warfare: The Lives of Medieval Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Carol Adams, Paula Bartley, Cathy Loxton *Under Control: Life in a Nineteenth-Century Silk Factory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Diane Atkinson *Votes for Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Hilary Bourdillon *Women as Healers: A History of Women and Medicine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Angela John *Coalmining Women: Victorian Lives and Campaigns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Caroline Lang *Keep Smiling Through: Women in the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Cathy Porter *Women in Revolutionary Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Gill Thomas, *Life on All Fronts: Women in the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and Rozina Visram, *Women in India and Pakistan: The Struggle for Independence from British Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
2. *Emmeline Pankhurst* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002).
3. MI5 took a great interest in Ellen Wilkinson's movements and stalked her. Apparently, the MI5 file on Wilkinson was destroyed, probably when she became Cabinet Minister.
4. Paula Bartley, *Ellen Wilkinson: From Red Suffragist to Government Minister* (London: Pluto, 2014).
5. Paula Bartley, *Queen Victoria* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); Paula Bartley, *Labour Women in Power, Cabinet Ministers in the Twentieth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

Writing Women's History: Struggles, Strategies and Support

Maggie Andrews

Over the years a number of articles and books have been written about researching women's history; likewise, there has been discussion of the relative benefits of gender and women's history. However, the illusive business of getting words onto a page, actually writing women's history, conveying and committing research, knowledge and arguments into something we are prepared to let someone else look at, has received less attention. This article does not offer a 'how to' guide to writing rather, it seeks to start a conversation about writing: specifically, around the emotional, practical, social, cultural and economic factors that prevent or enable us to write. To this end, I reflect on my own recurring struggles with writing and my experience as an educator, supporting others seeking to write women's history.

Writing women's history has offered me escape and agency. I enjoy losing myself in ideas and the power writing offers over the words on a page: the endless editing, re-editing and shaping of a text. I am not alone in feeling an enduring sense of achievement when something I have written is published: an emotion that compares favourably with the transitory sense of accomplishment that most tasks undertaken in employment or domestic life offer. However, like many women in academia, I have a complex 'relationship of attraction and repulsion' with writing.¹ Writing sometimes terrifies me. I can procrastinate endlessly, undertaking a multitude of displacement activities rather than sitting at a keyboard. I have experienced crippling bouts of writer's block (lasting days, weeks, months or even years). As Sarah Moore has suggested, individual and environmental factors restrain or even inhibit people's ability to write;² numerous practical, political and emotional factors have shaped my ability to write at different times in my life but, being a woman with dyslexia is intertwined with them all.

My struggles with writing predate my passion for women's history. When I was at school, in the nineteen sixties and seventies, dyslexia was incorrectly understood to be more common in boys. Consequently, my dyslexia was not identified until I was in my teens. Girls can remain undiagnosed for many years, often becoming withdrawn and alienated from school as I did.³ Unsurprisingly, if like me, they studiously tried to write well, to meticulously re-read work attempting to identify spelling and grammatical mistakes, only to be ticked-off by teachers for being lazy and slap-dash. Crushing comments that ensured writing would, for me, always be accompanied by apprehension and self-doubt. Years later, a submission for a journal produced a similarly disparaging response from an anonymous reviewer who considered my article marred by 'numerous careless mistakes'; that there were grammatical or spelling mistakes is undeniable but, the reviewer's use of the word 'careless' made a value judgement about why this had occurred. A consequence perhaps of their misguided assumption that those with dyslexia do not undertake historical research, become academics or even professors of history.

This assumption mirrored my school's response to my diagnosis of dyslexia. They speedily steered me away from the subjects involving writing essays, which the headmistress of my rather conventional Catholic school insisted I would find too challenging. Consequently, I have an A level in Home

Economics but not in History. As Sara Rankin points out, even now, 'schools view dyslexia as a deficit'. Not only does this interpretation lead to low self-esteem, it also has an 'impact on what you decide to do'.⁴ I dropped out of education and became a teenage mum. Like many of the women in Tina Skinner and Fiona MacGill's research on women and dyslexia, motherhood provided my incentive to return to study.⁵ I was lucky; funded postgraduate work at Sussex University set me on a path to become a historian. However, I am still left wondering how many girls and women have been cut off from studying history, from encountering, engaging and enjoying women's history by either a diagnosis or a lack of diagnosis of dyslexia.

Yet women without dyslexia, who love reading and research, can also find that the prospect of writing produces paralysing feelings of anxiety and endless procrastination. My undergraduate and postgraduate level students are not alone in finding extended writing projects are the core to academic success while simultaneously, often evoking insecurity and anxiety.⁶ For some, it seems this problem is only overcome by a looming or imminent deadline; for others, even this will not do the trick. Whilst the challenges of writing are not unique to women, Sylvie Gambaudo argues that 'the very experience of writing has been intimately enmeshed with the experience of gender'.⁷ Biographies of tragic lives of single-minded women authors imply that 'writing costs writers their lives'.⁸ It has also been suggested this is not a price many women want to pay.⁹ Women committed to writing can find it difficult and unsettling to assume the mantle of being a writer amidst their multiple other unstable identity positions in working, domestic and social lives.¹⁰ In the inter-war years, the successful writer E.M. Delafield produced an enduringly popular description of writer's block and domestic distractions in her semi-autobiographical publication, *The Diary of a Provincial Lady*.¹¹ As Delafield demonstrated, the expectations responsibilities and practical demands of being, for example, a carer, an educator, a mother, a partner and an 'Angel in the House', did not sit easily with those of being a writer.¹²

Researching and writing women's history can (and perhaps should) disrupt, stretch and challenge accepted family, community or national narratives of the past, as it advances uncomfortable truths that may be unsettling or upsetting for readers. Furthermore, placing words on a page and getting them published is a declamatory act; it assumes a degree of comfort in the writer's relationship to knowledge. However, women's history is often perceived to be on the fringes of the subject area, echoing many women's sense of themselves as not quite belonging or being 'other' and perhaps, exaggerating their sense of marginality. Does this explain why some women's historians are anxious that they may have nothing new or significant to say, or worry their work is of little interest to anyone else, consequently finding it difficult to write?

Writing women's history is an occupation that does not lend itself to the multi-tasking which, out of necessity, epitomises many women's lives. Years of teaching mature students and working with Early Career Researchers (most juggling working lives and domestic responsibilities) has provided ample evidence of the difficulties many women have in justifying spending time on writing.¹³ Compared to

the multitude of mundane practical tasks that the demands of home, family and/or working life place on the individual, writing can almost seem like an indulgence, a guilty pleasure. Indeed, like many women, I found guilt was an emotion associated with writing: guilt about my family when writing, guilt about writing when with my family. When I began studying for my undergraduate degree, I was the mother of two young children. By the time I had graduated and embarked upon a masters I had three. When I completed my doctorate, I was a single mum with four kids. Domestic responsibilities always seemed to need attention: floors required cleaning, supper needed preparing and children had to be put to bed. When I embarked upon an academic career, these responsibilities were replaced by numerous commitments to students, endless administrative tasks and meetings. Administration, quality processes and teaching and learning have become the housework of educational establishments. Often undertaken by women, these additional tasks similarly place huge hurdles in the way of their authoring articles and books. In time, I also came to realise that women's caring responsibilities are not limited to young children; women are major carers of the elderly and ill within families. My perhaps less-than-ideal solution, was to cut the amount of sleep I took and develop a habit of writing late at night.¹⁴ I still find that the clock announcing it is ten or eleven o'clock (a time when emails have slowed down and domestic tasks are done) is a period in which I can most easily give myself permission to write.

This scenario contrasts with some of the male professional writers who, when interviewed, acknowledge that writing is a 'hard graft' and describe the strict, almost military regimes they evoke to ensure they write productively at their desks. Gyles Brandreth apparently sets himself a target of 1,000 words a day, resisting a lunchbreak until he has completed at least 400 words.¹⁵ But such writers have a wonderfully legitimating factor in the mix – money. Their writing is lucrative; it 'brings home the bacon' so to speak. Writing women's history rarely does this. It might boost self-confidence or improve career prospects. It might, if you are writing for a magazine or for a publisher, which expects to sell their books in high street bookshops, bring some financial reward. But frankly, for almost all of us, the actually hourly rate of pay from writing women's history is derisory. Instead, we are more likely to be motivated by other factors: a passion for and/or a political commitment to our subject matter, a sense of the importance of women's experiences and a need for women's voices to be heard, not be hidden from history. However, perhaps this investment in writing histories of women and the ways in which it defines us, may make it more difficult.¹⁶ There have been times when the only way I can get through a bout of writer's block is to write about something that is less personally important—a document needed for work or a quality report—after which I can return to writing women's history.

Escaping the mundane demands of everyday life is easiest with dedicated space to write. For most women, the privileged ideal of 'a room of my own' and a guaranteed income, that Virginia Woolf suggested were the prerequisites to women's writing, are unobtainable.¹⁷ I spent years writing at the kitchen table, in the corner of a bedroom, under the stairs, on a sofa, on a train and occasionally, I sought the peace of a coffee shop with no WIFI. I did, however, grasp the practical assistance provided by new technology, portable computers, spelling and grammar checks and even voice recognition

software. Word processing enabled first, second, tenth and eleventh drafts to morph into each other; I find it liberating to know there is nothing final about the words on the page, all can be endlessly changed. But, I also wonder if it pushes me to sit and try and write when I need more time to think? If I cannot yet embrace my tendency to procrastination, I can now recognise it as an opportunity to walk and mull over ideas rejecting and developing them.

Unfortunately, I have seen no evidence that experience or even publications diminishes anxieties around writing. When I agree to write a book review for an unfamiliar journal, actually writing the review is inevitably delayed by multiple displacement activities. When, as with this article, I am out of my comfort zone (exploring a new topic or approach to history), I often suffer days of writer's block, anxious there are unwritten assumptions or rules that govern the ways in which material should be presented.¹⁸ Imposter syndrome, performance anxiety and perfectionism afflict many women, even when they have a string of publications to their name.¹⁹ Such afflictions are however a preferable alternative to overdeveloped sometimes misplaced confidence and can lead to much time spent crafting written work.

Experience does mean that I recognise the roller-coaster of emotions the writing process involves for me and that I understand my oscillations between panic and progress or between obsession and loathing for my topic. I have developed my own perverse patterns of working to circumnavigate or minimise these difficulties. I never sit down at a keyboard with a new writing task and a whole day or week stretching before me; I know I will be unable to write. I have to slowly transition from spending very short and limited periods of time writing, to becoming totally immersed in it. Experience also tells me much of my writing will be discarded when I edit; only brutal revision and numerous supportive and wonderful proof readers can save me from some of the potential humiliation that submitting work for publication can involve. Nevertheless, like all those with dyslexia, I find the time, energy and effort needed for writing sometimes takes a titanic emotional toll.²⁰

My challenge and the challenge for all women, is to find ways to create the physical and perhaps more importantly, the emotional space to write history. When, in 2014, I found myself, by chance, chairing a paper on structured writing retreats by Rowena Murray at a conference in Cardiff, it changed both my own practice and more importantly, how I try to support others writing women's history. Murray is one of a number of writers who have argued writing is a social rather than solitary or isolated activity—perhaps even a collaborative and community-based endeavour.²¹ This approach makes sense to me. I have found collaboration in writing and editing incredibly productive; it provides both motivation and emotional support that can help combat anxiety when writing. Murray draws attention to a number of capabilities that are pre-requisites for successful writing; these include motivation, peer support and working within a community of researchers.²² On the basis of organising numerous successful writing retreats in Scotland and elsewhere, she argues their importance in creating a safe productive space for writers. This is done by ensuring the days are tightly structured, the retreats are located away from everyday distractions, practicalities are taken care of (lunch, water, extension leads for computers etc.) and there is no surveillance of the material written. Barbara Grant has also noted that writing retreats can be effective in affirming

women's identity as writers.²³

A number of different formats to provide space, peer support and motivation for writers have emerged in recent years. Groups of PhD students have, for example, gathered electronically to write for forty-five minutes a day; other clusters of would-be writers have met for a week once a year. The Institute of Historical Research's shut-up-and-write group follows the 'pomodoro method', in the weekly writing retreats it runs. Participants write for a distraction-free focused twenty-five minutes, 'have a five-minute break to chat, look at Twitter, do emails, have a stretch or a coffee' repeating the process four times.²⁴ A Canadian Professor assured me that shut-up-and-write sessions in a coffee shop had transformed her productivity. Every Friday afternoon, she met a group of women friends, had coffee, cake and a chat, followed by forty-five minutes of writing, more coffee, cake and chat and a final forty-five minutes of writing. The routine of such groups, activities and the support they offer provides what might be called a 'community of practice', whilst giving a rhythm and structure to writing projects.²⁵ Interestingly, although only a few such activities are specifically organised for women, they are all overwhelmingly attended by women.

At the University of Worcester, I set up monthly writing retreats for between twelve and twenty-four staff and students on Saturdays. We explored different formats but settled on an agenda: meeting at 10am, engaging in two 1.5-hour bursts of writing and a coffee break before we had lunch together. The afternoon involved a single 1.5 hour writing session. In total we wrote for four hours. Feedback from the participants suggested they were amazed by what they could achieve working in a focussed, supportive space, away from distractions and interruptions, 'with other people but separately'.²⁶ One participant noted: 'the best aspect was just being a quiet space, working alongside other focussed people. I have never done this before and it worked for me.'²⁷ Other aspects of the retreat were important in helping us all to be productive, while beginning to shift our writing habits. The end and commencement of session times was strictly adhered to, so that we could all appreciate how much can be achieved in little more than an hour and apply this to our writing between retreats. Clear breaks ensured that we did not write until we had run out of anything to say, but for as long as we were really productive, making returning to the writing easier. The atmosphere of the retreats (on a fairly empty campus in rooms with a nice outlook), the provision of coffee and cakes on arrival, a shared lunch and designated times for chat, gave the retreats, as one participant undertaking a PhD noted, 'a sort of holiday atmosphere'.

The significance of the atmosphere created in a writing community was emphasised for me when National Teaching Fellowship (NTF) funding enabled me to attend longer residential writing retreats.²⁸ *Charlie's Urban Writers Retreats* were, paradoxically, set in a delightful and extremely comfortable Devon farmhouse, rented for the occasion. Individuals had their own spacious bedrooms with desks or table on which to write and the use of a number of communal rooms. Support and social interaction occurred at mealtimes, which punctuated the day and provided both wonderful home-cooked food plus a sense of being nurtured. Writers, who were mostly writing fiction, were removed from domestic responsibilities, free to just write and to think. There was no surveillance or disapproval if we opted for a little relaxation,

taking a walk or making a trip to the local town. And the internet connection was delightfully unreliable, which kept my focus on writing. The quiet, calm, but busy atmosphere in the house (between meals), plus the effort and expense of getting there, afforded added impetus to write. There was a gentle social pressure to produce words, a desire to be able to say something positive when asked how things were going at supper or when returning home after three or four days, a need to justify carving out the time to write. I was reminded of the importance of the link there can be between pleasure and productivity in writing, also the importance of acknowledging and containing the mixed emotions writing stirs up for women, emotions that can only be kept in check in a nurturing supportive environment.

Useful as I find writing retreats, they are not the silver bullet that can end my or anyone else's struggles with writing. Arguably, we need a smorgasbord of different formats, spaces, groups and approaches to progress both individual and collaborative writing. We also need to acknowledge that different circumstances and projects will demand different solutions. In January 2020, National Teaching Fellowship funds enabled me to organise a two-day WHN residential writing retreat at Denman College for PhD students and Early Career Researchers; this Women's Institute College in Oxfordshire had a calm and supportive environment in which to write.²⁹ As one participant explained, the retreat had given her space to think about the argument and structure of her writing and she had 'really broken through' on an area that had been 'giving her grief'.³⁰ Only two months later, Covid 19 and lockdown changed our everyday lives and the place of writing within them. Whilst some writers may have been enormously productive during lockdown, many were not. It was not merely the shutting of archives that was a problem for historians; home-schooling, changes in working and domestic life all disrupted support networks, rhythms of writing and motivation for many. Consequently, as Sarah Crook has noted: 'within academia, there is anecdotal evidence that the pandemic has disproportionately affected women's ability to publish, with journals noting fewer submissions from women but not from men.'³¹

With this in mind, on 3 October 2020, the WHN launched the first of its (now fortnightly) online writing retreats. These three-hour Friday morning sessions, open to all, are made up of two 1.25 hour periods of dedicated writing, surrounded by a chance to chat and feel that we are part of a virtual community of writers of women's history.³² It has been a joy to see writers of novels and books, postgraduate students and academics coming together to write and feedback has been positive.³³ Someone for example noted: 'I just wanted to send you a quick email to thank you and the WHN for setting up the online writing retreat. After starting writing a book proposal in lockdown (as well as juggling having a toddler at home), I have today sent it off to an agent. I don't think I would have managed to get it done this month without the retreat'.³⁴ Whilst another participant noted: 'This session has been really useful, it made me focus on a piece of work that I have been putting off looking at for a couple of weeks'.³⁵ Responses such as these are evidence of the need for ongoing supportive, nurturing spaces for writing women's history, something the WHN will hopefully be able to continue to provide in the future. This support may not necessarily transform the illusive business of getting words onto a page, actually writing women's history, but evidence suggests that it could provide women with a chance, even permission, to write.

Notes

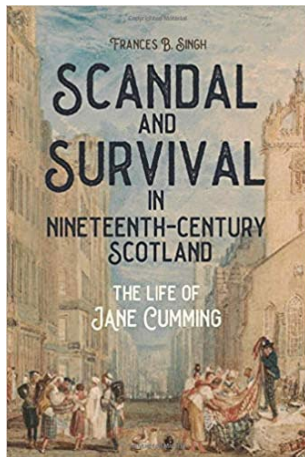
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Book Reviews

Frances B. Singh, *Scandal and Survival in Nineteenth-Century Scotland: The life of Jane Cumming*, Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2020. £90, 978 1 58046 955 5 (hardback), pp. xxxviii + 318

Reviewed by Gillian Beattie-Smith

The Open University



Frances B. Singh's biography of the life of Jane Cumming makes a valuable contribution to the growing body of literature on the lives of Scottish women, on the reception of women's narratives as court evidence and to discussions on race, gender and sexuality in the early nineteenth century. Singh provides a narrative of a girl born to an unnamed Indian mother and a Scots father, George Cumming, who had been sent to India by his parents, Sir Alexander Penrose Cumming

Gordon, 1st Baronet of Altyre and Gordonstoun and Lady Helen Cumming Gordon. Jane was born in Patna in 1795 or 1796 and with her brother, Yorrick, she travelled from India to Scotland in 1802. Jane was under the guardianship of her grandmother, Helen, who sent her to school – first in Elgin, and later to Edinburgh, to the school run by Marianne Woods and Jane Pirie, an experience which has shaped the creation of a narrative of Jane's life and character. Singh contextualizes parts of the narrative in educational philosophy, such as that of Elizabeth Hamilton, but also draws parallels from the lives of other children born to British fathers and Indian mothers, which illustrate the diverse experiences of the children.

In 1810, Jane Cumming gave an account to her grandmother, Helen Cumming, of lesbian sexual activities of her teachers, Marianne Woods and Jane Pirie. Helen Cumming repeated the story to another parent and as a result, parents removed their children from the school, which then closed. Woods and Pirie took legal action against Helen Cumming for recompense for their personal suffering, financial losses and legal costs. The case of *Miss Marianne Woods and Miss Jane Pirie Against Dame Helen Cumming Gordon* was heard in the Scottish Court of Session in 1811, was appealed, referred to and dismissed by the House of Lords in 1819 and was finally settled out of court in 1821. Woods and Pirie were paid £4000 solatium only.

The case has also been of interest to other writers. Scottish lawyer and author, William Roughead, published an account in his book, *Bad Companions* (1931), which was drawn on by Lillian Hellman for her play, *The Children's Hour* (1934), and the American historian of lesbian and LGBT history, Lillian Faderman, explored the underlying masculine perspectives and prejudices recorded in the court proceedings in her book, *Scotch Verdict* (1984). Singh's exploration of the court case

highlights the prevailing racial prejudices in the language used. For example, Jane was said by Clerk and Moncrieff, acting for Woods and Pirie, to have developed 'licentious or libidinous propensities' (p.145), as a result of living in India to the age of eight. They argued that it was well-known 'what black or half-blooded females learn in India' and compared her to 'the cobra capello of her native Ganges' as one who poisoned by disposition without human emotions (p.139). In response, and as if in support of Jane's character, Cranstoun and Mackenzie, acting for Helen Cumming, argued that Jane's colour was but 'the tinge' and that she was 'born of European parentage' (p.147).

In 1818, Jane was married to William Tulloch, who later became a church minister, and although she is not named, records of 1843 show she joined the Free Church, even though Tulloch remained in the Established Church (p.191). She died in 1844 and in her will, had named family members as executors. They declined to act. In a correspondence with family descendants, Singh found they had not been aware, until Faderman's book, of Jane, whose life, they told her, is a 'family story that has been quietly buried' (p.195).

The book is structured into seven chapters, four of which centre on Jane's schooling and the legal case, and which build on sixty-five pages of contextualisation, including brief and very useful biographies in a 'Dramatis Personae'. Five appendices and thirty-two pages of notes offer evidence of detailed research and additional information. The extent of Singh's research is extraordinary and the research, which created the line of narrative in the book, is considerable. The book provides a biography, a personal interpretation, narrative and opinion of the life and character of Jane Cumming. It builds on Singh's acclaimed body of published work on Jane Cumming and provides an interesting narrative through which to examine perspectives on race, class, sex and gender.

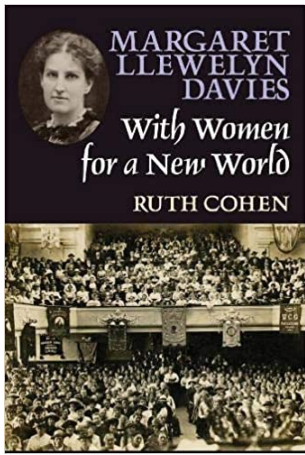
Ruth Cohen, *Margaret Llewelyn Davies: With Women for a New World*, Dagenham: Merlin Press, 2020, £17.99, 978-0-85036-759-1 (paperback) pp. 283

Reviewed by Cathy Hunt

Independent scholar

Ruth Cohen's study of Margaret Llewelyn Davies is the first full-length biography of a woman whose work placed her at the forefront of some of the most important issues facing working-class British women during a vital period of change from the 1880s to the 1920s. As General Secretary of the Women's Cooperative Guild (the Guild) between 1889 and 1921, Llewelyn Davies spearheaded campaigns to enrich and improve the lives of women as citizens, workers, consumers, wives and mothers.

I don't often pay much attention to book covers but here, my attention was grabbed by a small photograph of a young Llewelyn Davies. It is an extraordinary portrait of a determined and modern-looking woman, who appears to be communicating something important. Her life's work is meticulously recounted by Cohen, in a manner that helps the



reader to understand the strength of her convictions as well as her compelling personality. Llewelyn Davies was highly thought of across and beyond radical and socialist movements; I especially like the description by Sylvia Pankhurst that she was 'tender in her broad humanity' (p 190).

The primary aim of the Guild, founded in 1883 as part of the co-operative movement, was to provide space for women to develop their understanding of co-operation and to recognise their

importance within it. Cohen shows how much more the Guild offered; branch meetings were a chance for women to learn together away from men who were often at least outwardly confident in public speaking. Encouraging mutual support through varied social campaigns, Guild women acquired skills that working in the home often prevented.

The Guild is sometimes overlooked in labour and political histories because of the difficulty in deciding quite where it belonged; it was not a trade union, political party or philanthropic endeavour. Reading this study has deepened my own understanding of the breadth of the Guild's work. Life within this broad church was not always harmonious and Llewelyn Davies' skilled leadership was vital in ensuring progression and cohesion. Cohen takes great care to contextualise, explaining the Guild's cross-overs and connections with other organisations and causes, including suffrage, paid work, maternity, child care and divorce.

When Llewelyn Davies retired, tributes from Guild members described a friend, a big sister and a guiding spirit (p. 217). Cohen's biography shows how this came to be so – how a privileged, middle class woman of independent means was taken to heart by the largely working-class membership of the Guild. Much as I love the photograph included of Llewelyn Davies and Lilian Harris working in their office in the vicarage in Cumbria (the Llewelyn Davies family home), it is clear that Llewelyn Davies did not direct remotely. Instead, she was a leader who did as much as she could to connect with the expanding membership, travelling to branches offering support as readily as she sought to influence and persuade those in positions of political influence.

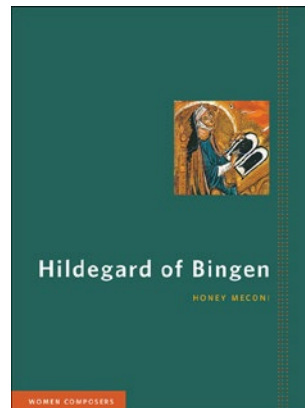
Llewelyn Davies was so well connected that it might seem that a life of some sort of distinction was inevitable. She grew up among people who expected and worked for social reform and the list of her family's friends and acquaintances – including Ruskin, Carlyle, Marx and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson – was impressive to say the least. Perhaps it was also a touch intimidating. Cohen questions for example, whether, while at Girton College, Cambridge, Llewelyn Davies was daunted by the fact that her aunt, Emily Davies, was one of the college's founders and that this may have contributed to a lack of confidence in her academic abilities. Llewelyn Davies implied that she left Girton, after two rather than the full three years, because university life was not really for her and her future lay outside of it, in social work. Cohen points to another possibility: she was needed at home. This was a recurring theme and despite the establishment of a brilliant career, Llewelyn Davies' work was periodically put on hold to care for her family during crises of ill health and

tragedy. It seems that no matter how liberal or enlightened one's family, as an unmarried daughter, familial duty, however lovingly carried out, could never be escaped.

It is Cohen's weaving together of the personal and professional parts of Llewelyn Davies' life that make this biography so absorbing. Its accessible style allowed me to get close to this remarkable campaigner and leader and to see why she was as well thought of by Guild members as by prominent reformers and politicians. The book is thoroughly researched and benefits from some invaluable family material, particularly letters. As well as being an important account of what Cohen refers to as Llewelyn Davies' visionary work in the Guild, it is a valuable addition to literature exploring the realities of women's lives at the turn of the last century.

Honey Meconi, *Hildegard of Bingen, Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2018. £16.99, 9780252083679 (paperback) pp. xiv + 162*

Reviewed by Karen Jones
Independent Scholar



Honey Meconi is a Professor of Music and her biography of Hildegard is in a series on women composers, aimed both at general readers and musicians. The first six chapters are a narrative of Hildegard's life, the seventh being an account of her works and reputation after her death. The final chapters are intended for specialised musical readers and will not be discussed here: they contain a detailed technical analysis of her musical compositions. After listing

Hildegard's works on theology, hagiography, natural history, medicine, autobiography and a voluminous correspondence, as well as the music for which she is now best known, Meconi discusses her sources. Hildegard was famous enough to be written about in her lifetime and for her works to be preserved but her large surviving archive contains many gaps and contradictions and Meconi concludes that this makes her story 'both intensely frustrating (how much is true?) and extraordinarily thrilling' (p. 3).

Born about 1098, the tenth child of a Rhineland noble family, Hildegard, by her own account, had visions since early childhood. In 1112, as the disciple of another visionary woman, Jutta of Sponheim, she became an anchoress, living in strict enclosure at the Benedictine monastery of Disibodenberg. Jutta practised extreme asceticism and her fame as a healer, counsellor and intercessor led other women to join her community. On Jutta's death they elected Hildegard their leader. Four years later, in 1141, Hildegard's real path to celebrity began. She reported a vision in which 'knowledge and understanding of all types came to her instantly' (p.8) and God commanded her to write these revelations down. Hildegard reacted by falling ill, her habitual reaction to stress, but was persuaded to write, chiefly by the monk Volmar, who became her secretary and biographer. She began her first major theological work, *Scivias* (Know the Ways) and began drawing attention to herself by writing for advice to the celebrated Bernard of Clairvaux and to the Pope, asking for

his approval of her writings. Her growing reputation encouraged further recruits, till the women's quarters at Disibodenberg became overcrowded. She then announced another revelation: God wished her to move to Rupertsberg near Bingen on the Rhine. The Disibodenberg community initially refused permission for this. Hildegard again fell ill, recovering only when the monks agreed to her leaving.

Eventually, aged about fifty, Hildegard (with around twenty nuns and Volmar as priest) moved to Rupertsberg. Though still technically under Disibodenberg's authority, they now had considerably more freedom. Hildegard became famous, much as Jutta had been, with many asking for her prayers, advice and healing. But for her, creativity replaced Jutta's self-mortification. Her music was probably initially intended for performance by her nuns, but soon this and her other writings were being copied and the manuscripts disseminated to other religious houses. She always described herself as unlearned and knowing only what God had revealed to her. Her writings show her strong visual orientation: she was describing her visions. In *Scivias* she describes virgins adorned with gold and gems, 'heads veiled in white, adorned with a gold circlet' (p. 31). In a later theological work, *Liber Vite Meritorum*, beautiful clothes, crowns and jewels feature among the joys of heaven. Delight in fine clothing was not confined to the visions: on feast days Hildegard's nuns wore white silk veils, gold crowns and rings, a practice apparently unique to Rupertsberg. The importance to her of music appears repeatedly: the final vision of *Scivias* is described as 'an extended tribute to music' (p. 39).

The disputed relationship between Rupertsberg and Disibodenberg was settled in 1158. The parent house would provide a priest for the nuns; they could choose Hildegard's successor and enough property was granted to Rupertsberg to give it economic independence. After this, aged about 60, Hildegard began *Liber Vite Meritorum* and still more remarkably, started preaching outside the convent, to monastic and lay audiences. Preaching by women was forbidden, yet she apparently had official approval, completing probably four preaching tours, finishing the last at the age of 73. Meanwhile she continued writing and corresponding with successive senior clerics. She died in 1179. Her monastery was dissolved in 1814, but a revival of interest in her led to its being refounded in 1904 and its nuns have contributed much to the status she now has.

From this short and accessible biography emerges a picture of an extraordinary woman who only came into her own when well into middle age, displayed creativity in multiple areas, loved fine clothes, excelled at getting her own way and promoting her own celebrity, all in a period renowned for its misogyny. This book left me with many unanswered questions but eager to learn more, which is a good reason to recommend it.

Lucy Ella Rose, *Suffragist Artists in Partnership: Gender, Word and Image*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018, £75.00, 978-1-4744-2145-4 (hardback), pp. xi + 260

Reviewed by Michaela Jones
Independent Scholar

This book is an engaging and long overdue reassessment of Mary and George Watts and Evelyn and William De Morgan. Previous publications have tended to focus on singular aspects

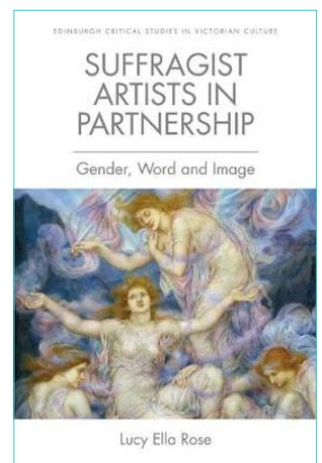
of Evelyn and Mary's careers, while others have largely omitted them in order to emphasise their husbands' talents. With this significant study, Rose demonstrates not only how Victorian women artists were able to construct professional identities for themselves, but also how 'conjugal creative partnership' was central to the practice of both the Wattses and the De Morgans.

As the title suggests, this book particularly focuses these artists' engagement with the women's suffrage movement. In this way, Rose makes an important contribution to a growing area of study, which, like recent publications such as Elizabeth Crawford's *Art and Suffrage: A Biographical Dictionary of Suffrage Artists* (Francis Boutle, 2018) and Zoë Thomas and Miranda Garrett's edited collection, *Suffrage and the Arts: Visual Culture, Politics and Enterprise* (Bloomsbury, 2018), considers the visual culture of the British suffrage movement. Rose also deliberates how these figures engaged with the emerging women's movement of the late nineteenth century, significantly expanding upon previous research, such as Deborah Cherry's *Beyond the Frame: Feminism and Visual Culture, Britain 1850-1900* (Routledge, 2000).

The book's biggest strength is its interdisciplinary approach. An impressive range of visual and textual sources are examined, including paintings, drawings, novels, diaries, letters, juvenilia, poems and photographs. Utilising such a wide range of sources – many of which have never before been studied – allows Rose to amend previous presumptions surrounding Mary and Evelyn as submissive or subordinate.

The first two chapters of the book serve to provide a biographical background to the Wattses and De Morgans. Placing them in the wider socio-political and historical context, Rose reveals how both couples 'successfully reconciled the conflict between domestic matters and artistic careers, negotiating conventions and constraints in similar ways ... in order to pursue creative careers and develop professional identities' (p. 16). The next five chapters provide a closer analysis of specific aspects of each of the individuals' artistic practice. Chapter 3 examines portraits and self-portraits created by the couples. Rose shows how Mary and Evelyn's depictions of their husbands subverted the more traditional 'hierarchical male artist/female muse dynamic' (p. 96) and how self-portraiture was a way for women to challenge 'the patriarchal presumption that the only life worth recording or representing was that of a "great man"' (p. 96).

The next chapter focuses on Mary and Evelyn's surviving diaries. Although written at very different points in their lives, both women's diaries reveal 'their private resistance to Victorian feminine norms, document their professionalism as woman artists and trace the emergence of their distinctly feminist voices' (p. 127). Mary's diary offers a fascinating insight into the conflicts between domestic duty and artistic activity. Additionally, Evelyn's teenage diary was particularly poignant – characterised by her constant 'self-scrutiny and self-flagellation', it reveals 'the damaging impact – and perhaps partial internalisation – of Victorian notions of female



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inadequacy' (p. 150). Chapter 5 analyses the couples' individual and collaborative writings, including William's novels; Evelyn and William's experiments with automatic writing; George's writings on dress reform and Mary's private, unpublished writings. This chapter reveals how these figures' writings engaged with the topic of female emancipation – explicitly, implicitly, publicly, and privately – and reflect wider feminist discourse of the period.

Chapter 6 examines the Wattses' 'collaborative reading practice' (p. 185), how their socio-political views informed and shaped their choice of authors and how these views were shaped by their readings. It additionally explores George's social realist paintings, inspired by poems, which were designed to 'inspire empathy and compassion ... for outcast female figures' (p. 204). Rose traces the similarities between these works and the depictions of women's oppression created by the early suffrage movement. The final chapter focuses on Evelyn's previously overlooked series of mermaid paintings. Rose argues that these works 'appropriated the man-made mermaid myth in a feminist reclamation of an image historically used either to objectify or denounce women' (p. 241). By examining these paintings within the wider context of suffrage iconography, Rose reveals how these works can be seen as part of a wider feminist visual culture.

The key contributions of *Suffragist Artists in Partnership* are the ways in which it reveals how marriage between artistic equals could shape and support the practice of both men and women and how women, such as Mary and Evelyn, successfully combined artistry and activism. The book's interdisciplinary approach means it will be of great interest and use to scholars working on a diverse range of subjects, including women artists, women's life writing, feminist literary and visual culture and gender relations in the Victorian and Edwardian period.

Jennifer Godfrey, *Suffragettes of Kent*, Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2019, £16.99, 978 1 526 72351 2 (paperback), pp.xii + 276

Reviewed by Clare Wichbold

Independent scholar



Jennifer Godfrey has set out to chart stories from the suffrage movement in Kent and is to be commended for tackling the subject, which has thrown up, in her own words, 'a vast array' of information (p. ix). By her own admission, Godfrey's book is an overview of what was happening in the county with both suffragettes and suffragists, so the title is a little misleading. The book begins with an account of Ethel Violet Baldock, a working-class suffragette from Gravesend who found herself in the

thick of the action in London through her window-breaking and subsequent imprisonment. After Ethel's story, the book settles into chronological chapters and goes on to chart a number of journeys, both physical and political, beginning with the 1866 petition and coming to a close in 1928 with the Equal Franchise Act, taking in the activities of various militant and law-abiding suffrage organisations. Notes about the County of Kent, to set the scene for the suffrage story, provide extremely helpful background

information about the state of the county around subjects such as education, communication and transport links.

The book has a good range of illustrations, including some wonderful images of individuals and campaigning in Kent, bringing a new dimension to what could so easily be a well-trodden path of pictures of famous suffragettes. The photographs of Ethel Baldock, held by her descendants, provide a face to a woman who could have otherwise remained anonymous and unseen for her deeds.

As well as Ethel, there are some other remarkable characters: Irene McLeod was one of them, to whom a chapter is also devoted. Amongst her many exploits, as a remarkably young suffragette she wrote several plays and together with her sister Janet, founded the Drummer's Union in 1909. Olive Walton was a militant suffragette who was imprisoned on more than one occasion and who achieved notoriety when she and Emily Wilding Davison interrupted a speech by Earl Beauchamp at the Opera House in Tunbridge Wells in 1913, only a couple of months before Emily's death at Epsom.

The chapters on imprisonment and forcible feeding include some grim descriptions of the treatment of women at Maidstone Prison, illustrating that the brutality experienced by women prisoners was not limited to places such as Holloway and Liverpool gaols. A contrast is to be found between these chapters and those on the rural campaigning journeys (undertaken by the Women's Freedom League, National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and the Women's Social and Political Union between 1908 and 1913). However, these travels were not always without opposition. Godfrey's descriptions of the lively exchanges between the speakers (doggedly carrying out their mission for the cause) and the local rowdy elements (who did everything to stop them) really bring these stories to life.

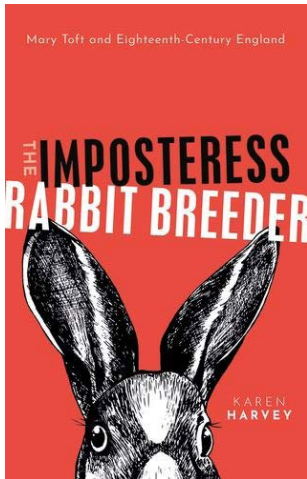
There are a couple of minor niggles: I found that the typesetting of the text was inconsistent and quoted text from other sources was sometimes difficult to distinguish from the author's own writing. A bibliography to complement the endnotes would have been beneficial to enable ease of following up quoted sources. These points aside, there is a lot to be appreciated from the huge amount of primary research by Godfrey that has gone into producing this book. It could be a 'dip in and dip out' volume, with the chapters being readable as essays in isolation, or as a complete work. The book presents many opportunities to begin further exploration of particular topics or individuals and provides inspiring material on the suffrage campaign for education at every level.

Karen Harvey, *The Imposteress Rabbit Breeder: Mary Toft and Eighteenth-Century England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. £16.99, 978 0 19 873488 8 (hardback), pp. x + 211

Reviewed by Gillian Williamson

Independent scholar

Mary Toft was an illiterate, labouring woman, one of perhaps two million in the early eighteenth century. Her life would have been almost totally obscure had she not, for a brief six months in 1726–7, become a newsworthy figure: firstly on the basis that she was giving birth to dead rabbits and rabbit parts and secondly (unsurprisingly to twenty-first-century readers), because she, together with some of



those around her, was exposed as a scandalous fraud. To date, historians' interest in the Toft case has centred on the way it drew the professional attention of eminent physicians, including some who served George I's household. Here the case arguably represents the interface between a traditional belief in 'wonders' and Enlightenment scientific, empirical medicine.

In *The Imposteress Rabbit Breeder*, Karen Harvey instead chooses to recover Mary Toft herself, in a microhistory that

intersects with many aspects of English society and culture in the period: the rural and urbanising economies, local and high politics, gender and class. Whereas most accounts of the Toft story are based on printed pamphlets and news reports on the case and its exposure, Harvey uses local archives and the contemporary manuscript notes that Dr James Douglas made of Mary's interrogation by Westminster JP Thomas Clarges. Her approach is especially valuable for scholars of women's lives, for it is a rare opportunity to study one of the most under-represented figures of eighteenth-century society: a poor woman scraping a living in the countryside - albeit one whose life was exceptional in that it came to public attention at all.

Harvey situates Mary within the wider settings of national public life: Godalming in Surrey, where she lived (then an expanding town of over 2000 inhabitants) and also in the domestic setting of her family and friends. She considers the government's political interest in maintaining the social order and in female reproductive health as the backbone of a strong nation. She exposes the deep class divisions in Godalming, where a rising middling sort and the landed gentry held a fragile and fearful power over the property-less masses - to which the Tofts belonged. This was the dark underbelly of the urbanisation hymned by so many historians of the eighteenth century.

Mary's family also comes under scrutiny. As far as we can tell, she was not especially close to any blood relatives,

though her brother James lived with Mary, her husband Joshua and their toddler son James (their first child had died at three months). Her mother-in-law, Ann, rather than her own mother, was the family member most closely associated with the rabbit births - indeed the dead daughter had been named Ann. Harvey analyses this relationship, based on seniority of age and experience (Mary was twenty-three at the time of the imposture), as well as the non-kin, all-female circles within which Mary worked. It is a valuable reconstruction of the hidden-from-history world in which labouring-class women lived. Harvey carefully locates these women within prevailing male power structures that both excluded them and simultaneously feared them as potentially unruly disruptors, giving this as one reason for Mary's savage treatment at the hands of the press once the fraud unravelled. The extended fraud, Mary's public display and her imprisonment, were only possible because of her lowly status.

Our understanding of Mary is greatly enriched by the use of the Douglas notes. These come as close as possible to revealing Mary's own words, thoughts and indeed, emotions. Here was a woman who had already lost one child and had, at the start of the rabbit events, undergone a slow miscarriage that was painful both physically and psychologically, yet through which she had to continue to work. Harvey points out that it was not just physicians who had no idea what was going on inside the pregnant (or any other) human body. Pregnant women themselves were in the same position. It is not surprising that there remained such potential, in all quarters, for the belief in 'wonders'. The fraud only added to Mary's desperation, but she was powerless to resist.

Harvey's monograph is another timely corrective to eighteenth-century narratives of politeness and improvement. As a microhistory of a plebeian woman's life it is inevitably limited by the dearth of sources, especially outside Mary's rabbit-breeder infamy. Without exception, the sources, including Douglas' notes, are heavily mediated by men who could properly regard themselves as by far her social superior. The wider context of elite men often comes to the fore. Nonetheless as a story retold from Mary Toft's perspective it is well-worth the telling.

The Women's History Network awards a number of prizes, fellowships and grants to historians of women each year. Further details can be found on our website but we would like to draw particular attention to the following annual prizes.

WHN BOOK Prize 2021

The Women's History Network (UK) Book Prize of £500 is awarded for an author's first single-authored monograph. Entries close on 31 March 2021 (for books published from Jan 1st – Dec 31st 2020). For more details go to <https://womenshistorynetwork.org/whn-book-prize-2021/>

WHN Community History Prize 2021

This annual prize of £500 is awarded to the team behind a Community History Project by, about, or for women in a particular locale or community which has been completed between the 1 January 2020 and 31st May 2021. For more details go to <https://womenshistorynetwork.org/2020-whn-community-history-prize/>

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.

Dana Mills, *Rosa Luxemburg* (Reaktion)

Sue Finch, Jenny Fortune, Jane Grant, Jo Robinson and Sarah Wilson (eds), *Misbehaving: Stories of Protest against the Miss World Contest and the Beauty Industry* (Merlin Press)

Stephen Williams and Tony Chandler (eds), *Letters from England, 1895: Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling* (Lawrence Wishart)

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

Kerri Andrews, *Wanderers: A History of Women Walking* (Reaktion)

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

Cassia Roth, *A Miscarriage of Justice: Women's Reproductive*

Lives and the Law in Early Twentieth-Century Brazil (Stanford University Press)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Getting to Know Each Other



Name

Helen Antrobus

Position

Assistant Curator (Cultural Landscapes) - National Trust

How long have you been a WHN Member

A year.

What are your special interests ?

I have so many different interests, which is important as a curator. I've always held a special interest in women's suffrage, but at the moment I'm looking into the history of female Irish immigrants in Manchester during the early twentieth century. I'm also interested in early female environmentalists - that's something I'm exploring more in my day job.

Who is your heroine from History and why?

I've got so many, and it changes all the time, but Ellen Wilkinson is a constant. I admire her journey to becoming one of the first female MPs in 1924, but also how she evolved as a feminist, and a politician. Women are often bracketed, defined by one action in often very full lives, but it's impossible to do that with Ellen. She was relentless in her activism.

Committee News

The Women's History Network's National Steering committee continues to battle with the challenges that the Covid crisis is creating. We met via zoom in November and have set up a number of online activities to support women's history, including: the very successful fortnightly seminar series and regular online writing retreats and an ECR Fellowship Webinar took place in September 2020.

Consequently, our membership numbers are robust, as is the readership of our newsletter. Our social media presence is also looking healthy, with over 4,000 followers of both our

Twitter and Facebook accounts. A number of Blogs have also been published on a range of fascinating topics, particularly in Black History Month.

We organised our first undergraduate and postgraduate dissertation prizes in Autumn 2020. The judging panels were impressed with the diverse range of topics, time periods and geographical contexts that entries covered and also with the high standard of the entries. In March 2021, we are hosting our very first online student conference - one of a number of online events to celebrate Women's History Month.

Publishing in *Women's History*

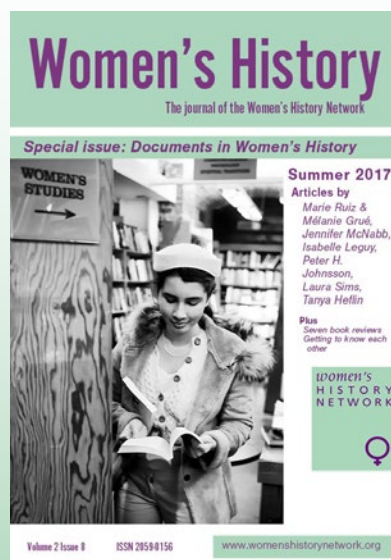
Women's History welcomes contributions from experienced scholars and those at an earlier stage in their research careers. We aim to be inclusive and fully recognise that women's history is not only lodged in the academy. All submissions are subject to the usual peer-review process.

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

[womenshistorynetwork.org/
whnmagazine/authorguide.html](http://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 Muggerridge

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 Hellowell

Student Representative – Clare Burgess

Co-opted Members of the Committee

WHN Journal Editor - Kate Murphy

IFRWH rep - Gillian Murphy

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 - Anne Logan
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*)

Community Group member	£15 / £20 / £30
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/>

Charity Number: 1118201. Membership application/renewal, Gift Aid Declaration are all available at
www.womenshistorynetwork.org