

Women's History Today

The journal of the Women's History Network

Summer 2021



Articles by:

Alice Mulhearn
Williams

Anna Jacobs

Ewan Short

Claire Davey

New Sections:

Spotlight on
Funded Research
Exploring the
Archive

Nine book reviews
In Profile

women's
**HISTORY
NETWORK**



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WOMEN'S HISTORY NETWORK 2021 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

HOMES, FOOD AND FARMS

women's
HISTORY
NETWORK



WITH KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

**PROFESSOR SAMITA SEN
DR LAUREL FORSTER
PROFESSOR JANE WHITTLE**

ONLINE EVENT

2-4 SEPTEMBER, 2021

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<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/homes-food-and-farms/>

Welcome to the Summer 2021 issue of *Women's History Today*. We hope you approve of our new title, our updated typeface and our additional sections. Laurel Forster (Reader in Cultural History at the University of Portsmouth) and Helen Glew (Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Westminster) are delighted to be the first to welcome you to the new look *Women's History Today*.

In this edition, we have a range of articles from vastly different periods of women's history, from the eleventh to the twenty-first century. From a range of perspectives, each of these articles examines ways in which women have both been marginalised from society or excluded from history. Our authors have sought to both to reveal women's peripheral status and reclaim and recover a different, and sometimes more central, perspective. Each article is built on primary historical research, be that through examining papers, letters and print media, or through oral history and personal testimony.

The first article, by Alice Mulhearn Williams, draws upon the testimonies of women survivors of Magdalene Laundries and asks questions about how memories of food and mealtime structures within those establishments contributed to a sense of abjection. The second article, by Anna Jacobs, considers ways in which women of the late nineteenth century, previously excluded from many public spaces, were heavily guided by writings on etiquette as they started to enter the more public arenas of urban spaces and department stores. Our third article, by Ewan Short, reconsiders the role of Sichelgaita in public life and argues for a greater acceptance of women's roles and participation in negotiations from this period of early European history. Our fourth article, by Claire Davey, re-examines the life of Constance Maynard and argues that although Maynard's unmarried status may have meant exclusions from some aspects of English Victorian society, it is in Maynard's travels abroad that we can understand the broader sense of her life and loves.

Interspersed amongst these articles, we have our new, regular columns. Our inaugural article on 'Funded History' is by Lucy Delap who discusses her Leverhulme-funded project on the business side of women's print media, specifically *Virago* and *Spare Rib*. The first of our new series on 'Exploring the Archive' is on the John Lewis



Cover Image:
Female business dress,
John Lewis Oxford Street,
1959

Image courtesy of the John
Lewis Partnership Archive

CONTENTS

Editorial	3
Food, discipline and belonging in Ireland's Magdalene laundries	4
Funded Research: The Business of Women's Words..	12
IMPORTANT WHN MEMBERSHIP ANNOUNCEMENT	14
What can etiquette books and print media tell us about the experiences of bourgeois women in the public urban spaces of Paris and London, 1850-1900?	15
Exploring the Archive: Women's employment viewed through the archive of the John Lewis Partnership	20
The Role of Sichelgaita in Marriage Negotiations between South Italy and Byzantium (c.1071-1074)	24
Escaping redundancy: Constance Maynard's travels and her challenge to Victorian femininity ...	33
Book Reviews.....	40
Books Received And Calls For Reviewers.....	47
In Profile	49
Committee News	50
Announcement of Prizes and Funding.....	50

Heritage Centre, which, Judy Faraday argues, contains extensive evidence of women's work within the retail profession. The first of our 'In Profile' sections introduces Dr Helen Glew, co-editor of this issue.

This issue also contains a number of book reviews on diverse contexts of women's history from monasteries to miscarriages, and female slaveholders to women working to end poverty through education. There are fascinating new books about women's history in Guernsey, Russia and France as well as a rare working class account of WW2. And we always welcome new reviewers.

Lastly, we want to draw your attention to the WHN Conference 2-4 September, with its focus on "Homes Food and Farms". It is our first ever annual conference online, and is spread over three days to enable maximum attendance.

Women's History Today is the journal of the Women's History Network and we invite articles on any aspect of women's history. We would be very pleased to work with you on your contributions.

We hope you enjoy the issue.

Laurel Forster and Helen Glew

FOOD, DISCIPLINE AND BELONGING IN IRELAND'S MAGDALENE LAUNDRIES

Alice Mulhearn Williams

PhD student, National University of Ireland, Galway

My dear daughters, you are bound to be Mothers to your penitents, you owe them the care a mother owes her child, and every one here is a mother; the cooks, the sisters who bake, labour for the penitents, preparing food which they should do most carefully.¹

Mother Mary of St Euphrasia Pelletier 1907

At the age of sixteen, Pippa Flanagan was admitted to the Good Shepherd Convent in Limerick. Recounting the experience in 2013, she recalls the sound of the heavy front door slamming behind her as she followed a nun into the communal bathroom. There, she was instructed to strip and climb into a bath of disinfectant. The nun told her it was to 'wash [her] sins away'.² Along with this event, one of Pippa's most vivid memories of the two years she spent at the Magdalene laundry was of the food. The resounding silence of the dining room; the nun's watchful position on a tall bench; and the repulsive taste of the heavily steamed meals felt, to her, 'worse than the concentration camp'.³

Pippa's story, just one of the many recorded by the Justice for Magdalenes Research group as part of the *Magdalene Institutions Oral and Archival History* project, stands in stark opposition to the instructions given by Mother Mary of St Euphrasia Pelletier to the Good Shepherd Convent. Far from being treated with 'the care a mother owes her child', Pippa was physically, sexually and psychologically abused by numerous agents of church and state throughout her time in St. Bridget's Industrial School for Girls and the Limerick Good Shepherd Convent. And like the many thousands of women who passed through an Irish Magdalene laundry in the twentieth century, Pippa would continue to relive these memories through the lifelong spectres of depression, suicide attempts and abusive relationships.

Such a harrowing narrative of abuse appears to leave little room for a discussion of food. After all, in its blandness, monotony and scarcity, the food served in the Magdalene laundries was unwaveringly institutional; a functional and expected aspect, some might argue, of the complex moral landscape that characterised twentieth century Ireland. Yet this paper offers a different viewpoint. As a political, emotional and gendered practice, the experience of *eating* frequently translates into the experience of *belonging*. As such, a study of the food served, consumed and remembered in the Magdalene laundries can offer an insight into both the socio-political position of these institutions within the nation state, and the embodied experience of those women who survived them.

Focusing predominantly on the 27 oral testimonies of survivors of the Magdalene laundries recorded by the

Justice for Magdalenes Research group, this paper seeks to examine the ways in which food practices reflect, support, or indeed undermine the moral discourses that pervaded the Magdalene institutions in post-Independence Ireland. Importantly, in studying the subject's active role in remembering the sensual experience of food, I aim to go beyond a structural reading of power. Instead, through an analysis of memory, I explore the ways in which the women interpret and resist discourses of discipline, in turn revealing the inherent subjectivity of food as a disciplinary tool.

This paper seeks to advance two distinct yet interrelated arguments related to the experience of eating in the Magdalene laundries. Firstly, I argue that we should view the Magdalene institutions as a tangible product of a 'site of exception' in post-Independence Ireland, whereby 'immorality' became interchangeable with 'illegality' as a justification for the containment and marginalisation of women.⁴ In doing so, it identifies the weaknesses of the many recent studies that interpret the twentieth century Magdalene laundries as Foucauldian disciplinary institutions – or as places where people are made obedient through the repression of any deviation from the norm – and posits a novel theoretical alternative to understanding *how* these institutions were perceived by those who experienced them. Second, this paper aims to demonstrate how disciplinary discourses are performed, interpreted, embodied and subverted through the acts of feeding, eating and remembering. Through this focus on the embodied experience of discourse, it argues that the survivors' interpretation of discipline is mediated through the position of the Magdalene laundries on the margins of the state. As a result, spiritual discourses of discipline were experienced in terms of punishment; or more specifically, the systematic stripping of identity, citizenship and belonging.

At the heart of this paper are the oral testimonies collected as part of the *Magdalene Institutions: Recording an Oral and Archival History* project by the Justice for Magdalene Research group. Conducted by Katherine O'Donnell, Sinéad Pembroke and Clare McGettrick, the objective of the project was to contribute to a better understanding of the Magdalene laundry system in Ireland by collecting and archiving testimonies from survivors and key informants.⁵ Unlike the closed archives of the religious orders, or indeed that created by the McAleese committee, these testimonies – alongside those collected as part of the Waterford Memories Project – are publicly available online, facilitating a new wave of multi-disciplinary scholarship.⁶

For the purposes of this study, I have extracted, compared and analysed the many references to food made by the survivors in their oral histories. Sometimes prompted by the direct question, 'Can you tell us about

the food?', other times cited as memorable sites of punishment or indeed pleasure, these recollections of eating, dining and food regimes appear in almost every one of the interviews. As these are life histories, the interviews also give an insight into how memories of food consumed in the laundries are framed with reference to subsequent life experiences. Jennifer Yeager and Jonathan Culleton, in their exploration of Magdalene survivor oral histories as a form of collective memory, explain how these memories of the past are inextricably linked with the realities of the present: 'Their stories reflect the very current trauma of women actively processing the meaning of their experiences. For them, this is not history per se, given its continuing impact.'⁷ Katherine O'Donnell, the head researcher at Justice for Magdalene Research, explains that the aim of the project was 'to capture as rich an experience as possible of the former Magdalene woman's life even if the central focus were the years of her incarceration.'⁸



Unidentified Magdalene Laundry in Ireland, c. early 20th century

INTERPRETING STATE, CHURCH AND THE MAGDALENE LAUNDRIES IN POST-INDEPENDENCE IRELAND

In Irish Catholic cultural iconography, the Virgin Mary symbolises self-sacrifice, suffering and stasis; dressed in white with her hands outstretched, she embodies the passive woman and the idealised mother. In many ways, this image of the Virgin Mary offers an opening through which to access the Magdalene laundries, and the spiritual, moral and political landscape on which they were formed. For as the 'Queen of Ireland', the Virgin Mary serves not only as a gendered symbol of state, but as a mimetic centre point for the complex, and at times conflicted ideal of nationhood, morality, and motherhood that characterised the Irish Free State.⁹ In this sense, her image acts as a yardstick for determining the perimeters of belonging within the state, hinting in turn at its moral peripheries.

Feminist work has long focused on how national, gender and sexual identities are constructed in culturally, historically and geographically specific manners.¹⁰ In the case of Ireland in particular, historians and anthropologists have observed how gender played an important role in constructing a national identity that specifically countered Irish colonial feminization under British rule. Rather than being a product of a new state identity, gender roles became an active agent in its construction, with

women taking on 'the labour of representing the nation' as mothers and guardians of the hearth.¹¹ Culturally, the attributes of morality, holiness and purity were framed by the peripheral histories, myth and imagery of an imagined bucolic past to craft a new image of the Irishwoman. As Catherine Nash argues, this was a literal process as well as a discursive and cultural one, with Irish artists increasingly favouring the image of the old peasant woman in their work – a motif that 'could represent the successful outcome of a life lived in accordance with the demands of motherhood, as well as being emblematic of the traditions, folklore, language and way of life extolled by the state.'¹²

This national version of ideal Irish femininity became the foundation for a wave of new legislation in the twentieth century that increasingly curtailed the rights of women and championed the family as the cornerstone of Irish society. A succession of new laws, including the Civil Service Amendment Act (1925), which gave government the authority to ban women from certain civil service exams and the Conditions of Employment Act (1935), all reaffirmed the idea that the morality of women should be the concern of the state.

By bringing into focus the ideal woman, we can locate the binary opposite: the fallen woman, and the development of the disciplinary institutions that sought to reform and punish her. Characterised first in the eighteenth and nineteenth century as the prostitute, in the twentieth century the definition of the 'fallen woman' expanded, to encompass those perceived to be – or at least at risk of becoming – sexually immoral, be that as the result of unmarried pregnancy, rape, incest or sexual abuse.¹³ The Magdalene institutions were imagined, at least until the early twentieth century, as a site offering spiritual reform for those who, like Mary Magdalene, were willing to 'seek penance'. In this formulation, prostitutes who wilfully entered the asylums would be protected from the social corruptions that led them there.¹⁴

The emergence of the Magdalene laundries during the 'new age of discipline' and the 'Great Containment' of the late eighteenth century¹⁵, has quite rightly led to the application of a Foucauldian analysis by a number of historians. In her study of the Magdalene laundries in Scotland, Linda Mahood links the rise of these reformatory institutions to a backlash against the relative moral laxities of the proceeding centuries, which contributed to a 'discursive explosion' around the subject of sex, whereby condemnation and punishment was replaced by a 'regulated and polymorphous incitement to discourse'.¹⁶ Una Crowley and Rob Kitchen, in their study of moral geographies and sexual conduct, use Foucault's work on discipline, punishment and sexuality in a similar way. Pointing to the development of a national bio-politics in Ireland, they connect the emerging panoply of government commissions in the twentieth century to the search for a national identity amidst postcolonial anxiety; a practice of governmentality that created a 'spatialized grid of discipline, reform and self-regulation' aimed at producing 'decent' women inhabiting virtuous spaces.¹⁷ In this view, the state and Irish Catholic Church appropriate the reforming zeal of the Victorian Age to create discourses of sin, shame, guilt and family that are inscribed within the

disciplinary machine of the Magdalene laundries.

Yet while Foucault offers an important framework for understanding the early formulations of the laundries, the change in purpose and character of the institutions after the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922 renders his mechanism of discipline insufficient.

As the power of the Catholic Church resurged, religion gained a moral monopoly over health, education and social welfare, in turn, transforming the Magdalene asylums' purpose from the reformation and rehabilitation of prostitutes to the punishment and shaming of any woman who challenged the boundaries of moral decency.¹⁸ This shame, Clara Fischer argues, 'was mobilized in the pursuit of a postcolonial national identity, which centrally hinged on the moral purity of women'.¹⁹ With women's sexuality and bodies now intrinsically tied to the foundation and prosperity of the Irish Free State, those deemed morally shameful were to be contained and othered.

While in the nineteenth century most women entered the laundries voluntarily, in this later period they were largely admitted under duress, given indefinite sentences, and charged with a wider range of sexual misdemeanours.²⁰ It could be argued that this historical shift can be understood with a simple theoretical jump, from Foucault's work on the discourse of sexuality to his writings on discipline and punishment. Yet if we widen the frame to view the laundries within the architecture of state and church, this Foucauldian analysis becomes increasingly incompatible. Rather than being state-led technologies of confinement like the prison, the laundries operated within a hidden 'architecture of containment', the availability of which empowered the decolonising nation to confine and make invisible those women and children who challenged society's moral prescriptions.²¹ The role played by the state in the continued existence of the Magdalene laundries was finally recognised in 2013 with the publication of the McAleese Report, which used oral histories and records from the religious orders to conclude that more than 2,500 women were sent to the laundries directly by the state.²²

Thus, as closed spaces that were sanctioned by the state, yet bureaucratically separate from it, the laundries in the Irish Free State appear closer to Giorgio Agamben's model for the 'state of exception' – or the state of 'being outside and yet belonging' – than the disciplinary institutions described by Foucault.²³

For the study of food in the Magdalene laundries, Agamben's work is important. Crucially, the shift of theoretical focus from discipline to the state of exception allows us to see institutional food not just as a technology of discipline, but as a locus for the experience of *being* and *belonging* for those who have been stripped of all political life.²⁴ In the peripheral world of the laundries, where citizenship is denied indefinitely and the narrative of contemporary discourse is subverted, a framework for studying history at the margins of the state is crucial. But that is not to deny the importance of Foucault here. To fully appreciate the overlapping lines between discourse and experience, his theories on discourse and governmentality can be used alongside Agamben's work on the state of exception to trace the discursive undercurrents, moral

architecture and ideas of citizenship that both structure and subvert the survivors' experience of time, space, and embodied subjectivity.

THE STRUCTURE OF DISCIPLINE: FOOD AND ROUTINE IN THE MAGDALENE LAUNDRIES

Disciplinary food regimes are more commonly defined by their content than their structure. Frequently characterised as bland, monotonous, scarce and even dangerous, institutional food often becomes another aspect of discipline. Yet it is not only the sensory experience of institutional food that makes it memorable. Food regimes in the Magdalene laundries were remembered as much through their repetition, totality, and the feeling of abjectivity that they provoked, as through their content.

At their foundation in the eighteenth century, the Magdalene laundries were envisioned as a semi-religious space where, through a regime of silence, toil and prayer, penitents would find spiritual peace through corporeal discomfort.²⁵ This total regime rested on the Catholic notion of redemptive pain experienced by a hurting subject, the objective of which was to turn physical and emotional suffering into a positive religious experience.²⁶ Historian Jacinta Prunty, as well as the religious congregations themselves, have confirmed that this monastic ideal continued in discourse and routine until at least the 1960s and 1970s following the Second Vatican Council, yet as the purpose of the institutions shifted from reform to indefinite containment, the experience of discipline – if not the spiritual discourse that legitimised it – shifted.²⁷ Unlike the voluntary and charitable institutions common in the nineteenth century, the modern Magdalene laundries are characterised by the embodied experience of coercion, corporeal pain, subversion of identity, and indefinite punishment; the exploration of which requires more than a simple analysis of discursive enactment. Instead, following Mary Douglas's assertion that 'the ordered system which is a meal represents all the ordered systems associated with it',²⁸ a structural study of food routine can allow for a deeper understanding of the embodied experience of the Magdalene laundries.

When asked about the daily routine at the laundries, survivors universally frame the institutional routine in terms of boredom, monotony, and control. For Bernadette, an Irish unmarried mother who was sent away to the Good Shepherd Mother and Baby Home and Magdalene laundry in Belfast and a laundry in the Republic of Ireland²⁹, the monotony of everyday life was a calculated part of the regime:

The whole thing was numbingly bland and it was deliberately so, because if it were in any way exciting it would get you thinking. By being mind-numbingly bland you just went from day to day to day and in that way you went through twenty and thirty and forty years, and you coped with it because it was so bland.³⁰

Here Bernadette perceives the blandness of the laundries, not as part of an agenda of spiritual reform, but as an engineered aspect of a punitive regime designed to

subjugate and suppress. Such interpretations highlight the rupture between discourse and experience, as rather than being experienced as a site of intense spiritual reform, memories of institutional life show how contemporary discourses are refracted and subverted within embodied experience, so that spiritual asceticism is experienced as a site of punishment, rather than a technology of self-discipline.

Food regimes too, are interpreted as another layer of punishment and disenfranchisement within the laundries. As Bernadette explains: 'You were told what time to get up in the morning, you were told what to put on, you were told what to eat, you were told what to do. Every ... every decision was made for you.'³¹ Interestingly, it is not the quality and quantity of food that posed the biggest problem for Bernadette – indeed, she explains that the 'food wasn't too bad' – but rather the suppression of agency.

It is tempting to liken the disciplinary experience of the Magdalene laundries to the prison. The embodied experience of the Magdalene laundries, however, points to a subtle difference between the two spaces of confinement. Most notably, the women in the laundries were contained indefinitely. As Bernadette explains: 'There was no end to our incarceration. Nobody had an end term.'³² While food regimes can serve as an apparatus of oppression for female inmates, in the blinkered incarceration of the laundries, food was intrinsically tied to the insidious and indefinite nature of power and punishment. Thus, unlike prisoners who may subvert food regimes through food fights, 'creative eating' and hunger strikes, survivors of the Magdalene laundries were left incapable of separating food regimes from the wider structure of indefinite incarceration.³³ Notably, rather than offering an individual opportunity for resistance, meals appear in their recollections as intricately tied to the unchanging pattern of mass, work, prayer and sleep. When asked to describe daily life in the laundries, depictions of food punctuate a repetitive and silent routine: 'Then you'd go to mass, then you'd come in and have watered down milk, dripping and bread, in an enamel mug. And then you'd get the clap, all you heard was the clap. And then come on. Come on we're going to work now.'³⁴ Here Maureen's memory of breakfast is bookended by two other experiences: mass and work. Rather than being a dislocated experience in the daily routine, eating becomes intimately linked to the spiritual and physical labours that surround it; a connection made even more fluid by the indefinite length of the meal, wherein a single clap could end the brief respite offered by breakfast. Maureen's account is mirrored in other women's recollections. Speaking of the routine in the religious-run industrial school, Mary offers a similar depiction:

The first place I think the women got up really early in the morning, washed in cold water, I remember that. I remember thinking, 'ugh!' It would be work, probably Mass as well, and eight o'clock you'd be ... maybe you'd have your breakfast. We always call it slop in both places.³⁵

Rather than offering a respite from the daily

routine, in both Maureen and Mary's accounts, mealtimes are remembered within a wider discourse of pain, punishment and powerlessness. This emphasis on monotony makes any exception to the routine even more notable. In Catherine's account of her daily routine, she explains that meals were always the same, apart from: 'on Mother's feast day or the Feast of Saint Mary Magdalene, Christmas, Easter, you got a hardboiled egg and you got an orange. They were the only luxuries.' Bernadette too, remembers receiving 'cupcake type things' on special events or holidays, before emphasising that 'there was a lot of ... rice pudding type food.'³⁶

The accounts of 'special treats' appear less as exceptions to the rule, and more as 'variations on a theme' within a larger framework of oppression. Treats like fruit and eggs, and the transitory pleasure that they bring, are not remembered as a positive exception from the whole or a brief moment of emotional resistance. Rather, they are perceived as structural events that more deeply reinforce the experience of total punishment.

An analysis of memory brings into focus one of the defining characteristics of food regimes in the Magdalene laundries: that the institutionalisation of food was total. Perpetually framed within the wider experience of oppression, powerlessness and punishment, mealtimes embody the 'abjectivity' of life in the laundries. Here the term is used as Sarah Willen defines it – as 'a sense of chronic vulnerability, a discomfort in one's own physical body, and everyday experience of non-belonging'.³⁷ In Willen's study, abjectivity is purposefully created by an ostensibly rational bureaucratic state regime as part of the structuring of 'illegal' migrants' experience of 'space, time, personhood, collectivity, and embodied subjectivity'. Kenworthy builds on the idea of abjectivity in her work on undocumented immigrants residing at a state psychiatric hospital, showing how processes of 'captive displacement', characterised by diagnosis, hospitalization and institutional mortification processes, compound the experience of abjectivity.³⁸ For the purposes of studying the experience of food routines in 'liminal' sites, however, it is Megan Carney's work on the construction of abjectivity through detention centre feeding practices that is most useful.³⁹ Here she locates the detention centre as a site of exception, where food represents a core tactic in the disciplining of 'illegal' migrants, most notably through its ability to consolidate the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Carney's application of a Foucauldian biopolitics of citizenship, as well as Agamben's model for the state of exception, offers an interesting framework for the study of disciplinary food regimes. By viewing the Magdalene survivors' experience of total food regimes not within the context of the Foucauldian prison or the reformatory institution, but the 'site of exception', we can begin to appreciate how abjectivity can serve to reorder the margins of belonging. While in the migrant detention centre, insecure food regimes embodied a discourse of illegality and deportability, in the Magdalene laundries, the total control over food regimes can be interpreted as the enactment of a discourse of 'immorality', which in turn reordered the parameters of belonging. Through this analysis, we can begin to understand the divergence of discourse and embodied experience within the

Magdalene laundries. In contrast to the disciplinary discourses of spiritual self-improvement that framed food regimes, the structure of routine was experienced as an insidious performance of power, grounded not in a visible institutional setting, but within the invisible confines of the laundry.

THE SOUND OF SILENCE: SPATIAL PRACTICES, FORCED COMMENSALITY AND THE RITUAL OF THE MEAL

Women in the Magdalene laundries never ate alone. When asked about food, all of the survivors locate eating within the context of the dining room, where they took two or sometimes three meals a day. Even 'a ten-minute cup of tea' in the afternoon was consumed upstairs, away from the workings of the laundry. If we subscribe to the idea that commensality answers our human need for sociability, it is tempting to interpret this aspect of everyday life positively, as a moment of collective rest within the arduous regime of the laundries.⁴⁰ Yet the survivors' testimonies suggest this is not the case. For the Magdalene women, mealtimes served as a continuation of the forced silence, ritual and presentness that characterised the wider institutional regime. In Pippa's account of the midday meal, she emphasises the punitive nature of these dining experiences:

So, in the laundry all day, then we'd come out for a b ... a break and we all had to line up in a big queue and go in and take our place at the dining table while one of the nuns sat up high on her bench so none of us would talk or say anything or say who we were or anything. It was ... it was worse than the ... the concentrating [sic] camp to me.⁴¹

From this description, three main disciplinary themes can be located: silence, surveillance and coercive commensality. To interpret the significance of these spatial practices as a technique of discipline, it is useful to turn to Jo Pike's work on the school dining hall.¹⁷ Employing a Foucauldian analysis of governmentality, Pike examines how public policy on healthy school dinners is performed through the spatial geography of the school lunchroom, particularly through surveillance, segregation and positive discrimination. In her use of Foucault to explain the spatial performance of governmentality within the school lunchroom, Pike offers an important framework for the analysis of discipline in the Magdalene dining rooms. It is not just her use of theory that is worthy of note, but also the similarities between the spatiality of the school and laundry dining room. Just as unruly children were physically separated and segregated in the school refectory, survivors of the Magdalene laundries describe how they were often physically moved to a separate table as punishment. Notably, Mary explains that if you 'stepped out of line' you might be told to kiss the floor, 'or you'd be put on the penance table, which is a small table, and you sat in front of the nun and your food would be brought.'¹⁸ Similar to the disciplinary practices in the school, spatial tactics and constant surveillance from a nun positioned on a 'throne' are used within the Magdalene

dining room to identify and isolate those deemed to have committed a punishable offence. Using Foucault's notion of the spectacle of the scaffold, this spatial practice could be interpreted as a method for deterring further deviant behaviour; indeed Mary goes on to explain that the veteran Magdalene women never got into trouble as 'they knew not to step out of line so they just went along.'¹⁹

The sensory geography of the dining room was also shaped by sound. As well as the use of seating plans, punitive segregation, and enforced silence, almost all survivors report having to listen to a 'story' while they ate. Mary explains: 'I remember you used to read stories, when you had your food they'd have somebody in the corner reading a story, I remember that.'²⁰ Similarly, Bernadette recalls: 'I've just remembered, a nun read from a religious book every day at lunchtime. When we were finished our main course, she finished reading, we were allowed to talk then.'²¹ Studied within the context of the semi-religious Magdalene institutions, the use of prayers and silence at mealtimes can be linked to the Rule of St Benedict, which prescribed that religious communities eat meals commensally, while listening to a Bible passage in silence. Following Foucault's model for the formation of the ethical subject, this monastic structure represents not the 'long effort of learning, memorisation and assimilation' through techniques of government, but the 'sudden, all embracing and definitive renunciation of one's pleasures' associated with ascetic practice.²² Yet it is through this coercive religious regime that discipline and punishment overlap. In the same way that food routines were experienced as a site of abjectivity rather than asceticism, the memories of the survivors reveal that the spatial practices of the dining room were embodied as punishment rather than self-improvement. Memories of the dining hall in the Magdalene laundries highlight a chronic rupture between discourse and embodied experience, with choice serving as the factor that determines whether commensality is experienced as monastic self-improvement or punishment. Far from offering spiritual fulfilment, it is clear that under the strict surveillance of the dining room, the Magdalene women associated the act of dining with the infantilization, mortification and subjugation that characterised the wider regimen of the laundries.

WE ARE WHERE WE EAT: IDENTITY, BELONGING AND THE DINING ROOM AS A STATE OF EXCEPTION

In the memories of the survivors there is a frequent disconnect between discourse and experience, the state and the local, semiotics and embodiment. With this in mind, what can the dining room tell us about discipline in connection to belonging and identity? To fully understand the subjectivities of women living within a state of exception, we must view the dining room with reference to the boundaries of belonging, and the survivor's place within them. As a space that is historically tied to food provisioning, commensality, food choice, and the traditional gender identity of women, the dining room is charged with politics.⁴² It is with this view that we can see the nuns' dominance in the Magdalene refectory, not

just as a technique of spiritual discipline, but as a site for the subversion of the survivors' identity as women.

For James Smith, the manipulation of gendered identity within the Magdalene laundry aims to reflect the model of motherhood for the Irish nation: one that is 'self-sacrificing, loving all-children, confined, and morally pure'.⁴³ This vision, he argues, is illustrated in the infantilization of the women by the nuns through the practice of hair cutting, the forced removal of names, the refusal of privacy, and complete control over routine. In this model, the women are children and the nuns their mothers – a relationship mirrored in a letter to Mary Costello from the nuns in Hyde Park in 1897, 'All over the world, since the days of Pere Eudes and St. Francis de Sales, we call the penitents 'children' and they call us 'mother''.⁴⁴ In Smith's view then, the disciplinary workings of the laundry operate as a direct manifestation of state discourse. Yet this view fails to appreciate the model of the Magdalene laundry as a place where regimes are based not on law, but on a rule of exception. To understand the importance of this in the study of infantilization through food, Luddy offers an insightful parallel between the Magdalene women and the nuns among whom they lived. As women who were 'deprived of individual expressions of personality and sexuality' because of their perceived 'purity' and 'impurity', Luddy argues that both the nuns and Magdalenes existed within an exceptional space, where traditional power relations were routinely subverted. For the study of infantilizing food practices, this analysis hints at a complex subversion of identity and belonging that problematizes traditional ideas of power, gender and motherhood. Rather than being dominated by an Irish state discourse that privileged the distinction of gendered roles and moral codes, in this site of exception the Magdalenes' identity as woman, caregiver, food provider and in some instances, mother, is subsumed by a distortion of gender, sexuality and power.

The systematic erasure and subversion of gendered identity within the Magdalene laundries can be observed within the dining room. Through the survivors' descriptions of corporal punishment, enforced silence, coercive commensality and storytelling, it is clear that infantilization served as a tool for the structural unpinning of identity and agency, which in turn strategically reordered the margins of belonging. In becoming infantilized, the Magdalene woman's gender identity was subverted and her maternal body appropriated.

TASTE AND THE BOUNDARIES OF BELONGING

Entry into the Magdalene institutions involved the mortification of past identities, and an attempt to recreate new moralities. In these sites of exception, the lines of belonging were drawn through the structure, rituals and geography of food regimes, as well as through taste. One example is through the hierarchical difference in meals. Martha, for example, describes how food was an explicit reflection of hierarchy, with penitents receiving bread and dripping, auxiliaries receiving porridge, and the nuns bacon and eggs, the smell of which always lingered in the hallway.⁴⁵ In a similar example of sensory stratification,

Kate describes how she was refused her first taste of a tomato in the Magdalene laundry as they were reserved for the nuns: 'they counted them. Everything was counted'.⁴⁶ In both these accounts, food serves as a tool for shaping the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. As both a moral and aesthetic category, taste becomes a tool for dominating the individual's membership in society.

The survivors' description of their lives after leaving the institutions opens another route of analysis in the study of food and discipline that allows us to observe how experiences of food continue to manipulate the boundaries of belonging. In telling their own story from childhood to adulthood, the survivors illustrate the broad and insidious effect of discipline, not just through memory, but in present day subjectivities. Angelina's discussion of food in the laundry, for example, is directly linked to her food likes and dislikes in the present: 'Mutton, fatty, disgusting mutton, I remember that. Tapioca, you wouldn't get me eating any of that rubbish now'.⁴⁷ The taste of Lucy's time in the Magdalene laundries has also become imprinted on her food likes and dislikes as an adult. While describing her enjoyment in cooking a wide variety of dishes for her family, she adds:

'God. Now I never ate vegetables because I've never had vegetables and every time I look at a vegetable I go, 'oh!' I was afraid of a vegetable, I'm terrified of onions. I don't know why I'm terrified of onions, the thought of an onion go into my mouth would just make me vomit'.⁴⁸

In both these cases, food preferences are shaped in different ways. For Angelina, avoiding the 'rubbish' served in the laundries is a form of resistance; while for Lucy, her own distaste for vegetables fuels her desire to cook them for her children – in turn subverting her own embodied oppression into a source of gendered power. In both cases, the retraining, developing and teaching of taste points to the survivors' desire to distinguish themselves, not from their past selves, but from the stigma of the Magdalene institutions.⁴⁹ In this sense, taste – as a sensory and cultural phenomenon – serves a dual purpose: as both a tool for discipline, and a site of resistance.

Within the strict regimes of the institutions, we can observe moments of resistance too. Bernadette, who as the daughter of a hotelier was considered 'better off' than the rest of the women, offers a particularly interesting example of how taste could provide a platform for expressing individuality. She explains how she picked up the courage to request her own pepper mill: 'I don't know what made me do it but I asked her to buy for me some black pepper and she had to ask the nuns if this was okay and she got the okay and she bought me my black pepper'.⁵⁰ For Bernadette, this act was a way to 'assert [her] individuality'; the pepper functioning both as a tool for improving the bland meals, and a means of distinguishing herself from the other women, many of whom had never heard of the spice.

Admissions of agency such as these are rare in the oral testimonies of survivors. Yet they point to something important: that in the study of the Magdalene laundries, we must never assume a clear binary between

inclusion and exclusion. The disciplinary machinery of these institutions may have sought to turn 'wayward' women into the 'Other', but embodied experience is made up of more than discourse. In their oral testimonies, the survivors show how taste – as just one subjective category of belonging – is as important in forging one's own identity as it is in disenfranchising others of theirs. Through the embodiment of structural violence, manifested through deeply ingrained likes and dislikes, we can see how discipline worked insidiously within the body. Importantly, this analysis encourages us to interpret hunger and tasteless food, not simply as a form of physical punishment, but as a subjective tool in the reshaping of the women's embodied experience of belonging.

CONCLUSION

As part of its campaign for redress and compensation for victims of the Magdalene laundries, the Justice for Magdalenes Committee asked survivors and their families: 'What would a state apology mean to you?'

'Acknowledgement,' the daughter of one now deceased survivor replied, 'acknowledgement for her, that she mattered to somebody and that she wasn't just that number, she wasn't three digits. She was beautiful, she was a mother, like the Virgin Mary in all her pain.'⁵¹

In the early years of the Irish Free State, the figure of the Virgin Mary was at the heart of Irish moral discourse. Her image, as the pure and doting mother, served as a mimetic link in the construction of post-Independence Irish nationality; the feminine ideal *par excellence* from which the immoral woman could be identified, measured and contained. Yet this daughter's wish: that her mother be remembered as the Virgin Mary 'in all her pain' shows us another way of interpreting the Virgin's image, and the importance of focusing on the individual subjectivities of the Magdalene survivors. In highlighting the significance of the 'Queen of Ireland' as a symbol of suffering for these women, this anonymous interviewee makes clear the potential for a rupture between discourse and embodied experience. She shows that while discursive practices may have positioned the Virgin Mary as the binary opposite of the Magdalene women, in lived experience these boundaries of belonging, of morality, and of identity, are far from clear-cut.

Food, as both a disciplinary tool and a site of subjectivity, helps to expand on this conclusion. This paper has shown how in its structural, spatial, and sensory form, food can bring us closer to an embodied interpretation of the Magdalene laundries in the twentieth century; in turn illustrating how we may bridge the epistemological gap created through the difficulties in accessing official records and informants. Importantly, the memory of eating has provided a lens for the study of discipline. In their accounts of food regimes, the rituals of the dining room, and the sensory experience of eating, the survivors of the Magdalene laundries have shown how the discourses of discipline that legitimised these institutions were consumed, not as a technique of self-improvement, but as a form of punishment.

Through an analysis of discourse and subjectivity, one can argue that survivors' experience of discipline was

mediated through the Magdalene laundry's position as a 'site of exception'. Unlike the voluntary and reformatory institutions of the nineteenth century, the twentieth century laundries largely resist a Foucauldian framework for state-mandated discipline. Pushed to the peripheries of state, these later formulations became increasingly invisible and insular – a 'no-man's land', Agamben might suggest – where women spent indefinite terms for moral crimes. As such, they are better understood as paradigms of the 'state of exception' in Ireland, where bare life is produced through strategies of dislocation and punishment, and justified in terms of immorality. In exploring these institutions through life histories, this paper has attempted to highlight the imprint of these exceptional spaces on the everyday subjectivities of survivors.

Through memories of food, we can observe how activities that were framed as part of a religious disciplinary agenda, such as monastic practices of forced commensality and ascetic consumption, were instead experienced as practices of punishment that attempted to redraw the boundaries of belonging in the laundries. Yet accounts of food also point to something important – resistance. In positioning the subject of power as largely passive, neither Agamben nor Foucault fully allow for the reality that the Magdalene women did not quietly adopt dominant discourses of discipline, punishment or non-belonging. Instead, in their subsequent lives as women and mothers outside these institutions, they are able to use food as a tool in shaping their own subjectivities, through their active role in food provisioning and tasting, but also simply in remembering. By sharing their testimonies, the survivors resist and subvert the disciplinary and punitive regime that physically contained them; and in recollecting and recreating their embodied experience, they bring to light a story that, once contained in the marginal site of the laundries, can now be heard.

NOTES

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46. O'Donnell, Pembroke and McGettrick, 'Oral History of Kate O'Sullivan', *Magdalene Institutions: Recording an Oral and Archival History*. Government of Ireland Collaborative Research Project, Irish Research Council (2013), 7.

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THE BUSINESS OF WOMEN'S WORDS

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Lucy Delap © Graham Copekoga

In March 1973, a mysterious advert appeared in *Spare Rib* magazine, featuring an apple with a single foot. To those in the know, this apple represented an early sign of the efforts of publisher Carmen Callil to launch what would become Virago Press, making the bitten apple logo and dark green book covers an iconic feminist brand. Callil collaborated with Marsha Rowe and Rosie Boycott, *Spare Rib*'s founders, and considered calling it 'Spare Rib Books'. The two projects were linked from the start, and form an appropriate pair of case studies for the Business of Women's Words project (BoWW).¹ Funded by the Leverhulme Trust and led by PI Prof Margaretta

Jolly (Sussex), BoWW is a collaboration between Sussex and Cambridge Universities and the British Library. It is drawing to a close after four years, which involved intense archival work, recording 18 oral history interviews, writing books and articles, running events, and helping to mount the major Unfinished Business exhibition at the British Library, curated by Polly Russell.² The pandemic has introduced new ways of working in the midst of it all, leading to some unexpected innovations, including running an online festival in place of our planned final symposium.

The premise of the Business of Women's Words has been that the women's movement has always included an orientation to enterprise. This however has been obscured by the common ideological stance that making money is necessarily destructive of feminist principles and ideals. The marketplace has been a site of uncertainty for many feminist activists, and for some, one of active disavowal. The magazines and books of the women's movement were regarded as essential ideological resources, and played an important part in conveying the ideas and creativity of the movement. But, shared, gifted and scribbled on, they were also tangibly and vividly powerful love-objects, making the women's movement materially present in the homes, workplaces and lives of activists. They could never be simple commodities, even if the book publishers, journalists, editors and booksellers were deeply aware that they had to sell to stay afloat. Readers could be infuriatingly careless of this. In 1988, a feminist bookseller reported that a reader had confessed to stealing a book from their shop that she 'needed to read'. Some months later, this reader had given them another book, jammed under the door grille of the shop, which she claimed was worth three times the cost of the original 'Call this a conscience book', her note informed them. The bookseller

wrote back in the pages of *Outwrite*, a feminist newspaper:

We would like to remind the woman concerned that the money from *sales* (!) at our bookshop goes towards paying tube fares *plus* rent, gas, electricity and food bills for *several* women (not to mention the authors and publishers concerned!) plus the odd dog and cat (luckily none of us are supporting children yet), [...] The book she left was of no commercial value: [...] It was a hardback, but now out in paperback so no resale value.³

Clearly, the details of the booktrade were far from the mind of this reader, and her sense of value did not align to monetary (retail) price. However frustrating this may have been to those running businesses, it is important to feminist praxis that value could be figured in a variety of ways, not always reducible to a financial balance sheet. Feminist bookshops themselves illustrated this, by providing many resources that went beyond direct sales. They offered spaces for meetings and groups, noticeboards, window displays of feminist culture in high streets and malls, and facilitated friendships between readers, authors and staff. Rethinking value was a significant feminist innovation. It was not always counterposed to profitability. Virago found both political and commercial value in reprinting books that had been neglected by the male cultural establishment, as BoWW postdoctoral fellow D-M Withers argued in their recently released monograph, *Virago Reprints and Modern Classics: the Timely Business of Feminist Publishing* (Cambridge, 2021). And Margaretta Jolly has traced Virago's experiment working with the woman-founded commercial giant, The Body Shop, in publishing a coffee-table book of 'birthlore' *Mamatoto* that meshed with cosmetic products in an uncomfortable mix of pampering and postcolonial deployment of 'third world' women.⁴ Virago used mainstream devices of raising capital and managing stakeholders, and was much criticised by feminist booksellers for offering better discounts to mainstream booksellers. But Virago argued that the goal of getting the broadest possible distribution for women's books was their overriding project, as well as guaranteeing their own survival in what was a competitive market. Women's economic security and access to meaningful work were feminist goals too.

Spare Rib started life with an embrace of mainstream magazine publishing; its founders sought to copy the marketing techniques and look of journals such as *Cosmopolitan*, launched in the same year, 1972. Alongside recipes, advice on fashion and sexual problems, they juxtaposed more challenging discussion of feminist thinking on sexualisation, poverty and women's exclusion from employment. It was not only *Spare Rib*'s content that sustained feminist convictions. The supply chains established by the editorial collective provided work for feminist and radical typesetting businesses, alternative printers, the computerised mailing company Microsyster and feminist photographers. A women-only carpentry business refurbished the *Spare Rib* offices. With BoWW, I have tracked these enterprises and *Spare Rib*'s own experiments with maintaining profitability through the archives of *Spare Rib*, based on the rich newly-catalogued



Feminist book pile © Tom Reeves

collections at the Feminist Archive South, University of Bristol. I've also been fascinated to examine *Spare Rib*'s grant applications that have left a record of its financial planning and operations amongst the papers of the Greater London Council, and have helped us understand better the influence of local government on politics and enterprise in the 1980s.⁵

Alongside the archival close reading that historians are so familiar with, our project has also used new techniques to track the content and impact of *Spare Rib* in terms of its spatial reach. Scholars have often looked to the distribution of magazines such as *Spare Rib*, tracking readership numbers and approximate spread. But not only is this data often completely absent for radical publishers and their often small-scale productions, it also only tracks one dimension of spatiality. It ignores the often plentiful data embedded in the magazine itself, in the form of listings, advertisements and letters. Such items might mention an address, telephone number or simply give a place-name. They give an insight into the projects and businesses that sought to reach the *Spare Rib* readership – offering feminist, women's or countercultural products and services. Women-only or lesbian bed and breakfasts, retailers of women-produced shoes, bags and clothing, women-led travel opportunities, feminist bands and theatre companies on tour – all feature in the listings pages and were compiled into a spread sheet and projected onto a map, hosted by the British Library.⁶ We also tracked mentions of women's centres, consciousness-raising groups, alongside letters from readers bemoaning the lack of groups in their area or offering to host new

ones.

The richness of data precluded a full survey, and instead BoWW postdoctoral researchers Zoe Strimpel and Eleanor Careless sampled *Spare Rib* issues from February, June and October over the full 21 years of publication, 1972-1993. This resulted in data that drew on around 8% of listings and 24% of letters. The data was categorised into what we managed to whittle down into 14 categories, after much debate. This allows map users to identify themes such as 'Health, Sex and Therapy', or 'Work' – with cross listing to reflect that these categories often bleed into each other. We also gave users the ability to search by their own keyword, so that specialist interests can be brought to the map data. And finally, an animated timeline allows for a dynamic representation of the changing locations and levels of feminist activity around the British Isles over time – an important resource for confirming arguments made by scholars that the 1980s are as much a feminist decade as the more iconic and well researched 1970s.⁷

The resulting map gives a picture of feminist activity across the British Isles; it is by no means complete, but does provide a measure of the changing location, orientation and density of feminist activities. The inclusion of Ireland is a reminder of the porosity of activism across national borders and the close links sustained with Irish feminists. With greater resources, we would have liked to map equivalent magazines in other national settings – the long-lasting *Emma* in Germany, for example, or *Ms.* magazine in the United States, to offer comparative elements. *Spare Rib* itself had strong connections with overseas markets and readers, with distribution in Australia and the United States, and a readership that spanned the globe. But this resource is a first pass at what can be done using digital humanities methods to produce easily shareable digital research tools, visualisations and code.

The Business of Women's Words has been an opportunity to extend our discussion of feminist enterprise well beyond the academy. We've hosted events at the British Library (or more accurately since March 2020, on a zoom platform hosted by the British Library) that has put academics in dialogue with festival entrepreneurs, artists, publishers, comics and journalists. We've run schools workshops that focus on the making of feminist books and magazines, podcasts on loneliness, and blogs on feminist cats.⁸ Our project has connected with parallel conversations about activist-entrepreneurialism in Black Power and lesbian liberation, and how these are being refigured in digital economies. We've reflected on the genuine tensions that often arise when a political ideology such as feminism is combined with making a profit, yet also the synergies and creative innovations that can result. Developing products, brands, marketing, customer loyalty – these languages sound alien to political activism. But look more closely at a political movement, and these techniques sometimes emerge under other names. Political commitment sometimes limited profitability, but it could also create new market niches and launch the innovations of feminist media that continue to inspire readers and audiences today.

NOTES

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WHAT CAN ETIQUETTE BOOKS AND PRINT MEDIA TELL US ABOUT THE EXPERIENCES OF BOURGEOIS WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC URBAN SPACES OF PARIS AND LONDON, 1850-1900?

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As bourgeois women entered the public spaces of the city during the second half of the nineteenth century, they experienced modern phenomena, such as urban development to roads and architecture; technological advances in lighting and glass; and department stores, described as 'cathedrals of consumption'.¹ In doing this they transgressed and realigned traditional ideal gender boundaries, which confined them to the domestic sphere.² In her ground-breaking study on the narratives of sexual danger, Walkowitz describes the many avenues taken by respectable women in their occupation of the public sphere, including philanthropy, shopping, and even politics. She details the complexities they faced as they experienced the freedoms of the modern metropole and attempted to realign acceptable feminine behaviour, whilst constantly at risk of immoral associations.³ Within the public sphere, shopping in the newly-established, elaborately-built department stores and walking along redesigned city streets, offered new and exciting experiences to bourgeois women. Subsequently, many spent considerable and increasing time engaged in these activities. For this reason, these spaces have been chosen for the analysis of women's experiences of public urban space. Paris and London experienced similar developments, yet both differences and similarities can be detected within female experiences of them, offering an interesting comparative history.

In using popular visual imagery and advice texts from two cities, supported by personal testimonies, this analysis differs from existing scholarship. The comparison of cities illuminates local conditions, including ideologies and traditions, shocking events, and business strategies, as well as their impact upon bourgeois women's experiences of public urban space. This highlights the causes of both subtle and not-so-subtle differences. The greater publication of advice articles and etiquette books within Britain indicates a fixation on the regulation of the public behaviour of women. In Parisian visual culture, a recognition of a relaxation on strict regulations is apparent. Magazines, posters, newspaper articles, art, and etiquette books form the core body of sources used in this analysis. The structure of this essay is provided by issues evident in these sources, including public amenities, maintaining respectability, the sexualisation of women and space, and enjoyment and observation. Analysing these aspects of the urban female experience can also offer insight into broad historical questions concerning gender ideology and relations, the emancipation of women, and the inclusion of women in experiences of modernity.

THE INTRODUCTION OF CONVENIENCES TO THE PUBLIC SPHERE

From the late 1860s the development of newly-

constructed, architecturally-grand department stores, which built on the existing feminine activity of shopping, contributed towards the influx of respectable women into the public sphere. As well as the obvious lure of commodities, department stores encouraged women to spend the day 'in town', made possible by the introduction of convenience facilities, which allowed them to tend to their domestic needs. From the 1880s, access to a public toilet was especially important, as the 'urinary leash' limited the distances women could travel from their own homes or those of close friends and relatives.⁴ Other facilities included supervised childcare, powder rooms, hairdressing courts, writing rooms, restaurants and tea rooms, libraries, grocery provision, and more, which ensured that women's time spent in the public sphere was more comfortable and convenient, encouraging longer and more frequent visits.⁵ Despite the presence of these 'domestic' features, freedom of access and the presence of unknown companions and thus anonymity and potential danger, rendered these spaces undeniably public.⁶

For women experiencing these conveniences there was little difference between Paris and London. Both cities introduced the same facilities, however, the nature and purpose of introduction differs. Within London, services were practical and necessary, allowing women to spend the entire day 'in town' and thus spend more money. Lady Jeune claimed that the convenience of having all necessities under one roof greatly contributed towards the temptation of spending money.⁷ In Parisian stores, conveniences were part of the experience and spectacle of the department store.⁸ The reading room and gallery of the *Bon Marché* were merged into the style of the Louvre Museum gallery and the buffet room curtains and palm leaves gave off the impression of a theatre lounge.⁹ This is a recurrent difference between the stores of Paris and London, whereby Parisian stores were described with greater splendour and every minute detail part of the spectacle. Nonetheless, within both cities the introduction of facilities, especially access to a toilet, encouraged more women to emerge from the private sphere, allowing them to spend longer periods of time in public whilst ensuring greater levels of comfort. Their impact on female emancipation and the female experience of modernity was significant.

RESPECTABILITY: CONDUCT AND DRESS

The introduction of conveniences within department stores helped bourgeois women to maintain respectability, by offering them an acceptable feminine space to tend to their needs. This was a primary concern of bourgeois women, especially in public, evidenced by the instructions contained within countless advice texts.¹⁰ In her advice

to 'lady travellers', Lillias Campbell Davidson implied that respectability and virtue could be demonstrated by various etiquettes. If a woman experienced impertinence from a gentleman, she had only herself to blame, for her lack of demonstrable respectability.¹¹ Strict regulations were imposed upon a woman's conduct and dress, for example, in order to display morality and virtue. British publication, the *Girl's Own Paper*, recommended that women 'look straight before [them], or on the opposite side when passing any man. Never look at them when near enough to be stared at in any impertinent and abrasive way'.¹² Three decades earlier, in 1862, an article for a London-based magazine provided a long list of what was expected of the respectable female within the public spaces of the city:

If she knows how to walk in the streets, self-possessed and quietly, with not too lagging and not too swift a step; if she avoids lounging about the shop-windows, ... and pass men without looking at them, yet all the while seeing them; if she knows how to dress as only a lady can, avoiding loud colours and too coquettish a simplicity as equally dangerous, the one for its assertion and the other for its seductiveness ... she is for the most part safe as if planting tulips and crocuses in her own garden.¹³

The comparison to the safety of her home is telling of a dominant domestic gender ideology, also reflected in the numerous instructions, demonstrating her incompatibility to the public masculine sphere.

While these examples, found commonly within advice texts, point to a dangerous and distant relationship between the sexes within the public sphere and echo the dominant ideal, this was not always reflected in reality. This can be discerned from other print media sources. In an article published in 1862, one female correspondent insisted that many young girls engaged with harmless flirtation on their walks, although they did not divulge this information to their parents.¹⁴ This suggests that it was not appropriate behaviour despite its prevalence. On the other hand, a photograph of Regent Circus and Oxford Street taken in the 1890s shows bourgeois women standing and peering into shop windows, while the surrounding crowds take no notice; it appears to be acceptable behaviour.¹⁵ Furthermore, as early as 1876, Samuel Beeton advised women to accept offers of assistance 'over a puddle' and stated that gentlemen 'mean nothing but civility' by it.¹⁶

In Paris, similar attitudes can be found regarding bourgeois respectability and the nature of advice given to maintain it. One source informed women that 'when on the street, one's gait should be regular ... A bouncy walk is an indication of easy virtue and flirtatiousness'. A full-page illustration in *Le Fin de Siècle*, instructed how women of each social standing should lift the hems of their skirts to avoid water. Bourgeois women were instructed to do so with modesty.¹⁷ This source sheds light on the classist nature of the issue, as immodesty was associated with the working classes. That this was a prominent issue is evidenced by its inclusion in Baudelaire's 'to a woman

passing by', who 'ostentatiously' lifted the hem of her dress.¹⁸ The reality for some was less definite. Jules Clarétie observed that in the face of department stores' retailing strategies, women had little self-control in public.¹⁹ Furthermore, an advertising poster depicted a respectable and fashionable woman, standing at the roadside gazing at a display of an antique bookseller.²⁰

Despite recognitions of non-conformist behaviour, the volume and diversity of advice literature suggests that maintaining respectability by following prescribed etiquette, was a central concern to many women of Paris and London, even if some chose to ignore it. The association between public space and immorality ensured that many women sought to demonstrate modesty. The volume of contemporary commentary on the respectability of women in public and their behaviours and endeavours reflects the contested nature of the streets and the complexities women faced in their attempts to traverse this 'masculine' space. By imposing these regulations, the traditional ideology that middle-class women were unsuited to public, especially urban, space was maintained. Yet, on the other hand, they allowed respectable women to negotiate new spaces beyond the domestic hearth, thus progressing female emancipation. It could be argued that they provided a necessary stepping stone from total restriction to emancipation.

CHAPERONAGE

Along with regulations regarding conduct and dress and the availability of conveniences, the accompaniment of a chaperone was recommended and often insisted upon, in order to maintain propriety. London-based diarist, Helena Swanwick, wrote that her 'mother said that [she] could not go into town alone, because [she] might be spoken to by some man'.²¹ An image of Regent Street from 1852 depicts a busy scene, in which every bourgeois woman on the street is accompanied.²² A decade later, a teacher who walked between the London residences of her pupils advocated that a chaperone was both necessary and desirable to avoid being bothered by strange men.²³ Furthermore, due to the masculine nature of the West End, women were advised to take a chaperone shopping, to protect them from men who saw the 'great emporiums' as stores full of 'ladies of easy virtue'.²⁴ Although in a more limited capacity, Parisian sources present women with similar concerns. French-novelist Collette presented the issue to her protagonist Claudine, whose father insisted that she must be accompanied by her maid when she left the house.²⁵ Parisian etiquette experts also warned solitary shoppers that they risked being mistaken for a prostitute by zealous department store inspectors.²⁶

Alongside this trope, Parisian visual culture presents an alternative narrative that idealised the independent, unchaperoned and respectable bourgeois woman. In her study of *fin-de-siècle* poster advertisements, Iskin advocates the commonality of unchaperoned women to the streets of Paris. A campaign for *Paris Almanach* shows an elegantly dressed and self-assured bourgeois woman walking alone along a densely-populated street. Although she is the object of masculine gaze, she maintains respectability and dignity. Another poster depicts a similar

scene whereby a fashionable bourgeois woman walks along the riverbank of the Seine, alone but composed and comfortable.²⁷ That these were advertisements for the sale of goods, implies that unchaperoned women were commendable and fashionable. This trope is also found within more traditional art. An oil painting, *Paris, Rue du Havre* (c. 1882), depicts a well-dressed bourgeois woman confidently striding alone across a busy thoroughfare. The woman's insignificance to her fellow pedestrians implies a normality to her unaccompanied presence.²⁸ The fashionable dress, confident manner and aura of respectability depicted in these sources is evidence for an accepted and idealised independent woman within Parisian culture and society.

Although not idealised, there was a recognition within London society that acquiring a chaperone was not always possible. As a compromise, female editors and journalists often assumed the role of chaperone through published literature.²⁹ The author of 'Shopping in London' claimed to have 'pioneered many a country cousin through her shopping and sightseeing'.³⁰ This article series was published in 1888 in the popular and respectable magazine *The Lady*, whose readership was upper- and upper-middle-class.³¹ This indicates a recognition that bourgeois women could enter urban public space alone and maintain respectability. As early as the 1860s, there is evidence that bourgeois women confidently walked the streets unchaperoned and unmolested. One correspondent to *The Times* claimed that 'I have been in the constant habit of traversing Oxford Street alone ... never have I received the slightest incivility from my chivalrous countrymen'.³² Although the desirability and perceived necessity of a chaperone was significant within London society, this was not universal, yet the unaccompanied presence of a woman was not idealised as it was within Parisian sources.

THE SEXUALISATION OF WOMEN: MALE PESTS

Informing these regulations on women's freedom within the public sphere was the traditional association between sex and women in public. Although regulations attempted to minimise the risk of association, they were not always successful; unwanted male attention was always a possibility. French journalist Giffard described the presence of 'maniacs' within Parisian stores, 'who follow[ed] the crowds in order to rub up against them'.³³ Giffard also described how male 'hawkers' waited on the streets for potential 'prey'.³⁴ In London, 'male pests' harassed women as they attempted to experience its freedoms. In 1862, a concerned father voiced his complaint in *The Times*, after his daughter and a young relative were bothered by a gentleman on Oxford Street.³⁵ Street harassment remained a substantial issue into the 1890s, when the editor of *Hearth and Home* magazine recalled how 'although I was quietly dressed ... there was scarcely a day when I, while waiting for an omnibus, was not accosted'.³⁶ Similarly, author Mark Twain claimed that 'if a lady unattended walks abroad in the streets ... even at noonday she will be pretty likely to be accosted and insulted'.³⁷ By the late 1880s this was such a common occurrence in London that the *Pall Mall Gazette* published

an article instructing women on how to lay a trap for 'the male pest'.³⁸

The prevalence of dialogue surrounding the male pest within contemporary discussion of London is considerable. A plausible explanation for this, within sources published during or after the late 1880s, can be found in a series of shocking events. Firstly, the 'Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' exposé in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, published in 1885. This series of five articles discussed the procurement and sale of young girls as sex slaves into the White Slave Trade and shockingly into homes of the West End bourgeoisie.³⁹ Secondly, the brutal murder of five prostitutes in Whitechapel during the autumn of 1888, by Jack the Ripper, and its subsequent press scandal.⁴⁰ Walkowitz has conducted extensive research on these scandals, arguing that sexual danger was subsequently constructed as a national issue, encouraging organised efforts and the emergence of a new social purity movement.⁴¹

A widespread response to these scandals emerged in the form of a moral panic concerning the mass influx of respectable women into the masculine 'sexual' sphere, away from the purity and protection of domesticity. The press scandals were publicised to warn middle-class women of the dangers of the city and of transgressing the domestic hearth, in order to reinforce traditional paternalistic social order, yet, the atrocities were actually committed upon working-class girls and women. By bringing sexual danger to the forefront of public discussion, triggering debate and publicising extreme events, these episodes may have exaggerated the threat of street harassment, deterring respectable women from transgressing their traditional sphere. In response to the Ripper murders, *The Lady* published a dozen shopping expedition articles, advising women on how to stay safe within the city.⁴² The fact that they were still advising women to go out unchaperoned is evidence that the threat may have been exaggerated. These events and press scandals go some way to explaining the apparent difference in level of concern regarding street harassment between Paris and London. Yet, it was no doubt a possibility for all women, encouraging many to abide by the advised regulations, which helped to protect them.

THE SEXUALISATION OF WOMEN: DEPARTMENT STORES

In keeping with the theme of sexualised women, department stores were often described to have seductive powers. Aristide Boucicaut, founder of the *Bon Marché*, famously specialised in seduction techniques that entrapped women and caused them to lose all rationality.⁴³ Émile Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames*, which tells the story of life within a fictional Parisian department store based on the *Bon Marché*, frequently describes the seductive quality of the store, especially on his protagonist Denise.⁴⁴ Similarly, Giffard stated that 'the husband who has driven his wife to the great bazar ... leaves her for long hours as prey to the seductions of lace'.⁴⁵ These sources convey a sense of lost autonomy and subscribe to the contemporary tropes of women in the public sphere as sexualised and incompetent.

The language of description for London's stores within print media offers a more varied picture. Lady Jeune wrote an article on the ethics of shopping, claiming that 'overwhelming temptations ... besiege us at every point' and affirms the 'seductive and intimate atmosphere of shops'.⁴⁶ Perfectly rational experiences are more common, however, such as that of Miss Wilson. 'I delight as every fashionable woman does, in taking a journey once every season to the West End and thoroughly doing the sights'.⁴⁷ William Whiteley, founder of Whiteley's department store, also assured the public that his female clientele were rational, respectable individuals.⁴⁸ A possible explanation for this disparity may be found within economic strategy. For example, a decision made by Boucicaut to rearrange the departments of the *Bon Marché*, so that women 'wander around this organised disorder, lost, driven crazy', forced to pass through departments they had not intended to visit, to ensure their submission in the face of new products.⁴⁹ Parisian stores were also described with greater, awe-inspiring splendour than their London counterparts.⁵⁰ Conversely, Whiteley was responding to accusations that he was transforming respectable women into Jezebels; he had an economic incentive to ensure that women retained respectability.⁵¹ Women's experiences of department stores were thus influenced by local factors. In London, respectability dictated conduct and directed public opinion to an excessive degree, whereas in Paris, entrepreneurial techniques which seduced and dazzled women were more extreme and influential.

ENJOYMENT AND OBSERVATION

Looking beyond restrictions placed upon women's experiences of the public sphere, including behavioural and dress guidelines, chaperones, harassment, and seduction by department stores, women were able to observe and enjoy themselves. *Flânerie*, the pleasurable act of strolling through an urban landscape with the freedom to stop and observe inconspicuously, was a quintessentially nineteenth-century Parisian phenomenon.⁵² Although traditionally conceived by Baudelaire as a masculine activity, bourgeois women were increasingly able to fulfil its criteria. Saisselin, however, whose monograph includes a chapter on the *flâneur*, makes no mention of a female counterpart.⁵³ Wolff denies the possibility that bourgeois women could become *flâneuses* due to the sexual divisions of the period.⁵⁴ Yet, the mass production of bold, enticing poster advertisements directed at Parisian bourgeois women, conveys a sense of enjoyment and freedom in the act of observation, crucial elements of *flânerie*, both by its subjects and target audience.⁵⁵ Across the channel, Mary Hughes, a frequent visitor to the West End delighted in gazing into its shop windows.⁵⁶ Modern developments in plate glass and lighting techniques added to the spectacular allure of displays, reinforcing the difficulty of maintaining strict behavioural ideals.⁵⁷ This activity of 'just looking' also occurred within department stores, which offered women the opportunity to 'become leisurely spectators'.⁵⁸ Women were under no obligation to buy when they entered a store and many spent time merely observing the space.⁵⁹ Women crafted their own version of the *flâneur*, which although different should not

be disregarded. Bourgeois women were able to appreciate the city in terms of leisure, observing and experiencing modern phenomena.

CONCLUSION

Public experiences of bourgeois women from Paris and London presented in print media, etiquette books and personal accounts were similar in many respects. New urban spaces including modernised streets and department stores offered women opportunities to experience modernity and the public sphere, and to transgress and realign traditional gender ideology. This freedom was informed by enjoyment, fear and socially imposed limitations. Using a broad range of popular sources, this essay has demonstrated the centrality of maintaining respectability within bourgeois society, providing an explanation for the imposition of limitations and attempts to maintain them. The wealth of material on this suggests that it impacted women's public experiences significantly. This can be seen in both Paris and London, however, London placed a much heavier emphasis on the desirability of a chaperone. This may have been a result of local factors and their publicity within the press, including the 'Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon', Jack the Ripper and the fixation on respectability. Entrepreneurs of Parisian department stores show a level of disregard for female respectability not evident in London. Their seductive retailing techniques intended to entrap women and remove their rational decision-making power, limited the emancipatory capacity of the stores. This less rigid attitude towards propriety facilitated a culture of idealising independence within Parisian bourgeois women. Without examining popular visual imagery this disparity would likely go unnoticed.

Despite these differing limitations, many women from Paris and London conveyed a shared sense of enjoyment in shopping, walking, observing the sights, and spending the day 'in town', aided by the introduction of conveniences and modern infrastructure. Many were happy to participate in these modern experiences, which to a large degree freed women from the constraints of domestic life and ensured the progression of gender ideology. Thus, this comparative history illuminates the impact of local factors and broader transnational trends on the public experiences of bourgeois women and shows that despite local conditions and restrictions, the determination of women to traverse the public sphere and their experiences were shared across national borders.

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'A KIND OF SUPERIOR HOBBY': THE CONCEPTS AND CONTRADICTIONS OF WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT VIEWED THROUGH RECORDS IN THE ARCHIVE OF THE JOHN LEWIS PARTNERSHIP

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As a woman working in a retail business archive, I find it fascinating, on a daily basis, to have the opportunity to examine the way my predecessors picked their way through a career path which appeared to offer flexibility and opportunity and yet was hindered by a patriarchal system, low pay and social stigma. Included amongst the business records, this archive holds a rich source of information, with its fair share of anomalies and contradictions, on the employment of women in retail which warrant further investigation.

The archive contains much information on the ways that women in the retail business, as a particular socio-economic group, helped to create and develop areas of commerce. This includes areas of personnel management, welfare, staff training and buying, and the ongoing reliance upon a predominantly female workforce to deliver a large retail business. Investigating the records found in a private business archive can often uncover untold stories which support wider issues of interest to both gender historians and to those working in business today as they tackle issues such as the gender pay gap, diversity and inclusion.

Our corporate archive contains what most researchers would expect to see. Memoranda, letters, photographs, marketing material, media coverage, personal files, with the addition of a comprehensive house journal which records all aspects of the development of the John Lewis Partnership. This includes new recruitment and employment strategies, roles, places and events which

chart progress throughout the late nineteenth, twentieth and early twenty-first century. The archive remains relatively undiscovered by researchers yet it provides a rich tapestry of personal stories, policies and business decisions which reflect changes and attitudes towards women both in terms of business and wider society.

As with all business archives, there are frustrating chronological and subject specific gaps. But there are also hidden gems. Amongst them are the stories of Florence Lorimer, recruited in the 1920s and then given funds to undertake a solo buying trip to Afghanistan, the Punjab and the surrounding area to purchase things of interest including rugs, pots and coins to be sold in Peter Jones; and Enid Locket, one of the first women to be called to the Bar who helped draft the Partnership's Constitution to create the co-owned business it remains today. These personal stories compensate for a lack of comprehensive employment records, and incomplete runs of documents which might hamper the exhaustive assessment of the overall success or failure of the women who chose to make retail their career either by design or necessity. Although literature and research has been carried out on cohorts of women as shop floor workers and customers, there remains scope for further study in particular areas, including working middle-class women for whom a period of employment in the 20th century was often dismissed as 'a kind of superior hobby'¹.

To provide an overview of their contribution, and perhaps an initial way into this fascinating subject,



Fig 1: Female Partners providing lunchtime entertainment in the Social Secretary's office in John Lewis, 1953

Image courtesy of the John Lewis Partnership Archive

our written resources include the house magazine, *The Gazette*, which has always been published weekly. Acknowledged as one of the oldest house magazines still in production, it provides a continuous, contemporary source which reflects both company policy and the thoughts of the managers and workers who contributed to it. Although initially a mouthpiece for the views and strategies initiated by John Spedan Lewis (JSL), the visionary founder of the John Lewis Partnership, *The Gazette's* usefulness is enhanced by his decision to allow space for readers' letters in each edition. These letters, written anonymously on any subject without apparent censorship, provide a unique perspective on staff views of past and present management initiatives including the recruitment and promotion of women. There was a clear directive from JSL that no letters should be suppressed and even those condemning the policy regarding the positive attitude towards the employment of married women, were published.

The Gazette also published details of the Partnership Census, which was carried out annually between 1920 and 1934, and then on an irregular basis until 1950. This document was compiled by the Department of Staff Advice, giving names, length of service, shop and department in which the member of staff was employed and also information on their geographical mobility, as the number of shops within the group expanded during the 1930s and 1940s. Another key annual document published in *The Gazette* was the annual Report and Accounts where numbers of workers were broken down by gender, revealing, for example, that in 1982 although women workers outnumbered men by 15,982 to 8,744 not one single department store manager was female while only four out of the seventy-six Waitrose branch managers were women.

Mrs Pam Roche was one of the female Waitrose leaders from 1972 to 1998. Loved and feared by her staff, Pam was renowned throughout the business as someone who would work harder than most and received the respect and loyalty of those who worked for her in what was a male dominated sector of the business. Through *The Gazette* it is possible to track the careers of other women who reached more senior positions. The rise and fall of their number and importance to the company often mirrors the external employment prospects of their peers. The general inability for most women to break the glass ceiling throughout the twentieth century is apparent in files of business correspondence, whilst other records spotlight those who were to become role models and lead teams with specific responsibilities, particularly in the welfare and secretariat of the business. Whilst relatively small in number, these women would have found the opportunities for advancement even more challenging without the support at the very top of the business particularly during the first half of the twentieth century.

Given the unique organisational structure of the John Lewis Partnership, its co-ownership model and the enlightened leadership of John Spedan Lewis, the story of the development of opportunities for women are often at odds with other large businesses. For example, the marriage bar, which so often appears to have hampered the career paths of women in the twentieth century, was



Fig: 2 Female business dress, John Lewis Oxford Street, 1959
Image courtesy of the John Lewis Partnership Archive

never a feature within the business. On the contrary, Spedan Lewis was an advocate for the recruitment and promotion of women. In 1946 he wrote:

The Partnership has always carried to great lengths its employment of women in highly paid posts and, so far as I am concerned, it will continue to do so both as a matter of intelligent selfishness and because it seems to me to be very desirable for the general community that women of high earning-power shall achieve high earnings.²

His innovative approach led to the introduction of a recruitment scheme, aimed at graduates and particularly well-educated and experienced women, known as the 'Learnership Scheme'. Set up at the end of the First World War, when many women were displaced from former managerial appointments on the return of men from the War, JSL was pleased to encourage them to join Peter Jones where he was then Managing Director. One letter written by Beatrice Hunter, who was to go on to become Spedan's wife and the first Deputy Chairman of the Partnership, recalled her excitement of joining the business in 1922.

I am going into trade. I've been offered a Buyership at Peter Jones, Sloane Square. It's a cheapish drapers and ladies' outfitters ... The Chairman is the son of John Lewis of Oxford Street ... He has a mad stunt of employing University women ... but the commercial world is very suspicious of outsiders the idea of taking in completely

*inexperienced people in responsible positions is quite a new one.*³

However, this desire to encourage bright women to move into senior positions in the initial interwar period was soon to be replaced by the hesitancy of those working for him. They noted that many of the recruits left the business on marriage or because the Learners realised that working on the shop floor was hard work with little glamour, long hours and restricted opportunities. As someone who had first-hand experience of life on the shop floor, Beatrice Lewis's knowledge and direction was to prove inspirational to her peers. Her business and personal papers have been retained in the archive and include diaries and letters to her friends which add a unique dimension to the resources found within the business archive collection. The documents record her recruitment into the company and her subsequent promotion and later marriage to JSL. The papers highlight issues relating to the relationship between the fast tracked 'Learners', traditional long service employees, and management. The way in which they viewed their employment was very different and led to claims of unfair treatment with Learners often leapfrogging other women to management roles.



Fig 3. John Spedan Lewis and Beatrice Lewis at home in Longstock House, 1948

Image courtesy of the John Lewis Partnership Archive

Despite this resentment the programme continued apace. Records show that during the interwar period Beatrice Lewis was also in contact with recruitment agencies, including the University Appointments Boards for Oxford, Cambridge and London Universities, and

correspondence with these bodies is housed in the archive. Other business documents created by the Staff Management teams, the Committee for Education and the Establishment Director also contain references to the Learnership Scheme and individual trainees. The papers record the decisions made regarding the future of recruits, the opportunities open to them and details of pay.

Although extensive business records produced by the Company are available, there is less material created by the women recruits themselves. Records of those women who remained within the John Lewis Partnership for a number of years and whose personal files have been retained in the archive contain relevant information on pay, conditions and career routes. However, there is not a consistent amount of data within these files from which to analyse their intentions, aspirations or personal circumstances. The women who chose to leave the company after a short spell of employment are not featured in the archive records and this lack of material results in an incomplete picture of why they decided to join and why their career at the shops ended. In an attempt to fill this gap, traditional archive records have been supplemented by interviews with retired staff. Staff were interviewed by the Archivist to obtain life story recordings, some lasting up to three hours, which cover their working lives both before, during and after their employment with the Partnership. Up to seventy interviews of both men and women are now held in the archive and give a personal and professional viewpoint which adds colour and life to the more traditional documents. In one interview, a former Partner at Oxford Street recounted the arrival of an oil-rich businessman from the far east in the late 1960s, one of whom called for her manager and then enquired about how many camels would be required to encourage her to leave the shop and join his family. Diplomacy by the manager ensured that both parties left with a better understanding of the cultural differences!⁴ Given these fascinating stories which complement the written record, more oral interviews continue to be carried out by a team of volunteers and will form an important part of the legacy of women in the Partnership in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The way social attitudes and external factors influenced the working lives of women is something which JSL did not appear to have factored into his recruitment plans and were not considered by those who followed him in senior leadership roles within the Partnership. As seen in Beatrice's letter, 'going into trade' was not seen as a suitable profession for a woman of a certain social status. For those who were able to overcome this hurdle the next became apparent when they married.

The contention that a couple should not marry until the man could support his wife led to many women resigning their posts on marriage to ensure their husband was seen as being the provider. However, one interesting aspect of female recruitment and retention within the John Lewis Partnership involved a fledgling maternity leave scheme. Whilst during the 1930s the doors remained firmly closed to many women who had children, Spedan Lewis was to acknowledge the loss of the expertise and experience many women had acquired prior to having a family. To this end he concluded, "There shall be



Fig 4: Choosing furnishing fabrics, John Lewis Oxford Street, 1950

Image courtesy of the John Lewis Partnership Archive

no avoidable discrimination against married women. Expectant mothers shall have leave of absence for not less than thirteen weeks, of which five shall be after the birth".⁵ This leave was not paid and therefore was not an option for many working women, but it did offer a choice for some women, despite the social stigma which dissuaded many women from continuing to work after marriage and childbirth.

During and after the Second World War, women did move into senior positions. Weekly figures printed in *The Gazette* reveal women who were managing department stores and who were buying merchandise across the country. As previously seen in the late 1930s, by the early 1950s the numbers dwindled and it was not until the 1970s that female senior managers, such as Pam Roche, once again featured in *The Gazette's* weekly Department Store figures. In terms of Buyers, there was less fluctuation, with a tradition of women Buyers sourcing merchandise that would appeal to female shoppers, as continues today. For example, in the 1920s, Edith Holloway was the first Buyer for the emerging market of electrical products which were targeted at housewives. On the shop floor there is also now a broad balance between male and female heads, if branches of both John Lewis and Waitrose are examined.

As a whole, the John Lewis archive provides a window into the world of female retail workers. The contribution of many working-class women remains largely unrecorded, but those women who managed them deserve their place in history too. As we have come to value the retail workers who have continued to provide goods to us during the pandemic, the structures, procedures and training which were set up by middle-class female employees in the twentieth century have

created a strong industry which continues to serve the public today. Despite their best efforts, the gender pay gap and other diversity issues continue. However, without the information gathered and retained in the archive it would be much more difficult to view the long-term progression of the policies and people who attempted to break these down and to reduce inequality across the industry. Few people working in retail today would consider it "a kind of superior hobby" but they stand on the shoulders of giants.

NOTES

1. Vera Brittain quoted in Pamela Horn, *Women in the 1920s* (London: Allan Sutton), 57.
2. Memorandum from J S Lewis to General Secretary 9.7.1946 as reproduced in *Retail Trading*, 1965, 126.
3. P. Cox, *Spedan's Partnership* (London: Labatie Books, 2010), 73.
4. Interview with Mrs J Swann in Oral interviews, Swan, J /Oral/Swan, 2004, John Lewis Partnership Archive (JLP Archive), Cookham.
5. Cox, *Spedan's Partnership*, 132.

THE ROLE OF SICHELGAITA IN MARRIAGE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN SOUTH ITALY AND BYZANTIUM (C.1071-1074)

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In 1076, a young noble-born girl, aged around four, arrived in Constantinople from Southern Italy. This was Olympias-Helena de Hauteville (hereafter Olympias), who had been betrothed to the two-year-old heir to the Byzantine Empire, the Purple-born Constantine Doukas.¹ Constantine was junior co-emperor, alongside his father, Emperor Michael VII, the senior Byzantine ruler. Olympias was one of the younger daughters of the Lombard Princess Sichelgaita (who is the focus of this article) and the Norman warlord Robert Guiscard. The union of Olympias and Constantine never took place, however. Her father-in-law, Michael VII, was overthrown by Nikephoros III Botaneiates in 1078 and the new emperor cancelled the marriage arrangements.² The aborted betrothal had repercussions for the politics of the eleventh-century Mediterranean. In 1080 Guiscard, accompanied by Sichelgaita, used the poor treatment of Olympias as a pretext to launch a major invasion of the Byzantine Balkans.

If Sichelgaita could consult with her husband on proposed military engagements and accompany him to war, it would not, then, be unreasonable to suggest that she could have been involved in the matrimonial dialogues concerning her children, and this article investigates the extent of Sichelgaita's involvement in the marriage negotiations which preceded Olympias' departure for Constantinople. The focus is Sichelgaita's position prior to 1076, when she took action to secure her son's inheritance and safeguard the reputation of her lineage. The most recent study of Sichelgaita, that of Valerie Eads, contends that her power was founded on a power vacuum in Robert Guiscard's position.³ The argument presented here is different. Rather than attribute Sichelgaita's position to exceptional circumstances, it proposes that her power at Guiscard's court was routine and in no way dependent upon her husband's weakness. This supports current scholarship on the exercise of power by elite women in the central medieval period in Europe: that these practices be treated as typical, rather than exceptional, an argument most clearly articulated in a recent series of essays edited by Heather Tanner. These advocate a 'beyond exceptionalism' model as a paradigm for discussing the power, authority and agency of medieval elite women: a model which takes the premise that women in positions of power were 'expected, accepted and routine'.⁴

Theresa Earenfight also argues against categorising power wielded directly through offices as more potent or effective than when it is derived from other sources, such as marriage, maternity, dynastic status and networks of influence. Such an approach, Earenfight proposes, enables scholars of elite women to analyse the way that gender shaped the exercise of power in patriarchal and misogynistic medieval societies, without succumbing to the trap of categorising power as either masculine

and effective, or feminine and subordinate.⁵ Specifically concerning the region of South Italy and Sicily, Jacqueline Alio has also recently published a biographical study of Sicilian Queens in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries which sheds light on these women's continuous significance as political actors.⁶

In the light of these studies, this article approaches Sichelgaita's agency and power as an ongoing factor in the history of southern Italy, thereby redressing an imbalance in modern scholarship, which has given considerably more attention to her husband.⁷ It focuses on two Greek letters attributed to Michael Psellos, a Byzantine polymath and adviser to the emperor, which were written between 1071 and 1074.⁸ Until recently, the only modern edition of these letters was that of Constantine Sathas in the nineteenth century.⁹ However, they have recently been published within a complete new edition of Psellos' letters, prepared by Stratis Papaioannou.¹⁰ When analysed in juxtaposition, the letters illuminate the negotiation process which eventually led to Olympias' betrothal to Constantine Doukas.¹¹ They offer contrasting depictions of the royal matriline of Sichelgaita and Guiscard's daughters and reveal new evidence that Sichelgaita was an important character during the marriage negotiations, when she took initiatives to safeguard the reputation of her Salernitan (i.e. from Salerno) lineage. The letters offer an invaluable opportunity to reconstruct and evaluate Sichelgaita's capacity for agency in this period, which will emerge as consistent and ongoing.

SICHELGAITA AND HER DAUGHTER OLYMPIAS

Sichelgaita (about 1040 – 27 March 1090) was the daughter of Prince Guaimar V of Salerno (about 1013 – 1052) and Gemma, daughter of Count Laidulf.¹² Her brother, Gisulf II also ruled over Salerno between 1052 and 1077. Sichelgaita and Gisulf had several other siblings, including two sisters named Gaitelgrima and Sica.¹³ Sichelgaita's family had ruled the southern Italian principality since 983 and she was named after the wife of John II, the first ruler of the dynasty. Accordingly, the city of Salerno had a developed royal centre including a palace and a cathedral, which came under the legal protection of the prince.¹⁴ By the eleventh century, the city had gained the reputation as a centre for medical excellence, with members of the royal family becoming practitioners.¹⁵

Sichelgaita's husband, Robert Guiscard (about 1015-1085), was the son of Tancred of Hauteville (a minor Norman noble) and Fressenda, Tancred's second wife.¹⁶ The family initially held lands in Coutances, Normandy and later, the Domesday Book attests that this clan gained additional acreage in Norman England.¹⁷ Guiscard arrived in southern Italy in 1047, with one of several groups of

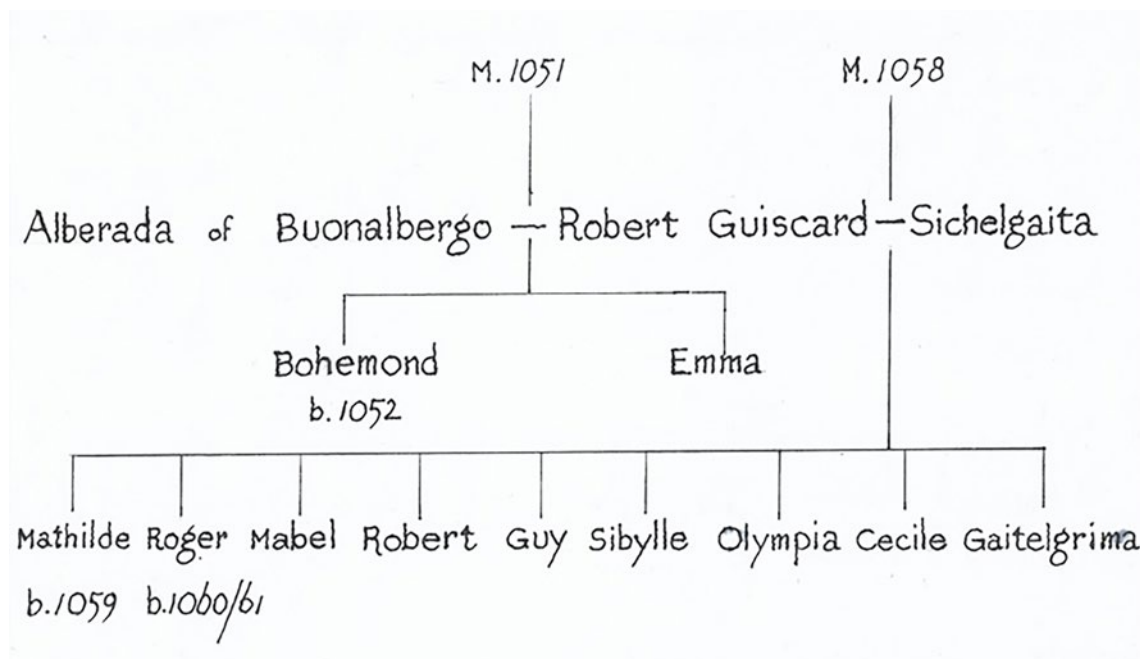


Figure 1: The children of Robert Guiscard, Alberada of Buonalbergo, and Sichelgaita. After Vera Von Falkenhausen, 1982, pg. 69.

Produced by Henk Huig, 2020.

Normans who travelled there. He then embarked on a spectacular career of conquest, which resulted in his domination of the region. He initially married Alberada of Buonalbergo, a Norman woman, in 1051. Alberada was the mother of Guiscard's first-born son, Bohemond (c1054-1111).¹⁸ Guiscard however, later repudiated her to marry Sichelgaita in 1058 and together they would have ten children, seven female and three male (fig. 1). Their eldest son, Roger Borsa (1060/61-1111) would eventually inherit, but only after facing ongoing challenges from Bohemond, a situation decried by his mother, Sichelgaita.

The Norman chronicler, William of Apulia, who wrote in the 1090s, stresses that Guiscard's marriage with Sichelgaita rendered his power more acceptable to the Lombard population of southern Italy.¹⁹ Patricia Skinner and Graham Loud have both highlighted how this marriage marked a turning point for the legitimacy of Guiscard's rule, because it provided him with kinship ties to an established royal family.²⁰ Guiscard succeeded as count of Apulia in 1057 and in 1059, he was invested by Pope Nicholas II as Duke of Apulia, Calabria and Sicily, a position naturalised by his recent marriage to the royal-born Sichelgaita.

Guiscard's heightened status made possible the proposed marriage alliance between his daughter Olympias and Constantine, the son of the Byzantine Emperor. If all had gone smoothly, the marriage would have been confirmed once Constantine had come of age. It was then expected that Olympias would, at first, deputise as junior empress to Michael VII's wife, Maria 'of Alania' and then, when Constantine succeeded his father, she would be crowned *Augusta*, as empress-consort to the senior emperor.²¹ However, Michael VII was deposed so the marriage never took place. According to Latin histories, Olympias remained in Constantinople after Michael's deposition and then travelled to the court of her uncle, Roger I of Palermo, during the reign of the subsequent emperor.²² In this period (between 1080 and 1083) Guiscard, accompanied by Sichelgaita, launched an invasion of the Byzantine Balkans, in response to the

deposition of Michael VII and Olympias' loss of status.²³ Guiscard died in 1085 and was succeeded by Roger Borsa. Before her death in 1090, Sichelgaita seems to have acted as *de facto* regent for her son, evidenced by legal documents where she is named as *Dux* (Duke).²⁴

THE MARRIAGE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN GUISCARD/SICHELGAITA AND THE BYZANTINE EMPEROR

Although Olympias would ultimately be betrothed to Constantine, as confirmed in an imperial chrysobull dated to 1074, this was not a foregone conclusion.²⁵ Rather, it was the endgame of protracted negotiations, which had begun at some point between 1068 and 1071, when a marriage alliance between one of the sons of the then Byzantine emperor, Romanos IV Diogenes, and one of the Salernitan princesses had first been mooted.²⁶ Romanos, however, was removed as emperor in 1071 and replaced by his stepson Michael VII. Michael then put forward his brother Constantios (who was born around 1060) as a potential match for one of Guiscard's daughters.²⁷ The main source for these marriage negotiations are the two aforementioned Psellos letters, which are numbered 89 and 90 in the Papaioannou edition.²⁸ A close study of the letters reveals, however, that firstly, they are chronologically in the wrong order – Letter 90 came before Letter 89 and secondly that, although the negotiations were conducted between Michael and Guiscard, it is almost certain that Sichelgaita was closely involved. This is supported by several factors: Sichelgaita's royal status, her ability to speak Greek and her determination to protect the lineage of her children.

LETTERS 89 AND 90

Before proceeding to a full analysis of the letters, a brief summary of the content will reveal the ways in which they differ.

Letter 90, which runs to 75 lines, begins by outlining

three reasons why Michael VII has been moved to seek Guiscard's friendship (ll. 1-7). Next, the letter stresses that Michael, as the son of a previous emperor (Constantine X), will pursue the former emperor's principle of promoting peace by establishing bonds with intelligent and generous men. The letter subsequently describes Michael's intention to establish a close and unbreakable bond with Guiscard (21-30).

A marriage tie between one of Guiscard's daughters and Constantios (the brother of Michael VII, described as a 'Porphyrogennetos [purple-born] co-emperor') is then proposed (ll. 31-38). The text describes how exceptional it is that he will be united with one of Guiscard's daughters:

I will not unite someone foreign to my family with your daughter, nor a distant relative, but a brother of the same blood as me, of the same origin, born in imperial purple, wrapped in imperial swaddling clothes, given imperial status by God, at the same time as he received life.²⁹

The text also stresses how Guiscard's status will subsequently increase (ll. 45-48). Next, the letter acknowledges that one of Guiscard's daughters was betrothed to the son of the emperor Romanos IV. However, Michael is described as a legitimate ruler, whilst Romanos is presented as an illegitimate tyrant, who was justly stripped of his power (ll. 48-58).

The next passage in the letter focuses on Guiscard's daughter:

Now your daughter, deemed worthy of imperial blood, will lawfully possess her title and rank.³⁰

The final passages of the text urge Guiscard to immediately act as a military ally to Byzantium. The letter concludes by confirming that Michael VII's intentions will not change and requests Guiscard to respond with a written reply (ll. 61-75).

However, at 127 lines, Letter 89 is significantly longer than Letter 90. It opens with Michael VII requesting that Guiscard congratulate him because, with the unanimous support of his subjects, the emperor has increased his inherited power (ll. 1-5). The text then outlines how Michael wishes to establish peace with distinguished leaders such as Guiscard and describes at length the similarities between the two men. (ll. 6-64).

The focus of the letter then turns to Guiscard's daughter and Michael's brother Constantios (ll. 64-90). The similarities between the two are highlighted, and Constantios' legitimacy and illustrious bloodline are described:

I consider that the descendants from each of us, who will be united, are both most legitimate, both from high bloodlines, with unsullied descent from our first ancestors and from a spring of sovereignty. I have a brother born to the same father and the same mother as me, from the same blood and nature, the renowned Lord Constantios.³¹

Subsequently the text offers a further comparison between

the co-emperor and Guiscard's daughters:

It is then to the co-emperor Constantios Porphyrogennetos, the beloved brother of my Majesty, who I want to join with the most beautiful of your daughters, whence she being the prettiest, will be joined with the greatest and the most beautiful.³²

The following passages of the text outline how the marriage tie should result in an alliance, which is presented as a reciprocal relationship, supported by God (ll. 85-110). Lastly, the letter uses the imagery of the grafting of branches, to stress that Guiscard's daughter will be united with a legitimate imperial partner (ll. 113-123). The metaphor used gives an impression of parity between Guiscard's daughter and Constantios, referencing the legitimacy of their lineages:

Your daughter will be united to the most beautiful man, so that new branches may shoot forth from this couple, who form a legitimate and truly imperial stock.³³

The letter closes with a request for an answer from Guiscard (ll. 124-127).

As will be demonstrated, a fresh analysis of the use of language within the two documents shines new light on Sichelgaita's involvement in the reception of the letters, rather than that of the official recipient, her husband.

THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE LETTERS

Both letters have broadly similar aims and show clearly that Michael's government intended for a military alliance with the Normans to be an outcome of the marriage tie with Guiscard.³⁴ They stress the fact that Michael VII had succeeded his father to the Byzantine throne and emphasise the legitimacy of Michael's brother Constantios.

Conversely, there are some differences. *Letter 89* is written using more complicated vocabulary and grammar, in other words a higher register of Greek. It is partly for this reason that it is longer. Another reason contributing to the length of *Letter 89* is that more passages in this text focus upon Guiscard's daughters. In this letter, the prestige of their lineage and their beauty is depicted, placing them on a par with Constantios. This is a marked change from *Letter 90*. A comparison between two passages in *Letters 90* and *89* demonstrates the significant difference between the descriptions of Guiscard's daughters in the two texts.

Letter 90 describes how, following the proposed marriage, Guiscard's 'daughter deemed worthy of imperial blood, will lawfully possess title and rank'. The writer of the letter here implies that the woman who marries Constantios, will gain imperial status through the marriage tie. Any impression that she herself is a royal woman herself, whose lineage renders her suitable as a spouse for Constantios, is minimised. It should be noted, that although Guiscard was a Duke by 1072, he did not hold a princely title until 1078, when he was recognised as Prince of Benevento for three years. Other Byzantine writers also describe the origins of Guiscard and other Italian Normans as obscure.³⁵ Accordingly, although in the

letter Guiscard is acknowledged as high-born, his lineage is not presented as comparable with the imperial status of Michael VII and Constantios. Therefore, the position adopted in *Letter 90* towards Guiscard's daughters, seems connected to an overall objective of the letter: to accentuate the difference in status between Guiscard and the imperial Byzantine family. By refraining from any comment on these women's royal statuses, the letter implicitly concentrates on the reputation of their Norman patriline, rather than their royal Salernitan matriline.

Notwithstanding these differences in rank, the Byzantines were aware of the reputation of the Salernitan princes.³⁶ Therefore, the omission of any reference to the royal lineage of Guiscard's daughters, through their mother Sichelgaita, is notable. This is especially so because, in many eleventh and twelfth-century texts, Byzantine writers emphasised the female line as an almost equivalent source of legitimacy to the male line.³⁷ The content of the letter can however, be explained through reference to wider Byzantine diplomatic practice. The description of how the future status of Sichelgaita and Guiscard's daughter will be improved through her marriage into the imperial Byzantine family, bears similarities to aspects of other official correspondences between Byzantine emperors and foreign rulers which affirm the emperor's supremacy.³⁸

In contrast, *Letter 89* includes a significantly different description of the status of Guiscard's daughter. It is here worth quoting the passage in full.

I consider that the descendants from each of us, who will be united, are both most legitimate, both from high bloodlines, with unsullied descent from our first ancestors and from a spring of sovereignty. I have a brother born to the same father and the same mother as me, from the same blood and nature, the renowned Lord Constantine.

Notably, the middle-voice first person verb, 'I consider', stresses Michael's personal acknowledgement of the royalty of Sichelgaita and Guiscard's daughters. The repetition of superlatives also seems designed to leave the audience in no doubt of Michael's awareness of the prestige of Sichelgaita and Guiscard's daughters' lineage. The explicit reference to Constantios' matriline also develops the impression that the comparable legitimacy, which Guiscard's daughters possess, is attributable to their mother's lineage. Therefore, although the ancestors described in this passage are associated with Guiscard, the named recipient of the letter, it is likely that the text refers to Sichelgaita's royal Salernitan ancestors, to whom Guiscard was connected through his marriage. This impression is reinforced by reference to the passage in William of Apulia's history describing Guiscard's marriage to Sichelgaita, which presents Guiscard's reputation as greatly increased by association with his wife's royal ancestors.³⁹

This move towards expressing equality of status is once again evident in the closing passage of *Letter 89*, which describes the shared royalty of the potential couple. It describes them as two young branches, and it expresses hope that they will be buoyed by each other's royalty

as they shoot up together. This further suggests that the royal lineage of Guiscard's daughters and their parity with Constantios was intended to be a dominant theme of the text. It reinforces the impression that the lineage of Sichelgaita and Guiscard's daughters, which is being described in this text, is their royal Salernitan matriline.

The change of emphasis within the two letters is marked. In *Letter 89*, language conventional to Byzantine diplomatic practice has been abandoned, a change best explained if *Letter 89* is viewed as a conciliatory text, which responds to Guiscard's rejection of *Letter 90*: a dispatch that had more explicitly manifested the Byzantine emperor's supremacy.

The identification of *Letter 89* as the second letter then raises the question of what this text tells us of the Byzantines court's perceptions of the reasons for Guiscard's rejection of their initial proposal. Previous scholars have argued that the marriage negotiations between Byzantium and Guiscard were protracted because Guiscard was holding out for a more favourable match, which he achieved when his daughter was ultimately betrothed, NOT to Michael VII's brother Constantios but, to the emperor's son and likely heir, Constantine Doukas.⁴⁰

However, both letters refer to Michael VII's increase in power, and Romanos IV Diogenes' downfall as very recent events, which places them in the period 1071-72– some two years before the birth of Michael VII's son Constantine Doukas in 1074. This means that when the letters arrived, Guiscard and Sichelgaita could not have hoped for a better offer than a marriage tie with the Byzantine imperial family through Michael's Purple-born brother, Constantios. To understand the reason that Guiscard and Sichelgaita did not immediately accept the offer of a marriage tie in *Letter 90*, we need to look elsewhere – to the language of the letters and their emphasis, or lack of it, regarding the royal lineage of Sichelgaita and her family.

SICHELGAITA'S POWER AT COURT

Before proceeding with an analysis of Sichelgaita's potential involvement in the marriage negotiations, we need to consider her power at Guiscard's court, both in the period when the letter was sent and later in his reign. During her marriage to Guiscard, Sichelgaita took actions to ensure the succession of her first-born son, Roger Borsa, to his father's patrimony. Valerie Eads has highlighted two perceptible moments. The first was in 1073, when Guiscard fell ill and nearly died, Sichelgaita called together his court and had them recognise Roger as his heir. Her actions indicate that she was determined for her son to succeed to the entirety of Guiscard's patrimony.⁴¹ It should be recognised here that modern scholarship often describes elite medieval women as motivated to act on behalf of their progeny, in what amounts to a historiographical topos.⁴² In Sichelgaita's case, however, this makes sense, given the threat to Roger's position posed by Bohemond. In this specific instance, the speed with which Sichelgaita called Guiscard's followers together and commanded their assent is telling. It suggests that her actions were based upon a position of routine authority at Guiscard's court and that her ability to act here was not dependent

upon the crisis caused by husband's ill health.

The second event took place in 1077, when Guiscard expelled Sichelgaita's brother, Gisulf II and took control of Salerno. The Benedictine historian, Amatus of Montecassino, writing soon after April 1078, provides the most extensive account of this event. His text depicts Guiscard acting as a protector, relieving the citizens of Amalfi from the injustices of Gisulf's rule. Sichelgaita is also depicted acting as a mediator and dutiful sister by sending supplies to Gisulf, without offering him her good will.⁴³ As Kenneth Wolf has pointed out, Gisulf is depicted as the antithesis of Guiscard, who is presented as concerned for the welfare of his subjects and the church.⁴⁴ This renders Amatus' account of Guiscard's motives suspect and invites informed speculation on why Guiscard acted to annex Salerno in 1077. Eads has suggested linking the date with Roger Borsa's coming of age. Guiscard and Sichelgaita may well have been prompted to secure the succession of their, now adult, first-born son to the principality of Salerno. After all, Gisulf had many relatives who could potentially challenge Roger's claim.⁴⁵

Evidence from this exceptional event therefore, once more points towards Sichelgaita's ongoing capacity for agency at Guiscard's court, through her influence and participation in political decision making. On this point, a charter issued by Sichelgaita herself in 1079, donating land to the church of St Trophimena, is also telling. The dating clause of the charter, analysed by Patricia Skinner, names Roger Borsa as a joint ruler of Salerno alongside Guiscard and extends their joint rule back to 1073 (rather than 1076). Skinner suggests that the charter demonstrates Sichelgaita's concern to ensure that Roger would eventually become sole ruler of Salerno and points towards her understanding of the written word as a source of power.⁴⁶ The charter also suggests that Sichelgaita perceived her son's royal Salernitan matriline to be a crucial factor legitimising his position as Guiscard's heir, setting him apart from potential rivals, including Bohemond.

Now let us turn to the *Alexiad*, written by the Byzantine imperial woman Anna Komnene around 1148. It provides valuable evidence for Sichelgaita's position during the last years of Guiscard's reign. Sichelgaita is mentioned several times in the text.⁴⁷ Notably, the text depicts Sichelgaita rallying troops in the heat of combat at the Battle of Dyrrachium in 1081, where the Normans were victorious:

There is a story that Robert's wife Gaita, who used to accompany him on campaign, like another Pallas, if not a second Athene, seeing the runaways and glaring fiercely at them, shouted in a loud voice – words which were equivalent to those of Homer, but in her own language: 'How far will ye run? Halt! Be men!' As they continued to flee, she grasped a long spear and charged at fully gallop against them. It brought them to their senses and they went back to fight. (trans. Sewter)⁴⁸

Caution must be extended here however. Although Komnene presented the *Alexiad* as a work of history, the text features elements of panegyric, eulogising the reign

of her father, Alexios I. To achieve her literary objective, Komnene deployed imagery drawn from Homer's poems, in addition to pre-Homeric and post-Homeric works.⁴⁹ Conversely, Komnene describes how she gathered material by listening to conversations between her father and her uncle George Paleologos, who were both present at Dyrrachium.⁵⁰ This may be where she heard this story, which may thus contain a grain of historicity, beginning as a reaction amongst participants at Dyrrachium to Sichelgaita's presence at the battle.

Komnene's writing offers a contrast to other male historians, for example William of Apulia, who only mentions Sichelgaita's presence at Dyrrachium as a side note.⁵¹ Komnene gives extended depictions of several women in active roles, including Sichelgaita and it appears that she aimed to bring forth women as characters and protagonists when she encountered evidence for this in her source material.⁵² Thus, despite the challenges posed by the *Alexiad*, it is useful in its foregrounding of Sichelgaita as a powerful figure at Guiscard's court. Latin and Greek history writers in the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, such as William of Apulia, were overwhelmingly men, writing for largely male audiences. Komnene provides a rare, alternative female voice.⁵³

Eads read Komnene's account as evidence that Sichelgaita moved with Guiscard's army. She also argued that because southern Italian Norman-Lombard society was hierarchical with patriarchal elements, Sichelgaita's movement with the army must have been transgressive of normative gender boundaries and therefore facilitated by unusual circumstances. After 1076, these circumstances were Guiscard's need for Sichelgaita's presence to help him secure the ongoing loyalty of the Salernitan members of his court and army. Eads also argued that Sichelgaita used her proximity to Guiscard and his army to work towards her personal ambition to secure the succession of Roger Borsa to Guiscard's patrimony.⁵⁴

These arguments are convincing and are also supported by those of Skinner, who pointed to charter evidence from 1079, describing Sichelgaita as *Dux* (Duke), rather than *Ducissa* (Duchess). This shed light on Sichelgaita's power after Guiscard became ruler of Salerno in 1076.⁵⁵ Although Eads discussed evidence for Sichelgaita's power before 1076, her final argument was that the takeover of Salerno was a watershed moment, leading to specific and exceptional circumstances which gave rise to Sichelgaita's power. While the circumstances outlined by Eads certainly contributed to Sichelgaita's power after 1076, a key objective of this article is to connect her prominence after 1076 with her position before this date, in order to show that her power was not constrained to unusual circumstances. Indeed, a passage in the history written by the eleventh-century historian Geoffrey of Malaterra, describes Judith, the wife of Guiscard's brother Roger, also acting as a military leader at the south Italian city of Troina in 1062.⁵⁶ This indicates that Sichelgaita's position was less exceptional, and more deeply embedded in south Italian political culture, than Eads allowed.



Emperor Michael III receives a message.

Source: History of John Skylitzes: Skylitzes Matritensis (Biblioteca Nacional de España).

This work is in the public domain.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MARRIAGE NEGOTIATIONS

In a passage in Book One of the *Alexiad*, Komnene described how, when in 1080 Guiscard received a Greek letter from an impersonator named Raiktor, falsely claiming to be Michael VII, he first discussed it privately with Sichelgaita.⁵⁷ This sheds light on Sichelgaita's position at Guiscard's court, revealing how she was consulted by her husband. It also raises the real possibility that when *Letters* 90 and 89 arrived between 1071-74, she would have been in a position to influence Guiscard's response.

Using miniature illustrations from the twelfth-century Madrid Skylitzes, (figs. 2 & 3) with their illustrated scenes from Byzantine history (based on the work of the eleventh-century Greek historian John Skylitzes), Margaret Mullet has shown that the reception of letters in Byzantium during times past were elaborate, public and formal processes. During the reception of a letter, the bearer communicated an oral message which complimented it.⁵⁸ It is likely, therefore, that the texts were performed orally, prior to the recipient reading them privately.⁵⁹ Because the Madrid manuscript was produced in Norman Sicily, the images can also be used as evidence for letter culture in this region and in turn, allow insight into a process that was likely also played out in Guiscard's court.⁶⁰

Amatus attests that in late 1071-72, when *Letter* 90

arrived at their court, Sichelgaita was with Guiscard in Sicily, raising the possibility of her involvement in the letter reception.⁶¹ The Sicilian chronicler Geoffrey of Malaterra also describes an occasion in 1080, when Raymond IV Count of Toulouse sent envoys to the court of Count Roger I of Sicily (Guiscard's brother). The purpose of the embassy was to request a marriage tie between Raymond and Roger's daughter Matilda. Geoffrey tells us that the envoys therefore met Matilda and reported back to Raymond on her beauty and character.⁶² It is probable that a similar process took place when the Byzantine envoys arrived at Guiscard's court to request a marriage tie with one of his daughters. It is also likely that Sichelgaita would have been present for such an occasion, as mother of the potential spouses.

A further reflection when considering Sichelgaita's presence while accepting epistles concerns language proficiency. The Salernitan court, where Sichelgaita was raised, was Latin speaking but, there was also likely considerable knowledge of the Greek language amongst courtiers.⁶³ Guiscard, on the other hand, spent the first part of his adult life in France and accordingly, he may not have had a strong command of Greek. It is possible therefore, that Sichelgaita translated the letters for Guiscard during a private reading or perhaps provided a second opinion on the translations offered by other members of his court. If we take together the nature of contemporary letter culture; Sichelgaita's presence in Sicily; the conventions



Georgios Maniakes sends the letter of Christ to Romanos III.
Source as above.

This work is in the public domain

surrounding the role of envoys in marriage ties and Sichelgaita's likely proficiency in Greek, they support the theory that she was present alongside Guiscard when his court formally received the diplomatic mission, headed by the envoy Romanos *Staboromanos*, bearing *Letter 90* and that she was therefore closely involved in the public and private stages of the letter's reception.

The change of emphasis in *Letter 89* (upon the emperor's knowledge of the royal lineage of Guiscard's children) suggests that *Staboromanos* reported that the restrained description of Guiscard's daughter's matriline in *Letter 90* had provoked a negative reaction at Guiscard's court. Accordingly, the prominence of the prestigious lineage of Sichelgaita and Guiscard's daughters in *Letter 89* can perhaps be explained as an attempt by Michael VII's government to redress this affront. The likely presence of Sichelgaita at the reception of the correspondence suggests that she was amongst those who were affronted. There is further evidence that points to Sichelgaita as leading this reaction. *Letter 89* employs a higher register of Greek than the previous correspondence. Given that Sichelgaita perhaps possessed a working knowledge of the language, upon receiving *Letter 89*, she may have noticed the change in register more quickly than Guiscard. Thus, Psellos may have written the second letter in a higher register specifically with Sichelgaita in mind: to encourage her to develop the impression that Michael VII's government held the reputation of her lineage in high esteem. This in turn, hints that when Straboromanos returned to Constantinople he reported that it was Sichelgaita who had influenced Guiscard to reject *Letter 90*. It also suggests that the dismissal was connected to the parts of the text which underplayed the prestige of her lineage.

The reasons for Sichelgaita's rejection of the first letter do not end with perceptions of her displeasure at its tone. As has been shown, Sichelgaita seems to have been determined to uphold the rights of her first-born son Roger Borsa to his father's patrimony, which occurred following Guiscard's death in 1085. Sichelgaita's swift actions in 1073, when she called Guiscard's court together to acknowledge Roger as Guiscard's successor, show that she was actively working towards this objective and was aware of potential threats during the period when *Letters 90* and *89* arrived in southern Italy.

Threats to Roger's position included Bohemond who, as a legitimate child from Guiscard's first marriage to Alberada, had a claim to succeed his father at his younger brother's expense. The situation was further compounded by Abelard of Hauteville, who refused to acknowledge Roger as his father's heir in 1073. The prestige of Roger's Salernitan matriline was therefore crucial to justify his position as his father's heir. *Letter 90*, which was likely performed orally at Guiscard's court, must have publicly damaged Sichelgaita's own reputation and that of her children, by downplaying the prestige of her daughters' Salernitan heritage before Guiscard's courtiers and potential rivals to her son. However, Guiscard's subsequent rejection of the letter would have undermined its credibility, thereby limiting the damage to the reputation of Sichelgaita's lineage. For these reasons, it seems likely that Sichelgaita expressed discontent following the reception of *Letter 90* and encouraged its

rejection.

The final success of the marriage negotiations, evidenced by the 1074 imperial chrysobull, suggests that it is unlikely that Guiscard rejected the Byzantines' second proposal in *Letter 89*. Rather, the most likely scenario is that Guiscard accepted the offer and when he subsequently heard news of the birth of Constantine in 1074, he pushed for his daughter – then identified as Olympias – to be engaged to the infant.⁶⁴ If Sichelgaita had given a cool reception to *Letter 90*, the performance of *Letter 89*, expressing the Byzantine emperor's regard for the lineage of Sichelgaita and Guiscard's daughters, would likely have redressed her grievances. This implies that after the performance of *Letter 89*, she expressed support for the proposal from Constantinople and that this was an important factor leading to Guiscard's acceptance of the letter and the successful completion of the marriage negotiations. In summary, it was the marked change in tone in *Letter 89*, which departed from the conventions of Byzantine diplomacy and persuaded Sichelgaita to support the Byzantines' proposal, turning the tide in negotiations between Constantinople and South Italy.

This investigation has exemplified the power exercised by an elite woman during a prolonged event: an episode that was not a crisis and did not involve a collapse of power elsewhere. The actions that Sichelgaita took during the negotiations do not appear to have depended on Guiscard's weakness, rather they seem to have been founded upon and point towards her ongoing and widely accepted position of power at Guiscard's court. This points to Sichelgaita as a determined figure who held a position of great prestige at Guiscard's court through her dynastic lineage; a woman who protected this reputation resolutely. Her station was connected to her power through her marriage, via her role as advisor to Guiscard, by way of her network of influence at her husband's court and due to her personal skillset: including her likely familiarity with the Greek language. This sheds light on Sichelgaita's power as a significant and consistently important factor in the politics of southern Italy and the wider Mediterranean, especially in relations between the Norman Duchy of Apulia and Calabria and the Byzantine Empire, from the mid-eleventh century through to the 1080s.

NOTES

1. When Olympias arrived in Constantinople, she was re-named with the Greek, Helena. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.
2. Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, ed. Peter Frankopan, trans. E.R.A. Sewter (London: Penguin, 2009), 4.5.
3. Valerie Eads, 'Sichelgaita of Salerno: Amazon or Trophy Wife?', *Journal of Medieval History*, 3 (2005), 72-72: 87.
4. Heather J. Tanner, Laura L. Gathagan and Lois L. Hunnecutt, 'Introduction', in H.J. Tanner, ed, *Medieval Women and the Exercise of Power, 1100-1400: Moving Beyond the Exceptionalist Debate*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 2.
5. Theresa Earenfight, 'A Lifetime of Power: Beyond Binaries of Gender', in H.J. Tanner, ed, *Medieval Women*

and the Exercise of Power, 271-293.

6. Jacqueline Alio, *Sicily's Queens 1061-1266 (Sicilian Medieval Studies) Abridged Edition* (New York, NY: Trinacaria Editions, 2020).

7. See Pauline Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 161 and Earenfight, 'A Lifetime of Power', 271-293.

8. For the biography of Psellos see Stratis Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos: Rhetoric and Authorship in Byzantium* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013), 4-20; The letters are preserved in manuscripts gr. 1182 and suppl. Gr. 593 in the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris.

9. Michael Psellos, *Letters*, in K. Sathas, ed., *Μεσαιωνική βιβλιοθήκη η συλλογή ανεκδότων μνημείων της Ελληνικής ιστορίας. Μιχαήλ Ψελλού ιστορικοί λόγοι, επιστολαί και άλλα ανέκδοτα*, vol. 5. (Venice: Typois toy Foinikos; Paris: Maisonneuve et Cie, Libraires- éditeurs, quai voltaire 15, 1876).

10. Michael Psellos, *Letters*, in Stratis Papaioannou, ed., *Michael Psellus Epistulae*, 2 vols. (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter 2019).

11. For a summary of the manuscript tradition see Michael Jeffreys, 'Summaries' in Michael Jeffreys & Marc Lauxtermann, eds., *The Letters of Psellos: Cultural Networks and Historical Realities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 151-416: 380.

12. Eads, 'Sichelgaita', 84 n. 84; See also Dorotea Memoli Apicella, *Sichelgaita tra longobardi e normanni* (Salerno: Elea Press, 1997) and Michele Scozia, *Sichelgaita: signora del Mezzogiorno* (Napoli: Alfredo Guida Editore, 1994). For a brief overview of her public career: Patricia Skinner, 'Halt! Be Men!': Sichelgaita of Salerno, Gender and the Norman Conquest of Southern Italy': *Gender & History*, 12/3 (2000), 622-641.

13. For a family tree: Huguetta Taviani-Carozzi, *La principauté lombarde de Salerne (IXe-XIe siècle). Pouvoir et société en Italie lombarde méridionale*, vol. 1. (Rome: Ecole française, 1991), 371.

14. Loud, *Age of Robert Guiscard*, 42. For the history of Salerno, and the city as a royal centre see Huguetta Taviani-Carozzi, *La principauté lombarde de Salerne (IXe-XIe siècle): pouvoir et société en Italie lombarde méridionale*. 2 vols. (Rome: École française de Rome, 1991), especially, 441-4, 527-6, 616.

15. Amongst the medical practitioners active at Salerno was Sichelgaita's brother, Johannes: Florence Glaze, 'Salerno's Lombard Prince: Johannes "Abbas de Curte" as Medical Practitioner', *Early Science and Medicine*, 23 (2018), 177-216.

16. The name Guiscard, which is used in modern scholarship, is a sobriquet which appears in Latin, old French and Italian sources, it is often rendered as 'resourceful' or 'cunning'. For Guiscard: Loud, *Age of Robert Guiscard*.

17. 'Ralph 35', *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England*. [www.pase.ac.uk/ Accessed 17 September 2020].

18. For Alberada: Chalandon, *Histoire de la domination*, 225.

19. William of Apulia, *The Deeds of Robert Guiscard*, (trans. Loud) [https://ims.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2019/02/William-of-Apulia.pdf/ (Accessed 17

September 2020).

20. Skinner, 'Halt! Be Men!', 626-628; Loud, *Age of Robert Guiscard*, 127-8, 236, who also discusses Guiscard's repudiation of Alberada.

21. Bibicou, 'Une page d'histoire', 46.

22. Orderic Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 4., M. Chibnall, ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 12-14; See also: Falkenhausen, 'Olympias', 56-72.

23. Komnene, *Alexiad*, 4.5; William of Apulia, *Deeds*, 47, 49; Geoffrey of Malaterra, *Deeds of Count Roger*, 3.13; Loud, *Age of Robert Guiscard*, 213-14.

24. Skinner, 'Halt! Be Men!', 631-32.

25. The chrysobull was drawn up by Psellos. For the Greek text: Michael Psellos, ed. Eduardus Kurtz & Franciscus Drexler, *Michaelis Pselli Scripta Minora*, vol. 1 (Milan: Società Editrice Vita e Pensiero, 1936), 329-34. For a French translation and commentary: Hélène Bibicou, 'Une page d'histoire diplomatique de Byzance au XIe siècle: Michel VII Doukas : Robert Guiscard et la pension de dignitaires'. *Byzantion*, 29/30, (1959), 43-75.

26. Romanos was the second husband of Michael's mother, the empress Eudokia.

27. *PBW* (2016): Konstantios 61.

28. Psellos (ed. Papaioannou), *Epistulae*, 189-193 (no. 89), 194-196 (no. 90). The letters are contained in the manuscripts gr. 1182 and suppl. Gr. 593.

29. Psellos (ed. Papaioannou), no. 90 ll. 39-44.

30. Psellos (ed. Papaioannou), no. 90 ll. 60-61.

31. Psellos (ed. Papaioannou), no. 89 ll. 64-70

32. Psellos (ed. Papaioannou), no. 89 ll. 82-85.

33. Psellos (ed. Papaioannou), no. 89 ll. 121-123.

34. Bibicou, 'Une page d'histoire', 45; John Skylitzes, *Continuation of the Chronicle*. Edited and translated by Eric McGeer, and John W. Nesbitt (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 6.25.

35. See for example: Komnene, *Alexiad*, 1.10.

36. The prestige of the principality of Salerno is acknowledged by Skylitzes, who describes Sichelgaita as having been the daughter of a prince with a great deal of land. He also describes Salerno as having been the first and greatest city of the principality: Skylitzes, *Continuation*, 7.21.

37. See Nathan Leidholm, *Elite Byzantine Kinship, ca 950-1204* (Leeds: ARC Humanities Press, 2019), 106-09.

38. Nikolaos Oikonomides, 'Diplomacy', *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), [https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195046526.001.0001/acref-9780195046526-e-1490?rskey=CpWhz8&result=1481/ (Accessed 31 August 2020). (Accessed 31 August 2020).

39. William of Apulia, *Deeds*, 26.

40. Loud, *Age of Robert Guiscard*, 211-212; Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold*, 261. *Letter* 90 refers to Romanos as a former co-emperor alongside Michael but does not celebrate his downfall triumphantly. This muted description of Diogenes' demise suggests that the text was written between the Battle of Manzikert in August 1071 and Spring 1072, when Diogenes had been debased from his position and exiled from Constantinople, but continued to actively oppose Michael. In contrast, *Letter* 89 opens with the celebration of an event that enabled Michael to increase his power and secure unanimous support for his rule. It is most likely that this passage refers to the end of

Diogenes' opposition. This reinforces the impression this letter was written second, likely after Diogenes' arrest in spring 1072 or following his blinding, between 29th June and 4th August 1072.

41. Eads, 'Sichelgaita', 83; Chalandon, *Histoire de la domination*, 179-84.

42. I thank Arietta Papaconstantinou for communicating this point to me.

43. Amatus of Montecassino, *History of the Normans*, translated by Prescott Dunbar and edited by Graham Loud (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004), 8.1-30.

44. Kenneth Baxter Wolf, *Making History. The Normans and their Historians in Eleventh-Century Italy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 112-115.

45. Eads, 'Sichelgaita', 83-85.

46. Skinner, 630. She goes on to suggest that Sichelgaita exercised influence over the production of Amatus' *History* to develop her own and Roger's public image: *ibid.*, 634-636.

47. Komnene, *Alexiad*, 1.12, 1.15, 4.6, 6.6.

48. Komnene, *Alexiad* 4.6.

49. See the parallels between Sichelgaita's speech and Homer, *Iliad*, 5.529; 6.1112; Larisa Vilimonović, *Structure and Features of Anna Komnene's Alexiad. Emergence of a Personal History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018) 75-81, 91.

50. Komnene, *Alexiad*, 14.7.

51. William of Apulia, *Deeds*, 49, 55. He also depicts Sichelgaita at the siege of Trani in 1080: *ibid.*, 45.; Eads, 'Sichelgaita' 75-76.

52. See Leonora Neville, *Anna Komnene: The Life and Work of a Medieval Historian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 133-140.

53. For the Latin historians of the Norman southern Italy: Emily Albu, *The Normans and their Histories: Propaganda, Myth and Subversion* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2001); Wolf, *Making History*. For Greek historiography: Neville, *Anna Komnene*, 15-30.

54. Eads, 'Sichelgaita', 81-87.

55. Skinner, 'Halt! Be Men!', 629-630.

56. Geoffrey of Malaterra, *The Deeds of Count Roger of Sicily*, parts 1-4 (trans. Loud) [<https://ims.leeds.ac.uk/archives/translations/>] (Accessed 17 September 2020). 2.29; Alio, *Sicily's Queens*, 82.

57. Komnene, *Alexiad*, 1.12.

58. Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, 31-42; Floris Bernard, 'Epistolary Communication: Rituals and Codes', in A. Riehle (ed.), *A Companion to Byzantine Epistolography* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 307-332: 309.

59. Another letter of Psellos refers explicitly to the public reading of letters at the imperial court: Psellos (ed. Papaioannou), *Epistulae*, 387-390 (no. 143) ll. 17-18. A further letter offers a cue for the bearer to elaborate on the text, suggesting oral performance: Psellos (ed. Papaioannou), *Epistulae*, 1-3 (no.1) ll.12-13. For public first readings of letters: Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, 38-39.

60. Vasiliki Tsamakda, *The Illustrated Chronicle of Ioannes Skylitzes in Madrid* (Leiden: Alexandros Press, 2002), 260-61.

61. Sichelgaita's entrance into Palermo with Robert in January 1072 is described by, Amatus, *History*, 7.19.

62. Geoffrey of Malaterra, *Deeds of Count Roger*, 3.22. For analysis: Alio, *Sicily's Queens*, 86-88.

63. Barbara Kreutz, *Before the Normans: Southern Italy in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 139. The Salernitan court was close to the port, where there was a considerable traffic of Byzantine goods in the eleventh century: Glaze, 'Salerno's Lombard Prince', 187 n. 25.

64. My argument partly follows Kolia-Dermitzaki, who argued that only *Letter* 90 reached Guiscard, that this proposal was accepted, and that Guiscard subsequently pushed for his daughter to be married to the new-born Constantine, rather than Constantios: Kolia-Dermitzaki, 'Michael VII, Robert Guiscard', 68.

ESCAPING REDUNDANCY: CONSTANCE MAYNARD'S TRAVELS AND HER CHALLENGE TO VICTORIAN FEMININITY

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Constance Maynard was born in 1849 and was one of Girton College's earliest students at the University of Cambridge; she studied for the Moral Science Tripos and matriculated in 1875. Maynard subsequently taught at Cheltenham Ladies' College, St Leonards School for Girls at St Andrews and in 1882, co-founded Westfield College, later to become part of the University of London.¹ This paper offers a new perspective on Constance Maynard and Westfield College through the investigation of her and her colleagues' travel and international networks. These experiences of travel contribute to our understanding of why and how Victorian women travelled and the extent to which these experiences enabled them to challenge the prevailing discourses of femininity and redundancy. Further, this paper explores how Maynard's unique position as headmistress of a residential higher education institution enabled her to navigate the self-subjective hierarchies of identity through travel, simultaneously challenging and reinforcing the Victorian norms that her gender, class, race and profession dictated. The notion of separate spheres² and associated ideals of femininity, were integral to the negotiation and navigation of class and racial social categories yet, as Susie Steinbach argues, it 'was not a rigid set of rules internalised as natural and adhered to unquestioningly...[they were] frequently challenged'.³ One of the ways in which Maynard and her contemporaries navigated such categories, was through travel.

All sources examined as part of this research are housed within the Constance Maynard collection at the Queen Mary University Library Archive. A balance between the discourse formulated by the institution and the academics' personal experiences is created by the inclusion of sources from Maynard's personal papers, in addition to the official papers of Westfield College. While some of the Constance Maynard collection is digitised, the sources used in this paper are from both the physical and online archives. This highlights the limitations identified by Lorraine Screene regarding the incomplete nature of selected online sources, particularly in this collection.⁴

Unlike some of her travelling peers, Maynard did not publish accounts of her travels, but recorded them in her travel diaries for private reflection. Key events were later transposed into her autobiography, which we must assume she intended for publication at some point. Her desire to write these travel diaries aligned with her evangelical, devotional practice of maintaining a 'Green Book' for personal, religious reflections. Throughout the forthcoming analysis, it must be kept in mind that Maynard's motives and intentions in writing were largely for the same self-reflective purpose. Aside from Westfield College statistics, it must also be understood that what is known of her colleagues' and students' travel is written through Maynard's lens of perception in her personal

papers.

Some of these sources have been utilised in the existing historiography regarding Constance Maynard, pioneered by Martha Vicinus, Elizabeth Edwards and subsequently Pauline Phipps [twenty-first century scholars]. Such research situates Maynard's experience within the context of her academic peer group and the university environment, with a particular focus on her same-sex desire and partnerships.⁵ This is helpful when contextualising the relationships that Maynard had with her students and colleagues, but is limited in its consideration of her life beyond the walls of Westfield College. A more recent special issue of *Women's History Review* brought together a collection of papers on Constance Maynard, which greatly informs understanding of the links between imperialism, Maynard's evangelicalism and her same-sex desire—themes which will be discussed here.⁶ This paper presents new research on Constance Maynard, which complements the existing knowledge of Maynard, but extends understanding of her identity outside of the University. I situate her experiences (and those of her peers) within a broader framework of Victorian women's travel. In doing so, this paper also contributes to the scholarship regarding Victorian women's imperial travel.

Dea Birkett and Sara Mills have published informative works regarding prominent Victorian female travellers and travel writers who were similar in socio-economic status to Maynard.⁷ They have demonstrated how these renowned women navigated foreign territories and particularly, how they conveyed this through the written word. Maynard's travel diaries however, provide private accounts of her travels that were not intended for public circulation and thus offer particularly inward-looking, unpolished narratives. Furthermore, travel was secondary to Maynard's identity as an educational and spiritual leader and this precedence shines through her diary entries.

Barbara Ramusack's work regarding British 'feminist' missionaries in India is particularly useful in understanding other missionary women's goals and practices during travel, which are somewhat reflected in Maynard's accounts.⁸ However, in this paper I avoid interpretation of Maynard's actions as 'feminist' due to the problematic ways in which she exerted power. Instead, I explore the 'complexity of the roles played' by Maynard and move away from binary interpretations, as advocated by Inderpal Grewal.⁹

Finally, *Carnal Knowledge* (2010) by Ann Laura Stoler has been incredibly influential in shaping discourse regarding the gendered, intimate roles of women in Empire.¹⁰ Yet as Maynard's accounts show, women's influence and power could be exerted within colonial territories outside of the heterosexual dynamic; childless, unmarried, middle-aged women still travelled and played

an active role in imperialism.

This paper will respond to Grewal's call to add depth to 'the ideologies and discourses that provided possibilities and problematics' for women's travel, both domestically and internationally – and not only within colonial territories.¹¹ It must be acknowledged, however, that Maynard's and her colleagues' experiences do not represent those of all Victorian women, but provide an insight into the exploits of middle class, English academic women.

AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH IMPERIALISM.

In the decade preceding Maynard's attendance at Girton, the 'Woman Question' increased its prominence within popular discourse. This was largely stimulated by the findings of the 1851 census, which documented a concerning increase in the number of single women of marriageable age. W.R. Greg's *Why Are Women Redundant?* (1869), projected the concern that women were not performing the 'natural duties and labours of wives and mothers', and instead they were choosing to 'lead an independent and incomplete existence of their own'.¹² The emigration of these seemingly redundant women was considered a viable solution by many prominent, feminist intellectuals and some conservative commentators.¹³ It is perhaps unsurprising that women's increased travel occurred in tandem with women's fight to access other public spaces, including universities.¹⁴ When writing her autobiography in 1925, Maynard placed her story within the context of the Victorian 'Woman Question', but she was not a contributor to public debates outside of the realms of women's higher education and religion.¹⁵ However, Maynard worked extensively to facilitate many of her students' relocations abroad and actively fostered a sprawling professional network which greatly facilitated her own travel.

Missionary work, blending education with religious conversion, was a key motivating factor for Maynard and her students' independence. Indeed, religious service was a founding principle of Westfield College, as stated in Maynard's whitepaper entitled 'Proposed College For Women'. She hoped that upon acquiring a university degree, 'many a student may go out thence with a new and enduring motive, ready to spend all in the service of the Lord'.¹⁶ Westfield delivered upon its aims; by 1927 it had more alumni who went on to become missionaries than any other university or college in the United Kingdom. At the time of writing, Maynard calculated this to be 43 of her 500 graduates.¹⁷ Anne Richardson, Lecturer and Vice Mistress of Westfield, believed that the college prepared their students for the 'daily pressure on heart and conscience in the presence of the darker sides of non-Christian civilisation' that they would face in their work as missionaries.¹⁸

In 1882, when Westfield was founded, university education for women was a controversial matter and not widely offered to the sexes on equal terms. In contrast, religion was a facet of life in which women had relative equality and that spanned both the public and private spheres.¹⁹ Even Reverend Barlow of the College Council



Fig 1: Constance Maynard as founder of Westfield College
c. 1885

Courtesy of Queen Mary Archives: WFD/25/1/1/7

was sceptical about the need for women's higher education but felt that 'it would be good enough if India and the colonies are a site for ladies to use their education'.²⁰ Alumni engagement with the Christian Mission was part of the broader, increased participation in the missionary movement by university graduates between 1880 and 1890, which also positively correlates with women's increased participation in higher education during this time.²¹ As highlighted by Angharad Eyre in her 2016 paper, it was thought that women could easily take on a missionary role and incorporate it into their existing social circle.²² Yet, particularly after 1850, there was greater acceptance of women taking this work abroad as part of the civilising mission.²³ Britain relied upon women's involvement to extend English values of supposed morality and domesticity abroad.²⁴ Emigration for missionary work, in lieu of returning to the family home after securing a degree, was deemed a suitable alternative for independent women of this era and remained within the confines of the contemporary discourse about women's roles in society. Thus, through feminine religiosity, Maynard and her students were able to subvert the gendered limitations on education, work and subsequently travel.

While missionary work may have facilitated and justified emigration, it was not always academic women's

ultimate occupation abroad. Maynard's student, then Westfield colleague, Kate Tristram, left Britain for Japan in 1888 to take up a missionary post and subsequently a headmistress position, where she remained for the next forty years.²⁵ By 1927, twenty of Maynard's alumni had secured positions as headmistresses in schools within (ex-)colonies, such as South Africa, India and Canada.²⁶ While missionary work was the initial motivating factor for travel, once settled, these university women were able to achieve further career advancement.

The need for teachers in over-populated immigrant communities, such as New York and parts of Canada, was publicised by prominent Victorian traveller Isabella Bird as early as 1856.²⁷ In contrast, positions for women within credible high schools or universities in the UK were still few and far between, especially at a senior level; there were higher numbers of candidates applying for the same posts, with lower middle class candidates competing against the upper middle class, who had previously maintained a monopoly. Jessie Boucherett, the Victorian political campaigner, accused working class women of entering the profession to gain social advancement.²⁸ Emigration for a professional post was one way to escape a limited job market, insure independence and potentially increase social and professional standing in the process.

The civilising mission provided women with an alternative to redundancy, not only through long-term emigration but also via short-term travels. Maynard had lengthy holiday periods to fill, during which she escaped her apartment within the empty college and took her missionary work abroad. This was facilitated by Maynard's substantial family wealth, which was largely extracted from southern Africa through her father's commodity trading business based in Cape Town (a more extensive summary of which can be found in Naomi Lloyd's 2016 paper).²⁹ Her intimate connection to imperialism not only provided her with the independent means to travel to colonial territories, but also furnished her with international, familial and religious connections.

In 1897 Maynard travelled to South Africa and stayed with contacts in Lovedale, Dr and Mrs Stewart. As a guest of these colonial missionary teachers, Maynard's professional expertise on women's education was sought-after to assist in their civilising mission; Maynard was introduced to the girls' school and its mistresses to see their practices and discuss future plans. Maynard helped to formulate the mission's ideas of a boarding school targeted at the native 'little creatures' as a means of extracting the children from their parents in order to civilise them.³⁰ While she did not directly contribute to the domestication of this colonial territory, her involvement in the education of children could be framed as an imperial, evangelical motherhood and thus alleviated her redundant status as a spinster.³¹ With such active involvement in the civilising mission, Maynard positioned herself as part of the colonial 'incoming force', despite her transient visit.³²

Maynard's presence within Lovedale society, at church services and public events, also demonstrated a more subtle involvement in the civilising mission. Her attendance served to enforce racial power relations, whereby white women were held to be of superior status to native males, despite their inferior status to white men

at home. In church, Maynard took her position in the segregated seating assigned to whites, which gave an elevated position of authority above the natives who sat on the floor below. Perhaps to Maynard this power was somewhat imagined, for in her diary she declared that she had to 'take care that a dressed person...[was] within a few yards' in order to feel 'safer', which suggests that she was not particularly comfortable when alone with sparsely-clothed natives.³³ Indeed, it was not unusual for single, professional women to feel that they needed protection whilst in colonial territories.³⁴ Yet fears held by white women, of uncivilised native men, were grown from commonly-held racist assumptions, which were inseparably tied to notions of power.

Her stay in Lovedale also served to critique European settlers' interactions with natives. As outlined by Ann Laura Stoler, the increased travel of women to colonial territories led to the strengthened clarification of boundaries between races and classes.³⁵ Maynard viewed their practices through the lens of upper-middle class English notions of propriety and felt that in many ways they fell short. It is unknown whether she raised these concerns directly with the Stewarts, but in her diary she questioned their parenting decision to educate their daughter, Lilla, amongst native children: 'I doubt if I could let my children thus sit day by day amid this mass of inky children'.³⁶ Further, Maynard regarded missionary women's physical contact with natives to be a 'grand thing', but noticeably distanced herself from this work due to classed notions of femininity; she was 'repulsed' by the 'sensual and sly' faces of the young native women and deemed them 'too much' for her to countenance or interact with.³⁷

Travelling for the civilising mission subtly wove together women's identities of race, gender and class. While some of Maynard's contemporaries (often educated, single and religious) travelled to colonial territories with genuine concern regarding the conditions of native women and an enthusiasm to educate, Maynard did not exhibit this sense of mission abroad and did not engage in critical self-reflection regarding the imperial project and her positionality within it.³⁸ Although English women were utilised by imperial forces to entrench the power of ruling elites, in light of their 'changing aspirations for the colonies', as suggested by Ann McClintock, Maynard took advantage of this and adopted a superior position of power, even if borrowed, based on her race and class.³⁹ This subjective hierarchy of power enabled Maynard to reinforce Victorian femininities and simultaneously avoid the stigma of redundancy.

NURTURING INTERNATIONAL PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

However, Maynard did not always adhere to Victorian social norms during her travels; particularly as she got older, she travelled without a chaperone (typically one of her siblings) and instead used professional motivations and connections to allay inferences of impropriety. Maynard nurtured her professional network extensively and utilised her international contacts, which largely consisted of Westfield alumni, as an opportunity



*Constance Maynard in travelling attire c.1905
Image courtesy of Queen Mary Archive: WFD/25/1/1/4*

to travel. In doing so she furthered her own professional reputation and that of Westfield College.

Maynard maintained some professional relationships by visiting alumni at their institutions abroad: for example, Miss Bleby during the aforementioned trip to South Africa and Miss Jones in Winnipeg. Maynard's call upon Miss Jones was tied into a broader tour of Canada in 1910 during which she took advantage of the opportunity to meet with influential leaders in religion and education, such as the Bishop of Saskatchewan and Miss Hurlbatt, Head of Victoria College, McGill University, and lectured extensively at various schools, home events and communities regarding either Westfield or religion.⁴⁰

However, such professionally motivated travels brought Maynard into contact with performances of femininity and sexuality that conflicted with her notions of acceptability. During a tour of McGill's campus Maynard's Victorian feminine propriety came under siege; she was faced with the stark 'difference between the Canadian girl and the corresponding English one' and, as such, found 'something depressing about the extreme worldliness of the atmosphere'.⁴¹ Female Canadian students combined overt femininity and sexuality with their identity as students; they did not have the same religious values to guide their pursuit of education. Maynard was not alone

in this observation of the less guarded nature of Canadian girls, compared to English girls, which had previously been identified by Isabella Bird during her travels in 1856.

Later during the same trip however, Maynard unexpectedly proactively advocated on behalf of two female teachers in Toronto, who were dismissed from their posts in disgrace for 'their little indiscretions'. In light of her own experience of romantic relationships with colleagues, she was eager to address the situation in an act of open support, which she would likely not have shown at home.⁴² After this incident and halfway through her Canadian tour, Maynard conceded that she had warmed to the Canadian girls: 'at any rate you see what they really are and you may be shocked or pleased as you like, the whole position lies before you'.⁴³ As such, through her professional, international connections and foreign travel, Maynard was brought into contact with an alternative discourse and performance of femininity. Not only did she see that Victorian notions of femininity were publicly challenged by others, but she reached an acceptance of this and stood in solidarity with some of its offenders. It could be questioned however, whether acceptance of such transgressions in femininity were predicated upon Maynard's ideals of class and race. Maynard extended her support to educated white women but may not have shown the same courtesy to those whom she deemed to be substantially below her in social status.⁴⁴

THE BLURRING OF BOUNDARIES WITH ALUMNI

As Maynard's Canadian travels demonstrate, she invested much time in nurturing her professional network abroad, which meant that it was difficult to distinguish between her public and private identities. Both past and present students formed a key part of her personal travel, some more intimate than others.

In 1897 Maynard orchestrated an Easter vacation trip to Berka, Germany, with a group comprising students past, present and one future pupil, Marion Wakefield (cousin of Vice Mistress Anne Richardson). Maynard's role as a chaperone enabled young women to experience new cultures – one companion had never left England before. She encouraged them to travel independently and sent the 'three little ones' off to Dresden for two nights. Maynard obtained great personal delight from sharing her travel experiences with her students, documenting that 'each thing is a pleasure and nothing is a trouble'.⁴⁵

By the late 1800s Maynard took up cycling as a means of transport to visit alumni during university breaks. At least once a year Maynard would undergo a large cycling tour of England or Scotland and during her summer vacation of 1898, she cycled 1400 miles to visit 20 students. She jested in her diary, 'I get handed from one to another like a very valuable parcel!'⁴⁶ While cycling had become popular by the late nineteenth century, female cyclists were often subject to jest and ridicule because it was a deviant choice.⁴⁷ Men, who she encountered at her stop-overs, were sometimes baffled by her determination to cycle dangerous routes and to be cycling such distances alone – Maynard often defied male advice not to go.⁴⁸ Maynard pushed the boundaries of what was deemed

feminine behaviour and openly challenged men's implicit authority in matters of exercise and travel. Travelling enabled her to defy social expectations and regulations of the female body by engaging in activities that were perceived as masculine. Away from Westfield, she had the ability to counter these views without a detrimental impact to her professional reputation. Consequently, she combined a socially transgressive mode of transport with socially acceptable destinations; it was a chance for her to socialise with these women individually, away from Westfield, whilst remaining within the private feminine sphere of the domestic.

The cycling tours and shared holidays also facilitated subtle opportunities to promote Westfield and access a well-stocked recruitment pool of prospective students. Whilst staying at students' homes, she was able to extend her friendship to their family members and networks and evidence her capabilities. Even during her time off, Maynard remained an ambassador for the College; she worked to ensure its future success and in doing so, maintained the identity she embodied in the public sphere, despite being comfortably welcomed into the domestic.

As discussed, Maynard's professional connections frequently evolved into personal friendships and on a number of occasions, these developed further into romantic relationships. Marion Wakefield soon became Maynard's long-term lover and intermittent student at Westfield. While they privately maintained the relationship at home, Maynard and Wakefield experienced greater freedom in their feelings and behaviour when abroad. During the Easter vacation of 1899 they travelled to the Pyrenees and luxuriated in the fact that 'no one in the whole world knew exactly' where they were. They were waved off from Westfield as pupil and teacher and their thirty-year age difference suggested Maynard to be Wakefield's chaperone, but through travelling together they were able to keep their 'secret as deep as the sea'. They cycled 'hand in hand for long sweeps', bathed naked in the streams, and 'lay like babes in the wood'. Through travelling with Wakefield, Maynard was able to acknowledge and accept that she was 'passionately in love' and that 'it was not merely all caresses, it was real'.⁴⁹ Their anonymity and removal from the public sphere of Westfield enabled them to openly defy society's prescribed gender roles and explore their sexuality in ways they struggled to explain.

Maynard avoided an overt challenge to the Victorian ideals of women's heteronormative sexuality at home and instead, framed passionate same-sex desire within discourses of evangelical conversion, which aligned with the publicly professional, yet femininely pious, academic role.⁵⁰ In contrast, travel enabled Maynard to express and accept her deviant sexual desires. It can be understood from Dea Birkett's study, *Spinsters Abroad*, that Maynard was not alone in the 'sensual awakening' that she experienced whilst travelling.⁵¹ Yet the co-existence of these two identities was not without its challenges and travel was frequently used by Maynard and her peers to overcome the resulting strain of same-sex desire.

TRAVEL AS A TONIC

Intimate college relationships mixed work and pleasure, which inherently brought pain to those within the relationships and outside of them. Maynard and her contemporaries travelled to remove themselves from situations of unrequited love, but also in an attempt to quell feelings of loneliness and resulting depression. Aforementioned colleague Kate Tristram emigrated to Japan in 1888. For the eight years preceding, Tristram struggled with her unrequited love for Maynard and threatened to leave Westfield over Maynard's relationship with student Margaret Brooke. Ultimately, this 'constant strain of acting a part' made her visibly 'miserable' to Maynard and travel provided the solution to remove herself from the same sphere.⁵² With little possibility of being able to live openly within a non-heteronormative relationship, removing oneself from the situation was a frequently-used solution that left the traditional gender roles unchallenged at home.

In addition to Tristram, Maynard travelled to alleviate the depression, which shrouded her in debilitating waves after she was rejected by colleague Frances 'Ralph' Gray. Her holiday to Norway in 1888 brought an 'intoxicating' 'freedom from all responsibility' after 'long captivity and sorrow'. These breaks provided an opportunity for her 'soul to sleep for a time', a rest from the constant bombardment of personal and professional pressures that Westfield generated. Her preference for death over returning home conveys the solace that Maynard found in travelling; she used travel 'to relegate them [waves of gloom] to the physical world'.⁵³ In 1894 Maynard admitted that she had 'always heartily despised people who "suffered from depression"', which was representative of her generation and class – there was little sympathy for the ill or the poor and the two were often viewed as interlinked.⁵⁴ Due to the dismissive, popular discourse regarding psychological wellbeing and the lack of medical advice available, it can be ascertained that middle class Victorian women used travel as a coping strategy for mental health difficulties. For Maynard and her contemporaries, travel was their resistance against the feeble and weak connotations associated with femininity, hysteria and the lower social classes. Once more, they removed themselves from their current positions at home to find peace abroad, thereby mitigating their public displays of weakness or inferiority, which would have reinforced others' gendered expectations that women of the upper middle class should not be working outside of the home.

In defiance of such discourse, Maynard had used her bicycle to develop her physical and mental strength through travel and was proud of her capability, but in 1909, at the age of 60 years old, she was distraught to find that she could no longer withstand the strain on her body that cycling created: 'my 14 years of the glory of independence is closed...I can hardly bear to write it. It is so despicable'.⁵⁵ The physical exertion undertaken by Maynard whilst travelling was a rebellion against the Victorian notion of women's physical inferiority and their cloistered existence within the domestic. When Maynard was forced to return to activities conventionally

expected of Victorian women, she channelled this anger and frustration on the limitations that her gendered body imposed. Her deteriorating physical condition meant not only that she lost a means of independence (the bicycle), but it also meant that her sphere was limited once more and thus, restricted the extent to which she could queer her identity.

CONCLUSION

This case study has used the papers of Constance Maynard and Westfield College to analyse the reasons why Victorian women travelled and examine the extent to which they challenged the popular discourse of femininity which prevailed at that time. Maynard and her contemporaries travelled abroad for short and long-term periods and for a variety of reasons, namely: missionary work, the colonial civilising mission, career opportunities, professional networking and duties, love affairs and health reasons. However, these motivations for travel coexisted and intersected with one another. Additionally, it has been identified that some of these justifications were used to obscure alternative reasoning, which enabled these women to subvert and challenge the appropriate behaviour prescribed to women of the period and escape connotations of redundancy. As this paper has demonstrated, Maynard and her peers used travel as a medium through which they could alter their identities and transgress the boundaries that their gender, class, race and profession enforced, whilst simultaneously reinforcing facets of these identities to increase their position of power and social standing. These women took advantage of the anonymity and relaxed cultural morals that some foreign territories afforded, in order to pursue happiness, progression and freedom which remained so inhibited at home. While this case study cannot be deemed representative of all Victorian women's experiences in Britain during the late nineteenth century, it contributes a detailed account to the existing historiography regarding Victorian women's travel, work and sexuality. It has also highlighted the uniquely intertwined professional and personal lives of academic women during this time which ultimately led to a complex web of self-subjective identities, both at home and abroad.

NOTES

1. Council Minutes of Westfield College, Queen Mary University Library Archive (henceforth QMULA), WFD 2/1/1, 11 February 1882. Please note that all sources listed henceforth with a 'WFD' reference number are located at the QMULA. A timeline of Constance Maynard is available at <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/library/archives/digitised-records/constance-maynard/> [accessed 11 September 2020].
2. A framework utilised to describe gendered social behaviours, whereby men and women operated within distinctly separate domains; women in private, domestic spaces, and men within public spaces, such as industry, politics and education. For further reading see Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* [1987]

(London: Routledge, 2002).

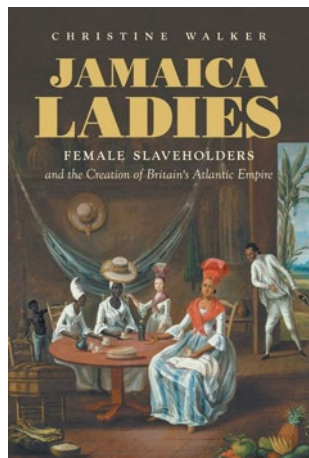
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4. Lorraine Screene, 'An Exploration of Religion and Education in the Life of Constance Maynard, Mistress of Westfield College', *Women's History Review*, 25/1 (2016), 89-104.
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6. Angharad Eyre, 'Love, Passion, Conversion: Constance Maynard and evangelical missionary writing', *Women's History Review*, 25/1 (2016), 35-52; Naomi Lloyd, 'Religion, Same-Sex Desire, and the Imagined Geographies of Empire: the case of Constance Maynard (1849-1935)', *Women's History Review*, 25/1 (2016), 53-73; Elisabeth Jay, 'Constance Maynard's Life-Writing Considered as Spiritual Autobiography', *Women's History Review*, 25/1 (2016), 74-88.
7. Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991); Dea Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad: Victorian Lady Explorers*, 2nd ed. (Stroud, Glos.: Sutton Publishing, 2004).
8. Barbara Ramusack, 'Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies: British Women Activists in India 1865-1945', in Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, eds., *Western Women and Imperialism* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1992).
9. Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire and the Cultures of Travel* (London, Duke University Press, 1996), 13.
10. Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2010).
11. Grewal, *Home and Harem*, 12.
12. William R. Greg, *Why Are Women Redundant?* (London, N. Trübner & Co, 1869), 5.
13. Frances Power Cobbe, 'What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?', *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, 66/395 (1862). Greg, *Why Are Women Redundant?* 15-16; A. James Hammerton, 'Feminism and Female Emigration, 1861-1866' in Martha Vicinus (ed.), *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1977), 52-53; Nan H. Dreher, 'Redundancy and Emigration: The 'Woman Question' in Mid-Victorian Britain', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 26/1 (Spring, 1993), 4.
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16. Council Minutes, WFD 2/1/1, 11 February and 15 May 1882.
17. Constance Maynard, 'Letter enclosing memories of Westfield', WFD 27/12, 23 September 1927.
18. Anne Richardson, 'Notes on the History of Westfield College up to 1913 and on some of its foreign connections since', WFD 27/16.
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23. Dreher, 'Redundancy and Emigration'.
24. Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Women of England, Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (London, Fisher, Son & Co, 1845), 50-51. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*.
25. Richardson, 'Notes on the History of Westfield College', WFD 27/16, 1927 and Maynard, 'Letter enclosing memories of Westfield', WFD 27/12, 23 September 1927.
26. 'Pre-history/Constitution', WFD 5/1/1 and Maynard, 'Letter enclosing memories of Westfield', WFD 27/12, 23 September 1927.
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28. Jessie Boucherett cited in Hammerton, 'Chapter 1' in *Emigrant Gentlewomen*.
29. Lloyd, 'Religion, Same-Sex Desire, and the Imagined Geographies of Empire', 56.
30. Constance Maynard, Travel Diary – South Africa (1897), QMULA, PP7/4/8, 10 and 19 August 1897. Please note that all sources listed henceforth with a 'PP' reference number are located at the QMULA.
31. Eyre, 'Love, Passion, Conversion'.
32. Travel Diary – South Africa, PP7/4/8, 11 August 1897.
33. *Ibid*, 19 August 1897.
34. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 61 and Ramusack, 'Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies', 121.
35. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 55.
36. Travel Diary – South Africa, PP7/4/8, 10 August 1897.
37. *Ibid*, 26 August 1897.
38. Ramusack, 'Cultural Missionaries, Maternal Imperialists, Feminist Allies', 119.
39. Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender & Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), 6.
40. Constance Maynard, Travel Diary – Canada Vol. 1 (1910), PP7/4/20.
41. *Ibid*, 11 April 1910.
42. *Ibid*, 23 April 1910.
43. *Ibid*, 25 April 1910.
44. Dreher, 'Redundancy and Emigration', 6.
45. Constance Maynard, Travel Diary – Berka (1897), PP7/4/9.
46. Constance Maynard, Travel Diary (1898-99), PP7/4/10.
47. Ella Hepworth Dixon, 'Why Women are Ceasing to Marry' (1899) cited in Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst eds., *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History c.1880-1900* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 86; M. Eastwood, 'The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact' (1894) cited in Ledger and Luckhurst, *The Fin de Siècle*, 91.
48. Travel Diary (1898-99), PP7/4/10, 15 August 1898.
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50. Eyre, 'Love, Passion, Conversion'.
51. Birkett, *Spinsters Abroad*, 198.
52. Autobiography, 'Chapter 44', 16 and 'Chapter 51'. Phipps, 122, 133.
53. Autobiography, 'Chapter 52', 222-231 and 'Chapter 51', 191 and 'Chapter 56', 336, 354.
54. Autobiography, 'Chapter 56', 336 and 'Chapter 8', 208-218. Elaine Showalter, 'Women and Insanity', *Victorian Studies*, 23/2 (Winter 1980), 157-181.
55. Autobiography, 1909, 610.

BOOK REVIEWS

Christine Walker, *Jamaica Ladies: Female Slaveholders and the Creation of Britain's Atlantic Empire* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020. £21.50, 9781469658797 (paperback), pp. x + 317

Reviewed by Alice Kinghorn
University of Bristol



Scholarship on slaveholding women has witnessed exceptional contributions in recent years, including Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers' *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2019) which demonstrates that women in the American South had much closer economic encounters with the slavery system than previously thought. Christine Walker's

Jamaica Ladies marks an important contribution to this scholarship by shifting the focus onto early colonial Jamaica. Across six chapters Walker explores the multifaceted interactions between race, gender, kinship, wealth, education, religion and marital status to study the lives of free and freed female slaveholders from the 1670s to the 1760s. Using largely unstudied sources from Britain, Jamaica and the United States, including wills, parish registers, and personal correspondence, *Jamaica Ladies* traces intertwining networks between generations of women. This forces a re-evaluation of the assumption in existing scholarship that slaveholders in Jamaica were white men, and instead asserts that women too shaped socioeconomic colonial affairs. Subsequently, Walker argues that slaveholding women possessed economic, legal, and social advantages over their metropolitan counterparts.

Jamaica Ladies commences in the early commercial hub of Port Royal, where the first generation of female colonists established themselves. Walker assesses slaveholding women's actions in this space to reveal their position as traders and moneylenders and provides microhistories of successful entrepreneurs. This examination continues in Chapter Two, which outlines the vocations of second and third generation female colonists in Kingston, indicating they 'lived at the centre - not at the periphery - of the developing Atlantic world' (p.113).

Chapter three's examination of women's contributions to plantation economy is especially convincing. Walker skilfully challenges the homogenisation of Jamaican plantations as masculine sites by revealing 'hidden' women in surveys of plantation ownership, where official records sometimes listed heirs or deceased husbands as the landholders, despite actually

having been overseen by women. Consequently, Walker produces a quantitative study of female plantation ownership from landholding lists, in conjunction with a close case study of the correspondence of Mary Elbridge, a skilled plantation manager. It is deduced that gender did not affect Elbridge's ability or status in Jamaica, and her transatlantic kinships granted her success, permitting her more power and autonomy than accessible to her metropolitan counterparts.

The final three chapters offer an assessment of free and freed women's inheritance patterns, non-marital relationships and manumission practices through a presentation of impressive quantitative studies. Walker contextualises over 1200 wills and inheritance documents within local inheritance procedures. Unlike in Britain, Jamaican legislation did not restrict the shares of property women could own, meaning they could benefit economically and 'grow rich' (p.174). Free and freed women also had social autonomy, as a study of non-marital relationships in chapter five demonstrates. High illegitimacy rates persisted in Jamaica because free and freed women *chose* not to get married, and preferred unmarried long-term relationships. This was likely because they were motivated by legal and financial concerns, where, if a woman remarried, 'the laws of coverture would have subjected her property to her new husband' (p.218). *Jamaica Ladies* finishes with a quantitative study of gendered aspects of manumission, which could function as a further form of coercion. For example, Walker describes 'porous' slaveholding families that put certain enslaved children through a process of 'preparation for freedom' before adopting them (p.274).

Throughout *Jamaica Ladies*, Walker confronts slaveholding women's treatment of the enslaved. Like their male counterparts, women saw enslaved people as currency, property and inheritance, and they participated in the cruellest slaveholding practices, exploiting their control for social and fiscal gains. Crucially, however, the autonomy of enslaved people is stressed in their relationships with women slaveholders and the system of slavery. Enslaved people assisted women in their economic ventures, and they regularly tested and manipulated the strength of female rule. Additionally, Walker considers the relationship between slaveholding, motherhood, and manumission, and argues that some enslaved women coerced their female owners to manumit their children to ensure a better life for them. Enslaved mothers wanted to have their children baptised to increase their chances of manumission. Walker adeptly links this to perceptions of race and whiteness, where 'women of African descent [...] created opportunities to alter their legal conditions and racial labels' (p.254).

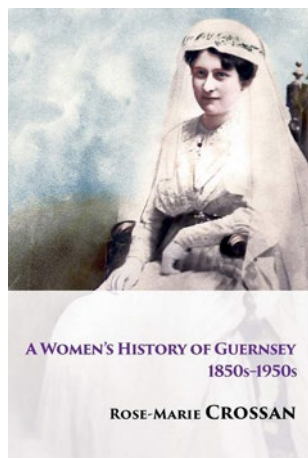
Overall, *Jamaica Ladies* is a skilfully composed analysis of the crucial role slaveholding women played in constructing colonial foundations in Jamaica and Britain. The scope of evidence presented through a combination of large-scale quantitative examinations and nuanced case studies is both rich and distinct within existing

historiography, and persuasively reconfigures our understanding of a 'typical' Jamaica planter. Subsequently, *Jamaica Ladies* provides a secure starting point for further examinations of women's gendered experiences from all facets of society in the wider Caribbean.

Rose-Marie Crossan, *A Women's History of Guernsey 1850s-1950s*, Denderlock, Argyll: Mòr Media, 2018, £8.00, ISBN 978-6-9954874-8-2 (paperback), pp. xv + 256

Dawne Durante (ed.), *100 Years of Women's Suffrage: A University of Illinois Anthology*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2019, £20.99, ISBN 978-0252084744 (paperback), pp. 257

Reviewed by Carrie de Silva
Harper Adams University



These two books look across a century and more of the women's movement and women's lives. Whilst writings on Britain and the United States of America are many, Guernsey is less well charted and Rose-Marie Crossan, a Guernsey native and independent historian, has conducted scholarly research in archives largely unexplored from a woman's and feminist perspective. Crossan starts with a useful introduction to

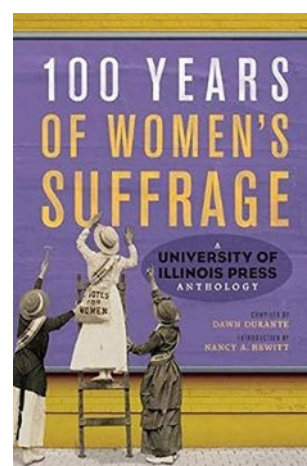
the constitutional position and history of Guernsey. This background is vital for appreciating the legal and cultural position of women on the island. The influence of both English and French systems, along with the measure of island autonomy, places the Channel Islands (as with some other island nations) in an unusual position which relates to, but certainly cannot be equated with, their mainland links. The book has six chapters: 1 Governance, Economy and Society, 2 Education, Work and Health, 3 Marriage, 4 Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence, 5 Female Criminality and Prostitution and 6 Public Office, the Vote and States Membership. Crossan posits the generic compulsion of men to dominate, entrenched in legal and social structures, and she takes marriage as central to the constraints on women's progress in education, work outside the home, financial independence, public voice and, sometimes, the subjugation of domestic violence. Her history of how women worked within these structures and then broke into them and changed their position is set against a comparative view of what was happening in the United Kingdom, France and the USA and the direct influence of external laws and public attitudes, as with the formal delegation from England when the reform around prostitution and contagious diseases was sought along English lines. The relatively slow progress of the position of women, measured against milestones in legislative reform (such as married women's

property, the age of consent, divorce law, abortion and voting rights) seemed to favour the links with France rather than the UK. For example, there was no legislation on the age of consent until 1907, no suffrage until 1945, no right to divorce until 1946 and no right to abortion until 1997.

As well as being a history of women, this is also an insight into the life, culture, constitution and laws of a society which will not be well-known to many readers; an insight into the history of an island which continues to have a distinct society. It is both scholarly with well-referenced primary sources and, of more general use to most readers, an excellent range of secondary sources. In short, it is a book I would have been unlikely to pick up were it not for reviewing it, but I find I am very much the richer for having done so. It is an enjoyable, readable work which will benefit anyone interested in women's history or simply history and the workings of Guernsey law. Importantly, it made me reflect on one of the central themes of the book, marriage, in other cultures and times, including the here and the now.

100 Years of Women's Suffrage is a compilation of writing relating to the mid-nineteenth century onwards, edited by Dawn Durante. The entries are divided between two sections: Part I - The Cultural and Political Struggles for Enfranchisement, and Part II - Winning and Wielding the Ballot. Whilst largely comprising extracts from academic works first published between 1975 and 2012, there are a couple of examples of contemporary writing from participants: Lady Constance Lytton writing of imprisonment in 1914 and a powerful piece by Carolyn Daniels, about her involvement in the civil rights movement in 1960s Georgia (first published in 2010). This latter points to the wider themes of the book, beyond gender, to race and class. I have a small criticism about the presentation: when looking at chapter authors and original publications from which they were taken, it was not immediately clear which were academic pieces written at the time of the works from which they were taken or whether they were written earlier. It would have been helpful to have all that information at the start of each chapter.

As with any anthology, there can be a tendency to fragmentation, but taken as a whole and, especially with Nancy Hewitt's useful and engaging introduction pointing to 'snapshots of key developments' (p. 1), the collection works well. The overall picture of enfranchisement is, of course, complex in the United States. Given state, as well as federal, law and the colour bar (which affected not only African Americans but also Latinas, Asian American and Native Americans), there is no one date from which women could vote. And another, maybe, US-centric piece, involves the position of women and the fiercely protected (in some circles) right to bear arms. But although looking at the US picture, there is context and comparison in

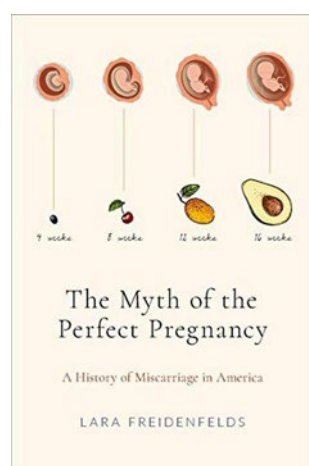


many of the pieces of the parallel struggles in Europe and elsewhere. And bringing in additional frameworks such as race (ch. 9, Caroline Daniels, ch. 10, Bonnie Thornton Dill and ch. 12 M Margaret Conway), firearms (ch. 5, Kimberley Jensen), explorations of literature and journalism (ch. 3, Mary Chapman and Barbara Green) and party politics (ch. 11 Leonie Huddy, Erin Cassese and Mary-Kate Lizotte) the work provides a wealth of well-resourced material to add richness to considerations of women's suffrage, well beyond the stereotypical.

Lara Freidenfelds, *The Myth of the Perfect Pregnancy: A History of Miscarriage in America*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. £19.99,

978 0 19 086981 6 (hardback), pp. xi + 236

Reviewed by Emily West
University of Reading



This is an exciting, innovative and genre-spanning book, despite the bleakness of the subject area. Part history of miscarriage in America, part contemporary polemic about how we might conceptualise early pregnancy and miscarriage differently, Freidenfelds successfully illuminates how people's changing notions about early pregnancy and miscarriage have, somewhat depressingly, culminated in rather restrictive

present day understandings of miscarriage that cause women a huge amount of grief, anguish, and sometimes guilt.

Yet this was not always the case; indeed, a diverse array of social, medical and technological innovations combined to create these new, more modern experiences of miscarriage. Freidenfelds' first chapter adeptly tracks American women's experiences of pregnancy from the colonial era through the nineteenth century, and argues persuasively that women did not always consider the early ending of a pregnancy as a loss. The second considers fertility control, focusing on how modern women's desire for this often results in unrealistic expectations. Chapter three addresses the changing meanings of parenting over time, and particularly memorable are Freidenfelds' sections on 'attachment parenting' and the increasing pressure upon women to subscribe to 'intensive parenting standards' (p.74) even as they became more likely to pursue their own career choices by the second half of the twentieth century. The fourth and fifth chapters track the emergence of modern prenatal care and the marketisation of pregnancy respectively. Both developments heaped pressure and responsibility upon women to prepare for motherhood, to partake in 'self-care', and to engage with a rising consumer culture. Particularly shocking is the way in which modern apps and websites frequently

(and unethically) bombard women in the early stages of pregnancy with marketing materials, and often fail to desist when miscarriages occur.

Chapter six adopts a different approach, covering abortion debates that came to the fore in the 1960s onwards. Here, Freidenfelds claims that a binary rhetoric between 'choice' and 'life', particularly the 'pro-life' argument that personhood begins with conception, give a 'misleadingly narrow lens through which to view pregnancy' that exacerbate the confusion and sorrow of those who miscarry wanted pregnancies and feel they have lost a child (p.139). The seventh chapter considers ultrasound rituals (including some interesting international comparisons), suggesting that very early scans can foster a false sense of security among women, who instead might benefit from a more gradual unfolding of pregnancy. Similar arguments are made in the final chapter, where Freidenfelds shows how pregnancy testing at a very early stage (especially before a missed period) is similarly problematic though giving hope to women that a pregnancy will inevitably continue. Both chapters suggest methods of detecting pregnancy used in the past, for example the slow accumulation of physical signs, offer lessons for women in the present that can mitigate the trauma of losing a wanted pregnancy. The conclusion is largely prescriptive: designed to help women reconceptualise miscarriage and learn lessons from the past, although throughout her volume Freidenfelds clearly seeks a more realistic and forgiving culture of pregnancy and childbearing.

Freidenfelds draws on a wide array of primary source materials, ranging from early modern texts and diaries through to blog posts of the twenty-first century. She keeps most of her historiographical analysis fairly scant and limited to the endnotes, perhaps on the advice of her publisher, but some of these discussions might have been better placed within the main body of the volume as they will be of interest to the reader. Drawing on a relatively long chronology and multiple historical perspectives (including social, cultural, political, business, and medical histories), coupled with the understandable archival limitations of her subject area also means that Freidenfelds inevitably has to occasionally generalize and essentialize women's experiences of miscarriage within a white, middle- and upper-class paradigm. The book contains a few references to enslaved and African American women, and women across social classes, but drawing upon the different traditions of, for example, Native American or ethnic immigrant women in the US, might have brought in fresh and different perspectives.

Some readers might find the 'presentist' agenda in this book troubling, but this serves to shine a light very perceptively on how the past has shaped the present. Freidenfelds should be commended for the intelligent way in which she centres a history so often plagued by archival silences and a sense of secrecy even in more modern contexts. Her volume is also about so much more than the book's immediate title, including the histories of fertility control, of desires and needs, of love and sex, and marketisation and consumerism. Its thoughtful and feminist agenda can inspire us to reconsider what the discipline of history can and should be.

Ludmila Miklashevskaya, edited and translated by Elaine MacKinnon, *Gender and Survival in Soviet Russia: A Life in the Shadow of Stalin's Terror*, London: Bloomsbury, 2020. £85.00, 978 1 3501 3920 6 (hardback), pp.xii + 267

Reviewed by Jane McDermid
University of Southampton



Elaine MacKinnon, editor and translator of this memoir, provides a wide-ranging introduction explaining her decisions on what to include from the Russian original and how to structure what was written as a continuous narrative. She also outlines key stations in the life journey of Ludmila Miklashevskaya (1899-1976), and provides historical context including the position of women and of Jews –

Ludmila's family was from Odessa, a city with a large Jewish minority and a history of often violent anti-Semitism – as well as the central place of autobiography in Russian women's writing. While the subtitle draws attention to Ludmila's suffering during the Stalinist Terror, the memoir encompasses her pre-revolutionary childhood and youth; her move to Leningrad in 1920 with an older man of the theatre and the intellectual and artistic circles in which they moved; her second marriage to an academic in 1929 and birth of her daughter Elena (1930); the arrest of her husband in 1936 and of herself in 1938; and her experience of labour camp over the next decade. Once back in Leningrad in the mid-1950s, rebuilding the relationship with her daughter proved difficult due to the deep bonds Elena had developed with the aunt who, with her husband (Ludmila's brother-in-law), had taken her in to prevent incarceration in an orphanage.

Ludmila's personality comes across vividly in this fluent translation. That the memoir was written in the last year of her life when she was seriously ill and in pain makes the coherence and detail of her testimony all the more remarkable. Her economic situation was always precarious. She had ambitions to be a published writer and experienced some minor success, but her main source of income was as a typist, working both for employers and private customers. It is notable that in a system which regarded workers as belonging to the state, Ludmila not only earned by typing for individuals (mostly men), but also employed women (housekeeper, nanny, seamstress). Her first marriage to former aristocrat Konstantin Mikhailovich Miklachevsky (1886-1944) put her in danger with the communist authorities, but immersed her in an exciting cultural sphere. When the state grew increasingly suspicious of potential social threats, Konstantin sought permission to go abroad to research theatre history. Not intending to return, he found work in the film industry and she in a Soviet trade bureau in Paris in 1924. By 1927, that had dried up and the marriage had broken down, though

they remained close friends. She returned to Russia and met a younger Jewish friend from Odessa, Isaak (Izya) Moiseevich Trotsky (1903-1937), a historian who became her second husband. He was no more anxious to be a father than Konstantin (who had pressured Ludmila into two abortions) but she persisted this time. Motherhood was central to her life, but she had only a few years living with her daughter before her arrest as wife of an enemy of the people (he was executed in 1937). Sentenced to ten years' hard labour, she records her ineptitude at the physically demanding manual jobs in the logging camp and relief at transferring to nursing duties. Ludmila retained contact with Elena through letters and very occasional visits, and received vital parcels from her in-laws. Released in 1948, she was soon rearrested (a typical occurrence), but Stalin's death in 1953 led to the freeing of millions of prisoners. The reunion with her now adult and married daughter was difficult and brief: nursed by her two mothers, Elena died in 1958. Ludmila stopped resenting her sister-in-law, acknowledging the bravery of her husband's brother and his wife in looking after a child of parents deemed traitors. Ludmila summed up the last stage of her life in two paragraphs, which underscore her resilience: 'My soul was in mourning and will be so until I draw my last breath. But life goes on, and there is no point in just lying limp' (p.225).

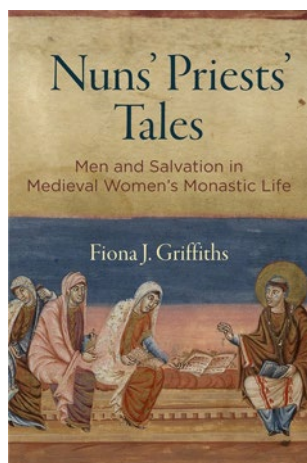
The editor sees gender as central to the memoir, and whereas Ludmila rarely addresses such issues directly, her narrative casts light on gender relations. Her parents, for example, favoured their two sons' education though she was the better student; she resisted an arranged marriage, making her own choice. Yet while the 1917 Revolution saw an initial push against traditional gender expectations, this narrowed to a loosening of sexual mores. Ludmila's relationships with, and attitudes towards men and family, confirm the persistence of customary gender norms under communist patriarchy.

The editor's thorough explanatory notes (but not the price of the hardback) make this moving memoir accessible to non-specialists with interests in life-writing, and women's and gender history.

Fiona J. Griffiths, *Nuns' Priests' Tales: Men and Salvation in Medieval Women's Monastic Life*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018, 9780812249750 (hardback), pp. x + 350

Reviewed by Karen Jones
Independent Scholar

Nuns' Priests' Tales focuses on the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, the period both of the campaign for clerical celibacy, and the great expansion of male and female monasticism. As the celibacy movement spread, so did anxiety about relations between the sexes, yet nuns needed a priest, at the very least to administer the sacraments. So nuns' priests were in a suspect position: when medieval sources mention them it is usually unfavourably, and modern studies largely ignore them. In this book Fiona J. Griffiths seeks to rescue these men



from oblivion and uncover how they justified their work with women. The problem is that hardly any of them left any record, leaving Griffiths to rely mainly on writings by those who ministered to women but 'have been deemed unrepresentative of mainstream medieval religious life', and to explore them 'in aggregate, focusing less on individual men than on ...ideas they held in common' (p. 3), as illustrated by letters,

sermons, biblical commentaries and images.

The first chapter focuses on the ambivalent status of nuns' priests, the only men permitted to enter female monastic spaces. Clerics who worked with nuns might be under the authority of an abbess: they might be local secular priests or ordained monks from nearby monasteries. Some lived in close proximity to nuns and some nunneries even had communities of male clerics attached to them. Priests provided practical as well as spiritual assistance, for example overseeing building and witnessing charters. It is clear that nuns did not live completely segregated from men.

Griffiths wishes to show that priests 'evolved spiritually through their service to nuns' and that they viewed contact with women 'as a spiritual opportunity, not a distraction' (pp.18-19). Slurs on such men led them to develop a defensive vocabulary, drawing on the examples of Christ, the apostles and the church fathers. She lists a few clerics who formed "double" monasteries or developed spiritual relationships with professed women, yet noting that their actions were typically based on the idea of the "natural" inferiority of even the holiest of nuns and that they expected a heavenly reward for their work.

The second chapter discusses the Biblical themes on which the protagonists of nuns' priests relied to justify working with women, notably Christ's commendation of his mother to the apostle John, and Mary Magdalene being the first to see the resurrected Christ. Next Griffiths devotes a chapter to the fourth-century church father Jerome, who had spiritual friendships with several Christian noblewomen in Rome. In his own day Jerome was criticised for this, but by the central Middle Ages his relations with women were celebrated as blameless, and he was invoked by clergy working with women. Jerome had argued for women's spiritual superiority, identifying devout women as brides of Christ, an idea which recurs in many of Griffiths' sources.

Family relationships are examined next. While early Christian communities rejected family ties, it gradually became acceptable for a male cleric to minister to his female kin, especially to his sisters, and by mid-twelfth century this was well established. Next Griffiths examines the belief of some clerics that women's prayers could be more effective than men's, and that 'men... could best access God through religious women' (p. 141). Nuns' prayers could also be regarded as payment for the assistance they had received from men. Griffiths gives

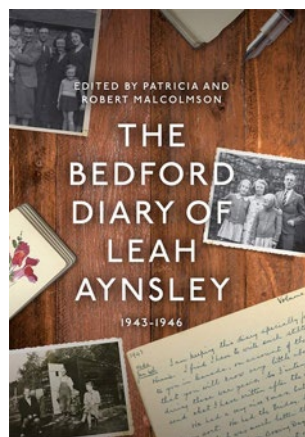
the example of Christina of Markyate who prayed for the abbot of St. Albans, who supported her financially.

In her final chapter Griffiths emphasises that the reform period, most often associated with clerical withdrawal from religious women, was also a time when a rhetoric was developed defending priests who worked with nuns, though she concedes that even the men she has quoted treated women 'primarily as vehicles for male spiritual experience' (p. 177). She then briefly examines how nuns interacted with their priests, noting that there is little evidence of bridal language in negotiations for pastoral care by women before 1200. She considers liturgical textiles, often made or commissioned by women, some of which portray women in prominent positions, though none of the artefacts she describes is from the late eleventh or twelfth century.

While Griffiths' book sheds light on a neglected subject and takes us into interesting byways of medieval clerical thinking, nearly all her examples are drawn from powerful and distinguished clerics who interacted with exceptional religious women. We can only guess how far their opinions were mirrored by the ordinary priests who ministered to ordinary nuns, and to this extent I feel her title is a little misleading.

Patricia and Robert Malcolmson (eds.), *The Bedford Diary of Leah Aynsley (1943-1946)*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2020, £25.00, 978-0-85155-083-1 (hardback), pp. vii + 171.

Reviewed by Linda Pike
University of Worcester



This book, edited by social historians Patricia and Robert Malcolmson, whose previous work has included *The Diaries of Nella Last: Writing in War And Peace*, provides an insight into the life of a single, forty-year old woman during the latter part of the Second World War. Leah Aynsley identifies herself as working-class and this makes her diary particularly interesting as many such women had neither

the time nor inclination to write diaries given their other, often family-orientated, responsibilities. Leah, an intermittent diarist since the 1930s, wrote this wartime diary for her cousin Winnie in Canada. It was written while she worked as a full time factory secretary in Bedford where her family lived after relocating from Sunderland's depressed economy. Leah's wartime experiences are contextualised by the editors' extensive annotations, using primary sources like newspapers and family photographs.

Repetitive themes of illness, domesticity and gardening are interspersed with wartime discussions of bombing, blackouts and potential invasion. However, like many unmarried women, Leah also had sole caring

responsibilities for her sick father and, later, her brother Jim. Combined with Leah's constant rheumatism and chronic toothache - dental visits were a 'gruelling business' (p. 35) - any plans to retire were thwarted, as her job was considered essential to the war effort. She considered herself working-class but needed to employ domestic help.

The book explores Leah's resilience in coping with day-to-day life in wartime, shortages, rationing, the occasional resort to the black market and her subsequent guilt associated with this 'art of shopping' (p. 28). However, Northampton, with its plentiful supplies, provided an 'orgy of shopping' (p. 89). Oranges from neutral Spain caused great excitement, as did the disappearance of ducks at Christmas while Jim's illness provided extra rations. However, Leah acknowledged that others were less fortunate, especially when she noticed 'gleaners' searching for harvest remnants and, although it was illegal, she gave away her spare food coupons. The stationing of American servicemen in Bedford increased local tensions, especially as the town was already congested with evacuees and Italian POWs. This diary shows how Leah relentlessly and methodically pursued her spring-cleaning and epitomised wartime's 'make-do-and-mend' philosophy by recovering eiderdowns with coat linings and making rag rugs from old clothes. Her beloved allotment provided vegetables to supplement rationing and fruit for jams, using hoarded sugar allowances, although carrot jam 'was not a success' (p. 68) unlike bottling fruit after the invention of Kilner jars. Her aspirational social life centred around cycling, folk dancing, enjoying concerts by the BBC's music section which had recently moved to Bedford, attending lectures and Literary Society meetings. She was totally unimpressed by film, although many working-class women went to the cinema regularly, but considered *The Great Waltz* and *Jane Eyre* 'fairly good' (p. 52).

Despite her Sunderland relatives experiencing horrendous air raids and erratic food supplies, Leah claimed, in Bedford, 'you hardly knew there was a war on' (p. 19) and subsequently ignored bomb alerts, especially if she didn't want to waste hot water if she was bathing. V1 bombs (doodlebugs) in London led to further evacuees, but she was sceptical of government secrecy when V2 Rocket bombs were officially reported as gas explosions. Military victories in North Africa and Italy in 1943 presented an optimistic desire to 'freshen up for peace' (p. 90) causing self-sufficient Leah to whitewash rooms herself, due to shortages of workmen, paint and wallpaper. However, with no radio, she had little knowledge of D-Day; instead, on that day, her diary devoted seven lines to her roses. Similarly, she was sanguine over the revelation of concentration camps and Hiroshima's bombing with her diary announcing she had 'just opened a tin of marmalade. It was delicious!' (p. 121). Likewise, the post-war general election merited little attention, other than that Labour won. There were no mentions of political allegiances, electioneering or voting - she seemed more excited about pan scrubbers arriving from Canada that made 'aluminium shine like silver' (p. 132).

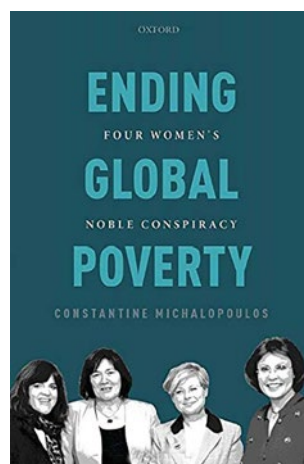
Leah's diaries were bequeathed to Bedford Archives Service, with the anticipation that they may be

useful for the future noting that, as a single working-class woman, she wanted 'something of mine to live after me' (p. 1). Their publication and reflection of the minutiae of wartime life is therefore welcome, not only as a valuable resource for historians of the home front during the Second World War but also, with their understated and engaging style, for the general public.

Constantine Michalopoulos, *Ending Global Poverty: Four Women's Noble Conspiracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. £30, 9780198850175 (hardback), pp. xxvii + 304

Reviewed by Paula Bartley

Independent Scholar



In 1997, when Labour was elected, Tony Blair appointed Clare Short Secretary of State for International Development (DfID). Her ambition was to reduce and even eradicate poverty in the poorest countries of the world through sustainable development. In the same year as Short's appointment, Hilde F Johnson was appointed Minister for International Development for Norway; a year later Eveline

Herfkens became Minister for Development Cooperation in the Netherlands and Heidmarie Wiczorek-Zeul, Federal Minister of Economic Cooperation and Development in Germany. *Ending Global Poverty: Four Women's Noble Conspiracy* is a story about these four remarkable women who worked together to reduce world poverty.

In 1999 at Utstein Abbey, the four forged an alliance to change the way that aid was distributed and used. Far too often, aid merely helped repay the interest debt of the poorer countries; far too often, aid was linked to the business programmes of the donor countries. For instance, Norway sent fermented tinned fish as part of its country's contribution, a delicacy in Norway but inedible to those in receipt of it. More egregiously, in 1988 the British government committed aid to fund the Pergau Dam in Malaysia in exchange for a major arms deal, an agreement later found to be unlawful. The goal of the four ministers - soon to become known as the Utstein Four (the U4) - was to change this. Basically, they envisaged making aid more effective in reducing poverty by encouraging developing countries to take charge of the programmes. In turn, the recipient countries had to commit to combating corruption, strengthening democracy and good governance, preventing conflict and implementing poverty-reducing policies.

Over the years, the four women convinced other aid agencies, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations, the OECD and others to support their approach. A main focus, according to

Michalopolous, was on girls' education because all four women believed that 'if you educate a man, you educate an individual; but if you educate a woman you educate a nation' (p. 2). All four had promoted women's rights before they became Ministers; all four were committed to empower women. As Short argued, 'women with as little as four years of education are more likely to have smaller, healthier families, to work their way out of poverty' (p. 132).

At the time, civil war was raging across several poorer countries. One of the U4's challenges was the conflict in Sierra Leone, where a brutal civil war was destroying the country. The U4 agreed that the top priority was to contribute to stabilising the African state. In 2000, Clare Short organised a donor conference in London which yielded \$175 million in new aid for Sierra Leone. Short also encouraged Tony Blair to send troops to control the situation. Within two years peace was established, the rebels were disarmed and the country held democratic elections. Clare Short, who firmly believed that conflict, violence and civil unrest was inextricably linked to poverty, played an important role here, according to the author.

War is fought largely by men who sometimes use sexual violence as a 'weapon of war' (p. 137). From the outset, the U4 focused on this. In particular, when the International Criminal Court was being established, Short and Johnson worked together to make sure that sexual violence was included in the definition of war crimes and seen as a grave breach of the Geneva Convention. In 2002 this became international law after 66 member states ratified the agreement.

It is not often that a historical work affects me at such a deep emotional level. Certainly, I was very moved by the stories of the women in *Ending Global Poverty*. The four, working collaboratively, achieved so much in such a brief time. It is a story that I had never heard, and it is one that deserves wide coverage. In this review I can only offer a glimpse of the contribution made to global politics by these amazing women. This book should be compulsory reading for any student of modern history, politics or international development. History, of course, is never static. In 2003 Clare Short resigned from the Cabinet, Labour lost the 2010 election and when Boris Johnson became Prime Minister he got rid of DfID, put it in the Foreign Office and cut aid. Britain's reputation on the world stage was diminished. However, the legacy of the Utstein Four lives on. Certainly, I would like to hear about the lives of those girls who took advantage of the free primary education and who would now be adult women.

Rachel Mesch, *Before Trans: Three Gender Stories from Nineteenth-Century France*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020 \$30.00 Hardcover ISBN: 9781503606739, pp 360.
Reviewed by Norena Shopland
Independent Scholar



One of the challenges when writing of historic sexual orientation and gender identity is the use of terminology. Most of the words and phrases recognised today are from the 20th century, coined to neutralise offensive and cater for absent terms of the past, which makes researching lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) difficult when there is little in terms of language to utilise. In addition, ascribing a sexual

orientation and gender identity when self-identification is absent, is fraught with problems, a difficulty I encountered in my own work. Despite having an enormous amount of material to work with, much of it, due to discriminatory attitudes of the day, rarely included personal narratives and where material does exist, it is often restricted to well-educated people. Therefore, the complexity of gender identification for most will remain unknown and we only have small windows provided by more well-known examples.

Some of those rare individuals include three writers in fin-de-siècle France, Jane Dieulafoy (1850–1916), Rachilde (1860–1953), and Marc de Montifaud (1845–1912) and it is these who are discussed in *Before Trans*. Mesch side-steps the problem of terminology in the title but then runs into the question of what descriptions to use for the three writers. In general, in order to entice readers, it is necessary to use modern terminology but once engaged the reader is then instructed to ignore all modern terminology and definitions.

The three individuals covered in the book struggled to find self-expression at a time when gender identity was not understood and rarely separated from sexual orientation. Mesch looks in depth at possible clues in their lives to see how much they can be considered 'trans' in the modern concept.

She starts with Dieulafoy, who rather than be separated from her husband Marcel, signed up with him as a soldier and experienced her first liberations from the strictures of female life. Later the couple became well-respected archaeologists in Persia providing Dieulafoy with a perfect excuse to cross-dress. Mesch raises an interesting point here about the absence of gender when cross-dressing, in countries where people are not experienced in what western women wear. As Simone de Beauvoir points out, one is not born a woman, one becomes a woman and the type of woman you become depends on the culture in which you are raised. Cross-dressing will always depend on cultural ideas of who is

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.

Clare Wichbold, *Hard Work - But Glorious: Stories from the Herefordshire Suffrage Campaign* (Orphans Press, 2021)

Joanna Martin, *Georgina Weldon: The Fearless Wife of a Victorian Celebrity* (Boydell Press, 2021)

Helen Antrobus and Andrew Simcock, *First in the Fight: 20 Women Who Made Manchester* (iNostalgia, 2019)

Roland Phillips, *Victoire: A Wartime Story of Resistance, Collaboration and Betrayal* (The Bodley Head, 2021)

Henrietta Heald, *Magnificent Women and their Revolutionary Machines* (Unbound, 2019)

Stephen Williams and Tony Chandler (eds), *Letters from England, 1895: Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling* (Lawrence Wishart, 2020)

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

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

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

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

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

allowed to wear what.

Both Dieulafoy and Montifaud were seen as so extreme in their dress that women would not want to emulate them and therefore, did not challenge society; but the writings of Montifaud and Rachilde were challenging and highly controversial. Both writers faced imprisonment for publishing explicit content – after all, authorities did not want people trying these things at home.

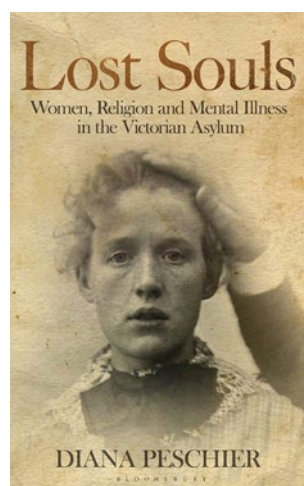
Mesch carefully deconstructs the writings of all three authors looking for clues as to what can today be identified as trans. The two most famous works are Dieulafoy's novel *Volentair* (Volunteer, 1892) based on her experiences as a soldier and is, writes Mesch, strikingly similar to Dieulafoy's own life. The difficulty with this, in terms of assessing trans literature, is that it is still only available in French and those without that language cannot make comparative assessments. The second is Rachilde's novel *Monsieur Venus* (1884) with its highly erotic plot, gender reversal and an exploration of sexual desires (it is available in English). It is these, and other works, that provide glimpses into the thinking of the three writers who, unable to speak openly at a period when both sexual and gender identity was little understood, used fiction to explore their identities.

Interestingly, Mesch reveals that both Dieulafoy and Montifaud were fascinated by men who cross-lived as women, particularly the Chevalier d'Éon (1728-1810) and collected material on them for prospective books, which never appeared. This, at a time when thousands of newspaper articles about cross-living women were being printed almost daily, raises questions of what it was they saw in those individuals who today may have been regarded as transwomen and not transmen. Sadly, neither left any clues to answer that question.

By exploring Dieulafoy, Rachilde and Montifaud in such detail Mesch has provided cautionary tales on the difficulties of ascribing identities to historic people, because as soon as we attempt to do so they slip away from us.

Diana Peschier, *Lost Souls: Women, Religion and Mental Illness in the Victorian Asylum*, London, Bloomsbury, 2020. £85, 978-1-78831-807-5 (hardback), pp. xv + 203.

Alison Pedley
Independent Scholar



Diana Peschier's *Lost Souls* is a study of women's experiences of incarceration in Victorian lunatic asylums. Through meticulous research in Victorian asylum archives, Peschier recounts the stories of female patients in, mainly, those asylums which provided treatment for the poorer of society. Through analysis of asylum case book notes, she describes lived experiences of women in various institutions. The book aims to demonstrate some of the rationale behind

such incarcerations and how the women, and their feelings, were understood by specialist clinicians and by Victorian society.

In the introduction, Peschier states that when reading asylum records, she found herself visibly moved by some of the stories she read. She also recounts how her impetus for the book stemmed from a personal reaction to the experiences of her grandmother. The impact of this personal aspect is apparent in her discussions about many of the accounts of female madness retold in *Lost Souls*. In some cases, Peschier suggests that there were often some causes of mental illness in female patients which doctors and clinicians did not wish to recognise. On more than one occasion, she appears to correct a diagnosis based on her modern understanding of mental illness, and her reading of the casebooks. Peschier has the tendency to make somewhat speculative comments on the causes of insanity. For example, the suggestion that a Bethlem patient, Charlotte Kelsey, had taken an abortion-inducing medicine, which convinced her that she had sinned against God, causing her mental turmoil, is conjecture (p. 27). Similarly, her assertion that 'obviously some patients labelled as suffering from puerperal mania' were actually suffering from fever and infection caused by childbirth missed by doctors, is questionable (p. 18).

Peschier's interpretation of asylum case notes appears to conclude that the medical men of the time were blinded by their ideologies and were often mistaken in their diagnoses. Peschier suggests that by framing women's mental disorders as overzealous adherence to religious tropes, clinicians had a rationale to medicalise women who refused to conform to Victorian gender norms. She argues that even when the women were 'experiencing pain, grief or hormonal changes brought about by childbirth' they would be diagnosed as suffering from religious mania or melancholy (p.170). To scholars experienced in asylum records, this is, perhaps, somewhat of a generalisation. It is quite correct that such terms were frequently used but often in tandem with other causes and diagnoses. Voiced delusions of a religious nature were recorded in asylum case books and, as suggested in Peschier's final chapter, more likely to be seen in women's records.

Peschier assesses the impact of contemporary literary approaches to female madness in Chapter 6. In so doing, she shows her familiarity with dominant cultural mores of the period, gleaned from previous research about nineteenth-century religion and literature. She demonstrates clearly how Victorian literary figures instilled a fear of madness and the asylum in their readers, through their depictions of women's insanity in their writings. These lasting impressions of madness and asylums as horrifying and frightening, owe much to the nineteenth-century novelists.

Chapter 7 is a comparison of the male asylum experience with the women's, to underline the concept that diagnoses of religious delusion and mania were gendered. Peschier suggests that the expression of religious excitement differed between male and female asylum patients. Women would use religious language to convey feelings of shame and disgrace and of extreme guilt. Men would invoke God or the Devil to justify their often aggressive behaviour. These differences add another nuance to historical interpretation of Victorian asylum

practice and the gendered environment of the nineteenth-century asylum.

By telling the stories of the asylum residents, Peschier demonstrates that much can be learnt from close analysis of patient case records. Her particular interest is to show that the use of religious allusions and fear provided a language for ordinary women, to identify and describe their mental distress. On the basis of such accounts, she argues that allusions to religious retribution and punishment were a dominant factor in many female asylum patients' articulation of madness. *Lost Souls* is at its best when relating the stories of women linked to individual abuse and oppression which some suffered, both within and outside the asylum. The horrific case studies of patients at the hands of men such as Isaac Baker Brown are sobering. As such, they are reminders that despite the best intentions of moral therapy and restorative 'cures', the asylums could also be places of great cruelty. *Lost Souls* provides a rich insight into the gendered aspects of religious mental afflictions in the nineteenth century. The book will be of relevance to many academic researchers interested in how differing influences, such as religious beliefs, shaped the ordinary person's experiences of insanity and the asylum in the nineteenth century.

WOMEN'S HISTORY BACK ISSUES

Print copies of back issues of *Women's History* are available to buy (in limited quantities) for:

£5.00 inc postage (UK)

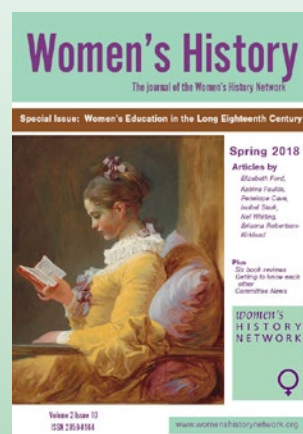
£9.00 inc postage (Overseas)

Archived digital issues are available free to download from

womenshistorynetwork.org/womens-history-magazine-download-page/

Discover the contents of each issue at

womenshistorynetwork.org/category/magazine/editions/



IN PROFILE

HELEN GLEW, SENIOR LECTURER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

Tell us about your area of expertise?

I'm interested in women's employment, particularly white-collar work and public sector work, and have worked extensively on women in the British civil service and the post office. I'm currently writing a book on the social and cultural history of the marriage bar and married women's paid work in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I'm also interested in the history of feminism and feminist thought.

What motivated you to become an historian?

I had superb teaching at the University of Lancaster, especially from Corinna Peniston-Bird who got me interested in looking at history from a gendered lens and also introduced me to cultural history. I took a year to live and work abroad after my undergraduate degree and I had what you might call a 'lightbulb' moment in the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria, BC, Canada where I was looking at some artefacts in a display case and realised I had had several of them (toys and stickers) as a child too; without being able to help it, I started asking myself all kinds of questions about the place those objects could have in a historical study. I was doing a job that didn't involve history (but it did involve books!) and that moment made me realise how much I missed history. That motivated me to carry out my idea of doing a Master's and then, at probably the last possible moment in a part-time Master's I decided that I wanted a career in historical research.

What achievement are you most proud of?

In my career as a historian, getting my first book completed in amongst early career precarity and high teaching loads. And finally publishing an article last year that had been 12 years in the making - I started to think it would never get published.

If you could choose five historic figures to enjoy dinner with, who would they be, and why?

Is it odd to say a selection of women I feel I already know a bit from my research? Winifred Holtby (I am fascinated by various elements of her work, including her novels and journalism), Edith Summerskill, Minnie Cale (who was active in the Association of Post Office Women Clerks and the Women's Freedom League), Philippa (Pippa) Strachey and E M Delafield. I think several of them would already know each other at least a bit, so I think the conversation would flow nicely!



What book about women's history has most inspired you?

There are many! Alison Oram's *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics* really helped me to think about how to write about women's work in terms of policies, institutions and women's agency. I've also always really liked Lise Shapiro Sanders' *Consuming Fantasies* about women workers in retail, because of the depth and sensitivity of her reading of the sources – that's a model of how to do that kind of social and cultural history.

What important piece of advice would you impart to a budding historian?

Read as much as you can, stay curious, but also make sure you have a work-life balance: you might love history, but if it's the main focus of your paid work, you need other interests to keep you going!

ANNOUNCEMENT OF PRIZES AND FUNDING

The WHN is pleased to share details of three new prizes and funding schemes for 2021. Please do share widely with anyone who may be interested.

2021 UNDERGRADUATE DISSERTATION PRIZE:

We will award £250 to the best BA dissertation in women's or gender history, and work with prizewinners to publish their research in the WHN journal or blog. Please send a copy of your dissertation to us by 30 June 2021. Info here: <https://womenshistorynetwork.org/whn-undergraduate-dissertation-prize-2021/>

ECR FELLOWSHIPS:

We will support 3 ECRs to undertake research into women's or gender history over the course of the 2021/22 academic year. Successful applicants receive £1,500 towards research costs plus up to £250 to attend and present at the 2022 WHN annual conference. The scheme is open to any ECR within ten years of their PhD being awarded, not in a full time academic post. Applications due 1 August, info here: <https://womenshistorynetwork.org/womens-history-network-early-career-fellowship-2021-22/>

INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER FELLOWSHIPS:

We will award up to £750 towards the costs of a women's or gender history project being undertaken by a researcher working outside of academia, plus up to £250 to attend the 2022 WHN annual conference. Applications due 1 August, info here: <https://womenshistorynetwork.org/fellowships-for-independent-researchers-3/>

Applicants for all prizes or fellowships must be WHN members. Any questions regarding the schemes can be directed to prizesandawards@womenshistorynetwork.org

COMMITTEE NEWS

The ongoing Covid crisis has continued to create both challenges and opportunities for the Women's History Network's National Steering Committee. We continue to meet via zoom, and to organise a number of online activities to support, promote and celebrate women's history. The blog continues to flourish, our Twitter follows are now reaching nearly 6,000, membership is increasing and we have undertaken much planning for our Annual Conference in September, which will be online this year, and to which we hope to welcome many members. We have also rewritten our Diversity and Inclusivity policy as we seek to broaden the range of women's histories that we engage with.

We continue to organise our regular online seminars and online writing retreats, a number of awards and fellowships and are very excited by the large number of entries that the schools' prize is generating this year. As many history students were struggling to get placements with museums, archives and heritage organisations shut due to Covid lockdown earlier in the year, we took on a number of work placement students. Thank you for all

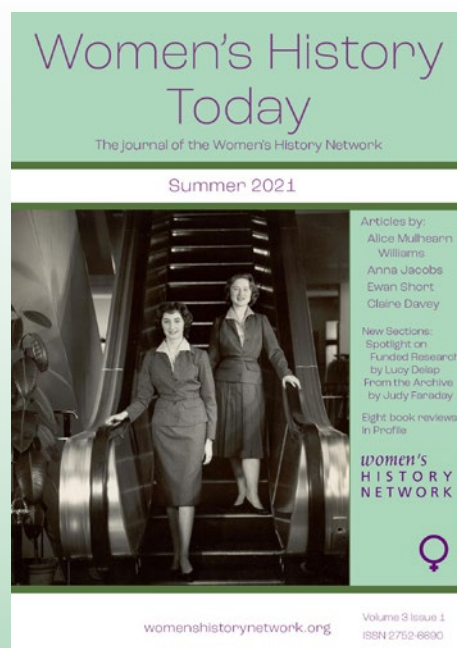
your hard work: Lauren Brannagan, Beth Cruickshanks Shannon Doyle, Lily Drewett, Meghan Harvey, Molly O'Neill and Freya Purcell. We wish you well in your future studies and careers. For Women's History Month in March we held a number of online activities including two wonderful roundtable seminars exploring women's history in museums, communities and heritage industries, our first student conference and two workshops on publishing women's history.

The difficulties Covid has created for the WHN and in many workplaces, along with changes in everyone's lives and the wide range of activities that we now undertake, have brought pressures for those serving on the committee and consequently some changes in the Steering Committee's membership. Out thanks go to those who left over the last year and a very special thank you to Kate Law who has done outstanding work as blog editor for the last three years and stands down as she begins her maternity leave. We are also pleased to welcome Norena Shepherd, Camilla Prince and Kat Perry onto the committee. The network continues to rely on the voluntary work of members. If you have a little time and space to get more actively involved with the WHN do please get in touch informally with the chair.

PUBLISHING IN *WOMEN'S HISTORY TODAY*

Women's History Today 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: <https://womenshistorynetwork.org/womens-history-today/> 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 - 2021

Chair - Maggie Andrews

Charity Rep - Beth Jenkins

Social Media and Blog Editors - Camilla Prince and Kat Perry

Membership Secretary - Susan Cohen

Treasurer - Becki Hines

(Archive) Secretary - Lyndsey Jenkins

Conference support role - Alexandra Hughes-Johnson

Website and publicity - Nancy Highcock

Prizes and Grants - Anna Muggeridge

Journal - Katharina Rowold, Laurel Forster and Helen Glew

Newsletter Editor - Catia Rodrigues

Community Liaison - Anne Logan and Helen Antrobus

Diversity Officer - Norena Shepherd

Schools Liaison - Tahaney Alghrani and Chelsey David

Seminar Organisers - Sarah Hellawell and Kristin O'Donnell

Co-opted Members of the Committee

WHN Journal Editor - Kate Murphy

IFRWH rep - Gillian Murphy

*To join the WHN just go to
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 Today*, 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 September 2021 / with journal hardcopy / with journal overseas delivery

Community Group member	£15 / £25 / £35
Student or unwaged member	£15 / £25 / £35
Low income member (*under £20,000 pa)	£25 / £35 / £45
Standard member	£40 / £50 / £60

Life Membership (includes journal hardcopy)	£375
Retired Life Membership(includes journal hardcopy)	£195

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
<https://womenshistorynetwork.org>