Women's History Today

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Autumn 2023

Articles by:
Rosemary Keep
Zuzubee Huidrom

Two Book Reviews
In Profile
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EDITORIAL

Welcome to *Women's History Today's* autumn issue. The theme of this special issue is commemoration and the different ways women's lives are marked, celebrated and understood.

Commemoration is an important way in which women's accomplishments and achievements can remain in public memory. However, the forms that commemoration can take are varied. From family portraits to a radio play, this special issue focusses on how women are remembered and why. In addition to the main research articles, there is an expanded Doing Women's History section covering a wide range of research and public history around the theme of commemoration.

The first research article is 'Commemorating the Female Deathbed: *The Saltonstall Family*' by Rosemary Keep. By positioning this seventeenth-century depiction of Lady Elizabeth Saltonstall's deathbed within its social, religious, and cultural contexts, Keep demonstrates how this reproduction and reimagination of Lady Saltonstall's final moments serves as a process of memorialisation. While previous interpretations of this family portrait have focused on its patriarchal nature, given the central positioning of Sir Richard Saltonstall, Lady Saltonstall's husband, in the painting, Keep offers an alternative reading of this artwork that emphasises its celebration of Lady Saltonstall's embodiment of feminine ideals, thereby shedding light on the correlation between seventeenth-century artistic practices, commemoration, and femininity.

Whilst Zuzubee Huidrom in 'Rethinking the experience of women in the Nupi Lan during the British colonial rule' focusses on different subject matter, the underlying theme harmonises with Keep. Huidrom's article explores commemorative simplification of the motivations of the women who participated in the women's wars, known as the Nupi Lan, in Manipur in the early twentieth century. Huidrom suggests that modern-day portrayals of the Manipuri women's protests as anti-imperialist reflects broader national discourse on anti-colonialism rather than the local economic considerations that sparked the protests. By fitting these events into national discourse, she argues that Manipuri women's powerful social roles as market traders are obscured, and their sophisticated understanding of the local trading infrastructure and the impact of colonial policies is minimized.

This issue's Doing Public History section features four different projects that bring women's accomplishments and achievements to the fore. Carrie de Silva's 'Women in Street Names Project' seeks to document the lives of women who have been memorialised in the naming of streets in Britain. While the names may be familiar, the biographies of these women are often obscure and the project aims to bring their stories to life. In ''More than a Woman on a Plinth'': Commemorating Lady Rhondda and Recovering Newport's Hidden Heritage', Sharon Thompson explores the latest initiative led by the 'Monumental Welsh Women', a public history project which was featured in the Summer issue of Women's History Today, and which aims to rectify the almost complete absence of statues celebrating Welsh women's achievements. Thompson identifies methodologies and opportunities for the celebration of women's history through the erection of statues. In a third piece, 'Civilian Women Fleeing Conflict in the Second World War', Barbara Coombes shares her research into women held in internment camps in Sumatra during the Second World War, and views records from the women's own writings as commemoration of their resilience. In 'Re-telling the Nuclear Story: How Theatre Could be the Answer to Women's Absence in Scientific History', Natasha Kitcher uses the medium of a radio play to tell the story of physicist Lise Meitner. Meitner, later dubbed the 'mother of the atomic bomb', is the subject of the play *Mum is MAD!* (https://www.lboro.ac.uk/arts/inspirationalwomen/popular/natasha-kitcher/), which explores Meitner's pivotal role in the story of nuclear

Cover Image
Composite of images from From the Archive: Mina and Memory: Commemorating Women's History at Thomas Edison National Historical Park

Images courtesy of Thomas Edison National Historical Park

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fission and the development of atomic weapons.

Continuing with the commemorative theme, From the Archive highlights Mina Edison, the wife of inventor Thomas Edison, through Mina's extensive archives held at the Thomas Edison National Historical Park in West Orange, New Jersey. Katherine Hobbs discusses the new trail at the Edison home, 'Mina's Place of Business', and the displays of Mina's personal items in the historic home's collection. The aim of these efforts is to emphasize Mina's active role in the community and to see the home not as a private retreat, but as Mina's own workplace where she managed the estate and family affairs. In Spotlight on Research Maggie Andrews and Anna Muggeridge critically examine the 1961 hagiography of Lady Denman by Gervas Huxley. The research, supported by a Leverhulme Emeritus Fellowship, discusses Lady Denman's life and work, but also the social context in which Huxley penned the biography.

Finally, In Profile features the Women's History Network's newsletter editor Omotayo Agunbiade, who is a journalist and author of *Untold Histories of Nigerian Women: Emerging from the Margins*. The issue also includes our regular book review section and a list of titles available to review as well as updates on WHN Prizes and committee news.

The editorial team would like to welcome two new members of the team, Amanda Norman and Joy Burgess. We hope you enjoy this special issue. If you would like to submit a research article or write about a project for our regular columns, please contact the editor.

Catia Rodrigues and Kate Terkanian for the editorial team
Joy Burgess, Helen Glew, Samantha Hughes-Johnson, Kate Murphy, Amanda Norman, Angela Platt

COMMEMORATING THE FEMALE DEATHBED: *THE SALTONSTALL FAMILY*

Rosemary Keep

Independent Researcher

This paper is concerned with a close examination of the seventeenth-century portrait known as *The Saltonstall Family* which, as I explore, was commissioned to commemorate the final moments of the pious Essex gentlewoman Lady Elizabeth Saltonstall (d. 1630) as she lay on her deathbed surrounded by the members of her family who came to witness the event [Fig.1].[1] The viewer is presented with a formally arranged tableau of figures situated in a richly furnished room. The group is dominated by the standing figure of Sir Richard Saltonstall (1596-1649) who extends his right arm to hold the hand of his eldest son, Richard (1622-1688). Richard, in turn, holds the arm of his sister Ann (b.1624). With his left hand extended and forming the central focus of the group, Sir Richard drops a white glove into the outstretched palm of his first wife Elizabeth as she lies on her deathbed. The strong diagonal lines of Sir Richard's arms are highlighted by the lines of the white shirt showing through his slashed sleeves which draw the viewer's eye towards his tall hat, symbol of his headship of the family. The diagonal lines are formed by a chain of hands and arms linking Sir Richard to his children and broken only by the falling glove.

To the right of the bed is Sir Richard's second wife Mary (d. 1651) who, I argue, holds in her arms the couple's first daughter who had recently been baptised as Elizabeth.

[Fig.1] The Saltonstall Family, c.1641, David des Granges. Photo: Tate .

While Lady Elizabeth's deathbed is the primary subject being memorialised here, the recent baptism of the new Elizabeth and the bright colour pallet, gives the portrait a sense of celebration which complicates its emotional language and belies Sir Richard's sombre expression. The group is framed firstly by the bright orange drapes and headboard of the bed, which in its turn is surrounded by a-symmetric panels decorated with scenes of landscape and woodland and finely painted twining leaves and flowers which are partially concealed behind the bed.

Analysis of the near life-sized portrait is supported by archival sources which place it in the context of the Saltonstall's family history. This paper is predicated on the understanding that family portraits such as this were mnemonic devices whose function was to memorialise particular individuals, life-cycle events or whole families while simultaneously conveying messages to future generations about status, religious values, gender norms and heredity. I argue that this portrait is more concerned with the sacred than many apparently 'secular' portraits of the period, or that previous scholars have allowed, and I seek a multi-layered and interdisciplinary interpretation.

Fundamental to the discussion is the religious framework which surrounded the early-modern understanding of all life events from birth to death. Contextualised within that religious framework are the categories through which women's identities were defined in the period: those of maid, wife and widow and the rigid gender roles imposed on both men and women by society and the church.[2] These gendered constraints and categories had profound legal and social effects on individual lives as well as the ways they were memorialised after death.

DEATHBED PORTRAITS AND COMMEMORATION

Portraits of the dead or dying have long served commemorative and memorial functions. The liminal moment of death as depicted here, and the theatrical deathbed performance offered families an important opportunity to make statements about their beliefs in the afterlife, their familial faith and to integrate the living and the dying into future generations. Scholars have argued that such portraits serve to imaginatively bring the dead back to life, offering them a type of immortality, and in many cultures portraits still play a part in funerary rituals, including the display of photographs of the deceased.[3] In seventeenth-and eighteenth-century Britain, it was not uncommon for portraits to represent the dead, including children, among the living, perhaps in an attempt to preserve their memory, giving them a permanent place in the home, restoring relationships of affection and intimacy and comforting the bereaved. The attempt to preserve the dead among the living is made explicit in the common sixteenth-century term for a portrait, 'counterfeit' meaning 'copy' or 'duplicate self'. Contemporary textual accounts confirm this; for example in Richard Haydocke's English translation of Lomazzo's tract on painting comes the claim that portraiture should be: 'a kind of preservative against Death and Mortality: by a perpetual preserving of their shapes, whose substances physic could not prolong.'[4]

Deathbed portraits of the recently dead or dying were mainly displayed in domestic spaces and though they are a relatively uncommon genre of portrait, include both adult and child subjects. Among the best known, are three which, like *The Saltonstall Family,* date from the first half of the seventeenth century: Anthony van Dyck's portrait of *Lady Venetia Digby on her Deathbed*; the portrait of *John Tradescant the elder on his Deathbed;* and the intriguing John Souch, *Sir Thomas Aston at the Deathbed of his Wife*.[5] What distinguishes the subjects in these three portraits from that of Lady Elizabeth Saltonstall on her deathbed is that the subjects are all depicted after death, while she, as I argue, is depicted in the process of dying, suspended between life and death.

Family portraits like *The Saltonstall Family* have much in common with sculpted tomb monuments in churches which frequently depict individuals on their deathbed and also had strong associations with particular families and, like painted portraits, were vehicles for the display of religious affiliation, status, wealth and pride in lineage.[6] Both sculpted monuments and painted portraits of the dead or dying have the particular function of shaping a post-mortem identity for the deceased, something which might go beyond the individual to encompass the whole family, creating a generational or dynastic collective identity. Importantly, both painted portraits and sculpted monuments were concerned with conveying messages to future generations.

FAMILY MEMORY

Astrid Erll asserts that families are communities of collective memory oriented to the needs and interests of the group in the present.[7] She understands that family memories are selected and reconstructed so that what is remembered is distorted and shifted, becoming almost fictional. Such memory, she claims, is inter-generational and constituted through ongoing communication between children, parents and grandparents: even those who did not experience events first hand can share in a memory through an exchange between eyewitnesses and descendants going back as far as the oldest members of the family can remember. This paper proposes that *The Saltonstall Family* is composed precisely through that shifting and distorting lens of family memory, something indicated by the eleven-year gap between the event it depicts, Lady Elizabeth's death, which took place in 1630, and the portrait's completion in 1641, suggesting an imaginative reconstruction of the events it portrays.

THE GODLY FAMILY AND THE GOOD DEATH

The central argument of this paper is that *The Saltonstall Family* was commissioned to valorise and memorialise Lady Elizabeth Saltonstall whose deathbed performance was recorded as the final act of a life which was renowned for its specifically female virtue, piety and domestic merit, the qualities for which women from so called 'godly' families such as the Saltonstalls were celebrated. 'Godly' is a broad term used to denote zealous

or fervent Protestants in the period after the English Reformation; the alternative term 'Puritan' sometimes had derogatory connotations when used by their critics.

For most pious Protestants, it was generally believed that life was a preparation for death; but for the godly, such preparation, which included constant meditation on the subject, was central to their faith and they hoped that death, with its everlasting consequences, would be deprived of its power and they would be confirmed among 'the elect', for them the deathbed held no terror.[8] For such believers, the deathbed performance was of central importance in the construction of a 'good' death, and the move from physical to spiritual existence was closely observed and reported on by friends and family who hoped for the salvation of their loved one's soul and proof of their election to heaven. For such believers, there was an obligation to treat the process of dying and, in particular the deathbed performance as an opportunity to demonstrate piety, thereby leaving an example of courage and steadfast faith in the face of death for witnesses and descendants. 'Good' deaths were of course distinct from 'bad' or sudden deaths in which the deceased had been offered no opportunity to prepare for their end.

Beyond the memorialisation of the final moments of Lady Elizabeth Saltonstall, the portrait represents a desire to commemorate the family unit as composed of husband and wife and their children, something which pious Protestants idealised as a reflection of divine order and a representation of 'godly' living and the foundation of society. This was a time when marriage and the family were controlled both by the church and society, when William Gouge, among other clergy, taught that the family 'was a little Church, and a little common-wealth' and gender roles and family relationships were strictly proscribed and policed by the church.[9] To achieve this, the church presented the patriarchy, for example, with its subordination of wives and children, as ideal, apparently sanctioned by scripture and a reflection of the heavenly order.

Although generally based on scriptural ideals, a number of secular literary and visual forms reinforced gender norms. Conduct books, such as *The English Gentlewoman* by Richard Braithwaite of 1631, for example, were part of a boom in such literature whose intention was to instruct its readers on proper manners and moral behaviour.[10] Aimed at a readership of young aristocratic or gentry women these books offered advice on topics such as how to choose a husband, manage a household and raise a family, and how to avoid perceived feminine faults such as vanity, immodesty, talking to much or risking damage to reputation. These literary forms were reinforced by secular visual influences such as portraiture and the popular and widely circulated ballads illustrated with woodcuts, which also served to reinforce orthodox gendered family roles and values.[11]

In the early modern period, particularly among elite families, female virtue was central to family honour. Jennifer Heller has noted that stereotypes of female virtue, particularly concerning women as mothers, 'saturated' early modern images and imaginations, with the 'ideal' mother juxtaposed against the 'bad' mother.[12] Such 'good' mothers, she observes, should be 'discreet and sober', well read in divinity, history and poetry and above all concerned with the instruction of their children in piety and morality.[13]

WHO WERE THE SALTONSTALLS?

The Saltonstalls were a large and wealthy family who owned land along the east coast of England throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The branch of the family represented in the portrait was from South Ockendon in Essex and were among the leading exporters of cloth to the Low Countries, northern Europe, Spain, Turkey, Russia and the Levant.[14] It is worth noting that textiles are represented everywhere in the portrait, displaying both the source of the family's wealth and their fashionable taste.

The history of this branch of the Saltonstall family helps in the understanding of their portrait. As noted, the date of its commission is 1641, eleven years after the death of Lady Saltonstall in 1630.[15] The artist depicts the moment her husband, Sir Richard Saltonstall, brings two of their surviving children, Richard and Ann, to witness their mother's death. At the time of her death, Lady Elizabeth and her husband had another surviving daughter, also called Elizabeth (1623-1637) who died four years before the commission of the portrait.[16]

Following his first wife's death, Sir Richard married Mary Parker, a member of a similar East Anglian, Protestant gentry family, who became Lady Mary Saltonstall. In the portrait she sits at the head of the bed holding the new baby Elizabeth who was baptised on 8 October 1641, the same year as the portrait's commission.[17] By 1641 Richard and Mary had been married for six years and had three sons, Philip, John and Bernard, who are not included in the portrait; baby Elizabeth was the couple's first daughter, though they were subsequently to have two more boys and an unknown number of girls.[18]

This large portrait was likely to have hung in one of the main rooms of the family's grand moated home, Groves Manor House, which was set in four hundred-acres in South Ockendon.[19] Its audiences would have included family members, the wider household and visitors. The face of Sir Richard, the central standing figure, conveys an apparently sorrowful expression, his body is turned towards his two wives and his gaze directed towards his second wife and the baby, the 'new' Elizabeth. He has removed the glove from his right hand into which his oldest son Richard lays the fingers of his left hand in an apparently trusting and intimate gesture. The boy wears a dress which suggests he is depicted at the age of about six or seven since after that age, as was customary, he would have worn breeches. In reality, however, since he was born in 1622, he would have been about nineteen years old when the portrait was completed, though only eight when his mother died. Young Richard grasps the arm of his sister Ann who was two years his junior. Their father turns his body from his two children and, in an ambiguous gesture, either draws back or closes the bed curtain while apparently simultaneously dropping his glove into the outstretched hand of his dying first wife, a gesture further discussed below. The use of curtains or drapes to separate the living and the dead was a common symbolic device

both in funerary monuments and portraits in this period, perhaps symbolising the thin veil that was thought to separate the living and the dead, but also drawing attention to the idea that the early modern deathbed was a theatrical event with actors and an audience.

Lady Elizabeth lies on the bed propped up on luxurious white lace pillows, symbolising both her wealth and purity. The fact that she wears her nightgown and a tightly fitting night cap around her chalk white face, rather than a shroud, indicates that she is on her deathbed rather than already dead and prepared for her grave. Her open eyes reinforce the idea that she is alive but her gaze, fixed upwards to the corner of the room, suggests she is near death. Sir Richard's second wife Mary is seated upright on an armchair to the right of the bed and holds the new baby girl who is tightly swaddled and wrapped in a scarlet and gold christening gown decorated with gold spangles, signifying her recent baptism. The new baby's head is held in close proximity to the dying Elizabeth, seemingly reinforcing their association. The central players in the tableau, Sir Richard, his two wives and the new baby are framed by the geometric orange/red outline of the bed and the back of the chair to form a separate group within the picture frame. The proximity of the heads of the two wives and new baby draw attention both to their central role in the portrait's narrative and to the women's relationship as wives of the same man. Lady Mary seems to be almost offering her new baby to the figure on the bed in the hope that she will inherit the virtues of her dying namesake. The use of luxurious fabrics and the colour palette of red and gold give the whole portrait a feeling of celebration rather than mourning, perhaps prompted by the recent baptism of the baby, but also possibly suggesting the dying woman's confidence and joy in her salvation after death.

Married women had little agency or authority outside the domestic sphere in the seventeenth century, and since they were unable to own property they rarely left written wills. However, deathbeds or prolonged periods of illness before death could sometimes provide the opportunity for them to make nuncupative or spoken wills in which their wishes were recorded, something which conferred a measure of authority on the deceased.[20] Since *The Saltonstall Family* was commissioned eleven years after Elizabeth Saltonstall's death, it can hardly be viewed in exactly the same way as a nuncupative will, however the careful construction of her post-mortem identity through the portrait confers on her a kind of spiritual immortality and granted her the authority, denied in her lifetime, to bequeath the thing she may have considered her most valuable asset which was her faith.

Lady Mary Saltonstall, Sir Richard's second wife, died as a widow and therefore did leave a written will.[21] In it she favoured her own oldest son Philip, urging her executors to do what was 'most advantageous to my children' and leaving him the South Ockendon estate, while his half-brother Richard, the boy in the portrait and Sir Richard's oldest son, inherited the rest of their estate in Chipping Warden, Northamptonshire, and with it the portrait. Through him it descended for many generations before being added to the Tate Collection in 1976.[22] It was unusual for estates to be divided in this way, since primogeniture was the norm and young Richard might have expected to have inherited his father's whole estate which had been handed down by his grandfather to his father in the same way that their title had been passed down. This unusual division might suggest the possibility of a rift in the family however the portrait tells a more nuanced story of family relationships; in particular, as was argued, the new baby Elizabeth, Lady Mary's first daughter, born in the year of the portrait's completion, is depicted at her dying step-mother's bedside, perhaps for a blessing, as previously suggested, to learn lessons from an exemplary death, or to express the hope that the new baby would inherit her step-mother's piety and virtue. This gesture suggests there was some kind of unity between Sir Richard's first and second wives and their children, as does the geometric internal framing of the central characters of Sir Richard, his two wives and the new baby as a central group in the portrait.

PICTURING THE GODLY WIFE AND MOTHER

As previously noted, ideals of female virtue centred on women's roles as wives and mothers, and their individuality was obscured and heavily controlled by both the church and society. The female body was the locus of much of the debate about female virtue and where great control was exercised. Women, particularly from elite families, were presumed to be virgins at marriage, faithful within marriage, fertile and pious so that they might set an example of virtuous behaviour to their children especially their daughters. Ideals of marriage proposed by the church included patriarchy, and wives and children were expected to display obedience to their husband and father and women's identity was always subsumed within that of her male relatives.

Some scholars have previously argued that this portrait was a conventional patriarchal image. For example, Jonathan Goldberg argues that the paintings and engravings of the period, including *The Saltonstall Family*, were part of a system of social control whereby patriarchy was justified as being ordained by God and part of the natural order of things. [23] Referring to this portrait in particular Goldberg writes: 'The painting is a kind of genealogical chart, suggesting the place of natural production in the patriarchal family, the family line is symbolised by the joined hands which describe a line rising to the top hat of the father.'[24] This analysis is undoubtedly correct as far as it goes, however for a godly wife and mother like Lady Elizabeth Saltonstall, accepting the rightness of patriarchy was an important part of her identity and her religious belief which played out in her daily life. Protestant advice literature widely circulated at the time stressed the requirement for household heads to become 'godly patriarchs' whose care should be for the souls in his family, an idea articulated by the influential theologian and Church of England clergyman William Perkins, who claimed that the first duty of the father of the household was:

> To be the principal agent, director and furtherer of the worship of God within his

> family … And this he doth partly by prayer for and with his household and partly by instructing them in the Holy Scriptures and in the grounds of religion that they may grow in knowledge and reap benefit by the public Ministries.[25]

Lady Elizabeth Saltonstall's identity as a pious, socially conforming and virtuous woman, wife and mother was forged in the immediate aftermath of her death in 1630, well before the portrait was completed. For example, a simple brass plaque on the wall in St Nicholas's Church, South Ockendon commemorates her death and burial. The wording of the plaque – 'The Lady Elizabeth Saltonstall her body anno domini 1630' – associates her body with the sacred space of the church, a privilege not afforded to many. More importantly, the record of her death in the South Ockendon burial register underlines her perceived piety: '1630 Maye 6. The Lady Elizabeth Saltonstall the wife of Sir Richard Saltonstall who departed the life 2i day of April:'[26] Unusually for this register, the clerk added the words *virtute vivunt mortui* (the virtuous live to die), an addition which highlights Elizabeth's particular piety and preparedness for death. Ralph Houlbrooke notes that for the godly:

> Earthly life was a long process of dying. Its most important aim should be to prepare oneself for the far more important life hereafter. The thought was expressed in countless pithy axioms and epigrams such as 'Live to die, and die to live eternally' or 'Death is the gateway to life'.[27]

Lady Elizabeth's exemplary piety was therefore established even before the portrait's commission, however, the manner of her death was important in confirming this and represented through a range of visual signals, including the fact that although she is apparently dying, her eyes are open, uplifted and she appears watchful, patient and ready, lying in a liminal state between life and death. In his popular manual on practical piety *The Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying* (1651), Jeremy Taylor advises that: 'He that would die well, must always look for Death, every day knocking at the gates of the grave, and then the gates of the grave shall never prevail on him to do him mischief.'[28] Given the importance of 'dying well', Elizabeth's raised eyes represent heavenly aspiration. As Lucinda Becker notes: 'The movement of eyes and body to heaven is commonplace in accounts of dying women and part of the process by which a woman could effectively become sanctified prior to death as the mourners sought to interpret her last actions as proof of her suitability for heaven.'[29]

For godly Protestants like the Saltonstalls the deathbed performance was public and became part of a family's collective memory recorded in a variety of ways including diaries, written testimony and even ballads.[30] It was important therefore that Lady Elizabeth's children Richard and Ann were brought to their mother's deathbed to witness her final moments so that she could be an example to them and offer the comfort of her confident faith. Ralph Houlbrooke notes that: 'The presence of large numbers of people at the deathbed was thought to be a good thing. They could not only help the dying, but also learn salutary lessons from the experience themselves.'[31] It is interesting to notice that although she is clearly not dying, the eyes of the baby Elizabeth, who was brought to the deathbed, are also raised heavenwards. As previously noted, perhaps it was hoped that she might also learn lessons from her stepmother's pious death or even prepare for her own, since even babies were encouraged to prepare for their death and one of the duties of the godly mother was to instruct her children how to die well.[32]

Preparation for death included putting one's earthly affairs in order, and for women, as mothers, that included making provision for children. With her hand outstretched towards her children Richard and Ann, Lady Elizabeth apparently simultaneously blesses them, bids them farewell and assigns their care to her husband, thereby demonstrating both her preparedness for death and indicating that her children's future safety and care is her chief concern. *The Saltonstall Family* has much in common with wider aspects of the seventeenth-century culture of death and memorialisation, specifically with the so-called 'Mothers' Legacy' genre of writing. This consisted of religious advice and moral guidance prepared for children by mothers who anticipated that they would die before their children reached maturity.[33] Lady Elizabeth's manner of death and the gesture in which she apparently consigns her children's care to their father offers them a visual sign in the same way as the written guidance.

For the artist David des Granges, this portrait was an extremely unusual one since he was principally known as a painter of miniatures.[34] However his skill in rendering fine, realistic detail in lively colours seems to have been particularly useful in the treatment of the flower border to the left of the bed. Here he has depicted narcissus, martagon lily, anemone, honeysuckle, carnation, daffodil and Madonna lily all set within a twining pattern of leaves and stems.[35] Flowers were common in portraits and other painting genres of the time where they might be associated with particular life cycle events, such as betrothal or marriage, where their fragility might suggest innocence or beauty. They also sometimes symbolised life's brevity, in which context they might be seen as *memento mori* symbols reminding viewers of their own inevitable death and the need to repent.

Although it is unconfirmed whether this was the intention with the display of flowers in *The Saltonstall Family*, it seems likely that the emphasis given to the white Madonna lily which shines out from the dark background may have had special resonance because of its association with Mary the mother of Jesus and thus with female virtue. It cannot, however, be ruled out that the flowers in the border were, more prosaically, included to identify the Saltonstall family with other wealthy merchants who benefitted from the extraordinary increase in trade and the value of plants and flowers during the first half of the seventeenth century. In particular the details of the scarlet and gold tulip bear strong resemblance to those depicted in Dutch still life painting of the time which were reflective of their high value.[36]

THE GLOVE AND THE DOOR

Two further enigmatic details in the portrait remain to be explored. The first is the intriguing detail at its centre, where a glove drops from Sir Richard's hand into that of his dying wife on the bed. Gloves were common details in early modern portraits, used as fashion accessories and symbols of status either worn or held, and as Catherine Hunt points out, were also 'associated with good faith, legal contracts, vows and promises.'[37]

It is suggested here that this elegant white glove is typical of many given as wedding or betrothal gifts in the period, what Thomas Dekker called: 'The innocent white wedding gloves', and that this glove might represent one given at the couple's wedding.[38] Sir Richard appears to be about to drop the glove into his dying wife's receptive palm and in that gesture, perhaps, in an act of memory, bids farewell both to her and to the contract of their marriage. Although its precise meaning remains unclear, as common gifts, both at weddings and funerals, the glove may be a poignant signifier of both marriage and death and as such, contain within it intimacy, tenderness and sorrow, emotions reflected in Sir Richard's sorrowful expression. As he drops the glove into the hand of his dying wife, he breaks the chain of hands and arms which link him to his first son, perhaps indicating how the ties of love are broken in death. However, as he simultaneously gestures with his left arm and looks towards his second wife Mary and their new baby, there might b a different suggestion: of hope for the future of his new family.

Another intriguing detail is the open door, its handle on the inside, at the end of the bed; this is a strange feature very rarely found in beds of the period. It is possible that the door represented a real door, left open behind the bed, although if this was the case it would have been cut into the tapestry, something which seems unlikely. Doors, particularly open doors, had particular resonance for Christians, suggested by Bible passages such as: 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hears my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me.'[39] This unusual detail may also have been included in the portrait to offer comfort to Lady Elizabeth's family, since the idea that death was merely a movement from one room to another was commonly used in funeral sermons and other writing. Lucinda Becker has drawn attention to the following passage in *Certaine Sermons of Homilies appointed to be read in churches,* a collection of sermons published regularly from 1562-1633, whose function, particularly in 'An exhortation against the feare of death' was to alleviate the fear of death:

> bodily death [is] a doore of entring into life, and therefore not so much dreadfull (if it be rightly considered) as it is comfortable; not a michiefe; no enemy, but a friend; not a cruel tyrant, but a gentle guide leading us not to mortality, but to immortality … it [is to] be thankfully taken and accepted as GODS messenger.[40]

CONCLUSION

This paper has stressed the ways in which *The Saltonstall Family* was commissioned to commemorate the piety and particular feminine virtue of Lady Elizabeth Saltonstall. It was argued that this kind of memorial portrait, which was subsequently passed down the family, served as a focus of family grief while simultaneously acting as an exemplar of feminine piety and virtue and a 'good' death for future generations. In this case, it was also argued, the presence of the new baby Elizabeth baptised in the year of the portrait's commission provided a reason for family celebration which runs counter to the sense of mourning expected on the occasion of a family death.

The paper's emphasis on the Saltonstall family's strong Protestant faith has drawn attention to its central importance in all life-cycle events in the early modern period for such godly families, something, it was asserted, which is often overlooked in discussion of apparently secular portraits in the period. It was argued that Lady Elizabeth Saltonstall's post-mortem identity as a particularly pious and virtuous wife and mother was constructed immediately after her death, as illustrated by the unusual entry in the burial record and memorial plaque in South Ockendon church. The notion that hers was a 'good' or exemplary death was explored through the portrait's visual language, including composition, gesture, facial expressions, the raised eyes, the celebratory colour palette, and enigmatic details such as the dropped glove and open door at the end of the bed.

The complex strands of the Saltonstall's family history were drawn out and set within the context of Astri Erll's 'distorting lens' of family memory. Of particular importance, it was asserted, is the eleven-year time lapse between the events depicted, and the portrait's completion, something which suggests that it was not merely the imaginative reconstruction of memories but was carefully constructed to create a specific post-mortem identity. Its strong performative elements, such as the dropping gloves and the audience of children, suggest that it was itself commissioned as an act of remembrance, perhaps what has been described as one of the duties of Christians to perform actions in order to 'do remembrance'.[41] More generally this paper has drawn attention to the often overlooked place of portraiture in the culture of commemoration and memorialisation which flourished in both secular and sacred contexts in the years after the English Reformation.

Notes

1. David des Granges, *The Saltonstall Family,* c.1641, oil on canvas, Tate Collection, London, 'The Saltonstall Family', David Des Granges, c.1636–7 | Tate (https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/des-granges-the-saltonstall-family-t02020) (Accessed 20 Sept 2023).

2. Elaine Hobby, 'Women, religion, and early modern life cycles', in eds. Caroline Bowden, Emily Vine and Tessa Whitehouse, *Religion and Life Cycles in Early Modern England* (Manchester University Press, 2021), 173.

3. Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 62-65.

4. Juan Luis Vives, *A very fruteful and pleasant booke called the Instruction of a christen woman,* trans. R. Hyde (London, 1557), Nn ii verso ff (1st edn, 1529).
5. Anthony van Dyck, *Venetia Digby on her Deathbed*, 1633, oil on canvas, Dulwich Picture Gallery; British School, *John Tradescant the elder on his Deathbed*, 1638, oil on canvas, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; John Souch, *Sir Thomas Aston at the Deathbed of his Wife,* 1635, oil on canvas, Manchester Art Gallery.
6. Nigel Llewellyn, *The Art of Death: Visual Culture in the English Death Ritual c.1500-c.1800* (Reaktion Books Ltd. 1992); Llewellyn *Funeral Monuments in Post-Reformation England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
7. Astrid Erll, 'Locating Family in Cultural Memory Studies', *Journal of Comparative Family Studies,* 42 (2011), 306-307.
8. Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 460-461.
9. William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties:* Eight Treaties (London: Printed by John Haviland for William Bladen, 1622).
10. Richard Brathwait, *The English Gentlewoman, London, 1631* (Theatrum Orbis Terrarum Ltd and Da Capo Press, 1970).
11. See for example a woodcut of a family, from *The Tenor of the Whole Psalms in Four parts*, 1563, woodcut, Bridgeman Art Image: STC347514
12. Jennifer Heller, *The Mother's Legacy in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 15.
13. Ibid.
14. For more details see: Ian W. Archer, 'Saltonstall, Sir Richard (1521?–1601)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan. 2008 [https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/24580] (accessed 30 Mar. 2023). This branch of the family also held land in Chipping Warden, Northamptonshire.
15. Thanks to Lisa Cole of Gallery Records at Tate for assigning the date of 1641 in email correspondence of 11 August 2014 which confirmed a date 'at the beginning of the 1640s' noting especially that Sir Richard's shoes are tied with a ribbon, rather than a rosette, a fashion that came in around 1641. Aileen Ribeiro and Valerie Cumming also assign the date of 1641 to this painting on the basis of the costumes, describing it as: 'A provincial family group with money to spend on good clothes, but not in step with the newest fashions.' They point to Sir Richard 'newly fashionable high-crowned hat' as indicating a date in the early 1640s, as do the style of sleeves and hair of the seated figure: Aileen Ribeiro and Valerie Cumming, *The Visual History of Costume* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1989), 113.
16. Her baptism was registered in the Register of St Gregory by St Paul, London Metropolitan Archives and her death recorded in 1637: Essex Record Office, D/P/159/1/1, Register of Baptisms Marriages and Burials for St Nicholas Church South Ockendon, 1538-1783.
17. (ERO), D/P/ 159/1/1 'Baptisings 1641: October 8 Elizabeth Saltonstall daughter of Sir Richard Saltonstall'.
18. In her will of 1651 Lady Mary Saltonstall leaves: 'all my Rings and other Jewells either of gold pearle, diamonde or other pretious stones be divided amongst my daughters'. National Archives PROB 11/308/208, Will of Dame Mary Saltonstall of South Ockendon, Essex.
19. W.R. Powell, ed, 'Parishes: South Ockendon', in *A History of the County of Essex: Volume 7* (London, 1978), 117-126, *British History Online,* Parishes: South Ockendon | British History Online (https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/essex/vol7/pp117-126) (Accessed 19 Sept. 2023).
20. Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman,* 29.
21. National Archives PROB 11/308/208, Will of Dame Mary Saltonstall of South Ockendon, Essex.
22. Tate, 'David des Granges, *The Saltonstall Family*, c. 1636-7' 'The Saltonstall Family', David Des Granges, c.1636–7 | Tate (Accessed 19 Sept 2023).
23. Jonathan Goldberg, 'Fatherly Authority: The Politics of Stuart Family Images', in *Re-Writing the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe,* ed. Maureen Quilligan, Margaret Ferguson, Nancy Vickers (Chigago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 3-31.
24. Ibid.
25. Perkins*, The Workes,* iii.
26. (ERO) D/P/159/1/1 'Register of Baptisms Marriages and Burials for St Nicholas Church South Ockendon. 1538, 1630'.
27. Ralph Houlbrooke, 'The Puritan Death-Bed, *C.* 1560-*C.*1660', in Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales eds, *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 129.
28. Jeremy Taylor, *The rule and exercises of holy dying* (1651, Printed London, 1715), 37.
29. Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman,* 62.
30. Unknown author, *A Hundred Godly Lessons. / That a Mother on her Death-bed gave to her Children, whereby they may know how to guide themselves towards God and Man, / to the benefit of the Common-wealth, joy of their Parents, and good of themselves* (Printed for F. Coles, T. Vere, J. Wright and J. Clarke, 1674-1679).
31. Houlbrooke, 'The Puritan Death-Bed', 123.
32. Becker, *Death and the Early-Modern Englishwoman*, 19.
33. Heller, *The Mother's Legacy.*
34. John Murcoch, 'des Granges David (bap 1611, *d.* in or before 1672?)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2008, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/7545 (Accessed 19 Sept 2023).
35. Thanks to Dr Jill Francis for help in identifying these flowers.
36. Jill Francis, *Gardens and Gardening in Early Modern England and Wales, 1560-1660* (Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Yale University Press, 2018)
37. Catherine Hunt, 'The Saltonstall Family: A Study of Time, Space and Memory' in *Artibus et Historiae*, 75 (2017), 183.
38. Thomas Dekker, *Satiromastix or the Untrussing of the Humerous Poet,* Act 1 scene i. In *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker,* ed., Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953).
39. Revelations 3:20.
40. Quoted by Becker, *Death and the Early Modern Englishwoman,* 12.
41. Andrew Gordon, and Thomas Rist, eds *The Arts of Remembrance in Early Modern England: Memorial Cultures of the Post Reformation* (Surrey, England and Vermont, U.S.A.: Ashgate, 2013), 3-15.

Rethinking the experience of women in the Nupi Lan during the British colonial rule

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The erstwhile kingdom of Manipur came under the control of British India after the defeat of Manipur in the Anglo-Manipuri War of 1891. During the British colonial administration, which lasted until 1947, many new colonial reforms and policies, which were 'foreign' to the people of Manipur, were introduced. Such introduction of colonial reforms indicated how the colonial power operated in a highly controlling manner that obviated the socio-economic and cultural norms of the local people and ignored their spatial realities. Enforcement of these policies, which were beneficial economically and politically to the empire, caused anger and frustration among the locals. In particular, protests led by Manipuri women caused huge disruptions in the functioning of the empire. Commemorated as brave and a symbol of anti-imperialism, the narratives about these women are made to fit in the broader discourse of the anti-colonial struggle that was occuring in the sub-continent. No doubt, Manipuri women were the pioneers of the protest movement, but their struggle was more a representation of their dissatisfaction with the political and economic policies implemented by the British, which threatened their livelihood. Scholarly works on the commemoration of Nupi Lan are non-existent, and commemoration events rarely discuss these women's understanding and articulation of the local economy, labour and market. In this paper, I am revisiting the unique historical event of Nupi Lan (Women's War) in Manipur to analyze the nature of commemoration by the state and people, which led to a particular discourse on how these women are remembered. The paper aims to draw forth and reveal how Manipuri women articulated and expressed their roles in labour, the market and the economy, thereby challenging the established notions of valiant women shaped by commemorative events and memorial performances.

COMMEMORATION: SELECTIVE MEMORY

Commemoration is the fulfilment of the promise to remember, carrying the weight of marking and exploring the significance behind the triumphs and trials of our forebearers.[1] This implies that the decisions we make regarding 'whom to remember, what to remember, where to commemorate', and how to convey the importance of remembrance are not only reflections of the past but also vital considerations for the future.[2] However, in her work, *Ethics of Commemoration*, Yuki Miyamoto argues that the inherent distinctiveness of the deceased is not respected but rather compromised. Narratives about the deceased are fabricated to advance the agendas of the living. This argument underscores the neglect of the distinct life stories of the departed in favour of narratives that aligned with the nation-state's objectives.[3] Some researchers have argued the advantage of commemoration is that it acts as a unifying force where diverse members of a community can individually, yet harmoniously, contemplate, pay tribute to, and preserve the memory of those who have passed away.[4] In South Asia, commemorating historically significant events and figures are widespread. This often leads to debates among diverse ethno-nationalist and linguistic groups, challenging the relevance of the events being commemorated. Studies have explored these complex dynamics and the region's multifaceted and gendered nature of commemoration.[5]

In Manipur, the women of Nupi Lan have been commemorated and associated with resistance to authoritarianism making them 'heroic and brave women who fought against the Britishers'. Through this paper, I intend to provide new insights into commemoration of the Nupi Lan by excavating the political and economic dimensions of this women's war. By analysing what aspect of the war is remembered and commemorated, this paper will pinpoint how the state historicised the identities of the women of Nupi Lan through claims of valiant and intrepid women heroes.

The Nupi Lan and post-Second World War merger of Manipur into the Indian Union in 1949 have long served as a fundamental reference point in understanding and writing Manipur's history. These historical events have been an influential instrument in understanding the struggles of the people who were affected both in terms of their identity and political aspirations. There is a corpus of works on the pre-modern history of Manipur focusing on the Anglo-Burmese War of 1824-1826, also known as 'Chahi Taret Khuntakpa' or Seven Years Devastation, and the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891. These works document the rivalries and violent clashes of the time and various facets of spatiotemporal dimension. However, in the post-colonial period, the historiography of the women's movement and the merger agreement of 1949 have been ingrained as a critical moment that instilled renewed historical thinking in Manipur. The women-led movement of Nupi Lan of 1904 and 1939-40 exemplify a historical element that evoked much interest, research and inquiry into women's agency. Therefore, it is important to identify and recognise how, in a conventional historical setting, conjoined with a thorough understanding of repressive colonial economic policies and social and political injustice, these women, rather than disadvantaging themselves, have contributed to the market economy.

Each year, on 12 December, the state government of Manipur observes and commemorates the Nupi Lan Memorial Day. In recognition of the bravery of these women, the state government of Manipur has installed the Nupi Lan Memorial Complex. This commemorative framework reveals how the government endorses a

certain aspect of a monumental historic event for public consumption, memorialisation and continuity of a shared past, illuminating profound national morale. Amos Funkenstein emphasises that nations are intended to remember their heroes 'forever', as perpetuating someone's memory involves firmly embedding it within the collective consciousness.[6] Further, Hamzah Muzaini highlights the state's practice of engraving the past into physical spaces to create platforms to collectively invoke the memory of a historical event.[7] The commemorative event of the Nupi Lan is also visible through various acts such as bike rallies, women participating in the Nupi Lan Memorial Run in traditional Manipuri attire, blood donations, and drawing competitions with the participation of several women's groups and civil society organisations.[8] For a peripheral region like Manipur, which has a deeply complex history marked by economic injustice and subjugation under colonial rule, commemorating the courageous and heroic aspect of the women's war reflects an attempt by the state government to equalise Manipur's might and power with the British. Yet, the important question remains as to whether the state's commemorative policy is an in-dept recognition and acknowledgement of the life stories of the women.

COLONIAL RULE AND REFORMS AND THE FIRST NUPI LAN

Historically, Manipur had an active movement of people and goods with neighbouring Burma, which extended to East Asia and China.[9] In addition, Manipur also had a hostile relationship with Burma, characterised by constant battles and ruinous violence.[10] The British sided with Manipur and halted further Burmese incursion into Manipur by signing the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826 at the end of the First Anglo-Burmese War.[11] However, after the Anglo-Manipur War of 1891, the British conquered Manipur. It was not just mere conquest but also strategically advantageous for British India with the historic opportunity to gain a stronghold and commercial footing in East Asia and beyond. In Manipur, British India operated through a system of regency from 1891 to 1907 until the minor prince came of age.[12] It was a form of indirect or native rule. For the British, this system was more economically viable than direct annexation.[13] Regency allowed 'semi-autonomous native rulers', to govern, in tandem with a British Political agent, which helped maintain and preserve native culture and tradition with limited interference in governance by the British.[14] With the accession of the Manipuri King in 1907, the British operated through the Manipur State Durbar with the king as the president of the Durbar and the British Political Agent as the Vice President. Later, in 1913, after the restructuring of the Manipur State Durbar, a British officer became the president of the Durbar.

Subsequently, the period of British domination in Manipur was marked by the introduction of various reforms, which caused severe impairment in the lives of its colonial subjects. For example, the introduction of a house tax of two rupees (Rs) per house in the valley and three rupees per house in the hill areas and the collection of land revenue by the British were alien concepts to the Manipuri community. Since antiquity, land in Manipur was held in ownership by the seven different Meitei clans.[15] The self-sufficient economy thrived on cultivating agricultural land and 'internal trade by women'.[16] As a result of the British land revenue and tax policies, they effectively controlled and exploited impoverished Manipuri subjects, extracting substantial profits in the form of revenues.[17] The house tax came into force with the abolition of the Lallup system on 29 April 1892 'to provide for the necessary expenditure on public works'.[18] In the initial phase, the tax was collected as paddy or kind.[19] Thereafter, the British collected tax in cash with the inception of the Patta system (land deed). The imposition of a rigid tax system induced a heavy burden and bitter resentment amongst the masses. The economic and political reforms resulting from colonial domination manifested a political consciousness in the lives of the Manipuri people. The First Nupi Lan of 1904 perfectly exemplifies the political change of that time.

Manipuri women played a central role in both the home and the local market economy through harvesting and selling their produce in markets, making them indispensable in every sphere of Manipuri society. Notably, women were the sole traders engaging in internal trade in the marketplace and nearby open spaces. Indeed, many British political agents and representatives remarked on the laborious and diligent nature of the Manipuri women compared to their counterparts in India and elsewhere.[20] Moreover, they observed how women asserted themselves in matters that concerned the market and their income.[21] This indicates that the market for the Manipuri women was not just a territorial unit but a space for sustenance with strong socio-political ties. In his book *The Meitheis*, TC Hodson relates how 'women hold a high and free position in Manipur, and all the internal trade and exchange and produce of the country were being managed by them'. According to him, 'the habit of this country is to have bazaars at convenient spots'.[22] For example, Sana Keithel (market), established by King Mogenba around 1580 and which still functions as an important market, highlights women's historical engagement in the local economy.[23] Similarly, the Khwairamband Keithel, where Manipuri women traded their goods, has functioned since the reign of King Khunjaoba (1652-1666 AD).[24] In a similar vein, James Johnstone, the political agent of Manipur from 1877 to 1886, noted how women were great traders in the marketplace.[25] The market sold all kinds of goods like food, clothes, and household items. However, the main trading item was rice. Manipuri men did not 'frequent the market' often as it was considered impolite by the womenfolk.[26]

In 1904, there were several fires, including ones on 15 March 1904 at the state bungalows of Captain Nuttall and tutor Mr Dunlop. These were followed by a fire on 6 July that burned down twenty-eight sheds in the Khwairamband Market, in which around 3000 market women undertook their business.[27] However, the British declared that the 4 August fire that destroyed the state bungalow of the assistant political agent was a deliberate incendiary attack. The British believed it was instigated by the princes in a protest over the installation of a minor prince by the British, but a police inquest into the matter was inconclusive.[28] As a result of this, the British, as a

punishment, reinstated the Lallup System, which required the Manipuri men to rebuild the charred bungalows without pay.[29] This decree reinforced the view amongst the colonised subjects that the empire was exploitative by nature, and that any opposition from people the British considered inferior would never be tolerated.[30] This sense of incredulity over the political experience of colonised people to respond and resist colonial practice is, in fact, a key attribute of colonialism that undermines the political ability of the community.[31] However, by resisting and expressing their beliefs in a colonial setting, women's resistance to the restoration of the Lallup system allowed a distinctive feature of collective consciousness to flourish. Under the Lallup system, women suffered enormously as they had to pay for a substitute when their men were ill and unable to work during the proscribed periods of obligatory labour.[32] This fractured the household income and created a circumstance in which women had no means to supplement their income. As a result, Manipuri women took this reimposition of a previously abolished system of free labour as punishment and an act of colonial prejudice that hurt them both economically and politically.

Consequently, to draw attention to this injustice, around 3000 women protested outside the political agent's bungalow in Imphal early in the morning of 5 October 1904.[33] As recorded in the archive by the British political agent, the women angrily yelled at him that as a consequence of their husbands refusing 'to work at the bungalow, and as they, the women, were the breadwinners, the cost of any order I gave them would fall on them'.[34] In view of this protest, the British engaged police personnel to curb the huge crowd of women. At the same time, the political agent remarked, 'it is difficult to treat a mob of wild cats like this … while the Manipuri men were sulking in their houses'.[35] This clearly illustrates the British empire's reliance on coercive tactics to control the Manipuris, where they suppressed the voices and resistance of women by unfairly labelling them as 'wild cats'. Furthermore, it gives an insight into an imperial perception that determined women and men should have appropriate separate spheres in matters of the affairs of the state.[36] In Manipur women made up a substantial part of the labour force, and in the socio-cultural context of the period, a strict gender hierarchy was absent.[37] The revival of the Lallup system was guided by British economic interest that aimed to exploit unpaid labour, undermining the fabric of traditional Manipuri society where female labour is intricately intertwined with work-life balance and family responsibilities.

On the whole, it burdened and violated the socio-economic well-being of Manipuri women. For example, it created a considerable distressing challenge for women to exert twice the effort to provide for the family and oversee household chores in their husbands' absence. How did Manipuri women transform themselves from market sellers into political actors who understood the colonial economy and sparked a revolution? Perhaps such a historic defining act by Manipuri women has forged an awe-inspiring effect on the masses and in the annals of Manipur's history.

THE KING, THE DURBAR AND FREE TRADE POLICY

Manipur was an agrarian society dominated by the cultivation of rice.[38] People practised wet cultivation in the valley, and Manipuri women played an important role in cultivating and trading rice in the market.[39] However, when the British adopted the policy of free trade, the economy of Manipur drastically changed. The British reduced taxes on many items and encouraged the export and import of a number of goods in Manipur. For example, foreigners, particularly the Marwari traders, 'migrated from Rajasthan take over the trade and mercantile activities'.[40] Furthermore, the Marwari businessmen were primarily settled in the British reserve areas under the protection of the British political agent and fell outside the purview of state police jurisdiction.[41] They were actively encouraged by the British to engage in external trade in Manipur, thus exercising a colonial power hierarchy by fostering a reliance on external traders with a profit-driven approach. As a consequence, the self-sufficient rice economy of Manipur was completely destroyed.

Philip Ehrensaft argues how peripheral societies are shaped by, but not solely determined by, their reliance on the global political economy. Despite operating within the broader context of imperial domination, these societies have their own distinct structures, realities, and dynamics.[42] Thus implementing policies promoting the monetisation and commercialisation of agriculture crippled both local rice production and exportation.[43] During the period under consideration, the export contract was under the control of Marwari traders. Permits were required for rice exports, along with a cart tax imposed to regulate the trade, as mandated by the British agent.[44] However, in 1912, a significant change occurred when the authorisation for rice export was delegated to a trading company in exchange for a fixed payment. This alteration was exploited by the Marwari traders in Manipur during the 1920s, leading to increased rice exports.[45] As a result of this oppressive colonial policy, Manipuri women collectively resisted by boycotting the bazaar in September 1920. In Yambem's view, the economic significance of women in the state cannot be overstated, and their market boycott had a profound impact on the economy, akin to a widespread strike, which led to significant disruptions.[46] The women stopped selling rice to the Marwari traders and demanded the following concessions from the king and the Durbar (as quoted in archival documents):

1. Price of rice has gone high because foreign shopkeepers purchase it.
2. To stop export of rice.
3. Not to allow any Manipuri men and women to enter Marwari shops to sell anything or purchase anything.
4. To allow them to sit daily bazar (sic) in the State Military Police ground (the King denied this demand).
5. To stop arresting person (sic) in the bazar (sic)

and keep them in the Quater guard.

6. To order Village Chowkidars and others to stop purchasing large quantity of rice by the shopkeepers who live in the village except for their own consumption(use).[47]

This boycott elucidates how Manipuri women demonstrated control over the resources they produced, voicing and exercising their agency by setting ultimatums and threats against colonial exploitation. Their experiences during times of change and circumstances, from pre-colonial to colonial settings, transformed these ordinary market women. The market became the site of protest activity where women expressed their grievances and negotiated their political and economic rights. According to Routledge, activists utilise and modify ordinary spaces as they engage in protest, generating not only locations of defiance but also spaces where alternative visions and symbolic confrontations can materialise.[48] Women formed collective solidarity and fought against any British colonial policies that affected their livelihood and the functioning of society at large.[49] This was evident in 1925 when Manipuri women demonstrated their influence by spearheading widespread protests against the imposition of water and vehicle taxes.[50] To solely label these women's action as brave and fearless is a shallow reading of the life histories of these women. Through economic empowerment, the Manipuri women have cultivated economic literacy, which is reflective in their protests that defied and questioned the capitalist political economy of the British empire. Additionally, the collective resistance displayed by the women clearly underlined their political consciousness and their status in the Manipuri society. Therefore, while remembering and commemorating these women, we should honour them in their historical entirety and not selectively remember what suits the political imagination of the present. As Jenny Edkins argues, merely alluding to a recognized narrative symbolically is no longer satisfactory; it is now necessary to explicitly articulate the story.[51]

THE SECOND NUPI LAN 1939-1940

Despite women's protests and market boycotts, colonial oppression persisted, which resulted in a continued conflict between Manipuri women and Marwari traders.[52] The implementation of free trade policies resulted in the gradual erosion of the traditional market system, which posed a formidable challenge to the Manipuri community, including increased food prices and an acute shortage of food. Furthermore, drought exacerbated the situation, hampering agricultural productivity, as farmers struggled to cultivate sufficient food and grains.[53] Karam Manimohan, who has written extensively on the history and political movements in Manipur, emphasised how both the king and the 'British Paramount power' disregarded the grievances and demands of the people and instead sought to suppress the voices of the people.[54]

Thus, the continued oppression and indifference by the ruling authority served as the catalyst for the Nupi Lan of 1939. The public and the state memorialise this women's war of 1939-40, and it has received much scholarly attention from academics in political science, sociology and anthropology. There are a number of possible reasons why this war has remained in the public memory. Firstly, it may be because this Nupi Lan was fought for over a year; secondary factors may be the onset of the Second World War in Manipur, then subsequently the end of British colonial rule in 1947, and the merger with the Indian Union in 1949. Thus, the period from 1939 to 1949 shrouded Manipur with innumerable fears, displacements and political instability. After merging with India, the Manipur state has attempted to reconstruct part of its historical narrative to fit in with the anti-colonial historical discourse adopted by the postcolonial Indian state. In particular, the commemoration of the women of Nupi Lan as valiant women who fought against the mighty Britishers is a reconstruction of the women's experience to fit the official state narrative, which I believe is the selective reading of history. One more reason for this projection is to create a sense of historical continuity and identity of Manipur as a formidable state with a distinct cultural past.

As with the earlier period of Nupi Lan, rice remained the main item that women traded. Extensive destruction of standing crops and grains in 1939 due to heavy rainfall, and the continuous hoarding of rice produce in Manipur for export by Marwari traders, combined to severely impact the Manipuri community and resulted in dire circumstances.[55] Additionally, Parratt and Parratt have pointed out how rice production had steadily declined over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries due to limited land for cultivation and increased population size.[56] This situation in Manipur clearly illustrates how the colonial view of the region as merely a source of raw materials and revenue generation had devastating consequences.[57]

Consequently, on 11 December 1939, around 4,000 Manipuri women approached the Durbar to stop the export of rice owing to the recent abnormal price rise during the harvest season. However, the Manipur State Durbar declined to pass an order as the king was not in station.[58] On 12 December 1939, a large protest erupted at the telegraph office in Imphal, with thousands of women demanding an end to rice exports. Approximately twelve women were imprisoned for one month on charges of obstructing bullock carts and protesting against colonial economic policies.[59] The women encircled and blocked the British officer, TA Sharpe, from leaving his office until there was a response from the king to stop the export of rice. The protest turned violent as women threw stones, resulting in a clash with sepoys. Several women sustained injuries from bayonets used by the sepoys, with the British authorities justifying their use of force, citing the stone-throwing. It is important to highlight here that employing violent tactics to subdue its colonial subjects is a characteristic feature of the British empire.[60]

Nonetheless, women protesters became increasingly agitated and blocked the exit of rice lorries and prevented carts from entering Manipur. The utilisation of force became even more evident when the British political agent resorted to deploying platoons to suppress the protest, but the women persisted in their resistance.[61]

The situation was ameliorated later in the afternoon when the Political Agent Gimson received a telegraph from the Maharajah, who immediately requested a halt to the export of rice.[62] Furthermore, women protesters in Manipur also vandalised rice mills owned by Marwari traders as a mark of protest.

Thus, the women's resistance movement in Manipur illustrates the robust networks established by women through their expertise in producing and selling rice and other goods. It underscores their profound understanding of Manipur's market economy. Despite facing socio-political challenges that posed obstacles to their efforts, these women displayed resilience and adeptly negotiated power dynamics with external forces. Indeed, this war highlights how the lack of formal education, and the marginal aspect of the self, did not limit the women of the Nupi Lan in making choices and overcoming coercive forces.

The other side of women's expereiences

Throughout the ages to the present, the contribution of Manipuri women to the socio-economic and cultural spheres is of great importance.[63] For instance, one can witness women actively engaging in various occupations passionately. They can be seen energetically selling fruits, vegetables, fish, clothes, and other goods. Additionally, they play a vital role in fostering critical political debates and facilitating deliberations in the public sphere. As seen in the Nupi Lan of 1904 and 1939, these women-led movements are etched in the collective memory of Manipur's modern history. These events hold a special place in the historical consciousness of Manipur, with women's roles being remembered and commemorated for their bravery and resilience during these pivotal moments in Manipur's history. Though the state government recognised the struggles of these women, what is missing is the failure to locate the intellectual and negotiation skills they acquired during the course of colonial rule and how they emerged as influencers of political and economic change.

The commemoration of these two Nupi Lan, as discussed in previous sections, is marked by various forms of celebration, including the installation of the Nupi Lan Memorial Complex, which houses a museum where photos of the women of the Nupi Lan are displayed and statues have been erected in their honour.[64] Museums are valuable sites to educate the general masses and commemorate historical events. However, Amy Sodaro points out that every museum also has its unique connection to history, authenticity and truth, but this connection can complicate their endeavour to be 'houses of history', while embracing the new historiographical trends that have emerged in the twenty-first century.[65] Various civil society organisations and women's groups also commemorate these events, such as women performing plays enacting the Nupi Lan, prose and poetry competitions and essay competitions.[66] Such commemorative acts demonstrate how, historically and culturally, the women of the war are profoundly embedded in the minds of the Manipuris. In their work, *Reweaving the Past,* Michelle LeBaron and Paulette Regan pinpoint that in certain instances, these forms of expression act as influential drivers of change, while in other instances, they uphold the existing state of affairs.[67]

While the narrative associated with these commemoration sites and practices acknowledges the courage of the women who participated in the two Nupi Lan, the historical narrative surrounding the remembrance of the First Nupi Lan is often limited to portraying Manipuri women as standing against the British policy of 'forced labour'; the emphasis is placed on their bravery in freeing their men from undue labour. This portrayal of women is redundant as in a familial structure, the lives of men and women are entwined and woven together, and forced labour is a financial aspect that affects the entire household. Women subject to British colonial rule criticised the various forms of taxation and colonial policies imposed by the British from time to time, and the Manipuri women's efforts should be put into this context. A similar case of women's protest, is the Igbo Women's War of 1929 in Nigeria, where women demanded to reverse colonial policies that infringed upon their participation in socio-political matters within their local communities.[68] The practice of free labour was widespread in the British colonies. Moreover, forced labour was pervasive during the colonial era across various regions of the sub-continent, with individuals from marginalized communities being subjected to demands to provide labour without receiving fair wages. In the Asssam tea plantations, also known as Planter's Raj, the wages of the labourers were extremely low, and due to inhuman working conditions there were 'high mortality rates'.[69] Similarly, under British colonial rule in Africa, the populations were subjected to forced or compulsory labour to build railways and transport facilities.[70] Recognising and understanding the historical context of forced labour is crucial to understand the colonial era's social, economic and political dynamics and its impact on marginalised communities.[71]

What has not been commemorated at a commensurate level is women's political action against colonial economic policy. The first Nupi Lan needs to be seen from the broader prism of how it affected the economy of the princely state controlled by the British political agent. These women brought back the discourse of 'dignity of labour' by strongly opposing the British imposition of the Lallup system while foregrounding Manipuri women's significant role in the market and society. The women's fight against this unfair system elucidates how they steered through and questioned the coercive capitalist practice of the British empire.

Similarly, the Second Nupi Lan was a collective fight of women against the British political agent colonial trade and labour exploitation. Women actively safeguarded their labour rights and the marketplace by mobilising women across the state during the second Nupi Lan. Women during this war faced violence, imprisonment and expulsion from the market.[72] The women's opposition to the British policy of rice export and the monopoly of 'outsider' Marwaris from Manipur reflected their profound understanding of the local economy and the detrimental impact of rice export on their livelihoods. Their struggle compelled the British to alter their rice export policy, resulting in relief for the local population, especially women and their everyday

lives. However, the underlying cause of challenging the British political economy was overshadowed and received less attention. This suggests that the framing of Manipuri women as 'brave' conforms to the state narratives of fighting might with power, making the women's historical experience irrelevant. That the British authorities conceded to the women's demands aligns with the historical and cultural expectations that the state uses to structure its historical narrative. Tina O'Toole points out how state-sponsored commemorative events frequently demonstrate a proclivity for oversimplifying history, thereby strengthening the particular origin myths and shaping national allegiance or identity.[73] Additionally, the adoption of 'brave women' reflects how the state reinforces a masculine domain and identity, thus altering and marginalising women's experience.

In other spaces, women have taken initiatives to recognize the women who participated in war efforts and revolutionary movements. For instance, in her work *Women and the Decade of Commemoration*, Oona Frawley points out that 'commemorations of this decade have marked out a space that sees women permanently lifted out of the footnotes and brought into the text'.[74] Laura McAtackney, in the same book, underlined how in the commemorative event of 2016, women of the 1916 Irish Revolution were remembered in both national and international media.[75] Though these works are examples of how women are celebrated where society has side-lined women's contribution to the nation's cause, in Manipur, women are commemorated with selective memorialisation. While the commemoration of Nupi Lan is ubiquitous in Manipur, the general masses seem to have consumed the official historical narrative of the state. It is important to analyse the intricacies of women's stories as visibility through institutionalised 'invented tradition', where the past suits the present, seems inadequate.[76] Instead, the state should understand these women and their experiences in terms of how they could comprehend and analyse a different worldview on the questions of political economy rather than merely characterising them as participants of the protest and waging war against the empire. Similarly, scholars and the public alike must delve into archival sources and organise public forums to discuss and trace the trajectory of their transcendence from ordinary women in order to understand and challenge complex colonial structures. In addition, the public should aspire to bring out an alternative discourse where the women of Nupi Lan were ground-breaking and ahead of their own time in articulating matters which would have been incomprehensible even to people of their own generation.

CONCLUSION

Although ruling indirectly through the office of Residency, the British policies in the princely state of Manipur were primarily geared towards benefitting the empire. Imposing heavy taxation, enacting forced labour and giving control of the import-export of rice to 'outsiders' by the British proved detrimental to the local economy and livelihood of the local population. Manipuri women, who played an active role in the private and public sphere, resisted the British imperial policies in 1904 and 1939, respectively. The memory of the women's resistance, known as the two Nupi Lans, is not limited to academic and literary works but has also become part of official and unofficial commemorations in Manipur. While re-examining and exploring the experiences of women in their interactions with the British Empire during two Nupi Lans, I argue that the dominant narrative of 'valiant women' against the 'mighty Empire' is just one perspective, and one needs to consider other aspects, such as the challenge which women posed to the political economy of the British Empire during the two Nupi Lan.

The first Nupi Lan against the British cannot be viewed solely as a rebellion against the system of Lallup but as a response to multiple oppressive policies enacted by the colonial administration. Heavy taxation, including house tax, had severe repercussions on the impoverished Manipuri population including women, who played significant roles in the public sphere. During the first Nupi Lan, women's resistance not only challenged the colonial imposition of 'free work' demanded from marginalised subjects but also redefined the nature of labour. It was a dual challenge to the exploitative taxation policy and the colonial logic of forced labour. Similarly, the Second Nupi Lan was a confrontation by women against British economic policies. However, commemorating this historically significant event often focuses solely on the day when thousands of women protested at the post office against rice exportation. Women did show exemplary bravery by standing up against coercive measures while passionately fighting for their cause, and the event has become an essential part of the collective memory of the Manipuris who commemorate this day. However, there is much more to this event that needs to be recognised and understood beyond just that particular day. While revisiting the Second Nupi Lan through the framework of commemoration and using archival material, I strongly argue that it is imperative to commemorate not only the actions of these courageous women during the protests but also the aftermath that resulted in significant changes in British policies. Acknowledging the enduring impact and consequences of their resistance to shaping the historical narrative is important. Thus, the commemoration of the two Nupi Lans in Manipur, like many other spaces in South Asia and beyond, carries a gendered significance. These commemorations should go beyond the spectacle of protests and be seen as a profound challenge to British colonial commercialisation, monetisation, and consumerism policies. It is essential to understand the broader socio-economic and political implications of this historical event in shaping the narrative of resistance against colonial exploitation.

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WOMEN IN STREET NAMES PROJECT[1]

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The 'Women in Street Names' project was launched stemming from a talk about the first woman chartered surveyor at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) Library in July 2019 (an expanded version of this talk was presented at the WHN Conference in the same year). It emerged from an interest in women's biographies and in the continued under-representation of women in senior leadership roles. The first element of the project, exploring women's lives, grew from an on-going compilation of women 'firsts' which, in turn started with a lecture slide on early women lawyers, through my day job as a law lecturer.[2]

This first strand of the project is a book and webpage of biographical notes on some of the women who have a street named after them in the United Kingdom. Discovering forgotten lives, learning more about vaguely recalled names, along with re-considering more well-known women has been a complete pleasure and indulgence with inspiration, awe and entertainment at every turn.

The second strand considers the wider issues surrounding the importance of the visibility of women in public spaces. There is an enduring problem of a lack of women in senior leadership roles.[3] Even with greater numbers of women now going into many (although not all) professional spheres, it is still a wide-based triangle. The reasons for this lack are complex and some issues discouraging women from high office also dissuade men – the hours and demands of such roles, and social media intrusion, for example.[4] Women are certainly self-selecting out of public roles for these reasons. Although this affects all genders, there is still a disproportionate impact on women and those who do not identify as male and, probably, also men who are not white or heterosexual, as a look at some recent numbers will attest:[5]

Some women (and men) self-select out of senior office, for sound reasons; they do not *want* a more senior role. They may not relish the pressure, *rightly* assess that they do not have the required qualities (a complex matter in itself, with gendered considerations of self-evaluation, development opportunities and more), or want more time for family, hobbies, voluntary work, for example – all good reasons where such decisions are grounded in truth. What *is* an issue is that capable women who would excel at the next level are not applying for roles as they simply do not consider themselves to be eligible, *wrongly* self-evaluating that they do not have the required qualities.

How does the public commemoration of women in street names fit into this? It draws on the parallel themes of why history matters and why *women's* history matters.[13] It feeds into a consideration of the subliminal and not so subliminal messages picked up from the cradle onwards – the subtle, but persistent, culturalisation that builds up day by day and how the relative lack of female representation in public spaces reflects and supports this. What impact does this have (or, indeed, not have) on the self-perception and personal development of individual women and girls and, in turn, on career progression, particularly in their pursuit of senior roles?

Reflecting on public representation led to thoughts of statues. The importance of women's history and the public presence of women has been considered over decades. In 1975 and 1986, US historian Gerda Lerner discussed how statuary is influenced by, and influences, the growth and reinforcement of a male dominated society and ideals.[14] This discussion was further expanded on by Chin and Bergman, regarding both the visibility of women and the commemoration of the specific histories of the statue subjects.[15] Statues were also highlighted in the UK with regards to race, but also to gender, with Caroline Criado-Perez reporting in 2016 that of the 925 statues recorded by the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association, less than 3% (twenty five) were of named, non-fictional, non-royal women.[16] The study ruefully

Roles in UK	Percentage of Women in Role
Members of Parliament	35%[6]
House of Lords	29%[6]
Cabinet	30%[6]
FTSE 350 boards	40%[7]
University Professors	28%[8]
University Vice Chancellors	24%[9]
Supreme Court judges	17%[10]
Court judges	35%[11]
Tribunal judges	52%[11]
Military officers	14%[12]

observed that there were more statues of men called John, than of non-fictional, non-royal women. Likewise, in 2018, Allison Vale found only 12% (111) of London's 903 Blue Plaques commemorated women.[17] There is a movement, albeit slow, to address these issues, with the erection of some significant statues in recent years. These include well-known figures, such as the somewhat controversial piece commemorating, although not *of*, Mary Wollstonecraft in Newington Green, London (*A Sculpture for Mary Wollstonecraft* by Maggi Hambling, unveiled in November 2020) and five statues in Wales.[18] The first Welsh statue erected was of educator Betty Campbell (1934-2017), unveiled in Cardiff in September 2021, followed by a statue of writer, Elaine Morgan (1920-2013) in Mountain Ash, in the Rhondda Valley. Further statues are planned of writer, Sarah Jane Rees, generally known by her bardic name, Cranogwen (1839-1916) in Llangranog; Lady Rhondda (1883-1958) planned for Newport; and Labour politician, Elizabeth Andrews (1882-1960) planned for Penderyn.[19]

As well as statues or blue (and other coloured) plaques, one could consider building names, the work of female artists, references in museums and galleries, paintings and photographs of women and much more, but street names were chosen for their enduring form, often local interest and, by definition, public positioning. Whilst lacking the clear representation of person that statues bring, and with the frustrating tendency to use only first names or surnames, thus losing the reference to the person commemorated, street names still bring some women's names to the public consciousness and sub-consciousness.[20]

While not an original idea, existing projects, at home and abroad, have tended to concentrate on one city, usually the capital. For example, there is the international Equal Street Names project and the Sankaranarayanan's study of seven cities in 2015 that looked at Bengaluru, Chennai, Mumbai and New Delhi in India along with London, Paris, and San Francisco.[21] Both the Sankaranarayanan project and the Equal Street Names project rely on software analysis and a cursory review highlighted omissions and discrepancies.

This project is, inevitably, random. In celebrating the stories of some of the women named, there is no pretence to full coverage. Reviewing every hamlet, village, town and city in the UK cannot, and will not, be attempted, but a goodly sample has been, and continues to be, gathered.

There has been interest from academics, local councillors, museums, history groups, tour guides, women's associations and individuals with over 500 names collected to date. The links made with people from around the nation, and beyond, is a serendipitous consequence of the project. Although it has shortcomings that inevitably favour a methodology dependent on simply spreading the word, it gains in focussing on local knowledge that is lost in systematic coverage. In contrast to computer-based studies, the projext benefits from bringing in the backstories of first names, knowing to whom surnames relate and, importantly and invaluably, providing details of local, often undigitized archives that do not always emerge from online searches.

Not all streets and women found will make it into the proposed book of biographical notes. For many first name only thoroughfares, time constraints preclude ascertaining reliable provenance. Such streets are often named for family members of original landowners, the developers or the builders. However, some will be explored, such as the ten streets in Saltaire, West Yorkshire named for the wife, daughters, daughters-in-law and a granddaughter of the industrialist Sir Titus Salt (1803-1876), and Constance (1890-1977), Dorothy (1889-1946) and Gwendolen (1887-1978) Roads in Leicester, named for the daughters of Arthur Wakerley (1862-1931), the influential late Victorian politician and architect of modern Leicester. Both groups of women have significant local relevance, albeit their positions and street names were gained through their male relatives.

Others likely to be omitted are royalty and aristocracy. These are not dismissed out of hand. They were people too, and many engaged in notable charitable and other work, such as Countess Bathurst (1871-1965), *The Morning Post* newspaper owner (Countess Lilias Close, Cirencester, Gloucestershire). Although respectful of their prominence, Queens Victoria and Elizabeth will not feature, however other royals *will* be included for historical and local relevance, such as Empress Maud (c1102-1167), also known as Matilda, represented in Littlehampton, West Sussex (Empress Maude Terrace), to commemorate her landing there from France in 1139. The more common saints will also be ignored, not least because there are so many St Annes, and the like (i.e. different saints, not just different streets). Finding the right one can be clear where there is a related church and/or school but that is often not the case. Some saints, mystics and others whose lives were shaped by their religion will, however, be included for their stories, local or otherwise. Although they may appear, *prima facie*, to add little to a consideration of the impact of the public representation of women, there is a discussion to be had about the impact of religious women, some of whom carved an independent life in a patriarchal society.[22] Such women represented in their local area include Julian of Norwich (c1342-c1416, Mother Julian Close, Thetford and St Julian's Alley, Norwich) and the nineteenth century nun, social worker and teacher, Elizabeth Prout (1820-1864), known as Mother Mary Joseph of Jesus (Elizabeth Prout Gardens, Sandwell, West Midlands). Non-conformists are represented by the redoubtable Mary Slessor (1848-1915), a Scottish Presbyterian missionary (Mary Slessor Street, Coventry and Mary Slessor Place, Oldmeldrum, Aberdeenshire).

As an ostensibly Christian culture, there have been no streets found in the United Kingdom to be named in their religious capacity, for those working and living by other faiths, but it is to be hoped that either the information is yet to reach the author, or it is an omission that will soon be rectified. There are, of course, women of other faiths, named for non-religious activity, such as Charlotte Auerbach (1899-1994), the Jewish Professor of Genetics, remembered in Charlotte Auerbach Road Edinburgh.

Street names that do not help the wider representation of women are those where the street takes their surname only. Clearly, many of these will be missed. But some are included for the celebration of

the women behind them, for example Dunwoody Way (Crewe, Cheshire) named for the long-standing Labour MP, Gwyneth Dunwoody (1930-2008).

Quantifying the impact of the dearth of women commemorated is not straightforward if trying to achieve anything more valuable than some anecdotal insights. A study is being formulated engaging women across age ranges, educational levels and experiences, to ascertain not only their self-perception but, perhaps more easily quantifiable, their awareness of role models; not, of course, simply those in street names.

A book of biographical notes is rather easier to structure, with capacity to add to an online listing, which includes all streets found, not just those to be included in a book.[1] A flavour of names and lives captured has been indicated above and the chapters will be based on the area of activity and achievement of the namesakes:

- Politics and community
- Education
- Literature
- Performing arts
- Visual arts
- Science and mathematics
- Medicene
- Sport
- Religion
- Military
- Business
- Local interest
- Family and benefactors
- Aristocracy
- Personal achievement/interest

The numbers in each category are not equal. For example, there are just two, to date, under Military: Charity Bick Way, West Bromwich, West Midlands, named for Charity Bick (1926-2002) and Lisa Head Way, Almondbury, West Yorkshire named for a bomb disposal officer killed on active service (1981-2011). Politics and community, Literature, Family and benefactors, and, unsurprisingly, Aristocracy comprise the bulk. The category of Personal achievement/interest is something of an anomaly as, of course, many in other categories are there because of personal achievement. But those here do not fit neatly elsewhere and include Lady Baden-Powell Way, Blandford, Dorset named for Lady Olave Baden-Powell (1889-1977) of the Girl Guides movement, and Janet Horne Square, Dornoch, Sutherland named for the last woman in the United Kingdom to be put to death for witchcraft (possibly using a contemporary generic name for witches in Scotland).[23]

What has been a particular pleasure and will, hopefully, be of some enduring value, has been uncovering the stories of those lost, certainly beyond keen local historians. Here, might be included Gitana Street in Stoke-on-Trent, named for Gertie Gitana (1887-1957), one of the highest paid music hall stars, earning over £100 per week by the time she was 15.[24] Whereas World War II forces sweetheart, Vera Lynn (1917-2020) is recalled by many (see Vera Lynn Close, in her native West Ham), Miss Gitana, who claimed that title in World War I, has largely been forgotten.

There are also the streets named for local politicians and community workers—often unsung even in life, devoting their lives for little return beyond aiding and improving the lot of others. Examples would include Sally Ward Drive, Walsall, West Midlands named for Sally Ward (1905-1969), a local councillor. Ivy Graham Close, New Moston Manchester, was named for disabled community worker Ivy Graham (c1922-2008) with, pleasingly, evidence of a campaign to ensure her full name was used. Many collations of well-known and influential women have been produced and many of those women have, of course, been the subject of full length biographies – the likes of Mary Seacole, Marie Curie and the Pankhursts, who will feature here too. But this project provides a framework for capturing forgotten local histories, the legends, the long dead parish councillors, the performers, neglected a century and more after they packed the halls, and the doctors and nurses who quietly made a difference to many thousands over their careers but whose lack of national reach excluded them from wide public consciousness. Street names, invaluably and delightfully, although inconsistently, commemorate those who would be unlikely to appear in a statute or on a plaque.

This summary has hopefully piqued interest in the wonderful stories to come, of the lives, work and experiences of women across many centuries, and also in quantifying the importance of the public commemoration of women. None of this excludes the histories of men but simply seeks to recover the lost, re-celebrate the well-known and highlight the gender imbalance.

As indicated above, the list is on-going, so please send in any names to carrie@carriedesilva.co.uk.

Notes

1. A binary view of gender has been taken, as to date, all found honoured with street names clearly identified as women, but that is not to exclude or diminish other identities as and when they are encountered in this context.

2. https://carriedesilva.weebly.com/history.html.

3. Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman, 'Women score higher than men in most leadership skills', *Harvard Business Review*, *92*/10 (2019), 86-93; Sarah Jane Aiston, and Chee Kent Fo, 'The silence/ing of academic women', *Gender and Education*, *33*/2 (2021), 138-155.

4. Angelia Wagner, 'Tolerating the trolls? Gendered perceptions of online harassment of politicians in Canada', *Feminist Media Studies*, *22*/1 (2022), 32-47.

5. Melanie D Chin, 'Progressive Commemoration: Public Statues of Historical Women in Urban American Cities, *CUNY Academic Works, MA thesis (City University of New York, 2018),* https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3654&context=gc_etds (accessed 10 Apr. 2023).

6. Elise Uberoi and Zoe Mansfield, 'Women in politics and public life', House of Commons Library Research Briefing No. 01250, 6 Mar. 2023.

7. FTSE Women Leaders Review, FTSE Women L*eaders Review: Achieving Gender Balance, Feb 2023*, https://ftsewomenleaders.com/ (accessed 4 Apr. 2023).

8. HESA Higher Education Staff Statistics: UK 2020/21,

Statistical Bulletin SB261, www.hesa.ac.uk/news/01-02-2022/sb261-higher-education-staff-statistics (accessed 12 Apr. 2023).

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10. Supreme Court, Biographies of the Justices, www.supremecourt.uk/about/biographies-of-the-justices.html (accessed 6 Apr. 2023).

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12. Ministry of Defence, UK armed forces biannual diversity statistics: 1 Apr. 2022, www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-armed-forces-biannual-diversity-statistics-april-2022/uk-armed-forces-biannual-diversity-statistics-1-april-2022#gender-1 (accessed 12 Apr. 2023).

13. See Peter N Stearns, 'Why study history', *American Historical Association*, 1998, 1-7; Penelope J Corfield, 'All people are living histories – which is why History matters', *Making history*, Institute of Historical Research, 2008, www.penelopejcorfield.com/PDFs/6.1.1-CorfieldPdf1-Why-History-Matters.pdf (accessed 12 Apr. 2023); John Tosh, *Why history matters* (London: Red Globe Press, 2nd ed. 2019); and on women's history in particular, Linda K Kerber, 'Why History Matters', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, *36*/1 (2015) 6-11.

14. Gerda Lerner, 'Placing women in history: Definitions and challenges', *Feminist Studies*, *3*/1 (1975), 5-14; Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

15. See Chin, 'Progressive Commemoration; Teresa Bergman, *The Commemoration of Women in the United States: remembering women in public space* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

16. Richard Drayton, '"Rhodes must not fall?" Statues, postcolonial 'heritage' and temporality' *Third Text*,*33*(4-5) (2019), 651-666; Caroline Criado-Perez, 'I sorted the UK's statues by gender – a mere 2.7 per cent are of historical, non-royal women', *The New Statesman*, 26 Mar. 2016, www.newstatesman.com/politics/2016/03/i-sorted-uk-s-statues-gender-mere-27-cent-are-historical-non-royal-women (accessed 5 Apr. 2023).

17. Allison Vale, *A Woman Lived Here: remembering London's remarkable women* (London: Robinson, Hachette UK, 2018).

18. Anon. 'Betty Campbell: statue honours Wales' first black head teacher', BBC News, 29 Sep. 2021, www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-58721710 (accessed 5 Apr. 2023).

19. Monumental Welsh Women, https://monumentalwelshwomen.com/ (accessed 5 Apr. 2023).

20. See Tim Edensor, 'The haunting presence of commemorative statues', *Ephemera: theory and politics in organization*, *19*/1 (2019), 53-76; Nuala Johnson, '"Cast in stone": Monuments, geography and nationalism', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 13/1 (1995) 51-65; Nuala Johnson, 'Mapping monuments: The shaping of public space and cultural identities', *Visual Communication*, 1/3 (2002) 293-298.

21. Aruna Sankaranarayanan, 2015, Mapbox, https://blog.mapbox.com/mapping-female-versus-male-street-names-b4654c1e00d5 (accessed 10 Apr. 2023); Equal Street Names, https://equalstreetnames.org/ (accessed 10 Apr. 2023).

22. See Oliva Espin, 'Female saints: submissive or rebellious?; feminists in disguise?', PhD thesis (University of Innsbruck, 2010), www.researchgate.net/profile/Oliva-Espin/publication/281151044_Female_Saints_Submissive_or_Rebellious_Feminists_in_Disguise/links/55d911bd08aec156b9ac25a4/Female-Saints-Submissive-or-Rebellious-Feminists-in-Disguise.pdf (accessed 12 Apr. 2023); Grace Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and theologian* (New York: Paulist Press, 2nd ed., 2000).

23. Lizanne Henderson, 'Witch Belief in Scottish Coastal Communities', *The New Coastal History: Cultural and Environmental Perspectives from Scotland and Beyond* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 233-249.

24. Martha Vicinus, '"Happy Times... If You Can Stand It": Women Entertainers during the Interwar Years in England', *Theatre Journal*, *31*/3 (1979), 357-369.

'MORE THAN A WOMAN ON A PLINTH': COMMEMORATING LADY RHONDDA AND RECOVERING NEWPORT'S HIDDEN HERITAGE

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The relationship between women's history and statues is complicated. Historians of the women's movement are well-practised in recovering women's pivotal yet often ignored role in shaping law, politics and society. Just as the importance of women's activism can be side-lined from institutional histories of reform, the relatively small number of statues of women similarly serves as a reminder that those seen as the 'elites' throughout history are predominantly men. Across Britain, of more than 800 statues, only 128 are of named non-royal women.[1] This dearth of female representation is particularly striking in Wales.[2] Many statues of women are mythological or allegorical, often partially clothed or even naked. They are anonymous, unnamed. The organisation 'Monumental Welsh Women' is now seeking to correct this through the erection of five statues commemorating Welsh women.[3] The focus of this public history project is currently on a statue for Lady Rhondda in Newport; a fundraising campaign is underway and the maquette – a miniature version of the statue – was revealed in March 2023.

As well as exploring the importance of this public history project as a means of recovering Newport's hidden heritage of feminist activism, this piece considers the relationship between representing women through statues and feminist biography. The design of Lady Rhondda's statue provides the opportunity to explore not only the reasons why women should be commemorated, but also how this commemoration might take place. The first half of this piece addresses the *why*: I consider why Lady Rhondda was identified as worthy of commemoration in Newport, as well as why the campaigns to erect statues of women matters more broadly. The second half of this piece reflects more upon the *how*, considering the artist's decisions in relation to her design of Lady Rhondda and how this links to feminist biography. Indeed, writing Lady Rhondda's history is quite different from sculpting her in bronze, for as Pippa Catterall has put it, statues, 'by their emphases and absences, distort history as much as they inform it'.[4] Thus, in correcting the near complete absence of statues representing women's achievements throughout history in Wales, this risk of distortion – and connection with women's history – must be confronted.

THE CAMPAIGN TO COMMEMORATE LADY RHONDDA

In recent years, the people of Newport have begun to celebrate their city's connection to suffragette and prominent businesswoman Lady Rhondda (also known as Margaret Haig Thomas). In 2015, thanks to community-based efforts of a group of Newport women, a blue plaque was erected on Risca Road next to the post-box Lady Rhondda set on fire in 1913 (for which she was arrested). Lady Rhondda, who grew up in Llanwern House on the outskirts of Newport, had been an active member of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), and was honorary secretary of Newport's WSPU branch. She travelled across Wales mobilising women (and a few men) to the cause. She is therefore an important part of Newport's heritage, and was deemed an apposite subject of the Monumental Welsh Women campaign.

As a wealthy married businesswoman of the early twentieth century – a time when the marriage bar often excluded women from gainful employment – Lady Rhondda was an outlier. [5] She sat on the boards of 33 companies and became the first female president of the Institute of Directors in 1926. She was also the first woman to hold a hereditary peerage, though was barred from taking up her seat in the House of Lords – something that was not permitted until four years after her death in 1963.

Importantly, the work of historians has uncovered Lady Rhondda's life story beyond her professional success.[6] Thus, Lady Rhondda is remembered not as a solitary pioneer, but as a leading figure during a pivotal time in women's history. Commemorating her involvement in the women's movement is therefore important, because it enables us to radically rethink what counts as achievement, while uncovering stories of women that have long been neglected.

One of Lady Rhondda's vital achievements was her push for further reform immediately after landmark changes to women's rights in the early twentieth century. The notion that votes for women meant equality had been achieved was severely misguided. Lady Rhondda was clear that the Representation of the People Act 1918, which gave the vote to women over 30 who met a property qualification, was just the beginning.[7] She believed it was crucial to continue campaigning for women's equality, not just in relation to voting rights but in all spheres. A year after the 1918 Act, the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919 enabled women to enter professions such as solicitors, barristers, magistrates and civil servants for the first time. Now that women were no longer excluded from parliament, these reforms ostensibly meant Lady Rhondda could take up her hereditary peerage and sit in the House of Lords. But her entry was blocked, she lost her court case challenging this, and she was never able to sit in the Lords.[8] In spite of reform, the law continued to marginalise women.

Lady Rhondda mobilised women to push for change. On 17 February 1921, she established the Six Point Group (SPG), a pressure group comprised of women able to vote at the time, to work towards equal rights for women through legal reform. As their name suggests, they targeted six issues at a time, and once they had achieved

as much as they could in one area, another issue would take its place. The activities of the SPG were publicised in *Time and Tide*, a ground-breaking feminist periodical which Lady Rhondda founded, owned and edited.[9] The SPG asserted important influence, raising awareness of issues related to equal pay, reform of the law on child assault, and the rights of housewives.[10] It remained active even after Lady Rhondda's death, and it spawned several other groups significant to the women's movement in the mid-twentieth century. In 1937, it established a subgroup that became the Married Women's Association, which had a profound influence on married women's property rights throughout the twentieth century.[11] Women for Westminster also rose out of the Six Point Group, an organisation established to 'train women for political life, and to assist female candidates at general elections'.[12]

While all of this underscores why Lady Rhondda is an important figure within women's history, the question of why she should be commemorated by a statue is a different, albeit related, matter. Catterall has argued that statues represent a dialogue between past and present, but do not represent history itself.[13] Indeed, the toppling of the statue of slave trader Edward Colston in 2020 sparked important questions about what statues are for, and how they contribute to public understandings of the past.[14] Many statues, like Colston's, were created in the nineteenth century as honorific symbols of power, with the implication that the men depicted are worthy of emulation. Those representations of power and authority are now rightfully being questioned. Within this context, Catterall's analysis makes sense. For, as she notes, Colston's statue represents a complicated conversation between celebrating him in the past as a hero, and dealing in the present with his legacy of violent imperialism: 'It was not history that was in play with Colston's statue, but what people chose to interpret his statue as representing about the values and nature of Britain's society today'.[15]

But what of statues of women – made by women – with the express purpose of making visible a community's feminist heritage? Retrieving Newport's hidden heritage opens a new dialogue between the community of women in Newport campaigning and fundraising for the statue of Lady Rhondda, the female sculptor designing and creating the statue, and the future generations of Newport who will pass the statue on their daily commute. While this is not quite *the same* as doing women's history, it does help to highlight the importance of Lady Rhondda to the history of Newport, and by extension, the importance of women's history more broadly.

Memorialising women could thus be used as a vehicle for normalising women's history. The campaign for the Lady Rhondda statue is connected to lessons on her legacy and networks being produced for Welsh school children. The publicity surrounding the statue has also shone a light on her work and of the activities of the WSPU in Newport. However, because there are so few statues of women in Britain, and even fewer statues memorialising feminist activists, it is difficult to tell whether this will raise public consciousness of women's history long term.

There is evidence to suggest the women within Lady Rhondda's networks were ambivalent about being memorialised through the erection of statues. But there is also indication that when the women of these networks were *not* memorialised, they were forgotten. One example of this is Dorothy Evans, who, like Lady Rhondda, had been a militant suffragette, led Lady Rhondda's SPG throughout the 1930s, and was instrumental in the women's movement throughout the early twentieth century. When she died in 1944, funds were raised for her memorial, but were ultimately absorbed by the SPG. Evan's partner Sybil Morrison, who was also prominent within the women's movement, expressed her deep regret about this in a transcribed conversation with fellow SPG member Hazel Huskins-Hallinan:

> …we had the money after Dorothy died. There was quite a large sum of money which was for a memorial for her. And foolishly as I think we decided to continue her work. This is a fatal thing because it disappears – something goes wrong, and you've no memorial. There's no memorial to Dorothy Evans. There was some £1500 collected from all the country and the world. I thought I'd buried these miseries.[16]

That the work of Dorothy Evans – a leading feminist figure of her day – faded into obscurity within Sybil Morrison's lifetime, shows how easily women can be 'disappeared' from history.[17] This process of disappearance has been explained by Susan Geiger: 'Women's political actions and history are 'disappeared' in a cumulative process whereby successive written accounts reinforce and echo the silence of previous ones'.[18] There is no way of knowing whether a memorial for Evans would have been enough to prevent her disappearance – leaving women historians to recover and reconstruct her memory. But Morrison's palpably painful recollection suggests a potentially important role for memorials of feminists, in positing a direct challenge to the erasure of the work of feminist activism from historical record. Nevertheless, the power of the statue's mere existence may not be enough. The design of the statue, and the story it can convey, matters too.

MORE THAN A WOMAN ON A PLINTH

As this piece has acknowledged so far, statues represent history, but are not history and indeed have the potential to distort it. This is why the maquette can be as important as the statue itself. First, this section considers why a statue's design risks presenting a superficial account of women's history and second, it explores how the designers of the statue of Lady Rhondda[19] have sought to avoid some of these pitfalls by including several narrative pieces of her life story.

STATUES AND THE 'HEROINE TRAP'

In their case for feminist legal history, Erika Rackley and Rosemary Auchmuty warned historians to avoid the 'heroine trap'.[20] This trap presents 'inspirational women' who succeeded against all odds, and such pioneer narratives have pitfalls: 'The danger is that if you set out with the intention of casting someone as a heroine or a

role model, you are going to craft a life story to suit' – a fiction that can obscure difficult personalities, fractious relationships and success tempered by setback.[21] When constructing statues of women, such heroine narratives are tempting. Many figures sit high on plinths, with an imposing and powerful presence; they are both literally and metaphorically placed on a pedestal. This distance from the public often makes details of their life story impossible to view, contributing to a simplified narrative.

Statues also have the potential to distort women's history because they crystallise particular individuals as focal points within the women's movement. Landmarks in feminist history cannot be explained by one heroine, or event, or idea. Just as progress tends to be neither steady nor united, feminist histories are inherently complicated, and are often fragmented by intellectual and cultural difference. The celebration of individuals through statues could be seen as aligning with traditional biographies and legal histories, which have often been characterised as the 'study of great or exceptional people'.[22] Yet this is a mould into which few women neatly fit.[23] Focusing on the pioneers of the women's movement skews the reality of collective activism.

Thus, while the statue of Lady Rhondda is designed to inspire, it also risks entrenching further these superficial narratives about women's history. This is one reason why its unorthodox design is so interesting.

THE DESIGN

The statue's sculptor, Jane Robbins, has named her design of the Lady Rhondda maquette 'The Figurehead' [Fig. 1.]. This is because the statue will lean forward at a 45-degree angle, like the figurehead of a ship, representing her survival from the sinking of the RMS *Lusitania* in 1915. According to Angela John, this event 'altered how people chose to see' Lady Rhondda,[24] with Octavia Wilberforce describing her as a 'romantic figure, for she had been torpedoed in the *Lusitania* and such a miraculous escape seemed to mark her out for a special destiny'.[25] Her survival 'against the odds'[26] plays into the narrative of Lady Rhondda as a 'heroine'. However, although a pitfall of the heroine narrative is that other stories are lost, Robbin's design, in consultation with Monumental Welsh Women and the Statue for Lady Rhondda Campaign goes beyond representing Lady Rhondda's achievements as an isolated individual. Other aspects of the statue ensure the importance of her work within networks is acknowledged. Lady Rhondda *was* a figurehead; in her leadership of *Time and Tide*, the SPG and the campaign for female peers in the House of Lords. The figure in the maquette represents these important elements of her life story. Lady Rhondda is depicted holding a copy of *Time and Tide*, wearing a suffragette sash, and stands on a steel base, reflecting Newport's local industry as well as her role as one of the few female industrialists of her day.[27]

Perhaps most notably, Robbins was clear that she did not want this representation of Lady Rhondda to be 'just another woman on a plinth with a suffragette hat'.[28] In contrast with traditional statues on plinths, the statue of Lady Rhondda will be approximately seven-feet (life and a quarter). Robbin's intention is for it to be 'imposing, but not too monumental to be overbearing. I want her to be accessible and engaging to the people of Newport'.[29] The hoop behind the statue will be made of life-cast hands of women involved with the project,[30] symbolising the unity of the Newport women's movement of which Lady Rhondda was part. This link to the present community activism of Welsh women is important. By including the hands of women from the Statue for Lady Rhondda campaign, as well as Lady Rhondda's biographer Angela John, the statue symbolises not just the importance of Lady Rhondda, but also the importance of women's history today.

CONCLUSION

While the debate around toppling statues of men in recent years has generated opportunities to question the often-sanitised stories about their lives, the creation of statues of women conversely has the potential to bring women back into history, acknowledging their often hidden, yet important impact. Even if it is unclear whether a statue is ever capable of preserving women's history in all of its richness and nuance, the Lady Rhondda statue does at least present a physical, seven-foot bronze barrier in front of that cumulative tide described by Geiger, whereby women can be written out of history and replaced by dominant, androcentric narratives.[31] The unorthodox approach to the design of the Lady Rhondda

Fig. 1. Maquette of Lady Rhondda by Jane Robbins, St Woolos Cathedral, Newport, 6 March 2023. Author provided.

maquette goes beyond simply depicting a likeness of the person being commemorated, instead revealing aspects of her life story and the feminist networks of which she was part. When the statue is built, it will not encapsulate the complete history of Lady Rhondda, but it will mediate an important conversation between past and present about the importance of women's history and the need to acknowledge the feminist heritage of Newport.

Notes

1. The Public Statues and Sculpture Association, 'UK Public Statues of Women', https://pssauk.org/women/ (accessed 2 May 2023).
2. A bust of Lady Mary Cornelia Vane-Tempest, Marchioness of Londonderry was initially erected in Machynlleth: https://www.coflein.gov.uk/en/site/707002 (accessed 2 May 2023).
3. The first statue associated with the campaign was erected in Cardiff in September 2021, and depicted Betty Campbell (the first black head teacher).
4. Pippa Catterall, 'On Statues and History: the Dialogue between Past and Present in Public Space', British Politics and Policy at LSE, 2020 https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/statues-past-and-present/ (accessed 2 May 2023).
5. Helen Glew, *Gender, Rhetoric and Regulation: Women's Work in the Civil Service and the London County Council, 1900-55* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).
6. Angela John, *Turning the Tide: The Life of Lady Rhondda* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2013).
7. Ibid., 367.
8. Muriel Mellown, 'Lady Rhondda and the Changing Faces of British Feminism', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 9/2 (1987), 7-13, 9.
9. John, *Turning the Tide*, 285.
10. Ibid., 368.
11. Sharon Thompson, *Quiet Revolutionaries: The Married Women's Association and Family Law* (Oxford: Hart 2022).
12. Laura Beers, 'Women for Westminster,' Feminism, and the Limits of Non-Partisan Associational Culture', in *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918-1945*, eds. Julie Gottlieb and Richard Toye, (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2013), 224-242.
13. Catterall, 'On statues'.
14. Saima Nasar, 'Remembering Edward Colston: histories of slavery, memory, and black globality', *Women's History Review*, 29/7 (2020), 1218-1225.
15. Catterall, 'On Statues'.
16. Women's Library, Hazel Huskins-Hallinan, Interview with Sybil Morrison, 26 Oct. 1971, 5SPG/M10.
17. Jean Allman, 'The Disappearing of Hannah Kudjoe: Nationalism, Feminism, and the Tyrannies of History', *Journal of Women's History*, 21/3 (2009) 13-35, 15. Morrison died on 26 April 1984.
18. Susan Geiger, *TANU Women: Gender and Culture in the Making of Tanganyika Nationalism, 1955–1965* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997), 10, cited in footnote 15.
19. The design was a community effort between sculptor Jane Robbins and groups within Newport, including the Youth Parliament Steering Group.
20. Erika Rackley and Rosemary Auchmuty, 'The Case for Feminist Legal History', *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies,* 40/4 (2020), 878-904, 897.
21. Ibid., 897-898.
22. Barbara Caine, 'Feminist Biography and Feminist History', *Women's History Review,* 3/2 (1994), 247-261, 250; see also Kate Murphy, 'Feminism and Political History', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 56/1 (2010), 21-37. 24.
23. Ibid.
24. John, *Turning the Tide*, 135.
25. Manuscript copy of Octavia Wilberforce's autobiography 'The Eight Child', 228, in Angela John's possession and as cited in ibid., 135.
26. Ibid.
27. As noted by Julie Nicholas in Monumental Welsh Women, 'Press Release: Design for Statue of Suffragette Lady Rhondda Revealed in Newport', 6 March 2023.
28. Speech at St Woolos Cathedral, 6 March 2023.
29. Monumental Welsh Women, 'Press Release'.
30. Including Helen Molyneux, chair of Monumental Welsh Women, and Julie Nicholas, chair of the Statue for Lady Rhondda campaign.
31. Allman, 'The Disappearing', 15.

Civilian Women Fleeing Conflict in The Second World War

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Following the fall of Singapore, thousands of women, along with friends, colleagues and strangers had no choice but to give up their careers and homes in the desperate attempt to flee from the oncoming invasion, an occurrence that is still relevant today. These women are barely remembered, let alone commemorated, leaving their experience long forgotten. Those who survived the initial ordeal of leaving Singapore and the subsequent attacks on the ships taking them to safety, would find that they were returned to a world far removed from their previous lives in Singapore: a female only internment camp. It would be the first time that as a group of women, within the limits and confines of Japanese control, they would devise their own social structures, utilising skills and talents to create some form of society. The women explored in this article, and interned in Sumatra, demonstrated tenacity, fortitude and the ability, under the most daunting circumstances, to develop their own pattern of social life utilising the skills they possessed. As the years of internment grew and so many perished through malnutrition, disease and lack of medical supplies, the skills of those who died were lost forever.

Figure 1 Map showing the fate of ships and internment camps on Sumatra. Courtesy of Jane Nielsen.

Commemorating the achievements and experiences of these women is vitally important. This point was highlighted in 2020 when a national television programme commemorating VJ day failed to acknowledge that both the words and music of the "Captives' Hymn", sung that evening to millions of viewers, were written by a woman, Margaret Dryburgh. In the early days of internment in Palembang, Sumatra, Margaret wrote the hymn that was sung by the imprisoned women throughout their ordeal despite their tired and ravaged bodies. A line in the last verse must have echoed in their thoughts throughout their days in captivity – 'May the day of freedom dawn, peace and justice be reborn'. Despite the attack on Singapore at the same time as Pearl Harbour and Hong Kong on 8 December 1941, the view that Singapore was impregnable still prevailed. When Japanese forces landed at Kota Bharu in the northern corner of Malaya (now Malaysia) and close to the border at Singora in Thailand, the population of Singapore was shocked and horrified. In a letter to friends, Reneé Walker, who arrived back in England on an earlier ship, wrote: 'The civilian population were let down badly by one and all, even when I left two weeks before Singapore fell, we were told Singapore Island could not fall, would not fall'.[1]

In the chaos that followed, the inconceivable fact that the Japanese were now on the doorstep of the once impregnable city of Singapore, the docks became a fusion of desperate people eager to leave. As women, often with small children, endeavoured to get aboard a ship, they were constantly being shelled on the docks. The relief for many when they finally secured a passage turned to subsequent horror: out of forty-four ships sailing between the 12th and 14th February, only four were not bombed and sunk. Those on board who survived the initial bombing faced hours in the sea before being subjected to internment.

One of the few ships captured was the Mata Hari, just off the coast of Bangka Island, Sumatra. On board were Margaret Dryburgh and her three fellow Presbyterian missionaries. Margaret Dryburgh, Daisy to her family, came from a strong Presbyterian family n Sunderland, England. Although she began her adult life as a teacher, she later felt called 'by God' to train as a missionary. In 1919, when women in the UK over 30 had only just been given the vote, Margaret, aged 29, received her first posting to Swatow in China, as turmoil erupted during the 1920s, she was eventually sent to Singapore in 1927.

Aboard the ill-fated Vyner Brooke, one of the last ships to leave Singapore, were Shelagh Brown and her mother Mary. Prior to evacuation Shelagh had been a member of the team of HMS Terror at the Singapore Naval Base. The Vyner Brooke was attacked and sunk on the 14th February; adrift in the ocean and clinging to a makeshift raft, the surviving passengers were finally picked up the following day by a Japanese barge taking troops ashore as they invaded Sumatra.

Shelagh was a child of colonial days: her father, Edwin, had arrived in Singapore in 1901 and was married on leave in England in 1910 to the daughter of family friends, Mary Hobbins. Despite representing a privileged life, the custom of sending children to England for their education was, for many, a disadvantage. Although in

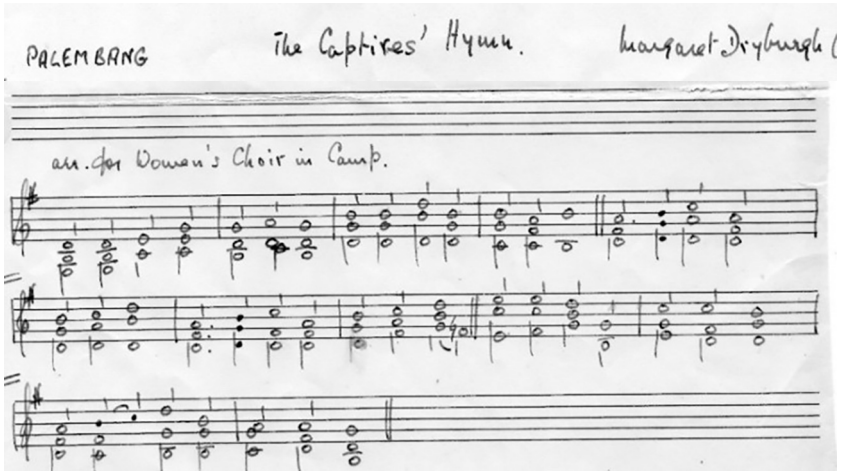

Figure 2 The score for the "Captives' Hymn" . Personal copy of Shelagh Brown. Courtesy of the Brown/Lea/ Caldicott families.

the care of loving grandparents, Shelagh and her siblings would not see their parents for months, or, in the case of their father, years.

Eventually, merging together from different areas in Muntok, on Bangka Island, Sumatra, Margaret and Shelagh's paths were to converge when they were taken to the old Asian workers' accommodation blocks with stone, sloping sleeping slabs. After the war, Shelagh's first recollection of Miss Dryburgh (she was never known by her Christian name in camp) was that first night on those sloping concrete slabs:

> We were opposite from her and she took out her Bible and read verses, two or three near her prayed – also in the morning and mother joined her from the start. She had her Bible in her case and some pencils and paper which proved useful later on! And praises be–her glasses. Had she been shipwrecked these could have been lost. [2]

Margaret, along with her three colleagues, Shelagh and her mother, finally found themselves herded into an area of small bungalows in Palembang, Sumatra. After several moves, they were desperate to find peace. However, by the time they arrived, these bungalows, designed for a family of four, were mostly filled with at least twenty people. The only remaining space was a garage, garage nine, and so this became their home for the foreseeable future. Eventually they were joined by eight other women and one small boy whose parents had died; the women would become his 'aunts' and cared for him throughout their ordeal. These fourteen women worked as a 'unit' and often referred to their group as 'the family'. Only five women and the small boy would survive.

Four of the women from garage nine produced diaries written during internment, which they had to hide from their captors. Gaps in these accounts were inevitable as they could only be added to when safe to retrieve them. There is, in addition, one retrospective account believed to be written shortly after the war. Researching diaries at the Imperial War Museum, there appeared more diaries from this camp than any other.[3] My first reading of the diaries surprised me: a preconceived notion that it would be a formidable task was overtaken by admiration for the way in which the women worked and for their humour. This is not to deny that there were tensions within the camp as a whole; the inevitability of human nature did appear when some would endeavour to find a way to do less. Nevertheless, overall, most worked to the common good.

The time in the bungalows' camp, as it became known, was a period when many believed it would be a temporary arrangement. Small groups like those in garage nine would organise themselves for cooking and day-to-day needs. Ingenious ways to diversify a rice-based diet were invented. Even burnt rice at the bottom of a large pot had its uses: hot water poured into the pot was then served as coffee. It was during their time in this camp that Margaret Dryburgh, on 5th July 1942, introduced the 'Captives' Hymn', sung initially by herself, Shelagh Brown and the Brown's friend from Singapore, Dorothy MacLeod, who was also interned in garage nine. It became the hymn that sustained them throughout their worst days of internment.

A camp newsletter was created with Margaret Dryburgh as editor. Two copies were produced, one in English and one in Dutch, the main languages spoken in camp. It is here that the self-deprecating humour can be seen in Margaret Dryburgh's take on 'Alice in the Looking Glass', transformed into 'Alice in Internment Land' in the newsletter. The same humour, evident in many of the diaries, was the incentive for further research into these women's experiences.

Shelagh Brown's diary demonstrated this humour when endeavouring to make a desperately needed purchase of haberdashery:

> On Wednesday Melwani's [sic] shop is at the Guard House Phyllis and I go down but she has a sun-top on so not allowed to write her order. I am decently clad so can order (decently i.e. dress but no knickers!). [4]

Two traders were allowed into the camp, though at a cost; particularly the second trader, who would come with fruit and vegetables. For those who arrived with no money or possessions this was a problem; however, they became resourceful by offering services to those who had money or, on rare occasions, by working for the Japanese. Eva Prouse, fellow member of garage nine, took on sewing for the Japanese. The money was for the 'family' of garage nine, and how to spend the very little they were paid became a major debate. Mamie Colley notes in her diary: 'Prouse does sewing for 50 cents. Big discussions how to spend it! Cullen's face when she shook her head over 1

cent purchase!' [5]

Faith was a key underpinning factor for many of the women in garage nine: seven were missionaries and four held a strong faith. One of the remaining three, Mamie Colley, remarked in her diary that she almost converted. This core of strong faith upheld them and gave hope during these dark days of malnutrition, lack of medicine, illnesses, watching friends die and having to bury them.

Margaret Dryburgh became the linchpin of the camp; perhaps for the first time she was not hindered by expectations on how a woman should act. Not long after her arrival in Singapore her frustration is evident over the way women are perceived in a letter to Mrs Elizabeth Bell, President of the Women's Missionary Association:

> I am afraid I must be a rebel and very intolerant but I do not think things are run as they should – but being a mere woman, I have very little to say in matters [this of course is not for public identification! Mr Murray is too set in his ways to alter things – I give him terrible shocks at times by my suggestions].[6]

Internment in the garage was to come to an end in September 1943. In what was to become a frequent event they were instructed, at short notice, to pack up their belongings and be ready to move. Finding themselves still in Palembang, the women arrived at a deserted camp, previously the accommodation for the male internees who had been moved back to Muntok, on Bangka Island. Despite the overcrowding, and lack of food and medicine, the bungalows had provided some form of familiarity arranged over two streets. However, their next accommodation was a deterioration on many levels. The immediate sight of this new camp was a shock. The basic accommodation consisted of long huts, each with bamboo plaited walls and palm fronds covering the roof. Margaret's diary concerning their arrival appears to be written in retrospect, a feature throughout the diary where the passages cover one to three months: this is most likely due to the restrictions of their captors, or shortage of paper. Here she illustrates their early thoughts:

> Conditions were bad, and the bathroom was appalling. More and more people kept arriving until there were over five hundred in the camp … We shared out pots and pans and goods and begun to get organised. The predominating feature was mud, which penetrated everywhere – and clung tenaciously to our clogs and trompaks. Rain poured in through holes in the roof and our beds were often soaked, after thunderstorms had done their worst. We had to get accustomed to doing unpleasant tasks like collecting garbage (a job refused by the coolies) and cleansing the bathroom and sanitary tanks. A threat (which materialised later) of having to cut down trees was a worry. So were the noises in the night, what could they be? Rats, dogs, rain, footsteps or planes? [7]

The women became more despondent not only about their conditions, but also about the realisation that internment was not going to end in the foreseeable future. These thoughts were fuelled by the isolation they felt as they had no access to information on the outside world, no secret radios or even letters from home. It was not until 1944 when they finally received letters; however, these were now long out of date. Margaret Dryburgh's contribution to how these women adapted, created and supported each other was vast. Her legacy includes poems reflecting feelings and thoughts, sketches of the camps, birthday poems for members of garage nine, musical events and concerts. However, one of the most astonishing achievements, in collaboration with fellow internee Norah Chambers, was to create a 'vocal orchestra'.

A choir had been singing in various concerts whilst they were in the bungalows camp, however, a fresh approach was needed, particularly one that would be inclusive of the different language spoken in the camp. Norah Chambers, a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music in London, had studied violin, piano and chamber music. As a talented violin player, she had the unique opportunity to play in the orchestra under the renowned conductor Sir Henry Wood. Norah's inspirational idea of creating a 'vocal orchestra' using women's voices in lieu of musical instruments lit a spark with Margaret, whose opinion on the matter was requested by Norah. Together they went on to create a choir that would become a symbol of the tenacity, fortitude and courage of these women to transcend the squalor of their internment existence.

Margaret's ability to remember and write musical scores was remarkable, as Helen Colijn, one of three Dutch sisters interned, remarked:

> Just think of it, with a blank scrap of paper in front of her, already a year and half cut off from the outside world, she drew staves and wrote music remembering melodies, counter melodies, harmonies and bass lines. [8]

Once this was achieved, Norah and Margaret set to work condensing complex works, arranging and harmonising the music in four parts for women's voices: first and second sopranos, and first and second altos. Following the achievement of the master copy, scores had to be painstakingly written out and copied for each choir member. Paper was always in short supply, however they managed with scores of minute proportions of which some have survived. They went on to rearrange and harmonise at least thirty pieces of classical music.

Shelagh Brown was quick to join the 'vocal orchestra': once a choir member at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Singapore, she relished the opportunity to try something new. The first performance of the 'vocal orchestra' was on 27 December 1943 and it stunned their fellow internees. Helen Colijn, wrote:

> The music seemed a miracle among the hunger, disease, cockroaches, bedbugs and smell of latrines. The music reinforced our sense of human dignity. We could rise above it all. We would struggle on.[9]

The struggle became more intense in the following

year, as they were moved back to Muntok on Bangka Island, where they had first begun internment. The accommodation appeared to be an improvement on the huts in Palembang, including even some kitchen facilities. For a short time, the women's spirits were lifted. However, this faded abruptly after just a few months when it became apparent that it was indeed a 'death camp'. Sickness and fever were rampant and the women's bodies, now weak from malnourishment and the lack of medical resources, could not fight what became known as Bangka Fever. The disease was later identified as cerebral malaria and was to claim fifty-eight women, including Shelagh's mother Mary Brown.

Finally in March 1945, when the war in Europe was edging closer to the end, they were informed of yet another move. To their shock and horror, they were to return to mainland Sumatra, back down the Moesi river to Loeboek Linggau—deep in the jungle, further inland than Palembang. They were to go in three batches starting on 8 April; Shelagh went with the first group describing it as an

> Awful journey – first night on ship – 2nd in train, and 3rd in train – very little food – rain at 4.30 a.m. when turned out of the train – soaked – bus journey here. Awful block leaking roof – very hard work – haul rice sacks, dig graves – bury dead – ……. Rest of camp arrive in 2 more lots – many deaths – and sickness.[10]

Upon arrival, Margaret fell ill. She died shortly afterwards with her close friend and colleague Norah by her side. Years of deprivation had finally taken their toll; she could fight no longer. In the printed post-war edition of Margaret's diary, Mrs Hinch, the British Camp Commandant wrote: 'To many of us her death was the greatest of our camp sorrows. In my job as Commandant of the British Camp, I felt as though I had lost my strongest prop.'[11]

> From Fellow Internees:
>
> She was an inspiration to us all. Contact with her meant a real quickening of spiritual, mental and intellectual life. Many would have given up and died had it not been for her strength of character. The whole camp was unanimous that the concerts and music she arranged were a real uplift. She lost herself in her creative work. She regarded internment, not as so many years wasted, but as an invaluable training ground for learning many priceless lessons.[12]

From the trio who introduced the "Captives' Hymn", only Shelagh survived. The Hymn is now sung around the world at remembrance services; Margaret would have been astounded. When the war ended on 24 August 1945, only Shelagh, along with Mamie Colley, Phyllis Briggs, Gladys Cullen, Mary Glasgow (known as Paddy) and young Mischa were alive from out of the original fifteen from garage nine. Margaret Dryburgh, two of her colleagues, Sabine Macintosh and Ann Livingston, Shelagh's mother Mary Brown and friend Dorothy MacLeod, along with Eva Prouse, Florrie Oldham, Mary Jenkin and Nan Weir had lost their fight for survival along with so many other internees.

The women fleeing conflict were not just 'women interned' but individuals with their own stories, skills and talents and deserve to be remembered. This was the spark that encouraged a deeper investigation into the earlier lives of Margaret Dryburgh and Shelagh Brown and gave birth to *Women Interned in World War Two Sumatra, Faith, Hope and Survival*.[13]

Notes

1. Barbara Coombes, *Women Interned in World War Two Sumatra, Faith, Hope and Survival (*Yorkshire: Pen & Sword, 2022), 96.
2. Shelagh Brown: Family Papers, by courtesy of the Brown/Lea/Caldicott families.
3. This does not imply that there are no others; these may be lodged elsewhere or in the hands of family.
4. Shelagh Brown: Family Papers.
5. IWM Ref: 4508, Mamie Colley's internment diary, 12, courtesy of Hazel Watson.
6. School of Oriental & African Studies, University of London (hereafter SOAS), Presbyterian Missionary Papers, PCE/WMA/06/01/03, October 1928, Box 4 file 5, May 1929.
7. Margaret Dryburgh's Sumatran Diary, 36.
8. Helen Colijn, courtesy of the Helen Colijn Private Family Archives, Holland.
9. Ibid.
10. IWM Ref: 1729, Shelagh Brown's personal internment diary, 37, courtesy of the Brown/Lea/Caldicott families.
11. Margaret Dryburgh's Sumatran Diary, 47.
12. Ibid.
13. Coombes, *Women Interned in World War Two Sumatra*.

Re-telling the Nuclear Story: How Theatre Could be the Answer to Women's Absence in Scientific History

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In July 2019 a forty-five minute live-recorded radio play was performed in Stanley Halls, South Norwood, London. Three actors read the lines to *Mum is MAD!* – a story about the life and work of Lise Meitner, an Austrian physicist who had discovered nuclear fission in December 1938, aged sixty.

The title was a riff on the dawn of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), and the fact Meitner became known in later years as the 'mother of the atomic bomb', despite her refusal to accept an invitation to join the Manhattan

Project. The aim of the wider project was not only to teach an audience, and the actors that worked on the production, about a female scientist they had not known before, but also to create an accompanying website to further commemorate Lise Meitner and her work.[1] The production took around eight months to stage, including a period of research time where I engaged with mostly secondary sources to locate a narrative that would work well on stage.

My work was written in response to Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen* (1998), which proposed three alternative ways a secret meeting between nuclear scientists Werner Heisenberg and Niels Bohr in 1942 may have taken place.[2] Alongside the two scientists, Margrethe Bohr, Niels' wife, is a third player constantly grounding the scientific content of the play and explaining to the audience things that might otherwise be too complex for a theatrical production. Frayn's work has been dismissed by some historians as revisionist because it avoids making conclusions, instead proposing three different ways the meeting could have taken place and asking the audience to decide what really happened. For me, Frayn's honesty about the uncertainty at the core of historical practice was intriguing, and there is evidence that it has boosted the historical tradition, leading in turn to increased interest in the period and the release of new source material including the Heinsberg letters and *Copenhagen in Debate*.[3] The work highlighted the process that historians undergo to write historical narratives. I set out to create a play that was just as honest about the fact that history is a matter of interpretation rather than just facts, similar to how *Copenhagen* was presented.

While enjoying the uncertainty and theoretical aspect of Frayn's work, I could not help but notice the only female character was used as a bridge between the audience and science rather than seen as a scientific authority herself. In an earlier study I conducted of eighteen plays written since 1945 that discussed nuclear science, I found only one focused on a strong female lead and this play, *The Letter of Last Resort* by David Greig, takes place in the future and focusses on an imaginary future female Prime Minister.[4] Women have been largely written out of the nuclear story, and men are often the central focus in these sorts of stories – take the recent Christopher Nolan film *Oppenheimer* as just one example. I was interested in addressing this imbalance through theatre.

A key challenge for the project was taking academic research and turning it into something both artistic and accessible to a wider audience. This was especially challenging as I was turning an entire person's life and work into a short one-act production. To approach this project, I turned to the work of the Tectonic Theatre Collective, an American theatre project led by Moisés Kaufman which specialises in turning research into theatre. One of their most notable plays is *The Laramie Project* which was created using oral testimony. The Collective view history as a series of moments that can be reflected in theatrical performance, and so following their methodology I searched for 'moments' in Meitner's life that would capture an audience's imagination.

The first 'moment' was an image of Meitner aged six conducting experiments and hiding her notebook full of findings under her pillow, which was discussed in a documentary of Meitner's life directed by Rosemarie Reed.[5] For me, Meitner's childhood spent hiding her passion and propensity for physics was synonymous with the challenges she would face in the future as a woman in science. Showing Meitner as not only incredibly smart, but also highly motivated by the subject, explained why she continued to work on the fission project even after Nazi rule began in 1938. The second moment was when Meitner moved to Berlin and met Otto Hahn, whom Meitner would work alongside for many years. In 1944 Hahn received the Nobel prize for Meitner's discovery of fission. Hahn was a key player throughout Meitner's career and life and became one of the three characters in the *Mum is MAD!* The third moment was chosen because it was deliberately misleading. When forced to flee Berlin during the Nazi regime, Hahn gifted Meitner a diamond ring – to be used to pay her way across the border.[6] This scene was not included to give weight to any suggestion of a romantic relationship between Meitner and Hahn – I do not think there was one – but to acknowledge that there is discourse around such a relationship, and again to play with the premise that history is a series of interpretations rather than facts.

Since the play was inspired by *Copenhagen*, I wanted to acknowledge this in the script. While I was researching and choosing three areas to focus on, I was inspired by the three different versions of events depicted in Frayn's play. I decided the best way to give a nod to *Copenhagen* was to use lines from Frayn's work in my own play. The start of the play was the final three lines from *Copenhagen*:

> MARGARETHE: Sooner or later there will come a time when all our children are laid to dust, and all our children's children.
>
> BOHR: When no decisions, great or small, are ever made again. When there's no more uncertainty, because there's no more knowledge.
>
> MARGARETHE: And when all our eyes are closed, when even the ghosts have gone, what will be left of our beloved world? Our ruined and dishonoured and beloved world?[7]

The language evoking ideas of childhood and innocence was also selected as it tied into the idea of Meitner as 'Mum'. The play ended with the opening lines of *Copenhagen*:

> MARGARETHE: Some questions remain long after their owners have died. Lingering like ghosts. Looking for the answers they never found in life.
>
> BOHR: Some questions have no answers to find.[8]

By reversing Frayn's script, I also echoed the non-linear narrative throughout the play which were a series of moments scattered through time rather than a clear narrative from start to finish.

Copenhagen featured three characters, one as

the less-scientific figure and the other two as scientists engaged in debate. I wanted to reflect this and explored ways to make one of the characters act as a historian, guiding the audience through the story. Robert Frisch, Meitner's nephew who also worked on the nuclear project, became this character and served as a narrator. I used his relative youth as a way to explain his decision to ask questions, poke fun, and encourage Meitner to open up throughout the play. Frisch was also an exciting historical agent since he had a clear motivation to tell the story while also having an obvious family bias that could demonstrate the way history is open to interpretation, and the potential dangers of this. As he was the youngest of the three, Frisch brought an energy to the piece for the others to play off. Meitner's voice emerged out of her distaste for being in the spotlight, and Hahn's voice emerged as a man annoyed at having to constantly defend his decision to stay in Germany during the war. Initially, he seemed an obvious 'bad guy' because he worked for the Nazis and developed gas warfare in the First World War. However, my research showed that Hahn has often been erased from the history books in favour of remembering Meitner and Frisch, so I wanted to encourage the audience to make their own judgement about him.[9]

After the live-recording, I hosted a post-show discussion. I asked questions of the audience and encouraged the actors to participate and reflect on their own experiences learning about Meitner, nuclear fission, and the three scientists they had to embody throughout the rehearsal process. By encouraging everyone to participate, I was deliberately leaning into the way history is 'up for debate'.

I asked the audience what they learned from the production. Many said they had learned the story behind fission and that for them it raised questions about responsibility while also making them think about history and the 'danger of looking backwards'. I was pleased that audience members felt they had learned more than just 'historical facts' from the show and understood some of the nuances of the work. For a few months after the live recording, an online feedback form was hosted on the website I had created, featuring a scale which asked the online audience how much they knew about each character before the play, and how much they felt they knew after. Again, no one felt they now knew everything – with all visitors making an improvement of 50% but no one reaching 100% after the production. I felt this result showed that I had succeeded in my aim of educating an audience not only about a moment in the past, but also about the impossibility of knowing everything in history, and the value of the subject as a series of endless possible interpretations.

By engaging actors and audience members in the history of Lise Meitner I sought to challenge pre-existing male-centric narratives of the history of nuclear science. Although my work was a small-scale production, it shows scope for future work that could be done between theatre and history to commemorate and celebrate women. Scientific history may seem inaccessible because of the complex language used to engage audiences, evoking traumatic memories of school days that many are keen to get away from. For women, scientific history could seem even more off-putting since it is so often men that are celebrated as the 'greats' of science. Theatre is an especially effective way to combat this narrative since, according to a recent survey by Arts Council England, 70% of theatre audiences are female.[10] *Mum is MAD!* put a woman back where she belonged, in the centre of the story of nuclear weapons development, and hopefully can be used as a case study for more work bringing women of the past and present into science.

NOTES

1. The website, featuring a full audio recording of the play, is available at https://suitcasetheatre.wixsite.com/mumismad.

2. Michael Frayn, *Copenhagen* (London: Methuen Drama, 1998).

3. Matthias Dorries (ed.), *Michael Frayn's Copenhagen in Debate: Historical Essays and Documents on the 1941 Meeting Between Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg* (Berkley: University of California, 2005).

4. Natasha Kitcher, 'Theatres of War, Art and the Atom: Since 1945 what are British playwrights most afraid of?' (Unpublished thesis, Royal Holloway University of London, 2018); David Greig, 'The Letter of Last Resort,' *The Bomb: A Partial History* (London: Oberon Books, 2012), 210-222.

5. Rosemarie Reed, *The Path to Nuclear Fission: The Story of Lise Meitner and Otto Hahn* (On the Road Productions International, 2006).

6. Doug Stewart, 'Lise Meitner', *Famous Scientists*, 2014, https://www.famousscientists.org/lise-meitner/ (accessed 21 July 2019).

7. Frayn, *Copenhagen*, 94.

8. Frayn, *Copenhagen*, 16.

9. Susanne Kiewitz, 'Portrait of Lise Meitner', *MPG*, https://www.mpg.de/11721986/Lise-Meitner (accessed 5 May 2023); Stewart, 'Lise Meitner'; It is worth noting Otto Hahn does not have an entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

10. Arts Council England, 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion data report for 2020 to 2021', 2022, https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Equality_Diversity_and_Inclusion_A_Data_Report_202021.pdf (accessed 28 June 2022).

Mina and Memory: Commemorating Women's History at Thomas Edison National Historical Park

Katherine Hobbs

Thomas Edison National Historical Park

The year before she died, Mina Miller Edison (1865-1947) sold the Edison family home, Glenmont, on the condition that it would be preserved as a monument to her late husband, Thomas Alva Edison. 'It has always been my desire', she wrote in 1945, 'that Glenmont and its contents, particularly the living-room on the second floor, should be preserved as a memorial to my dear husband and his work'. Mina had been guarding this memorial since Thomas's death in 1931, and had ensured that 'His desk, books, papers, and other mementos of his activities [remained] preserved intact in the position and condition in which he left them'.[1] Mina's preservation efforts did not simply arise from the grief of a devoted wife. She was a champion of her husband's historical significance and held strong beliefs about how history should be preserved. Back in 1929, Henry Ford had reconstructed Thomas's Menlo Park laboratory at Greenfield Village, Ford's new amusement-park-style tribute to American culture and industry. Mina was disturbed by the way Greenfield Village commercialized Thomas's legacy. She wrote, 'I do not approve of disturbing historical spots. Let things be put and surround the historical spots with beauty'.[2]

Mina got her wish with Glenmont, which still stands today as part of Thomas Edison National Historical Park in West Orange, New Jersey. Ironically, despite being the mistress of Glenmont for over sixty years and the instigator of its preservation, Mina herself has until recently been peripheral in National Park programming. This interpretive gap reflects larger historical and institutional biases—specifically, the tendency to prioritize male-dominated histories of science and technology over the domestic sphere, the idealized domain of women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When Park programs focus predominantly on Thomas and his achievements, Mina is cast as simply the wife of a great man rather than an important historical figure in her own right.

Fig. 1, Glenmont.[3]

But the narratives are changing. Innovative interpretive programs at Glenmont, set to begin in late 2023, will return Mina to her central place in the Edison story. These historical research and preservation efforts are funded by a National Park Foundation Inclusive Storytelling Grant, part of an initiative helping National Parks to tell the stories of marginalized figures in American history. For Thomas Edison National Historical Park, this means making more room for domestic history. As Curator of Glenmont Beth Miller reminds us, the house was an important space for the Edison family. It was also Mina's responsibility. '[W]e're taking a person who is largely marginalized in the Thomas Edison story at the Park', says Miller, 'and we're pushing her into the spotlight so she can be recognized for her contributions, because the home was primarily her sphere, her domain, and she spent her life advocating not only for women's contributions, but also for the value of operating a household'.[4]

A new tour of the Glenmont grounds, titled 'Mina's Place of Business', will highlight Mina's role as 'home executive' and her efforts to redefine domestic labour as a skilled profession on par with the male-dominated fields of science and business. In addition to the tour, four artifacts—including Mina's Red Cross uniform, one of her birding journals, a baby blanket, and a letter opener gifted to her by prominent African American businesswoman and philanthropist Ella Piper—are being conserved so that they can be publicly displayed for the first time. These artifacts reflect Mina's multiple roles as mother, philanthropist, and businesswoman who devoted herself to supporting her family and giving back to the wider community. By showcasing Mina's story, the Park will become a crucial cultural resource for demonstrating the interconnectedness of the so-called feminine domestic sphere with scientific and technological history.

Brought up in a well-to-do Ohio Methodist family, Mina Miller was only twenty years old when she married Thomas Edison and came to Glenmont in 1886. Thomas already had three children from a previous marriage, and Mina—who would soon have three children of her own—quickly had to learn how to be a mother, manage a massive house, and navigate interactions between her famous husband and the press. It was overwhelming, but Mina rose to the occasion. In addition to running Glenmont and the Edisons' winter home in Fort Myers, Florida, Mina took on a staggering number of philanthropic and social commitments. She was affiliated with the Orange Woman's Club, the League of Woman Voters, the National Recreation Association, the American Red Cross, the Audubon Society, and the Women's Christian

Fig. 2, Mina's desk at Glenmont.[6]

Temperance Union, among other organizations.[5] She was also a lifelong advocate for education as well as the preservation and appreciation of nature. All the while, she kept tabs on what her husband was doing in his laboratory and mediated in family business matters. Mina was a busy woman—no less busy than Thomas or any of the men working in the lab.

She knew it too. Mina saw women's work as real, skilled work, integral to the well-being of American society. Accordingly, her own views of labour and her definition of the 'home executive' are at the heart of the new Glenmont programming. In a 1930 speech on women's work, Mina explained the role of the home executive in detail:

> As head of the house, woman occupies a most important and enviable position… She must be an executive, an executive with a great many qualifications to enable her to successfully fill the triple role of wife, mother, and home-maker. 'Home-Executi[v]e' is the title I like to apply to home makers. The term 'Housewife' does not apply to the capable woman who conducts her home just as efficiently as the man who carries on his work. …But home-making is more than the business of housekeeping. It involves spiritual and aesthetic qualities as well. In the first place, the home-maker must be well-educated. She must have executive ability. She must be a good purchasing agent… She must be something of a chemist in order to guard her family's diet. She must be an economist. She must be a gracious hostess. …She should be versed in music, in art, in literature…[7]

Mina's version of the efficiently-run home sat somewhere between the domestic haven of nineteenth-century separate spheres and a modern business. The home was still woman's sphere, but the woman was 'head of house' and could never be *too* educated for this position. She did not just need to know household skills and parlour music. She had to understand chemistry, economics, literature, and business practices. Mina argued that she also needed control over her own money.[8] While she always believed that her primary job was to support her husband and be 'Mrs. Thomas A. Edison', Mina defined this role as one that came with considerable independence and authority.

After going on the 'Mina's Place of Business' tour, visitors will come away with a sense of Glenmont not as an isolated domestic sphere—or just the place Thomas Edison slept when he was not crashing in the lab—but as an active workplace and cultural centre. Here, the family did research on matters pertaining to Thomas's inventions.[9] Mina drove down the hill from Glenmont's garage in her electric car to pick Thomas up from the lab.[10] She supervised a domestic staff that typically included maids, a gardener, a waitress, a chauffeur, and a cook, as well as other fluctuating personnel.[11] Madeleine Edison, daughter of Thomas and Mina, was married at Glenmont and had her reception on the grounds in 1914.[12] Famous visitors—Henry Ford, Helen Keller, Maria Montessori, Herbert Hoover—passed in and out of the Glenmont doors.[14] Glenmont and the lab functioned as an integrated whole, both crucial to the success of the Edisons' business.

Uncovering and presenting this perspective has posed certain challenges. Not least among these is the looming cultural myth of Thomas Edison. Whether in his guise as heroic, self-made inventor or unoriginal, unscrupulous conman, this mythical Edison tends to

Fig. 3, Madeleine Edison Sloane's Wedding. Pictured (L to R): Thomas Edison, Mina Edison, Madeleine Edison Sloane, John Sloane.[13]

Fig. 4, Thomas and Mina Edison at the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco, 1915[16]

overshadow his family and the more ordinary aspects of his daily life and business dealings. A giant of technological history, these stories imply, does not need a wife or kids to make his reputation.

I will admit that before I joined this project, I had never heard of Mina Edison. It took me less than a day of research to realize how egregious this was. There is no understanding Thomas Edison without his family. Granted, he was already famous when he met Mina, but she was quickly integrated into his professional life; as soon as they returned from their honeymoon, she was taking notes in the lab.[15] The Edison business, moreover, was a family endeavour, which the papers clearly show.

When we take the documents on their own terms, they quickly unravel the faulty places in our inherited historical narratives. Mina's presence is palpable at Glenmont and in the Park archives. Her many remnants are scattered across the Park's archival collections, from financial records to family correspondence to personal scrapbooks. Additional papers and artifacts relating to Mina are held at Glenmont; letters still preserved in her desk, for instance, fill in gaps in the archives but require persistence and serendipity to track down. It is a continuing puzzle, and one that would be impossible to solve without the input of Archivist Leonard DeGraaf. His vast knowledge of the Edison papers and historical expertise—along with a commitment to letting the archival records speak for themselves—have made it possible for us to access previously neglected information about Mina and her work. We plan to make these valuable resources more accessible to researchers and museum visitors alike. In addition to incorporating archival images and documents into tour resources for Interpretation staff, we have recently reprocessed some of the Park's archival collections. In June 2023, we integrated two existing collections into the new 'Mina Miller Edison Papers,' a collection that more accurately reflects the centrality of Mina and the family in the Edison story.

Woven together into a narrative, the Park's records bring Mina and Glenmont to life. Through her business correspondence, we see Mina the fierce and savvy (and somewhat picky) estate manager locked in a years-long squabble (c. 1907-11) with the famous landscape architect Ernest Bowditch. Bowditch had designed the landscape at Cornelius Vanderbilt's home, The Breakers, but Mina still could not agree with him in matters of garden design, fought him over the geography of garden paths, and disputed his fees.[18] Through personal correspondence, we see Mina the humorous, animal-loving mother, trying to figure out how to get all of her son Theodore's pets (including fish, birds and a monkey) to their winter home in Florida.[19] Through newspaper clippings and household records, we see Mina grow from a young, inexperienced nineteenth-century wife to a self-assured twentieth-century public figure, her family and the Glenmont estate changing all the while.

The records also remind us that the story of women's work at Glenmont is not only Mina's, but that of the many other women who lived and worked there. Glenmont's staff included working-class women, immigrants, and women of colour, and Mina would not have been able to run the house without their labour and support. Archival records tend to be skewed in favour of employers—those privileged enough to keep the records—so the perspectives of staff can be especially difficult to track down.[20] But through Mina's archival traces, we can get glimpses of what life was like at Glenmont for workers. For instance, there is Queenie Adams, the talented black chef who faced the challenge of integrating with a predominantly white staff in the 1930s.[21] We have legal records from Madge Cheetham and Annie Quigley, two servants who leveraged their limited resources to fight for their wages.[22] Most of these accounts remain tantalizingly incomplete, yet they demonstrate that Glenmont, rather than just the backdrop for a celebrated inventor, was a diverse, if hierarchical, space kept alive through the work

Fig. 5, Thomas and Mina Edison at Thomas Edison's 84th birthday, 1930[17]

and the voices of people from all walks of life. These partial stories should encourage museum professionals, visitors, and researchers to keep searching for the histories hidden in plain sight.

'Mina's Place of Business' puts these archival stories back into the physical space of the Glenmont grounds so that visitors can gain a deeper understanding of Mina and her work in the context of her surroundings and her era. It is my particular hope that visitors will get a sense of how Mina and her work changed over the course of her residency there. Instead of treating Glenmont as simply a relic, or a space frozen in time, I would invite visitors to consider it as a dynamic workplace that saw the Edison family through the period of rapid social transition from the Gilded Age to Second World War.

Historical commemoration, as we can see through the new narratives we have uncovered during this research, is an evolving thing. As we learn more about figures like Mina and the women who worked with her, we have a responsibility to keep updating our public programming. On the practical level, this will ensure that museum programs accurately reflect the breadth and depth of the archival materials available to us. More importantly, these updates will challenge ingrained, outdated narratives that push women and other historically marginalized populations to the side lines even in the face of substantial historical evidence pointing to their centrality. Mina is everywhere, as even the briefest glance at the Edison family photo albums showing Thomas and Mina together at public events, or at the speeches Mina made in her capacity as 'Mrs. Thomas A. Edison', will show. It is absurd to consign her to the margins.

History itself does not change, but our own perspectives in the present are always shifting. In Mina's case, our perspective has shifted enough to allow us to see more and more of the historical threads that bind together the realms of business, technology and the home, all of which make the Edisons significant to American history. It does not end with Mina or her family either. '[F]or every woman's story like Mina's that is being told, there are probably 10 others that are not being told', Miller says. 'We're just at the beginning'.[23]

NOTES

1. Thomas Edison National Historical Park Archives (hereafter TENHP), Mina Miller Edison Papers, Series 5: Subject Files, Glenmont, Mina Miller Edison to Thomas A. Edison, Inc., 31 Dec. 1945.
2. TENHP, Mina Miller Edison Papers, Series 1: Correspondence, "Mixed Feelings."
3. Photo by Katherine Hobbs.
4. Interview with Beth Miller, 10 Mar. 2023.
5. TENHP, Edison Biographical Collection, Mina Miller Edison Folder, List of Organizations.
6. Photo by Katherine Hobbs.
7. *The Chautauquan Daily* 54, no. 10 (8 Jul. 1930), 4.
8. *The Chautauquan Daily* 54, no. 10 (8 Jul. 1930), 5.
9. TENHP, Edison Biographical Collection, Oral History Transcripts, Interview of 26 Jul. 1970, Thomas Alva Edison Project: Theodore Edison (Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, 1974), 32-33.
10. 'TAKING CARE OF THOMAS EDISON. HIS THOUGHTFUL WIFE EQUAL TO THIS BIG TASK. HE WILL OBEY NO ONE ELSE', *Ferndale Enterprise*, 5 Dec. 1913, 6.
11. TENHP, Vouchers and Other Financial Documents, Series 6: Mrs. Thomas A. Edison Vouchers, Payroll.
12. Wedding Invitation (1914), David E E Sloane Collection, https://edisondigital.rutgers.edu/document/X400GEO#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-37%2C-120%2C722%2C1247 (accessed 7 May 2023).
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15. See, for example, TENHP, Technical Note, 23 Mar. 1886, accessed through Thomas A. Edison Papers Digital Edition, Rutgers University, https://edisondigital.rutgers.edu/document/N314157#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-58%2C-560%2C1153%2C1876.
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19. TENHP, Mina Miller Edison Papers, Series 1: Correspondence, Mina Miller Edison to Mary Valinda Miller and Mary Miller, 11 Feb. 1909.
20. Faye E. Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 2, 8.
21. TENHP, Mina Miller Edison Papers, Series 5: Subject Files, Glenmont, Mina Miller to John Vincent Miller, 16 May 1930.
22. TENHP, Vouchers and Other Financial Documents, Series 6: Mrs. Thomas A. Edison Vouchers, Payroll, Box 380.
23. Interview with Beth Miller, 10 Mar 2023.

Spotlight on Research

Tensions and contradictions in commemorative hagiography: A case study of Gervas Huxley's Lady Denman (1961)

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Lady Gertrude Denman (1884 – 1954), the daughter of Weetman Pearson, a Liberal MP with global enterprises in engineering, mining and munitions, threw her energy and significant financial resources into a multitude of organizations. These were primarily, but not exclusively, focussed on women's issues and encompassed, for example, housing reform, hostels for nurses and women over thirty, land settlement, child nutrition and maternal welfare. She was chair of the National Federation of Women's Institutes for thirty years; chair of the Birth Control Council (later the Family Planning Association) for nearly twenty-five years; Director of the Women's Land Army during the Second World War; an early member of the BBC Women's Advisory Committee; sat on the Boards of Westminster Press and the Carnegie Trust, and succeeded Lady Rhondda as President of the Ladies Golf Union. Had she been a man, even with a less robust public and philanthropic profile, her life would arguably have been commemorated by the elevation of a stone statue in a prominent public place—but this was not to be.

Women have a complex relationship with both public history and commemoration in Britain. Practices of memorialisation and remembrance, developed in tandem with politics, the state and the military, have tended to marginalise them. Bee Rowlatt has demonstrated that, 'there is a bronze ceiling: over nine out of ten of London's figurative statues are of men', while public art suggests 'greatness was achieved by men'.[1] Women have fared better in alternative forms of commemoration: hospitals, schools or charitable trusts were sometimes named after them.[2] Lady Denman, before and after her death, was memorialised in similarly practical ways. Denman College, an adult education residential college, commemorated her iconic place in the Women's Institute (WI) Movement. Similarly, the Lady Denman Memorial Fund, established by the Family Planning Association after her death, provided birth control clinics in rural areas.

Denman's daughter, Lady Judith Burrell, felt that 'a biography would form her mother's best memorial'.[3] Consequently, Gervas Huxley's book, *Lady Denman, 1884-1954*, was published in 1961.[4] This hagiography provides an official history, an entry point into Denman's life, for both academic historians and the general public, and ensures she has been remembered and revered. Ownership of Denman's mythical status might initially have been in the hands of her family but, over time, others came to feel they shared it. The book offers a sense of what Francesco Alberoni describes as 'connected knowingness' to a woman who has iconic status, particularly within the WI Movement and the Women's Land Army.[5] When interviewed, members of these organisations recount anecdotes about Denman, gleaned from the text, despite never actually having met her, thereby contributing to Denman's almost mythical status.[6] Myths, however, as Angus Calder points out, are purifying, selectively remembering, but also forgetting, as they smooth off rough edges and iron out contradictions to evoke versions of the past which affirm a sense of identity for families, organisations, communities or nations.[7]

Commemorative hagiographies, like statues, seek to ensure individuals' lives are revered and emulated. Huxley's book is unreferenced and, with no publicly accessible private papers or correspondence referring to Denman, its claims have hitherto gone unchallenged. As researchers on a Leverhulme-funded project entitled *Privilege, politics, pragmatism: Lady Denman and the women's movement (1914-54)*, we see the text as selective. It is arguably a negotiation between the sometimes-contradictory expectations and possible tensions between her family, the author, the book's potential readers, and the cultural moment in which it was written.[8] As feminist historians we are using Denman's life as a prism to explore social, political, and cultural change across this period. Our interest lies in the networks, inter-relationships, and complex, even contradictory, politics of feminist activism of the era.[9]

This approach differs significantly from a commemorative hagiography, which emphasises the subject's exceptionality, supposedly unique qualities, skills, attributes, and their personal contribution to social or political progress and the public good. Huxley's hagiography presents Denman as a key player in women's progress towards equality, but in so doing, disguises how complex, multifaced and wide-ranging the women's movement in the first half of the twentieth century was. The very first paragraph confidently asserts 'no one questions that women have equal rights with men to education, to intellectual freedom and the opportunity to

Lady Denman

serve the community'.[10] A version of the gestalt of the 1960s many at the time, and historians since, would contradict.[11] Huxley goes on to explain how although Denman was born into a very different society, she was ahead of her time in supporting, for example, women's suffrage, birth control and the WI Movement. This affiliation with perceived 1960s values affirms her right to be commemorated.

The book's structure prioritises causes with values similar to those relevant to the time when it was written; hence it privileges Denman's work with the WI, Family Planning and the Land Army. The WI and Family Planning have a dedicated chapter each. The WI and Birth Control movements were successes of the 1950s – the WI's membership peaked at over half a million members, and the Family Planning Clinics received a much-publicised visit from Health Minister Iain Macleod in 1955.[12] At a time when, as Hilda Kean points out, references to 'the war' unquestionably meant the Second World War and war work was seen as a precursor to women's greater participation in economic productivity outside of the home, it is unsurprising that Denman's work in the Women's Land Army is afforded two chapters.[13]

However, the birth control movement's relationship with the eugenics movement has been carefully omitted. In the first half of the twentieth century, eugenics was mainstream in British social and political thinking and birth control was far from respectable. By 1961, when the book was published, their positions were reversed.[14] Thus, Denman's membership, although a rather half-hearted and inactive one, in the National Executive of the Eugenics Society from 1940-43 is not mentioned. Likewise, the Society of Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress, founded by Marie Stopes and which Denman gave support to, is referred to merely as the Society for Constructive Birth Control.

Denman's political and financial commitment to the Liberal Party also receives scant attention, perhaps because the book was written during the Butskellism post-war consensus years when, to quote Denman's granddaughter, 'the Liberal Party had become something of a joke'.[15] Our research, however, highlights the network of radical cross-party organisations Denman was involved in, and her acute awareness of how women's personal lives, and their access to birth control, were shaped by economic circumstances. Denman was a proponent of the Progressive Party in the 1907 London Country Council Elections; a supporter of interwar peace campaigns, and the Children's Minimum Committee which was established in the 1930s to ensure all children had adequate food. She was a member of what Helen Jones describes as a 'group of women not personally affected by misfortune', who nonetheless understood the gendered impact of poverty and took action to get women's issues on the political agenda between 1914 and 1950.[16] Significantly, in ignoring such nuances, Huxley's hagiography serves to depoliticise Denman's highly political work.

Like most commemoration, this book does not interrogate class structures and economic inequalities. It determinedly suggests Lady Denman was down-to-earth, unpretentious, and a supporter of ordinary women. Yet our research suggests it was inherited wealth which enabled her, in both her personal life and politics, to stretch and redefine the norms of heterosexual femininity. She had a large independent income, estimated to have been £50,000 a year in the interwar period, the equivalent of £4-5 million in 2023, which provided her with an extraordinary degree of personal freedom, and ambivalence towards social approval. This, and an army of domestic servants, enabled her to take a leading role in risqué campaigns such a birth control. Her wealth and social connections were assets prized by the causes she supported. However, it is her skilled chairing of meetings and commitment to hard work which Huxley's text highlights, smoothing away the complexities of class and Denman's political engagement. This may have avoided antagonising the book's potential readers, or perhaps been a deferential nod to Burrell's Conservative politics.

The choice of Huxley to write the book was deliberate: Burrell wanted the book to be written 'by someone with close personal knowledge' of her mother, who, by her own admission, she thought was the 'most wonderful person I have ever known'.[17] Huxley was the son-in-law of one of Denman's closest friends, and his opening page acknowledges he 'was privileged to enjoy Lady Denman's friendship'.[18] Tense negotiations and conflicts surrounding public commemoration are often a subject of public record, carefully recorded in official minutes. It would be presumptuous to speculate whether there were private negotiations about which aspects of Denman's life might have been perceived 'unpalatable' and edited out. Huxley's preface acknowledges the manuscript was read by Burrell,

Denman's brother and his wife, and Denman's partner, Margaret Pyke, prior to being submitted to the publisher.

As Huxley was part of Denman's network of friends, he had some understanding of the emotionally difficult areas of Denman's life her family might prefer to be glossed over in a public commemoration. Any family sensitivities were also influenced by prevailing values and assumptions of the time. Burrell approvingly noted how the book skates over the anguish caused by Denman's son's mental illness 'in a most marvellous way'.[19] In later decades, Thomas Denman's mood-swings and unpredictable and difficult behaviour, shifting from being 'sweet Thomas' to threatening, would, perhaps, have been diagnosed as schizophrenia and appropriate treatment offered. In the interwar years, Denman increasingly became unable to manage her son, who eventually required full-time care, and responded by burying herself in public work.

Our research suggests Denman's private life informed and motivated her public activities. For her the personal was political, as her daughter pointed out, 'if you are very happy at home, meetings are a frightful bore and if you are unhappy meetings are quite pleasant'.[20] Her personal need for distraction seems to have led her to support any cause which 'would make women's lives more bearable'.[21] Such an explanation would contradict the altruistic profile a hagiography demands. Yet in explaining Denman's numerous public roles, Huxley quotes her as explaining in writing to a friend 'there are so many things that are so untidy and I get fussy and feel something should be done about them', as if she is merely acting as some sort of public or admirative housewife.[22]

Additionally, Burrell commented Huxley handled 'wonderfully the relationship' between her parents.[23] Marital fidelity was not Lord Denman's forte, although his wife's money financed his involvement in Liberal politics. The peak of his career came with his appointment as Governor General of Australia in 1911.[24] However, his term of office was impacted both by his own poor health, and Lady Denman's affair with one of his aides. The couple returned to England in 1914, with Lady Denman making plans to divorce her husband. Her divorce papers remain in the National Archives, but her plans for remarriage were tragically thwarted when her lover was killed in the Dardanelles in 1915. As such, the Denmans remained married; it is unlikely she would have been able to undertake some of her public roles without this veil of respectability. Yet for the next forty years, the couple were, in reality, separated; their personal lives, circles of friends and public appearances were detached from each other. Their relationship seems to have been cordial, with occasional family Sunday lunches and a joint appearance at their daughter's wedding, but Lord Denman lived largely in hotels in Brighton, maintaining close relationships with two women friends. Later, after all three had died, the two women were laid to rest either side of Lord Denman.

Marital difficulties, adultery, and divorce, providing it was speedily followed by remarriage, were not uncommon amongst the landed aristocracy and the political elite in the first half of the twentieth century. The 1960s was, however, a period of transition and change in relation to public discourses of sexuality. As Geoffrey Gorer's study of attitudes to sex and marriage indicated, while people's sexual behaviour at the beginning of the sixties were more liberal than the views they expressed, by the end of the decade the reverse was true.[25] When Huxley's book was written, revelations about Lady Denman's messy and complex personal life, it can be surmised, would have presented an unpalatable past to many stalwart members of the WI Movement who were consumers of the text, and stakeholders in myths surrounding their revered leader, Lady Denman.[26]

Unpalatable or not, marital difficulties, combined with an empathetic personality, shaped Denman's political and social concerns, including her commitment to the birth control movement. She knew it was her wealth and public activities which enabled her to cope with, or indeed circumnavigate, her personal problems. She explained to her daughter that she 'thought it awful when a woman was tolerably unhappy in her marriage and had absolutely nothing else to think of'. To her this was why the WI Movement was so important, as her daughter recalled her saying:

> If you are a woman in a cottage absolutely everything you do, from washing the fellow's socks to cooking his dinner, brings your thoughts back to how tiresome he is.
>
> And the only let out that at all is the WI, when for perhaps two days a month you can get out of your beastly cottage and away from your horrid husband and think about something else.[27]

But for Denman, an unhappy marriage did not mean an unhappy private life. In 1930, she met Margaret Pyke, the woman who would be become her partner, and appointed her Secretary of the National Birth Control Council. Their personal and work relationship lasted until Denman's death in 1954. They lived together for 20 years at Denman's country estate, Balcombe Place, where their individual bedrooms shared a Jack-and-Jill bathroom. Denman and Margaret Pyke fall into the category of women who Sybil Neville-Rolfe has identified as having a mutually-enriched relationship which provided 'emotional stability' enabling 'them to make larger contributions to the welfare of society'.[28] However, no commemoration of Denman's life written in 1961 would suggest that Pyke was more than one of Denman's numerous friends and colleagues. As Adrienne Rich argues: 'women's choice of women as passionate comrades, life partners, co-workers, lovers, tribe, has been crushed, invalidated, forced into hiding and disguise'.[29]

There is no surviving evidence which might shed light on how the two women defined their relationship. Yet it clearly went beyond that of employer and employee; the couple played nurse to each other when sick, and 'Pykey', as she was known to the family was at Denman's deathbed in 1954, receiving many kindly letters of condolence on her loss. A friend and colleague in the Birth Control movement recalled, when interviewed in the 1970s, the 'enormous affection they had for each other'.[30] Any interrogation of Denman's life in the modern day cannot ignore the possibility theirs was a lesbian relationship, whether sexually, romantically or both. Whilst acknowledging this lies in

the realm of speculation, it was a topic Denman's family remain uncertain about. There are, however, problems in using modern categorisations and contemporary understandings of identity to analyse the historical past, as Laura Doan argues.[31] Lesley Hall has pointed outthat same-sex relationships in the interwar period may need to be understood as more complex, variable and nuanced.[32]

The nature of Lady Denman's public and private identities, both lived and reconstructed, demonstrate the challenges of a commemoration text when readers, writers and the subject of the text are all inhabiting different historical moments in time. Arguably, Huxley's commemorative hagiography smooths over the tensions, contradictions and rough edges of Denman's life. In seeking to celebrate her contribution to history, his work, with its many problematic absences, arguably diminishes her many achievements. In continuing our research, we look forward to writing our own messy history of Lady Denman's complex and contradictory life.

NOTES

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2. See Katie Pickles, *Transnational outrage: the death and commemoration of Edith Cavell* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
3. Gervas Huxley, *Both Hands*: *An Autobiography* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970), 236.
4. Gervas Huxley, *Lady Denman, 1884-1954* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961).
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7. Angus Calder, *The Myth of the Blitz* (London: Pimlico, 1992).
8. https://www.leverhulme.ac.uk/emeritus-fellowships/privilege-politics-pragmatism-lady-denman-and-women's-movement-1914–1954
9. For further discussion of feminist biography see L.D. Ginzberg, 'The Pleasures (and Dangers) of Biography', *Journal of Women's History*, 19(3), (2007), 205-212; 'Why Biography?', *The American Historical Review,* 114(3), (2009), 625-630. Recent examples of biographies include: Angela V John, *Elizabeth Robins: Staging a Life: 1862-1952* (London: Routledge, 2002); Susan Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the politics of conscience* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); June Purvis, *Christabel Pankhurst: a biography* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2018).
10. Huxley, *Lady Denman,* 11.
11. See for example: Laurel Forster and Sue Bruley (eds.), *Historicising the Women's Liberation Movement in the Western World: 1960-1999* (London: Routledge, 2019); Sara Maitland (ed.), *Very heaven: looking back at the 1960's* (London: Virago Press, 1988); Lynn Abrams, 'Mothers and Daughters: Negotiating the Discourse on the "Good Woman" in 1950s and 1960s Britain', in *The Sixties and Beyond: dechristianization in North America and Western Europe, 1945-2000*, eds. Michael Gauvreau and Nancy Christie (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 60—83.
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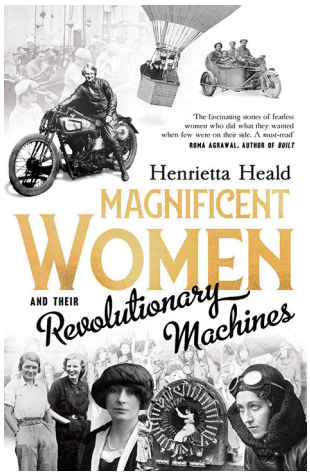
14. Clare Debenham, *Birth Control and the Rights of Women: Post-Suffrage Feminism in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014).
15. Informal personal interview carried out by Maggie Andrews 2021.
16. Helen Jones, *Women in British Public Life, 1914-50: Gender, Power and Social Policy* (London: Routledge, 2014), 84.
17. Oral Evidence of the Suffragette and Suffragist Movement: the Brian Harrison, Lady Burrell carried out on October 1977, LSE Library 8SUF/B/173, Box 1: Disc 35, https://www.lse.ac.uk/library/collection-highlights/the-suffrage-interviews; Huxley, *Both Hands,* 236.
18. Huxley, *Lady Denman,* 5.
19. Lady Burrell. LSE Library 8SUF/B/173.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Huxley, *Lady Denman,* 124.
23. Lady Burrell. LSE Library 8SUF/B/173.
24. Shane Breynard and David Peace Headon, *Love & World War: The Denmans Empire and Australia 1910-1917* (Canberra: Canberra Museum and Art Gallery, 2016), http://cmag-and-hp.s3.amazonaws.com/heracles-production/982/326/dad/982326dad67015e7d5279ff6d1447d8a7517c7bd223db01e4d9c365e5eb5/The%20Denmans%20Catalogue.pdf
25. Geoffrey Gorer, *Sex & Marriage in England Today: Study of the Views and Experience of the Under-45s* (London: Nelson, 1971).
26. Lady Burrell. LSE Library. 8SUF/B/173.
27. Lady Burrell. LSE Library . 8SUF/B/173.
28. Sybil Neville-Rolfe, *Why Marry?* (London: Faber & Faber, 1935), 95, cited in Lesley Hall, '"Sentimental Follies" or "Instruments of Tremendous Uplift"? reconsidering women's same-sex relationships in interwar Britain', *Women's History Review*, 25/1 (2016), 124—142.
29. Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence', *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*, 5/4 (1980), 631-660, 632.
30. Mrs Nancy Raphael, LSE Library 8SUF/B/173. Box 1: Disc 36.
31. Laura Doan, *Disturbing practices: history, sexuality, and women's experience of modern war* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).
32. Hall, '"Sentimental Follies"', 124-142; Hall is in many ways arguing against the ideas expressed in Sheila Jeffreys, *The spinster and her enemies: Feminism and sexuality, 1880-1930* (Chicago: Spinifex Press, 1997).

Henrietta Heald, *Magnificent Women and Their Revolutionary Machines*
London: Unbound, 2021. £9.99, ISBN 978-1-80018-027-7 (paperback), pp. xi + 281
Eleanor Gillespie
University of Portsmouth



The Women's Engineering Society (WES), founded in 1919, brought together technically-minded women under one common purpose, 'a good education and secure employment for themselves and others but also a better, fairer world for all members of the female sex'. (p.208). Those founders and early members of the Society are the focus of Henrietta Heald's *Magnificent Women and Their Revolutionary Machines.* By taking the drastically different figures of Rachel Parsons and Caroline Haslett as the basis of her work, their stories are brought together with 'other amazing individuals who, along the way, would clamour to get into the book' (p.ix). Heald's work allows for a broad range of women from differing backgrounds to enter the narrative, and she skilfully weaves their lives and experiences into the wider story of the development of women's roles in engineering during the first half of the twentieth century.

Utilising a largely chronological structure, *Magnificent Women and Their Revolutionary Machines* charts the story of women engineers from the late nineteenth century to the 1950s, with a particular focus on the contribution of women during the First and Second World Wars. Not just a story of London, this work explores the diverse heritage of female engineering across the Northeast of England and Scotland.

Meticulously researched, this book unearths the contribution of women to major engineering feats of their day, from the design of the steelwork on the Tyne Bridge by Dorothy Donaldson Buchanan to Beatrice (Tilly) Shilling overcoming issues with early Merlin engines in Spitfires and Hurricanes. Heald acknowledges that 'From the start, The Women's Engineering Society was a broad church'. (p.105) Those who worked in mechanical, aeronautical, naval, and electrical engineering are all discussed in detail however, a prominent place is given to the latter. Specifically, the introduction of electricity to the home to reduce the burden of domesticity on women was championed by Caroline Haslett, who became first director of the Electrical Association for Women in 1924.

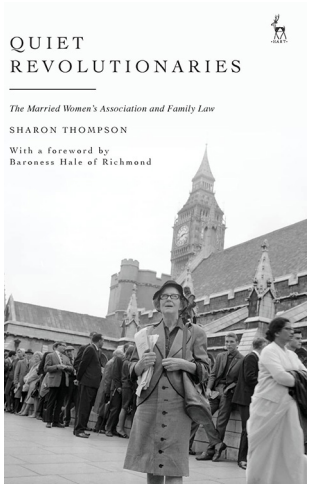
What this book excels at is unearthing both the personal and professional lives of the women studied. None more so than Rachel Parsons, whose tragic murder in 1956 is discussed in detail in Chapter 12. While Rachel had been an important member of the Society in its early days, she had drifted away from engineering and became a society hostess. Heald's description of the press coverage surrounding her death reveals the ways in which her engineering past served as a tool in the press' character assassination of her as an 'eccentric', highlighting the difficulties faced by women engineers. Whilst celebrating their achievements, Heald does not overlook the challenges and prejudices faced by women attempting to break into employment.

This book seamlessly intertwines the development of the Women's Engineering Society with the movement for increased political participation for women, particularly as Members of Parliament. In doing so, she emphasises the centrality of women engineers both to the political advancement of women, but also the advancement of their freedoms. This is largely achieved through a discussion of the attempted political career of Rachel Parsons. Whilst Heald's claim that the Society laid the groundwork for the Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act may, at first glance, seem tenuous, the way in which she charts the lives of these ground-breaking women through their professional and personal lives places them as part of the wider feminist movement emerging in the twentieth century.

Heald's social history is written in a manner that is accessible to a general readership but does not come at the cost of academic meticulousness. Utilising a wide variety of sources: including diaries, personal accounts, letters, and official speeches, she provides an extensive range of endnotes for each chapter. However, the lack of page numbers given for these references makes the sources sometimes difficult to utilise. Despite this, the scope of the sources cited emphasises the thoroughness of the research grounding this work. Heald also includes a timeline of 'Milestones for Women', spanning from 1805 to 2021, which helps to place the work of these magnificent women into the wider context of women's achievements. In places, this book frustratingly appears to focus little on the Women's Engineering Society itself. However, this allows Heald to uncover the stories of the women behind the movement, and their contributions to engineering and equality for women.

This work is a wonderful and accessible introduction to the world of women engineers in the early twentieth century. Heald emphasises that the 'revolutionary machines' were not just their mechanical inventions, but their contributions to a 'vibrant "wave" of feminism' (p.xi). A cast of diverse characters brings to life the involvement of women in many areas of engineering and places them firmly within this movement of increased rights for women.

Sharon Thompson, *Quiet Revolutionaries: The Married Women's Association and Family Law*
Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2022. £85.00, ISBN 9781509929412, pp. 280
Reviewed by Lyndsey Jenkins
Queen Mary University of London



Lily Ince was a model housewife. Married to a spendthrift and gambler. She was conscientious and thrifty, diligently putting away cash carefully saved from money she and her children had earned. After her husband's retirement, however, he sued her for half of these savings, claiming they were the product of housekeeping economies. He won. Mrs Ince could not believe the injustice. She refused to comply with the court order to hand over the money, resulting in her imprisonment.

Quiet Revolutionaries grapples with a fundamental feminist question – how should work in the home be valued? – with a specific focus on how it should be valued in law. The Married Women's Association (MWA) campaigned throughout the twentieth century to ensure that married women's contributions to the home were reflected in their legal rights. On the face of it, its demands were not especially radical. It did not oppose marriage, challenge gender norms, or insist, like some later feminists, that women should be paid for housework. Instead, envisioning marriage as a partnership grounded in equality, it sought to ensure that the realities of women's lives were reflected in family and property law.

Thompson's detailed and comprehensive account traces this important but neglected history across nearly fifty years. Founded in 1938 as an off-shoot of the feminist Six Point Group and chaired by Juanita Francis, leading members included key figures in mid-century feminism, including Dora Russell, Vera Brittain, and, perhaps most significantly, Teresa Billington-Grieg and Edith Summerskill. Their papers are among the many archival sources Thompson utilises, and inevitably, some of these figures loom large in the narrative. But Thompson rightly insists on looking beyond the leaders and out to the lawyers and members who made up the wider organisation, drawing on sources, like the organisation's newsletter, to understand their priorities and interests.

A series of chapters examine the various strategies pursued by the organisation, including developing draft legislation, taking up cases like those of Mrs Ince, and pursuing piecemeal legal reforms. The prominence of men as members and allies, and the emphasis on pursuing lawsuits, are especially striking. At the beginning of each chapter, letters from married women explain their difficulties, often in heartrending detail. This makes the human story of suffering central to the narrative. 'Interludes' between chapters provide extended reflections on different individuals or themes; a strategy which might offer inspiration for any writer struggling to integrate all their ideas into the main narrative.

Thompson excels at explaining the precise implications of particular policy stances, legislative developments, and legal cases in ways that can be easily understood by the lay reader. The discussion of divorce reform is particularly intriguing, and a valuable reminder that it was not welcomed as liberating by all women. On the contrary, there were fears that it might remove important protections and leave some women, especially older or dependent women, vulnerable to financial disaster. Thompson's emphasis here on delay, obstruction, and resistance to change reveals another side of feminist activism in the twentieth century.

She also shows the many struggles the organisation faced, including a painful fracturing, and sometimes fierce backlash. Thompson's account demonstrates the extent of the injustices and inequalities that were embedded in the law, as well as the degree of opposition faced by would-be reformers, so that, for all the criticism levelled at earlier women's organisations for their supposed conservativism and timidity, it is clear just what they were up against. Some of the claims made by the MWA were, by necessity, astonishingly basic, including 'the idea that women should know what their husbands earn, have a say in how the income they help generate is spent and have a legal right in their own home' (p.103).

Thompson situates the most energetic years of the MWA in the context of post-war celebrations of housewifery and domesticity. It might, however, have been useful to take into account more of the recent work on inter-war feminism to understand how the organisation emerged. Though Thompson acknowledges that differences between 'old' and 'new' feminism have been challenged, she still very much grounds the work of the MWA within 'new' feminism. Similarly, though Thompson draws direct parallels with the militant suffragette movement – a number of leading figures in the MWA had been members of the Women's Freedom League and the Women's Social and Political Union – perhaps the more apposite comparison is with the constitutional organisations, who also engaged in the patient, behind-the-scenes, lobbying which characterised the MWA's campaigns.

Quiet Revolutionaries is a rich, multifaceted and thought-provoking resource, and an important contribution to the literature challenging narratives stressing the weakness and quiescence of the women's movement in the 1940s and 1950s. There is exciting potential to build on this with more comparative studies, and consider the MWA's relationship to other campaigns for legislation that would advance women's rights and protect women's interests, especially in view of the involvement of key figures who were prominent in a number of organisations. The book is also a vital intervention into feminist legal history, and Thompson insists throughout on the importance of a legal history attentive to the interventions made by, and for, women. Asking 'how many changes for women in law and society would not have happened without the work of female lawyers', (p.65) she reminds us that feminist activism comes in many forms.

Omotayo Agunbiade

Tell us about your area of expertise?

My area of expertise is women's history. I have spent the past few years conducting archival research about the deeds, articles, petitions and accomplishments of Nigerian women. I uncovered a lot of information that we were not taught in our history classes. It made me realise that women had been excluded and marginalised in our national history and I decided to invest time and energy in doing something about this as an independent scholar.

What motivated you to study history?

I have always been fascinated about stories telling us about the past. Even family history brought interest; I asked a lot of questions and imagined my descendants all those years ago. I transferred my curiosity for private history into public/ social history, which is why I studied History as my first degree at the University of Lagos.

What achievement are you most proud of?

My first by-line as a reporter-researcher brought a lot of excitement. When I started out as a journalist in Lagos, Nigeria, I felt proud that I had done the work and my name was boldly printed under my first published piece of work. I looked forward to seeing my name every week and this pushed me to spend my entire career researching and writing articles and reports. I'm also proud that I have finally turned my findings, from six branches of Nigeria's national archives, into my forthcoming book *Untold Histories of Nigerian Women: Emerging from the Margins*. It has steered me towards researching for material for a second volume on women's history.

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

Growing up I did not read books about women's history, but I read a lot of novels written by women such as Laura Ingalls, Jackie Collins and Catherine Cookson. In school, from my Literature in English class, I came into contact with books authored by Jane Austin. Much later, as a young adult, books by Maya Angelou caught my attention for leisure reading.Thus, I was aware that women had successful careers as authors. During my Women's Development Studies course at the University of East London, I first encountered books written by women specifically on non-fiction women's issues. One was a textbook by Cynthia Cockburn. The book was about the history of women, science and technology. I am glad I kept it and still have it on my bookshelf.

In recent years, my daughter gave me a book by Svetlana Alexievich—*The Unwomanly Face of War*. I was touched by her determination to find and interview women who participated in the Second World War and to pay tribute to them by documenting their pain-filled and sad stories. I showed the book to a young Ukrainian woman I met, who said she was not aware of the deep role of women during the war. So the book is not only a commemoration to the women themselves, but it also informs the world about what these women did during the war: the roles that they played during this time; their courage and bravery and, of course, the sad loss of lives. Such books are knowledge products, without which, no-one would be aware of what happened, and it underscores why the voices of women must be included in historiography. I admire her efforts to document the role of these women and it has inspired me to carry on with my own journey.

What important piece of advice would you impart to a budding historian/ archivist/ activist/ librarian?

I would advise a budding historian to enjoy the beauty- and tediousness- of archival research; to endeavour to conduct research from primary sources. They should cross reference information and also place their narration in proper historical context. They should be intentional about separating facts from opinions, and as much as possible to ensure accuracy in their production of knowledge.

They should not to be afraid to be original in their thoughts when analysing historical figures and events. They can develop their own ideas and narratives to construct new themes and interpretations from their findings, and be a new voice when offering their narration of history. My experience taught me not to over-rely on material on websites, as there are plenty of inaccuracies in the narratives about the lives of some historical figures. As part of deeper investigations, one should search for original sources.

Archivists play an important role in compilation, cataloguing and preservation of historical records and they should be open-minded in the construction of an archive and recognise all citizens.

I would advise archivists to search for women and not ignore their roles, speeches, articles, letters and so on; not to leave their accomplishments buried in the depths of broader history, but to always be on the lookout for names of women and their inputs; and categorise them accordingly. We see a very recent example in the commemoration of the women negotiators in the Irish Peace Talks to show the world how important this is. The women have finally been recognised for the value they added to the whole process and their history is being memorialised.

Continued on page 44

Photographs where they exist are also important to include in archival compilations. I also think it is important for libraries all over the world to have a variety of sections specially dedicated to material and resources on women.

Why do you think it is important to commemorate women's achievements?

Women form half of the population in the world, and it is very important to commemorate their achievements and contributions to development—not always necessarily in a separate category—but in general as citizens. Women have made giant strides for centuries, but have for the most part been overlooked during discussions and recordings about global feats by mankind. We must be intentional about the documentation of what women have done, otherwise they will get side-lined and will be unknown by future generations which is what has happened in this generation. Many of the deeds and endeavours of women were not written into history or preserved as a record by archivists. This has been my observation as an independent scholar. Special commemorations are an excellent way to recognise and record women's accomplishments.

During my research about the history of Nigerian women, I discovered that the national honours list. which commemorates citizens for their good deeds, was tilted in favour of men, and where women were recognised, they were relegated to the lower rungs of the honours list. The gender gap in the award of honours was too wide to ignore and will not foster social inclusion and national unity. For example, during the centenary celebrations of the amalgamation of Nigeria in 2014, only eight women received recognition. In other words, for a period of a hundred years, it was believed that only a handful of women accomplished anything worthy of national recognition. My archival findings point to the contrary. This means women's achievements are not being recorded and archived; but where they exist are overlooked and not being given the same prestigious recognition as those of men. Agencies in charge of national commemorations must endeavour to conduct thorough research into public records to ensure a balance in the process of national awards. Writing about this particular bias is to deepen awareness about it and to encourage a change in attitude towards women.

BOOKS RECEIVED AND CALLS FOR REVIEWERS

The following titles are available for review, so if you would like to review any of the titles listed below, please email the 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.

Anthony Bale, *Margery Kempe: A Mixed Life* (Reaktion, 2021)

Ruby Blondell, *Helen of Troy in Hollywood* (Princeton University Press, 2023)

Lara Campbell, *A Great Revolutionary Wave: Women and the Vote in British Columbia* (UBC Press, 2020)

Lara Campbell, Michael Dawson and Catherine Gidney (eds.), *Feeling Feminism: Activism, Affect and Canada's Second Wave* (University of British Columbia Press, 2022)

Elizabeth Cobbs, *Fearless Women: Feminist Patriots from Abigail Adams to Beyoncé* (Harvard University Press, 2023)

Charlotte Cooper-Davis, *Christine de Pizan: Life, Work, Legacy* (Reaktion, 2021)

Jessica Cox, *Confinement: The Hidden History of Maternal Bodies in the Nineteenth Century* (The History Press, 2023)

Virginia Cox and Lisa Sampson (eds.), *Drama, Poetry and Music in Late-Renaissance Italy: The life and works of Leonora Bernardi* (UCL Press, 2023)

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

Katherine Harvey, *The Fires of Lust: Sex in the Middle Ages* (Reaktion, 2021)

Susanna Hoe, Series *'Of Islands and Women' Livret 5 - Sardinia: Women, History, Books and Places* (Holo Books, 2022)

Katherine Manthorne, *Fidelia Bridges: Nature into Art* (Lund Humphries, 2023)

Andrew Maranis, *Inaugural Ballers: The True Story of the First US Women's Olympic Basketball Team* (Penguin, 2022)

Richard Rhys O'Brien, *The Campaigns of Margaret Lloyd George* (Y Lolfa Cyf, 2022)

Joan Sangster, *Demanding Equality: One Hundred Years of Canadian Feminism* (University of British Columbia Press, 2022)

Veronica Strong-Boag, *A Liberal-Labour Lady: The times and Life of Mary Ellen Spear Smith,* (UBC Press, 2021)

Mihoko Suzuki, *Antigone's Example: Early Modern Women's Political Writing in Times of Civil War from Christine de Pizan to Helen Maria Williams* (Palgrave, 2022)

Deanne Williams, *Girl Culture in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: Performance and Pedagogy* (Bloomsbury, 2023)

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

Yevonde: Life and Colour (National Portrait Gallery, 2023)

THE WOMEN'S HISTORY NETWORK

AUTUMN SEMINAR SERIES 2023

An online series dedicated to women's and gender history

13 September 2023
Dr Naomi Pullin
Solitude, Ageing and the Female Lifecycle in Early Modern Britain, c.1600-1800

POSTPONED TO SPRING SERIES
Black History Month Special Seminar
FURTHER DETAILS INCLUDING NEW DATE TBA

25 October 2023
Dr Lottie Whalen
Postcards from the Smock Colony: Jessie Tarbox Beals' photographs of Bohemian Greenwich Village

22 November 2023
Professor Shenila Khoja-Moolji
Archival Marginalia and the Lives of Displaced Ismaili Muslim Women

6 December 2023
Disability History Month Special Roundtable - Exploring the Lived Experiences of Historians with Disabilities
Dr Esme Cleall, Dr Lucie Matthews-Jones and Kirstie Stage

Unless otherwise indicated, all seminars take place via Zoom at 4pm UK time.

For further details and information on how to sign up please visit
https://womenshistorynetwork.org/category/conferences/seminars/
or follow us on Twitter at **@WomensHistNet**

WHN Schools History Prize 2023

Tahaney Alghrani

This year for Women's History Month we invited students to create a poster that illustrated Women & Girls in Science or 75yrs of the NHS – Past & Present.

The Senior Category winner was Srinidhi Balaji who submitted a poster about Katherine Johnson.

The panel were impressed by Srinidhi's explanation for her eye-catching design:

> Katherine Johnson was a competent Physicist and Mathematician who worked for NASA during the space race. She was paramount in calculating the trajectories and windows for the first human spaceflight and the Apollo 11 moon landing. My collage narrates a powerful story that embodies the sweat, tears, and sheer determination that went into making the moon landing a reality. It showcases the various stages of the mission, from calculating in the workspace (located at the top) to the lift-off (located in the center) and the historical moment of the first man on the moon (located at the bottom). Johnson's contributions were significant not only for the space program but also for society as a whole. As an African American woman working in a male-dominated field during segregation, she broke down barriers, paving the way for future generations of women and people of colour in STEM fields.

The Junior Category winner was Polina Chuykov who submitted a poster about Mary Anning.

Polina described the choice and design of her poster:

> I decided to base my poster on the inspiring work of Mary Anning – an unsung hero of palaeontology. Anning lived in the 19th century, a time when women were not valued for their skill or intelligence, especially not if they were of the working class, like Mary Anning was. Anning's lower position in society meant that many people could use her discoveries and claim them as their own. For this reason, not many people know about Anning or her discoveries, which seems extremely unfair when you consider the importance of her work. Yet even aside from all her scientific achievements, Mary Anning's resilience to continue to pursue her passion of palaeontology despite all the difficulties is why I view her as an inspiring figure. So please, join me on this journey through time, as we see how Anning went from collecting seashells on the shore to becoming one of the most influential female scientists in history!

The panel were very impressed with the entry by Polina and we are sure that everyone will agree that this is a worthy winner!

There were so many very popular entries this year and we would like to acknowledge some highly commended posters in both Junior/Senior categories.

- Sophia Senbanjo for her poster celebrating the first black nurse in the NHS and her grandmother who is a nurse and her aunt who is a doctor in the NHS.
- Poster on volcanologist Katia Krafft Daphne Scantlebury-Roach
- Poster on Rosalind Franklin by Max Li
- Poster on Ada Lovelace by Emily Taylor
- Poster on Ukrainian mathematician Maryna Vyazovska by Ilona Antoniv

Thank you to all the students that entered this year's School History Prize! Special thanks to the teachers and parents who sent in entries! All the entries were fantastic! Looking forward to next year!

WHN Community History Prize Report for Women's History Today

Anne Logan

Judging for the 2022 Community history Prize took place in June 2023.

The judges were impressed by the high standard of entries. It was noted that there was a clear divide between the projects with larger budgets and the ones with smaller ones. It was good to see the projects were so strongly imbedded in their communities, including two in the north of England. No entries were received from Wales or Northern Ireland this year.

After some discussion, it was agreed to nominate 'Women listening to Women' and 'Indian Women and War' as joint prize winners and to divide the prize equally between the two projects. Supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, 'Women Listening to Women' is an oral history of the Bristol Crisis Service for Women, which opened in 1988. The project resulted in an exhibition, a 24-page booklet and podcasts, among other outputs.

Also funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, 'The Indian Women and War' project explored the contribution Indian women made during the Second World War, producing films and an exhibition and working with volunteers in communities across England and through the medium of Punjabi as well as English.

'Herstory.York' received a commendation for its impact on a small budget. This project organised an exhibition focused on the question 'why are there so few women in books about the history of York?' The project aimed to place women much more firmly into the city's history – where they belong!

Report on Grants and the Book Prize

Anna Muggeride

We had a record number of applications for both the Early Career Researcher and Independent Researcher Grants this year. To this end, we have appointed four ECR Fellows as normal, but increased the fund for the Independent Grant to support four Independent Researchers, too. The eight will produce blog posts and participate in the WHN seminar series throughout the year, so keep an eye out for plenty of updates on their very exciting research.

The ECR Fellows for 2023/24 are:

- Dr Lillie Arnott, whose project is entitled 'Witnessing Women: Sight, Subjectivity and Gender in Early Modern Europe';
- Dr Debanjali Biswas, whose project is 'Fallen Through Seams: Traveling Women Performers and Dangerous Animals Acts in Britain (1895-1945)';
- Dr Alexis Wolf, whose is writing a monograph entitled 'Women Writers in Transnational Networks, 1798-1840';
- Dr Hannah West, who is researching the experiences of policewomen in the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

And the Independent Researcher Grants went to:

- Laura Agustín, who will create walking tours of Medieval Norwich and Portsmouth based on archival research in these locales;
- Elizabeth Ajao, who is working on developing a biography of Muriel Herbert for BBC Radio 3;
- Joanne Coates for a project entitled 'Daughters of the Dales', a community history project working with museums and archives in Yorkshire;
- Laura Maw, who is publishing a biography with Virago on four working-class women writers, Shelagh Delaney, Ann Quin, Buchi Emecheta and Andrea Dunbar, in post-war Britain.

In other prize news, the book prize for 2021 will be judged in the coming months and results announced separately to the 2022 prize, which is now live on the WHN website. The deadline for entries to the 2022 prize has been recently updated to 31 October. If you have an enquiry about the prize, please contact us at bookprize@womenshistorynetwork.org

Emily Rhodes has joined the Prizes and Grants team this year, and we are delighted to welcome her on board. To keep in touch with us, please email whnprizesandgrants@gmail.com

Announcement of Prizes and Funding

The WHN is pleased to share details of three new prizes and funding schemes for 2023. Please do share widely with anyone who may be interested.

BA and MA prizes:

We will be running both the MA and BA prize schemes again this academic year. The MA Dissertation Prize is running through the spring, with entries of not more than 20,000 words due by the end of April. The BA prize, for an undergraduate dissertation of not more than 10,000 words, will be launched in May with entries due by the end of June. Details of both prizes can be found on our website; entrants should be members of the WHN and can join at the student rate of £15. We look forward to announcing the details of winners of both prizes at the September conference.

The prizes are open to any dissertation which focuses on women's history, or gender history that substantively focuses on women. Entrants must be based at a UK institution but we encourage dissertations written on any period, topic or place – the sky's the limit! In recent years, we have been enormously impressed with the quality and diversity of work produced, particularly so as most dissertations over the past two years were written under the constraints of lockdown, with limited access to archival sources. Despite this, the extremely high standard of work submitted, and the vast range of topics covered (temporally and geographically) speaks to the commitment of lecturers in institutions across the UK who, in the current challenging climate, continue to enthuse and inspire students to study women's history.

Check out the WHN Blog to read a selection of entries from previous years, which speak to this quality and diversity.

WHN Research Facilitation Grant:

In recent years, reflecting the challenges of the pandemic and the lack of access to institutional resources for precarious scholars, the WHN has run a number of small grant schemes designed to help support those producing works of women's history for an academic audience. These have included a covid hardship grant; a grant to facilitate access to the copying of archival documents; and an image licensing grant to help cover the costs of illustrative material in publications.

It is our intention to combine these schemes into a new Research Facilitation Grant. Details of the scheme are still being finalised, and will be announced at the September conference, but we envisage a small grant scheme to which applicants can apply to cover research costs while producing a piece of academic work (for example, completing a PhD or writing a journal article). We hope that the scheme would be of particular benefit to precarious scholars, including self-funding PhD students, ECRs without a current institutional affiliation or staff on teaching-only contracts with no access to research funds, as we are aware of the particular pressures facing such groups.

Examples of research costs which might be funded as part of the scheme include: costs of conducting archival research; access to online research collections; costs of attending conferences; or costs of reproducing illustrations in journals or monographs. However, we would be keen to hear of any other particular needs which might be funded by the scheme and encourage suggestions to the address below, which will be taken into account when putting together the scheme.

ECR and Independent Fellowships:

The WHN each year supports a number of Early Career Researchers and Independent Researchers. This year's Fellows have been making excellent progress with their projects and we are delighted to see their innovative and exciting research coming to fruition. We look forward to hearing more at the Fellows Roundtable as part of our Seminar Series, later this year.

The ECR and Independent Fellowships will run again during the academic year 2023/24. Applications will open in early June, with applications due by 1 August. ECR Fellows will be awarded £1,500 each, and Independent Fellows may apply for up to £750.

To keep up to date with our prizes, grants and fellowships, keep an eye on the WHN website and Twitter feed. Alternatively, please contact our prizes and grants coordinator, at WHNPrizesandGrants@gmail.com

WHN Annual General Meeting 2023 – Chair's Report, 1 September 2023

Although it has felt as if the year has been dominated by administrative matters, I am delighted that WHN has continued to be as active and innovative as usual. We had planned to run the 2023 conference in person at the Black Country Living Museum but issues with transferring the bank account meant that the committee decided it would be too large a risk until we had the new financial arrangements in place. I am very grateful to our excellent conference team Hazel Perry, Anna Muggeridge and Susan Cohen for their agility in moving the conference online on the chosen theme of 'Women and Migration'. We are in discussion about next year's conference and hope that we will be able to run an in-person, or, at least, a hybrid event.

We have continued with our other popular online activities including our successful online seminar programme and writing retreats. The committee continue to meet online which is obviously a great saving for the network as there are no travel expenses. We also maintain our commitment to promote and publish women's history, providing opportunities for academics, students, and independent researchers at all levels of experience to disseminate their research. Our flagship journal continues to thrive and the special issue for the Autumn of 2022 focused on broadcasting echoing our conference theme and fittingly celebrating the centenary of the BBC. Our blog has continued to promote new and diverse histories and we provide news and events information via our monthly newsletter.

The regional networks are thriving, and I particularly draw your attention to this month's day conference held by the West of England and South Wales regional network**: 'Women and the Natural World: historical perspectives on nature, climate and environmental change'.**

I am hugely grateful for the commitment, hard work, and goodwill of the WHN National Steering Committee who work tirelessly on our activities, publishing, running events, adjudicating prizes and much more! This year has seen a larger number of changes of roles than usual, and I'd particularly like to thank those committee members who have stayed on beyond their 'official' end date to help ease handovers and ensure our activities continue seamlessly, but also to give a warm welcome to our new committee members who are already providing excellent support.

Finally, as always, thanks to you the membership who support and enhance the activities of WHN. We value your input and ongoing encouragement. The Steering Committee always look forward to receiving comments and feedback, so please do get in touch if you have ideas or suggestions.

Professor Sarah Richardson, Chair of WHN

Membership Announcements

You can manage your WHN membership, update your details, pay your subscription, add your research interests/books and make a donation by logging into the new Members' Account page at www.womenshistorynetwork.org/my-account/

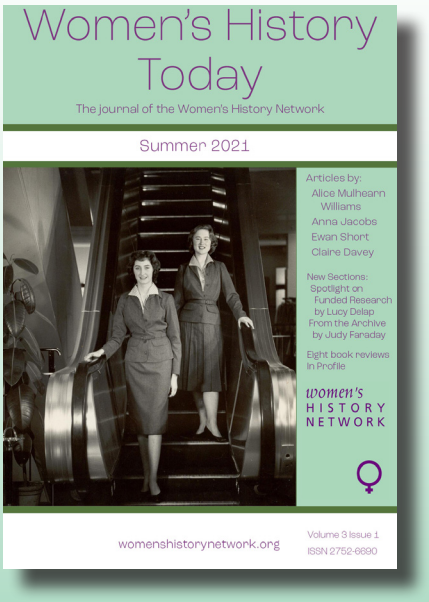
Do you pay your subscription by standing order? If so, please check that the payment details reflect the 2023 rates. Don't forget, we have different rates to reflect different personal circumstances, so it is worth checking that you are paying the correct rate for you. Details of the 2023 rates for all categories of members can be found on the back cover of the magazine or by logging into your account at www.womenshistorynetwork.org.

Has your email address changed? If we don't have your current details, you may not receive the monthly e-newsletter, included in your membership fee. If you have changed email addresses since joining, or recently acquired a new email address, please update your details by logging into your account at www.womenshistorynetwork.org OR by emailing the membership secretary.

All information (or queries) about membership, or changes to personal details, can be arranged by logging into your account at womenshistorynetwork.org OR by emailing membership@womenshistorynetwork.org

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—2022

Chair—Sarah Richardson

Charity Rep—Hazel Perry

Blog Editors— Kat Perry, Lisa Berry-Waite

Social Media— Vicky Igilkowski-Broad

Membership Secretary—Susan Cohen

Treasurer—Vacant

(Archive) Secretary—Urvi Khaitan

Conference support role— Alexandra Hughes-Johnson, Hazel Perry

Website and publicity—Maria Georgouli Loupi

Prizes and Grants—Anna Muggeridge

Journal—Kate Murphy, Helen Glew, Samantha Hughes-Johnson, Catia Rodrigues, Kate Terkanian, Angela Platt, Amanda Norman, Joy Burgess

Newsletter Editor—Tayo Agunbiade

Community Liaison Vacant and Helen Antrobus

Diversity Officer—Norena Shepherd

Schools Liaison—Tahaney Alghrani and Mary Feerick

Seminar Organisers — Rose Debenham, Anna Harrington

Co-opted Members of the Committee

WHN Book Prize Panel Chair —Krista Cowan
bookprize@womenshistorynetwork.org

WHN Journal Editor: Kate Murphy
editor@womenshistorynetwork.org

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 2022 / 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