

Women's History Today

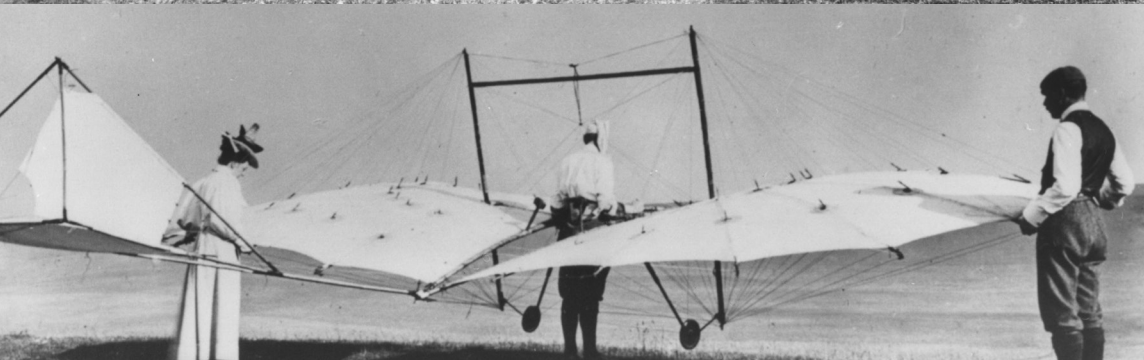
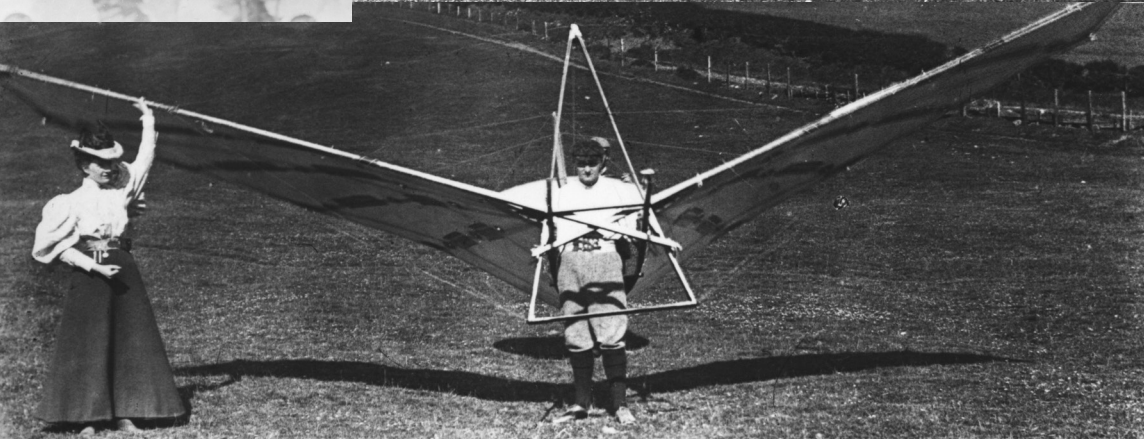
The journal of the Women's History Network

Spring 2024



Articles by:
Lily Ford
Phoebe
Parsons

Three Book
Reviews
In Profile
Doing History
From the Archives
Spotlight On
Research



women's
HISTORY
NETWORK



Spring 2024

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Women's History Network 2024 Annual Conference: 'Curating the Female Self'

Hosted with the Bedford Centre for the History of Women and Gender at Royal Holloway University, 5-6 September



Mary Cassatt courtesy rawpixel.com



Mary Cassatt courtesy rawpixel.com

Call for Papers

One of the exciting developments in women's history over the last few years is the explosion of different approaches to agency, empowerment and identity, as well as scholarly attention to issues of intersectionality and context-specific identity-formation. Our 2024 conference, the first in person WHN conference in five years, aims to explore the creative potential of this diversity by encouraging papers from a wide variety of perspectives and disciplinary approaches.

Possible topics of interest include, but are certainly not limited to:

the distinctive presence of women and female networks in oral history and storytelling; critical fabulation; composure; womanhood as a (contested) category of identity; race, gender, class etc.; community, cohesion, transgression; material culture and the history of objects as a route to understanding women of the past; family/personal papers/collections; curations of family history; the role of women as artists and performers and/or as subjects of art and drama; female bodies and the objective gaze; self-fashioning; fashion and textiles; contested or transgressive self-fashioning; female identity in its broadest forms; women and the media; (re)presentation; social media, past, present and future; women as political actors and agents; female activism and agency; gender politics.

We invite submissions of **150 – 200-word abstracts for 15 -minute papers** which take a critical look at these areas of history. Proposals are welcomed from **scholars working at all levels, including those without an institutional affiliation** and for example, those working outside academia, in heritage or other historically linked sectors.

As part of WHN's mission to support postgraduate scholars, we also welcome and encourage participation from post-graduate researchers pursuing all other areas of Women's History to the Open Strand. Contributors to this strand are asked to propose a 10-minute lightning talk only.

All submissions must be on the form downloadable from

<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/the-womens-history-network-annual-conference/> and emailed to whnconference2024@gmail.com by 30 April 2024.

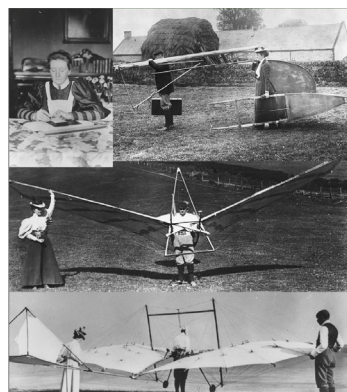


Welcome to the Spring 2024 issue of *Women's History Today*.

This is an open issue that has a broad range of feature articles alongside the more conventional academic articles that are peer-reviewed. Our two academic articles are on very diverse themes. The first, by the historian and film-maker Dr Lily Ford, is “‘Up Here I Must Seem Proper’: Ella Pilcher and Early Aeronautics in Britain’. Ford has written widely on women in aviation and this is the first time that Ella Pilcher – sister to the more famous Percy – has been brought to prominence. Ford reveals the ways in which Ella Pilcher supported her brother not just as a housekeeper but also as crucial to his flying success. The second article, ‘Women and the Nation: Women’s Fight for Self-Determination in Timor-Leste’ is from Phoebe Parsons, the winner of the WHN’s Undergraduate Dissertation Prize, 2022. Parson’s focus is women in the struggle for independence, which took place in the latter part of the twentieth-century. She considers the development of the women’s movement at a time when both nationalism and feminism were in the ascendent, using oral history interviews to enrich her analysis.

There are two *Doing History* features. Helen Antrobus, who is the Assistant National Curator (Cultural Landscapes) for the National Trust, reflects on her recent research into Beatrix Potter. By visiting the terrains that were central to Potter’s life, Antrobus presents a deeper understanding of the writer’s relationship with the National Trust. Following on from an article in the Autumn 2023 issue of the *Women’s History Today*, which looked at the ‘Women in Street Names’ project, we have a contribution from Dr Alison McCall the administrator of the Mapping Memorials to Women in Scotland project. The 750th woman has recently been added, following the unveiling of a plaque in Inverness to the novelist Josephine Tey.

There are two very different *From the Archives*. The first, from Dr Rosalyn Sklar, is written in collaboration with The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. This explores a treasure trove of new archival material that has recently gone on display in Stratford-upon-Avon and which throws new light on the women closely connected with Shakespeare – his mother, sister, daughters and wife. The second, by Isobel Bloom, a PhD candidate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, looks to the future and considers the fertility forums of today as a potentially valuable source for the historians of tomorrow. *Spotlight on Funded Research* offers insights into ‘Global Workplaces in Transition: The History of Technology, Gender and



Cover Image
Composite of images from
*‘Up Here I Must Seem
Proper’: Ella Pilcher And
Early Aeronautics In Britain*
Lily Ford, Independent
scholar

Images courtesy of
Philip Jarrett

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Emotions Since the 1960s’, an international project backed by the Elisabeth List Fellowship Programme for Gender Research at the University of Graz, Austria. Professor Christiane Berth and Dr Helen Glew, two of the scholars involved, discuss the progress of the study, which aims to show how emotional reactions to technologies have varied over space and time.

We also have other regular features, including ‘In Profile’, as well as book reviews. Many new books have been added to the ‘Books Available for Review’ list, so please do consider reviewing for us. And, if you are a member of the Women’s History Network, please do let us know when you have a new book published.

We hope that you enjoy this issue.

Kate Murphy, Kate Terkanian, Samantha Hughes-Johnson, Angela Platt, Catia Rodrigues, Joy Burgess and Amanda Norman.

Women’s History Today is always open for contributions, whether this be submitting an article on any aspect of women’s history for peer review or by contributing to our regular features. These include *Spotlight on Funded Research*, which showcases funded research projects; *From the Archives*, about using archives to explore women’s history and *Doing History*, which highlights community/public history projects with a focus on women’s and gender history. We are also always open to ideas for ‘special’ themed issues. If you are interested in contributing to the journal in connection with any of the above, please contact: editor@womenshistorynetwork.org

'UP HERE I MUST SEEM PROPER': ELLA PILCHER AND EARLY AERONAUTICS IN BRITAIN

Lily Ford, independent scholar

In the summer of 1895, there was a new apparition in the pages of the popular scientific press. Journals such as *The Practical Engineer*, *Invention* and *The American Engineer* were brimming with ideas about fixed wing aeronautics. Enthusiasts read them with zealous interest, many vying to have their designs featured. By this time, photographic prints were common and scenes of would-be pioneers with their aircraft were often to be found. What was less usual within these pages was the sight of a woman.

Standing in sensible feminine attire, complete with hat, the woman shown in the accompanying photographs appears alongside a man and a glider. Her hand is often on the aircraft, keeping it still in the breeze, holding it to its best advantage. Sometimes she is carrying parts of it, sometimes she is running after it as the man takes a flight. Her image recurs throughout 1895 and 1896, not just in scientific publications, but also in mainstream newspapers and magazines such as *Black and White*, the *Evening Citizen* and *The Sketch*. In the latter, below a photograph of both the man and the woman shouldering parts of a dismantled glider, the caption reads 'Mr Pilcher carrying his machine'.¹

Not one of these articles names the woman in the pictures. It is as if she is not there. It was likely that she was the one who organised and sent the photographs to the publications. Would she have bristled at the omission as she pasted the cuttings into her album? Perhaps she encouraged it by leaving her own name off of the information she sent to the press. Her appearance in the photographs, which were taken over several years, would suggest that she was instrumental to the project they depicted. The woman's name was Ella Pilcher.

Women did not have much of a place in the history of aviation during its first century. This is not to say they were not involved – Kathleen de Landa inspired John E. Hodgson to produce his landmark 1924 work *The*

History of Aeronautics in Great Britain.² But, the handful of women who made it past the foreword of most aviation histories, then and now, were the headliners – Lady Heath, Lady Bailey, Amy Johnson – pilots who were deemed remarkable by the male-led press and aviation establishment for transcending the limits of their sex.³ The favouring of 'firsts' has dominated what we know about aviation and women have tended only to be memorialised for record-breaking.

Ella Pilcher was not a record breaker. She was the older sister of Percy Pilcher. Percy enjoyed several years of repute at the end of the nineteenth century, for his achievement of glider flight, and a permanent place in history from 1899. He was among the aeronautical innovators credited by the Wright brothers for nudging them towards a successful direction in their own flying experiments, which would culminate in the first powered, sustained and controlled human flight in December 1903.⁴ It is possible that Percy would have achieved his ambitions without Ella, but it is important to point out that he did achieve them with her. Her collaboration was acknowledged by Percy's principal biographer, Philip Jarrett, in his very thorough 1987 monograph.⁵ But more broadly, where Percy was given his due, and now inhabits a venerable footnote in the established narratives of the history of flight, Ella disappeared.

This article is the first scholarly account to focus on Ella Pilcher's experiences. It draws on letters and articles, but also turns to visual and circumstantial readings of her situation where written evidence is lacking. It offers some context for the *milieux* of scientific innovation, aeronautics and experimental gliding, with attention to the possibilities of participation for women at this time. Finally, it considers the factors that might have inclined her to cooperate in her own effacement from the record.

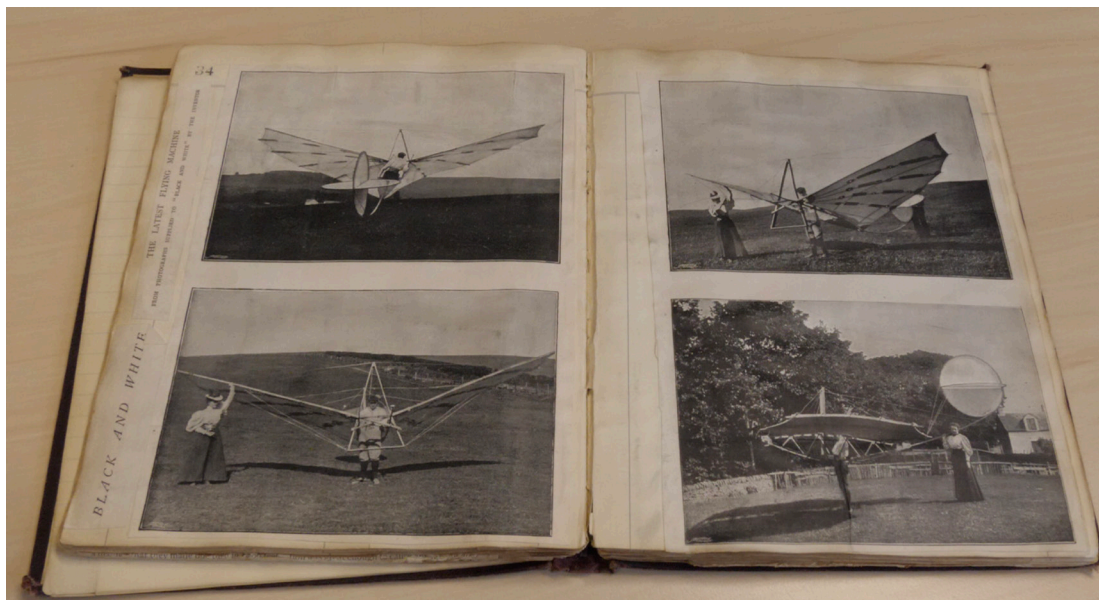


Fig. 1. 'The Latest Flying Machine' featuring the Pilchers and the Bat glider, *Black and White*, 1895. Pilcher cuttings books, RAE/19/9. Courtesy of Royal Aeronautical Society/National Aerospace Library.

THE PILCHER PARTNERSHIP

Ella Sophia Gertrude Pilcher (1863/4 -1939) and Percy Sinclair Pilcher (1867-1899) were born in England to a Scottish mother and English father, the younger siblings of Thomas David and Ada Violet.⁶ Their father, Thomas Webb Pilcher, was in his sixties for most of his children's births and died in 1874. Up to the early 1870s the family seems to have been well off, with a residence in Holland Park, London, a small domestic staff, and Thomas at a prep school in Hove.⁷

After Thomas W. Pilcher's death, the family began making economies to uphold their social capital. Their mother, Sophia (née Robinson), took the family to Celle in Germany where life might be cheaper (perhaps to enable her oldest son Thomas to keep attending Harrow School). She herself then died only three years later. The orphans returned to England in the charge of Thomas who, at nineteen joined the army to pay for the schooling of his younger siblings.⁸

It has not been possible to find out where Ada and Ella lived during their schooling, nor what kind of establishment they attended. They do not appear in the 1881 census when Ella would have been eighteen and Ada, twenty. Percy was enrolled as a naval cadet at the age of thirteen and upon graduation pursued an apprenticeship in the engineering department of a Glasgow shipyard. Ella went with him to Glasgow. It was probably a move of practical expedience – Ella could have kept house for Percy and his income could have provided for the two. The arrangement must have worked well, as they moved together to London and Southampton at the end of his apprenticeship, and together they returned back to Glasgow when, in late 1891, he secured a job as an assistant to Sir John Biles, a professor of naval engineering at Glasgow University. By 1895 Percy had also taken on a draughtsman position at a Glasgow shipbuilding firm alongside his university work.⁹

The siblings were remembered as clever, gregarious and attractive. Ella was 'an accomplished songstress', according to a friend from this period.¹⁰ Furthermore, she had performed in amateur concerts in the south east of England.¹¹ By her niece's account, recorded many decades later, she was 'a most organising character, very feminine' and 'fond of singing'.¹² Percy, on the other hand, followed with great interest the exploits of the famous German glider pilot Otto Lilienthal, and began to tinker with model gliders; Ella probably joined in. They kept birds in their apartment and watched their flights carefully. When Percy later presented a lecture at the Aeronautical Society of Great Britain (hereafter, ASGB) he used the third person plural in recounting these observations: 'We noticed ...'.¹³ Although Ella was not credited, we can read into this Percy's tacit acknowledgement of his closest collaborator. It is clear from Percy's papers that she knew his work intimately. Most of the manuscripts of his lectures and articles contain inserts in her handwriting.¹⁴

Ella was not among the first cohort of women entering British universities during the 1870s. She was eleven when her father died so, if her brother Thomas was funding her and Ada's schooling after that, it would have been a secondary education. Girls' schools in the

1870s varied in the quality of their provision.¹⁵ With their limited finances, the most likely outcome for Ella and Ada would have been to become teachers themselves, had they not had brothers to keep house for.

It is worth considering the environment of censure towards women in science in this period, since this would have impacted how Ella saw and presented her work with Percy. Women were barred from many learned institutions and sometimes could only pursue their academic interests by ghosting for men.¹⁶ Grace Chisholm co-authored papers on mathematics with her husband, who published them under his name. 'Mine the laurels now and the knowledge', he insisted, 'yours the knowledge only.'¹⁷ The engineer and inventor Hertha Ayrton, despite having a husband who supported her career, was not allowed to read her own research paper at the Royal Society in 1902. She remarked on the ease with which the female contribution to an intellectual partnership was dismissed with reference to the married astronomer Margaret Huggins. 'No one will believe that if a man and a woman do a bit of work together the woman really does anything'.¹⁸ In 1883, the American scholar and suffragist Matilda Joslyn Gage protested at the systematic sexism in the scientific bodies of England and the United States, identifying a number of unacknowledged female inventors.¹⁹ The 'Matilda Effect' has since been named after her by the historian of science Margaret Rossiter, who has documented how this effect lasted well into the twentieth century.²⁰

Ella did not have a chance to be an intellectual and she was not political either. In the early 1890s she conformed to a much more acceptable type for unmarried women: the housekeeper or the 'angel in the house'. While Percy's salaries may have stretched to a maid, Ella would have done a large share of the housework. Percy had time to develop his flight ideas alongside his day job because he did not have to shop, cook, clean and launder.

One formal portrait exists of Ella Pilcher: a



Fig. 2. Portrait of Ella Pilcher, probably in Glasgow in the mid-1890s. Via Philip Jarrett.

photograph probably taken at home in Glasgow in the mid-1890s, where she sits at a table in a good silk and lace dress. A companion portrait places Percy in the same location. Percy poses with a large album and pair of compasses at his elbow, alluding to his skills as a trained engineering draughtsman. Ella's props are harder to read. She is wearing an apron, signalling her participation in something more workmanlike than simply writing a letter or sketching. Behind her is a chiffonier loaded with books, and an embroidered cushion depicting vases of lilies, perhaps her own work. She appears to be writing on a small, raised notepaper block, which rests on a blotter and the same large album. The diminutive size of her paper, compared with the large album beneath, that might have contained Percy's drawings, is telling. Her work was on a less grand scale, the small details that held things together. Ella's stitching would be the least visible component of the gliders Percy would design.

FLIGHT AND ITS FABRIC

The invention of hot-air balloons in the 1780s caused a lasting sensation. Throughout the nineteenth century male and female aeronauts made their livings by exhibiting and giving rides in balloons; the women, who were rarer than the men, were considered particularly plucky. Sophie Blanchard in France and Margaret Graham in Britain both started ballooning with their husbands, but went on to high-profile solo careers.²¹ By the late nineteenth century, ascending in a tethered balloon was commonplace in Britain.²² Aerial entertainment had now moved on to the spectacle of daring parachute jumps from balloons, particularly by young women. These were organised by older male aeronauts including George Philip Lemprière and Auguste Gaudron.²³ The popularity of these jumps in the 1890s was fuelled by their high casualty rate. The other route into the air, available only to women of means, was as a passenger in a free balloon. The aeronaut, writer and lecturer Gertrude Bacon, and Vera Butler, co-founder of the Aero Club, shared their first ballooning experiences with their fathers around the turn of the twentieth century.²⁴ The Aero Club, set up in 1901 for sporting ballooning, was open to both men and women of high society.

Airships were being developed with some success in the late nineteenth century, but there was a lobby of inventors that insisted that it would be possible to develop aircraft that were 'heavier than air', using motor propulsion and wings to harness aerodynamic lift. Despite many well-publicised failures to achieve fixed-wing flight, some men had formed the Aeronautical Society of Great Britain (ASGB) in 1866 with the express aim of 'the advancement of aerial navigation'.²⁵ Little had been done in this respect by the 1890s, when Lieutenant Baden F.S. Baden-Powell (whose brother Robert later founded the Scout Movement) became secretary, bringing together a new generation of enthusiasts and launching the *Aeronautical Journal*.²⁶ The journal published updates on the small cluster of innovators across the world intent on achieving flight without buoyancy—among others Otto Lilienthal in Germany, Lawrence Hargrave in Australia, Octave Chanute and Samuel Langley in the United States,

Clément Ader in France, Hiram Maxim in Britain and Louis Pierre Mouillard in Algeria and Cairo. They were working in local isolation and were mostly self funded (only Langley and Ader received institutional support from their nations' war departments).²⁷ Chanute had retired from a successful career as a civil engineer. Maxim (the American born inventor of the machine gun, the asthma inhaler and fire sprinklers) funded his aviation experiments as a side-interest from his prosperous British weapons business. Lilienthal was a staff engineer for several companies before patenting and manufacturing a new engine design that gave him financial independence to pursue his passion.

Percy, according to Ella, had been transfixed by flight since he was a child.²⁸ In his late twenties he had begun corresponding on the subject with Lilienthal and would later exchange ideas with Hargrave, Maxim and Chanute. He was the youngest member of this loose global community and needed his day jobs to support both his aeronautical hobby and his sister, although he undoubtedly benefited from her unpaid assistance. There were no independent female innovators in this circle of 1890s flight enthusiasts, although a few would emerge later in the following decade including, in Britain, Lilian Bland and Hilda Hewlett.²⁹

The Pilchers' ambition was to create a hang-glider, or as they were then called, a 'soaring machine', in which a person could fly. In the summer of 1893, Lilienthal was accomplishing 250 metre flights in Germany's Rhinow mountains with gliders made from willow and cotton.³⁰ Percy was inspired and encouraged by the German, whom he visited twice, and followed many of his design ideas. The glider he and Ella would build would consist of a fixed wooden frame with wings covered in sailcloth. Like Lilienthal's 1893 model, the wings would fold for transportation. Early in 1895 they made a full-sized prototype.³¹ Percy did the design, carpentry and bracing. Ella was in charge of the fabric.

While Ella's previous sewing experience had almost certainly been restricted to the domestic sphere, it was not unusual for women to be involved with the fabric of flight. Small industries had grown up around balloons and airships. Women were employed to prepare and sew fabric in huge quantities for the balloon envelopes. An 1883 drawing of the Paris balloon workshop of Henri Lachambre shows a mainly female workforce.³² This was also true for 'The Captive', one of the French aeronaut Henri Giffard's gigantic balloons, which ascended in Paris and London in the late 1860s; a contemporary image of its construction shows two tables holding thirty seamstresses each.³³ The French-Alsatian Weinling family, mostly female, had been brought to the Royal Balloon Factory in Chatham in 1882 in order to secure and scale up their goldbeater's skin technique, in which sheets of ox intestine were scraped and attached together to form a gas impermeable membrane. By 1907 one of the Miss Weinlings had become forewoman of the balloon skin department in the institution's new home in Farnborough.³⁴ The department consisted entirely of women. The association between aviation textiles and female expertise would continue through the First and Second World Wars. In the field of fixed-wing aviation, we

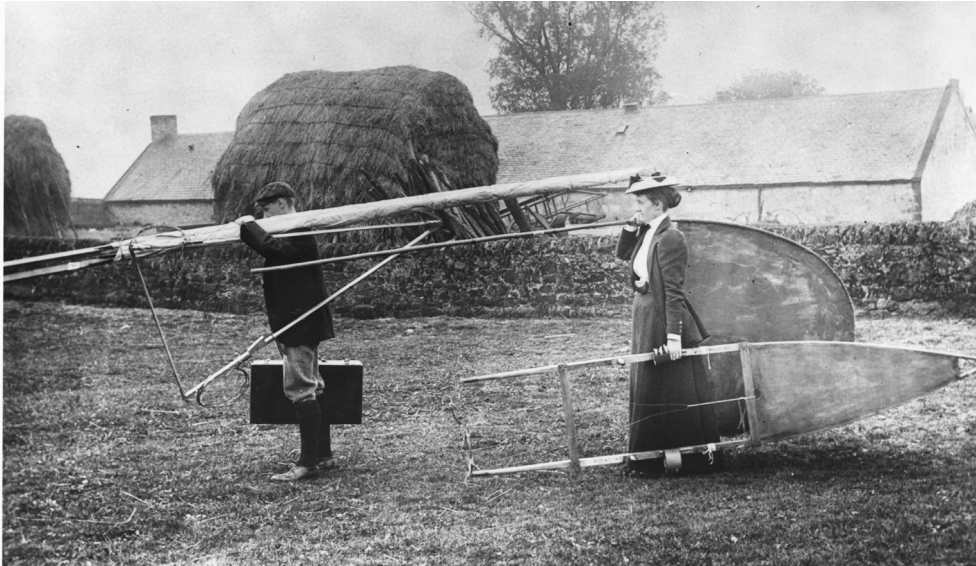


Fig. 3. Percy and Ella Pilcher carrying the dismantled Bat glider at Cardross, Scotland, 1895. Via Philip Jarrett.

can claim a first for Ella Pilcher. Lilienthal had his gliders made by male assistants; the Wright brothers machined their own flight fabrics.³⁵ Ella is the first woman known to have sewn wings.

TRIALING

The limited working space at the Pilchers' home led them to construct the aircraft in five sections, with connective lacing and wings that folded like fans. It must have been very challenging work, both to sew and to devise ways of securely fastening the components – Riga pine, Nainsook fine cotton fabric, steel plates, piano wire and a curved bamboo tail – in their most aerodynamic configuration. The sails were treated with a solution of sugar, of lead and alum to waterproof them.³⁶ The Pilchers had limited funds and spent all of their money on materials and the daughter of Percy's professor, Iris Biles, came to help sew.³⁷ They were loaned a large room at Glasgow University by its Chair of Natural Philosophy, Lord Kelvin, despite his doubts about aeronautical progress: in 1896 he had asserted that he had 'not the smallest molecule of faith in aerial navigation apart from ballooning'.³⁸ Friendly scepticism was the order of the day. 'In those days even one's best friends laughed at attempts at flying', Ella remembered years later.³⁹ When Percy,

aged twenty eight, gave his first lecture on the subject in Glasgow in late 1895, his friend Sam Mavor spoke up against 'the apparent inclination of the gathering to treat the subject with levity'.⁴⁰

At the weekends the siblings went looking for suitable hillsides for test flights, settling on farmland just north of Cardross, a lochside village outside Glasgow. Percy took time in April to visit Lilienthal in Germany to discuss his design. Finally, in June 1895, he and Ella completed a prototype of their soaring machine. They travelled to Cardross to begin testing what they had christened, perhaps after Lilienthal, the 'Bat'.⁴¹

It took weeks of trials and modifications before Percy could actually fly any distance in the Bat. Almost every launch ended very soon afterwards with a crash. The glider tended to flip over as soon as the wind direction changed, resulting in breakage and some hard knocks for Percy.⁴² But they persevered. He and Ella rented a farmhouse near their testing ground, in order to cut down on travel and have space to house the Bat and make new components.⁴³ When asked a dozen years later about her work, Ella remembered her relief at having enough space to spread the material out flat when making new wings.⁴⁴ In midsummer 1895 the siblings built a completely new machine, the Beetle, which was a failure.⁴⁵ However, by September they had a third iteration of the Bat, with



Fig. 4. Ella and Percy Pilcher with the Bat glider assembled at Cardross, Scotland, 1895. Via Philip Jarrett.

a better tail, a reduced wing angle and an improved bracing system. Percy could test it in stronger winds and could stay hovering into wind for 30 seconds if alone, or a minute if towed by a rope.⁴⁶ Ella also took at least one towed flight.⁴⁷

These brief hops into the air may seem insignificant, but the Pilchers were among the very few people in the world who were managing to get aloft without the aid of buoyant gas. The 1890s saw the first tentative successes, among them being the Pilchers. Lilienthal had progressed from a soaring distance of 20 metres in 1891 to 250 metres in 1893.⁴⁸ Lawrence Hargrave had risen to 4.8 metres using box kites in 1894.⁴⁹ The longest of the 1903 powered ascents at Kitty Hawke, North Carolina, that would cement the Wright brothers' claim on the invention of flight, lasted 59 seconds, and they all ended in crashes.⁵⁰ The gains were slow, and the smallest flights celebrated.

What can it have felt like to fly in the 1890s? Percy and occasionally Ella would have been airborne for just seconds before landing. Would they have had time to relish the sensation, the noises of the wind and fields suddenly calmed, the towrope creaking, the piano wires singing, the slack ends of the laces drumming against the taut cotton? One had to be a very active flier in the Bat – the lower part of the body was used as a basic means of control, flexing this way and that to maintain stability.

The Pilcher's testing ground at Cardross, unlike the grounds chosen in Germany by Lilienthal, was not ideal. 'Our winds here are extremely puffy', Percy wrote

to Lawrence Hargrave that summer.⁵¹ The terrain was rough and muddy. The cattle and horses in nearby fields had a 'great objection' to the Pilchers' machine which, as Percy reported to *The Practical Engineer* magazine, made it difficult to traverse the fields carrying the rigged glider.⁵² The 'hedges, ditches, gates &c' he mentions would have been particularly testing in women's clothing, and Ella's skirt is muddy in some photographs.

Did Ella permit herself an outing or a flight without a long skirt? Women in Britain and the United States had been experimenting with new attire for cycling in the 1880s and 1890s.⁵³ When in August 1895, the American mountaineer Annie Smith Peck became the second woman to climb the Matterhorn, she found more attention was paid to the trousers she wore than to her accomplishment.⁵⁴ It is likely that Ella would have held onto her skirt, as a symbol of respectability. It might also have offered some protection against the landing. Mary Kingsley would write of 'the blessings of a good thick skirt' just a couple of years later in her popular travelogue, *Travels in West Africa*, after the garment cushioned her fall into a spiked pit designed to trap leopards.⁵⁵ Kingsley was, of course, also signalling her alliance to traditional codes of femininity. Even a suffragist such as Dr Elizabeth Garrett Anderson maintained that conventional womanly attire was key to being taken seriously in public life.⁵⁶

Despite the discomforts of their experiments, and a certain lack of solidarity from the Glasgow University community, Percy and Ella remained resilient, and were



Fig. 5. Ella and Percy Pilcher with the Hawk, Glasgow, 1896. Via Philip Jarrett.

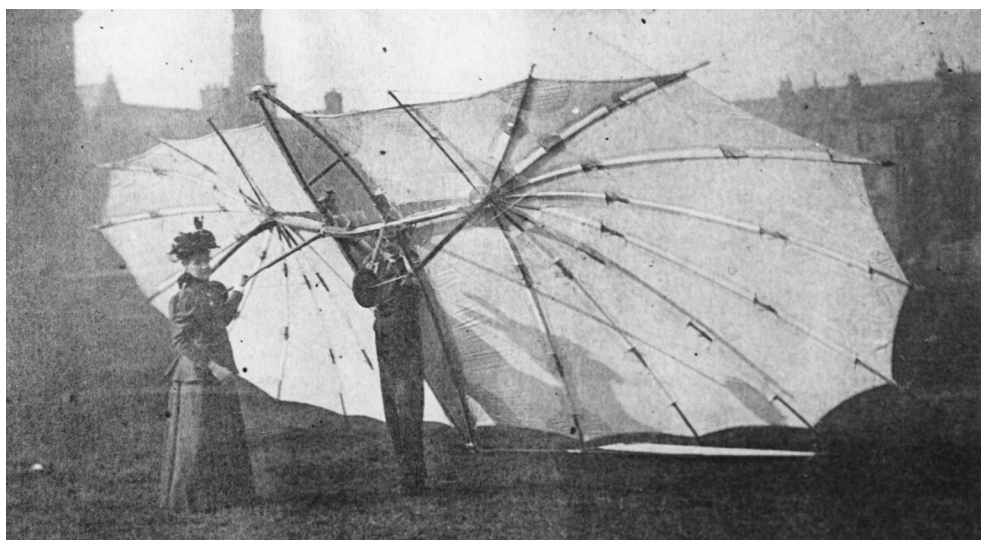


Fig. 6. Ella and Percy Pilcher demonstrating the underside of the Hawk, Glasgow, 1896. Via Philip Jarrett.

sufficiently buoyed by their limited successes to begin yet another prototype in the autumn of 1895, which they called the Gull. Percy ventured to try it in October 1895, when the weather was worsening, and had a nasty crash. It may have been Ella who wrote a consolatory 'Elegy' that appears opposite photographs of the broken Gull in a family album. It ends with this verse:

So with purple oaths assist me
My fury to assuage,
For I cannot hope my tongue will cope
With the measure of my rage.
Since up here I must seem proper;
(If my sister swears, I stop her)
Yet my studied smile cloaks a depth of guile
That no Devil's plumb could gauge.⁵⁷

The poem gives a glimpse of the emotional ups and downs faced by the Pilchers. Whether written by Ella or Percy, it reveals a close working relationship and a shared concern to keep up appearances.

The crash did not stop Percy from pressing on, and Ella from supporting him, with a fourth prototype, which would become known as the Hawk. For the Gull, Ella had transformed 27 square metres of sailing silk into its huge wings in less than a month (between mid-September and mid-October).⁵⁸ Now the academic year had begun, Percy was required to be at the university most of the time.⁵⁹ Used to working from her brother's drawings, Ella set about preparing the wings for the Hawk, perhaps with some relief at the smaller fifteen square metre surface area.⁶⁰

The Hawk was built from bamboo, to keep its weight down, with a new undercarriage with sprung wheels – the first ever use of a wheeled landing gear for an aircraft.⁶¹ All points of attachment had strengthening patches sewn on top of the usual double seams.⁶² It was finished in March 1896, and the following month Percy applied for his first aircraft patent for an engine-powered glider.⁶³ The spring weather prohibited trialling the Hawk, but they were confident enough to present it to the press. Percy and Ella posed with the Hawk on the lawns in front of Glasgow University.

The Pilchers look confidently into the camera, displaying their soaring machine with pride and assurance. It is not known who took the photographs, but the Pilchers would have invited the photographer to the lawns, just as they asked them to the boggy fields of Cardross six months earlier, with a view to circulating prints to the press. Ella is dressed for a display rather than a demonstration of the glider: her tailored suit, with leg-of-mutton sleeves; the long A-line skirt and her hat, rather grander than the light straw one she usually wore, reflecting the fashion of the mid-1890s.⁶⁴ Percy too has foregone his gliding outfit of polo belt and breeches tucked into socks for a sober pair of long trousers, a waistcoat and a bowler hat. The pair look eminently decent and reasonable people, which is important given the ease with which people who tried to fly could be dismissed as quacks.

For Ella this would have been all the more critical. The only women associated with flight in 1880s and 1890s Britain were aerial *artistes*.⁶⁵ In dressing for photographs, which she hoped would be widely published, Ella may

have been intentionally distancing herself from these performers who designed their own racy outfits to better exhibit their bodies as part of a parachute show.⁶⁶ She may have valued her intelligence and practicality over her appearance – her brother Thomas called her 'the untidy one' and would joke that her hats looked 'thrown onto her head'.⁶⁷ At the same time, as an unmarried woman in her thirties she would not have wanted to draw attention to herself by innovating with tweed bloomers, as a number of contemporaries were doing, thus inviting allegations of being a 'New Woman' or, what was 'the most damaging stamp' according to social reformer Beatrice Webb, 'eccentric'.⁶⁸ Appearances were important. Judging from photographs of ASGB gatherings in this decade, Ella was a top hat and a moustache away from blending in, but she could at least channel feminine decorum in her outfits.

'GODDESS OF THE TEA-TABLE'

In the spring of 1896 Percy was invited to become Hiram Maxim's chief aeronautical assistant in London – his first actual paid job in flight. Percy and Maxim were the foremost innovators in fixed wing flight in the British Isles at this point and had complementary skills.⁶⁹ Maxim, with decades of experience in mechanical engineering behind him, knew a lot about engines. The colossal steam-powered aircraft he had designed and built in 1893, to demonstrate his thesis that flight started with the right motor, had been damaged early on in its trials.⁷⁰ Percy had form with light airframes. Maxim did not see Percy as a rival and was relaxed about him promoting the Hawk alongside his own multiplane. He also allowed Percy to make use of his test ground to keep trialling it.

Percy's focus on achieving 'soaring' flight before trialling a motor meant he was not much influenced by Maxim in design principles. Lilienthal's death that summer in a glider crash was widely reported, leaving Percy bereft of a mentor and correspondent. It was the news of Lilienthal's accident that prompted the Ohio bicycle mechanic Wilbur Wright to begin investigating the mechanics of aviation with his brother Orville. Like Percy, they believed that achieving soaring flight with a glider was the first step.⁷¹

Now in London, and with new resources at his disposal, Percy no longer needed Ella's help with test flying. Yet she still helped him prepare for lectures and seems also to have managed the photographs. The secretary of the ASGB, Baden-Powell, wrote to her rather than to Percy in early 1897 to request the illustrations shown in his lecture.⁷² A few years later, Katharine Wright would perform a similar role for her brothers Wilbur and Orville, who asked her to manage the press when they were overwhelmed by international interest. She would accompany them to Europe in 1909 as their paid social manager, deploying her university education and conversational skills to smooth over their awkwardness at dinners and ceremonies.⁷³

In March 1897 Percy was elected as a member of the ASGB, in what must have felt like an anointing from the small and passionate community that Baden-Powell had been growing.⁷⁴ Ella did not try to follow suit at this point. Though the society was open to women, they

were vanishingly rare in its ranks.⁷⁵ She did continue to support Percy's ventures, however, and joined him in a public demonstration that would raise his profile and attract much-needed investors to his proposal to develop and install a motor in the Hawk. On Sunday 20 June 1897, a party of scientists and journalists were invited to travel to Maxim's test site at Eynsford to watch Percy take flight. The group included Douglas Archibald, a former president of the Royal Meteorological Society, and William J.S. Lockyer, an astronomer, balloonist and photographer, both of whom had jostled with Percy in the pages of scientific journals. The Pilchers had organised refreshments for the visitors, who had cycled from the station. Archibald wrote a description of the day for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, in which he made a tentative mention of Ella:

And here I hope I may be permitted to remark that Mr. Pilcher has been, fortunately, blessed with the possession of a sister, who not only acted as the presiding goddess of the tea-table on the present occasion, but actually made most of the wing surfaces with her own hands.⁷⁶

While Ella's steady hand with a teapot might have taken precedence over her unique wing-sewing skills, Archibald was certainly right to judge her existence a blessing for Percy. As it turned out, Ella would find herself in possession of Percy's reputation for many more years than she had already rendered her services to him, as she carried around his papers and contributed to biographical accounts long into the next century.

Lockyer had brought a cinematograph camera to the demonstration with which to record Percy's flying attempts and went on to publish seven frames of his exposures in the science journal *Nature*.⁷⁷ Before he could take the pictures his camera was almost destroyed by the first flight of the day. The Pilchers' cousin Dorothy Rose Pilcher, who may have come to support Ella and Percy, was given the chance to ascend.⁷⁸ While a thin rope for the main flight was being attached to a pulley across the valley, Percy gave Dorothy a tow by hand in the Hawk from the hilltop, without noticing the camera at the bottom. 'Crash went the soaring machine, lady and all, into the

camera, which was hurled violently to the ground' wrote Archibald.⁷⁹ All three seem to have emerged unscathed. Ella, meanwhile, dressed in fashionable white and clearly not anticipating taking a turn herself, marshalled three boys on the other side of the valley as they hauled on the rope and pulley to set Percy flying. He ascended to 21 metres above the valley floor. Even when the rope broke mid-flight, he managed to steer and land the glider 45 metres on from his starting point, occasioning cheers from the onlookers.⁸⁰

The cinematograph footage taken by Lockyer is lost – and he may simply have used it as a scientific instrument to photograph fast movement rather than a cinema camera – but the assembly of the seven frames published in *Nature* can be regarded as the first moving image of a Briton in flight.⁸¹ It is tantalising to wonder whether Lockyer or any other photographer thought to document Dorothy Pilcher's flight as a rare record of an early female flyer. No photographs bear this claim. It is an androgynous figure that occupies the Pilcher gliders. We may speculate whether it is Dorothy, or indeed Ella, in flight in some of the photographs; more likely it is Percy, whose silhouette was given a feminine form by the thick polo-player's belt he wore to support his back.⁸² The fact that this demonstration had more eyewitness reports than the Pilchers' trials in Cardross has resulted in Dorothy being deemed the first woman to do a fixed wing glider flight, which seems a little hard on Ella.⁸³

The demonstration at Eynsford went as well as the Pilchers could have hoped, though it did not produce the much hoped-for funder for a motorised prototype of the Hawk. It did, however, raise Percy's stock sufficiently for him to set up an experimental engineering firm, as well as being elected to the council of the AGSB in November 1897. While other projects took the focus away from powering the Hawk, in the summer of 1899 he finally found a potential backer in the form of John Henniker Heaton, an advocate of cheap imperial communications and the Conservative M.P. for Canterbury.⁸⁴ Percy planned another demonstration of the Hawk at his old naval friend Adrian Verney-Cave's home of Stanford Hall in Leicestershire, inviting Henniker Heaton along with several others including Baden-Powell, on Saturday 30 September.⁸⁵ Ella was there too.

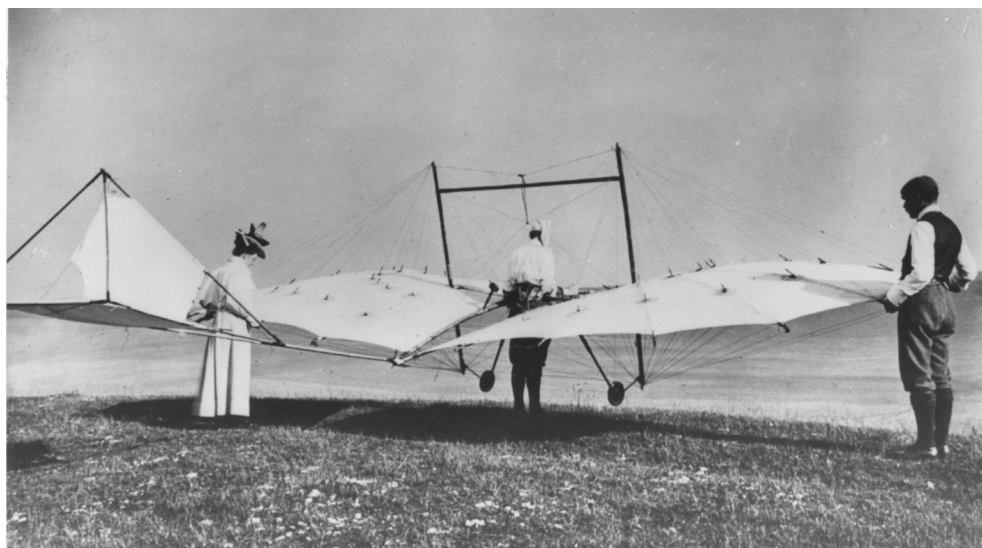


Fig. 7. Percy Pilcher in the Hawk glider, with Ella Pilcher and an assistant at the Eynsford demonstration, 20 June 1897. Via Philip Jarrett.

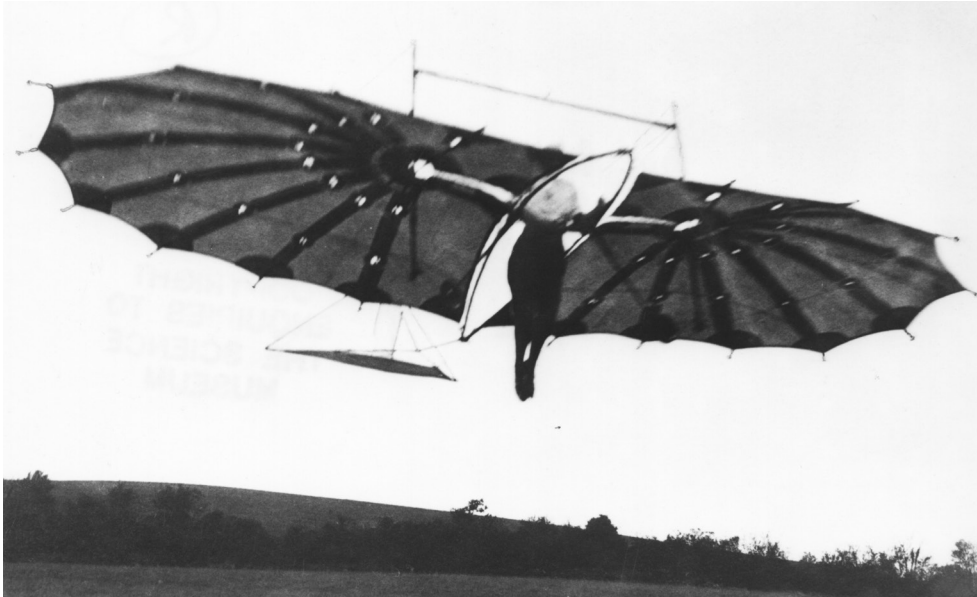


Fig. 8. The Hawk, probably flown by Percy Pilcher, at the Eynsford demonstration, 20 June 1897. Via Philip Jarrett.

It was a wet day with strong winds, but this, as ever, did not deter Percy. He ascended in the Hawk on the third attempt at about 4.20pm, towed by a horse, and travelled some 120 metres before the glider's tail snapped and the whole thing collapsed and crashed to the ground.⁸⁶ Ella and Verney-Cave ran to find that Percy had fractured both legs in the crash and was severely concussed. He never regained consciousness and died on Monday 2 October, with Ella and their brother Thomas, who had been summoned from Dublin by telegram, at his side. Percy was buried in Brompton Cemetery two days later, aged just thirty two. He was remembered by friends as being particularly brave.⁸⁷ Always excited about performing new trials, he had written less than a year before that 'it would be heartrending not to try and keep one's place in the work that is being done'.⁸⁸

LEGACIES

Aside from the trauma of seeing her brother killed in the machine they had built together, Ella faced a practical challenge. She had no husband, and no private means to speak of. Percy died intestate, and his estate of £39 and 19 shillings went to Ada.⁸⁹ With her options narrowed, Ella followed her brothers' example and volunteered for military service. She had accompanied Thomas back to Dublin after the funeral, but within a month she was on board the RMS Carisbrook Castle, bound for Cape Town, where she would help nurse British soldiers during the Boer War.⁹⁰ Three years later she married Colonel Edward C. Tidswell, a veteran of the Battle of Omdurman who was stationed at Kumasi on the Gold Coast, now Ghana.⁹¹

On her voyage out to Cape Town in 1899, Ella had written to Baden-Powell at the Aeronautical Society to thank him for the wreath he had sent for Percy's funeral and for the extra prints he had organised of her brother's photograph. The time had come for her to declare her own interest in flight: 'I should like to become a member of the Society,' she wrote. 'I should not like our name to be taken off your lists. As I always helped my dear brother in his experiments, I am able to take great interest in the subject.'⁹² Her wish was granted; the ASGB elected her an

Honorary Member five weeks later.

The Pilcher contribution to aeronautics was acknowledged both in the mourning of Percy, and in the increasingly successful circles of experimental aviation as the century turned. Percy Pilcher was named, alongside Lilienthal and Chanute, in Wilbur Wright's account of how he and Orville honed their Flyer design and developed a practical system of flight control, 'A few others have built gliding machines, but nearly all that is of real value is due to the experiments conducted under the direction of the three men just mentioned'.⁹³ Their achievement of motor-powered flight in December 1903 has since come to mark a watershed in the history of aviation, though its significance at the time was not much recognised. The tide turned in 1908 and 1909, when powered flight was widely demonstrated in Europe. The Pilcher gliders were ferried around the country through the 1900s, first on display and then, increasingly tattered, as white elephants needing a home.⁹⁴ Ella donated the papers and photographs of Percy's in her possession to the ASGB in 1902 and, at the editor's insistence, contributed her own account of Percy and their gliders to the *Aeronautical Journal* in 1909.⁹⁵

In 1907 Ella gave an interview to *Lady's Pictorial*. When she was asked to confirm that she had flown in a Pilcher glider she answered merely 'It was not a free flight', meaning that she would have been towed just as Percy often was.⁹⁶ The article writer paints a picture of a modest woman, brushing off allegations of courage and heroism and offering instead technical details on the gliders. Most of the published interview was devoted to Ella's more recent lifestyle as a colonial wife in Kumasi: how she bore the heat and how she managed her house staff. 'Needlework was my favourite amusement'; clearly sewing wings had not put her off embroidery, even if now the trials were different – the humid climate causing needles to rust as they were being used.

Upon Major Tidswell's retirement, she and her husband moved to Jersey to live in a condominium at St Brelade's Bay. In March 1925 Ella read in *The Times* that the Royal Aeronautical Society's librarian, J. E. Hodgson, was seeking exhibits for the Society's stand at the Empire exhibition at Wembley.⁹⁷ She contacted him and agreed

to send some remaining sketches of Percy's.⁹⁸ Their acquaintance led to her invitation to the society's sixtieth anniversary celebration in January 1926.

Ella travelled to London for the party by boat and train. Although there were by then frequent passenger flights there from the Channel Islands, she never took a plane because it was too expensive.⁹⁹ The celebration was a grand affair, taking place in the Science Museum under the wings of the original Wright Flyer. It was hosted by Sir Sefton Brancker, Director of Civil Aviation, and among the 300 guests were some of the most influential figures in British aviation just as it was crystallising into an organised industry. The RAF band played all night. It was 'quite the best evening' of Ella's trip, where 'everybody felt himself a special guest'.¹⁰⁰ Now sixty-two years old, she was used to a genteel, but frugal, life caring for her husband in sleepy Jersey. To revisit her brother's achievements in this prestigious environment would have been thrilling. Would she have felt them to be her own achievements too? Would she have looked at the manufacturers, the foreign dignitaries, the female guests who were there independently of husbands or brothers, and wished she had been born a generation later? While she was evidently well treated at the event, she was not remembered afterwards—her name was not included in the long list of guests published in the society's write-up.¹⁰¹

Once again Ella slipped through the official records. Her labour on the 1890s glider project had not fitted into the late nineteenth-century British paradigms of invention and experimentation, nor did it fit into the stories of flight told later. Ella's final contact with contemporary chroniclers of aviation was in the early 1930s when she supplied Sam Mavor, a friend from 1890s Glasgow, with information for an article he was writing about her brother. The article praises her character and acknowledges her support in correcting the proofs, but makes no specific mention of her work with Percy beyond saying that she 'ably assisted' him.¹⁰² Perhaps still concerned to 'seem proper', she did not ask for any further credit. She restricted her energy to family life. The development of powered flight galloped ahead of her as the twentieth century went on, but she was still looking to the skies as a septuagenarian, teaching her great-nephew to fly a kite in the late 1930s.¹⁰³

NOTES

1. *The Sketch*, 3 June 1896, 241. This and cuttings from other mentioned titles are contained in vols 2 and 3 of the Pilcher cuttings albums in the Royal Aeronautical Society Archive RAeS/19/9, at the National Aerospace Library, Farnborough (hereafter RAeS and NAL). I'm grateful to NAL librarians Brian Riddle and Tony Pilmer, and to Philip Jarrett for his generosity in showing me Pilcher family documents, commenting on an early draft of this article, and permitting the reproduction of photographs in his possession. Thanks also to Ceryl Evans.
2. J.E. Hodgson, *The History of Aeronautics from the Earliest Times to the Latter Half of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Humphrey Milford/Oxford University Press, 1924), viii.
3. See the very fleeting mentions of women in early chapters of R.G. Grant with Philip Whiteman, *Flight: The Complete History of Aviation* (London: Dorling Kindersley in association with the Imperial War Museum, 'Revised and Updated' edition 2022).
4. Wilbur Wright, 'Some Aeronautical Experiences', paper presented to the Western Society of Engineers, 18 Sept. 1901, reproduced in *Resonance: Journal of Science Education* December 2003, 101, <https://www.ias.ac.in/article/fulltext/reso/008/12/0099-0114> (accessed 27 Jan. 2024).
5. Philip Jarrett, *Another Icarus: Percy Pilcher and the Quest for Flight* (Washington D.C. and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987).
6. In early census records Ella's year of birth is listed as 1863, though in the 1901 census it is listed as 1864.
7. Census records of 1861 locate the family at 10 Earl's Terrace, Kensington, where they remain in 1870 ('Robert Freeman Committee', *Bayswater Chronicle*, 19 Nov. 1870); in the 1871 census they are recorded living in Ware, Hertfordshire.
8. Gonne S. Pilcher 'Note on the Pilcher Family', Nov. 1963, unpublished recollections by the son of Thomas D. Pilcher, shared by Philip Jarrett.
9. Jarrett, *Another Icarus*, 8.
10. Sam Mavor 'Memories No. 4: A Pioneer of Flight' in *M & C Apprentices Magazine*, Summer 1934, 56.
11. 'Conversazione', *Westminster and Pimlico News*, 5 May 1888; 'Basing', *Mercury Reading*, 18 Jan. 1890.
12. 'Mrs Forrester', record of an interview with Thora Forrester, daughter of T.D. Pilcher, by a TV producer on 9 Apr. 1949. I'm grateful to Philip Jarrett for sharing his copy with me.
13. Jarrett, *Another Icarus*, 68.
14. Contained in the Pilcher papers, RAeS/19/9.
15. Alice Zwimmern, *The Renaissance of Girls' Education in England: A Record of Fifty Years' Progress* (London: A.D. Innes and Co, 1898), 149, 167. See also C.S. Bremner, *Education of Girls and Women in Britain* (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co, 1897), 118-9, 112.
16. See Claire G. Jones *Femininity, Mathematics and Science, 1880-1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
17. Quoted in Jones, *Femininity, Mathematics and Science*, 109.
18. Quoted in Jones, *Femininity, Mathematics and Science*, 81.
19. Matilda Joslyn Gage 'Woman as an Inventor', *The North American Review*, 136: 318 (May 1883), 478-489.
20. Margaret W. Rossiter 'The Matilda Effect in Science', *Social Studies of Science*, 23: 2 (May 1993), 325-341.
21. Sharon Wright, *Balloonomania Belles: Daredevil Divas who First Took to the Sky* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books, 2018), chapters 4 and 5.
22. Tethered balloons were attached to the ground with a cable, raised and lowered with a winch, as opposed to free balloons.
23. Wright, *Balloonomania Belles*, 141-49.
24. *Ibid.* 113, 126.
25. 'A Short History of The Royal Aeronautical Society', ed. Chris Male, *Aerospace*, January 2016, 48. E-publication https://www.aerosociety.com/media/9728/raes_history_

- in_11_parts-2016.pdf (accessed 25 Jan. 2024).
26. J. L. Pritchard, 'Major B. F. S. Baden-Powell, Honorary Fellow (1860-1937), An Appreciation', *Journal of the Royal Aeronautical Society*, 60:541, Jan. 1956, 13.
 27. David Edgerton, *England and the Aeroplane: Militarism, Modernity and Machines* (2nd ed) (London: Penguin, 2013/1991), 2; R.G. Grant, *Flight*, 15.
 28. Ella Tidswell, 'The Work and Experiments of Percy S. Pilcher', *Aeronautical Journal*, Jul. 1909, 87.
 29. Eileen F. Lebow, *Before Amelia: Women Pilots in the Early Days of Aviation* (Dulles, VA: Brassey's Inc, 2002), 124; Gail Hewlett, *Old Bird: The Irrepressible Mrs Hewlett* (Leicester: Matador, 2010).
 30. Markus Raffel and Bernd Lukasch, *The Flying Man: Otto Lilienthal—History, Flights and Photographs* (Switzerland: Springer Biographies, 2022), e-book DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-95033-0>, 127.
 31. Jarrett, *Another Icarus*, 10.
 32. 'Atelier de Mr. Lachambre fabricant de ballons de baudruche, aerostats, etc. Paris' Aug. 1883 drawing by A. Tissandier, Library of Congress, digital ID: ppsmsca 02310 //hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ppsmsca.02310 (accessed 31 Jan. 2024).
 33. Woodcut entitled 'Construction of the Captive Balloon of London' in J. Glaisher, C. Flammarion and W. de Fonville, *Travels in the Air* (London: Richard Bentley, 1871), 370.
 34. Dr Graham Rood 'Royal Engineers Balloon School' Farnborough Air Science Trust History and Learning Briefing No. 7, 2. http://www.airsciences.org.uk/FAST_Briefings_07_RoyalBalloonSchool.pdf (accessed 11 Mar 2019); 'A Brief History Of Farnborough Aviation Site Part 1 : The Early Days 1901-1914' Farnborough Air Science Trust History and Learning Briefing No. 1, 2. http://www.airsciences.org.uk/FAST_Briefings_01_History_Part1.pdf (accessed 11 Apr. 2019).
 35. Raffel and Lukasch, *The Flying Man*, 130; Richard Maurer *The Wright Sister: Katharine Wright and her Famous Brothers* (New York: Square Fish/Macmillan, 2003), 46.
 36. Jarrett, *Another Icarus*, 10-11.
 37. 'The Sportswoman's Sketch Book: Mrs Tidswell', *Lady's Pictorial*, 13 Apr. 1907, 600.
 38. Pritchard, 'Major B. F. S. Baden-Powell', 13.
 39. RAeS/19/9, E. Tidswell to J.E. Hodgson, 8 Apr. 1925.
 40. Jarrett, *Another Icarus*, 34.
 41. Lilienthal said his 1893 glider was modelled on a bat's wings, Raffel and Lukasch, *The Flying Man*, 114.
 42. Jarrett, *Another Icarus*, 15-18.
 43. Ella Tidswell, 'Work and Experiments', 88.
 44. 'The Sportswoman's Sketch Book', 600.
 45. Jarrett, *Another Icarus*, 19.
 46. Ibid. 22.
 47. 'Mrs Tidswell' interview, 600.
 48. Octave Chanute, *Progress in Flying* (New York: American Engineer and Railroad Journal, 1894), 205; Raffel and Lukasch, *The Flying Man*, 82, 127.
 49. Percival Serle, 'Hargrave, Lawrence (1850-1915)', in *Dictionary of Australian Biography*, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1949).
 50. Orville Wright, 'How we made the first flight', first published in *Flying*, Dec. 1913, reprinted by the Minnesota Department of Transportation Office of Aeronautics, 1986,
 51. <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/aero/aviationeducation/documents/publications/howwemadethefirstflight.pdf> (accessed 2 Feb. 2024).
 52. Quoted in Jarrett, *Another Icarus*, 42.
 53. *The Practical Engineer*, 6 Dec. 1895, 484-5, 485.
 54. Julie Wosk, *Women and the Machine: Representations from the Spinning Wheel to the Electronic Age* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 107.
 55. 'Yankee Girl climbs the Matterhorn', *New York Times* 26 Aug. 1895, see also Hannah Scialdone-Kimberley 'Women at the Top: Rhetoric, Politics and Feminism in the texts and life of Annie Smith Peck' (Unpublished PhD thesis, Old Dominion University, 2012), 77, 89-90.
 56. Mary Kingsley, *Travels in West Africa: Congo Français, Corsico and Cameroons*, (London: Macmillan, 1897), 269-70.
 57. Elizabeth Crawford, 'Suffrage Stories: Suffragettes and their Dress', Woman and her Sphere website, 5 Jun. 2021, <https://womanandhersphere.com/2021/05/06/suffrage-stories-suffragettes-and-their-dress/> (accessed 2 Feb. 2024).
 58. 'Elegy' handwritten MS in an album of photographs of Percy and Ella held by Philip Jarrett.
 59. Jarrett, *Another Icarus*, 26.
 60. Ibid. 25.
 61. Ibid. 30.
 62. Ibid. 45.
 63. Ibid. 43-5.
 64. Ibid. 47.
 65. Alison Gernsheim, *Victorian and Edwardian Fashion: A Photographic Survey* (New York: Dover Publications, 1963/1981), 78-9.
 66. See Wright, *Balloomania Belles*, chapter 8.
 67. For example acrobat Leona Dare or parachutist Ada MacDonald; Peta Tait, *Circus Bodies: Cultural Identity in Aerial Performance* (London: Routledge, 2005), 46; Jerry Kuntz, *A Leap from the Clouds: The Balloon-Parachute Act and the Daredevil Heritage of Aviation* (Jefferson N.C.: McFarland & Company, 2022), 55.
 68. 'Mrs Forrester' interview.
 69. Quoted in Sheila Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day: Women who Invented the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 2010), 25.
 70. Jarrett, *Another Icarus*, 48.
 71. Grant, *Flight*, 15.
 72. Wright, 'Some Aeronautical Experiments', 103.
 73. Baden-Powell to E. Pilcher, 8 Mar. 1897, mentioned in Jarrett, *Another Icarus*, 207 (footnote 1).
 74. Maurer, *The Wright Sister*, 61, 70-76
 75. *Aeronautical Journal*, Apr. 1897, 1.
 76. Unlike other learned societies, the AGSB was open to women from the start, albeit as 'associate members'. The first woman to join was Ethel Bourne in 1874. When Ella did join in 1900, it would appear that she was only the third woman to do so. Wright, *Balloomania Belles*, 120; RAeS records provided by Tony Pilmer at the NAL.
 77. Douglas Archibald, 'A New Experiment in Soaring Flight', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 29 Jun. 1897, 5.
 78. W.J.S. Lockyer, 'Soaring Flight', *Nature*, 12 Aug. 1897.
 79. Jarrett, *Another Icarus*, 76.
 80. Archibald 'A New Experiment', 5.
 81. Ibid.
 82. Film historian Luke McKernan made these into a

GIF and wrote about them on his blog: 'Icarus Ascending', <https://lukemckernan.com/2018/08/21/icarus-ascending/> (accessed 14 Oct. 2019).

82. Jarrett, *Another Icarus*, 25.

83. See Sally Spencer, *Magnificent Women and Flying Machines: The First 200 Years of British Women in the Sky* (Cheltenham: The History Press, 2021), chapter 5.

84. Jarrett, *Another Icarus*, 124.

85. *Ibid.* 128.

86. Jarrett has made a careful reconstruction of this day drawing on eyewitness accounts, press coverage and the inquest into Percy's death. *Another Icarus*, 129-48.

87. Percy was 'one of the few men I have met who had no sense of fear', according to Professor John Biles, quoted in Jarrett, *Another Icarus*, 29, see also 71.

88. Jarrett, *Another Icarus*, 113.

89. *Ibid.* 142.

90. Passenger list, *Irish Independent* 30 Oct. 1899, 4; a letter from Ella begins 'On board, RMS Carisbrook Castle', RAeS/19/9, E. Pilcher to ASGB, 31 Oct. 1899. In the

1901 census Ella gives her profession as 'Army Nursing Service', and she mentions nursing in Africa in 'Mrs Tidswell' interview, 600.

91. G.S. Pilcher 'Note on the Pilchers'; the Kumasi posting is described in 'Mrs Tidswell', 600.

92. RAeS/19/9, E. Pilcher to ASGB, 31 Oct. 1899.

93. Wright, 'Some Aeronautical Experiences', 101.

94. In 2016, the Hawk was restored by National Museums Scotland and put back on display.

95. Tidswell, 'Work and Experiments', 88.

96. 'Mrs Tidswell interview', 600.

97. In 1918 the ASGB changed its name to the Royal Aeronautical Society.

98. RAeS/19/9, E. Tidswell to J.E. Hodgson, 24 Mar. 1925.

99. RAeS/19/9, E. Tidswell to J.E. Hodgson, 27 Jan. 1929.

100. RAeS/19/9, E. Tidswell to J.E. Hodgson, 4 Feb. 1926.

101. 'Conversazione', *Journal of the Royal Aeronautical Society*, 30:182, Feb. 1926, 79-82.

102. Mavor 'Memories No. 4', 60.

103. 'Mrs Forrester' interview.

WOMEN AND THE NATION: WOMEN'S FIGHT FOR SELF-DETERMINATION IN TIMOR-LESTE

Phoebe Parsons, winner of WHN Undergraduate Dissertation Prize, 2022

INTRODUCTION

The Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste, formerly East Timor, comprises the eastern half of Timor Island, nestled between Australia and the southernmost edge of the Indonesian archipelago. It remains the youngest country in Asia, achieving formal independence in 2002 after centuries of foreign domination under Portuguese colonial rule, Japanese military occupation during World War II, and a repressive Indonesian occupation between 1975 and 1999. For twenty four years, Timor-Leste was subject to the terror and brutality that characterised Indonesian President Suharto's New Order regime. During the occupation, it is estimated that 200,000 East Timorese people were killed—a quarter of the population at the time.¹ Timor-Leste's struggle for independence is a history marred by violence and bloodshed, violence which often took gendered and sexualised forms. Investigations by the *Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation* (CAVR) into the systemic human rights abuses during the occupation revealed the 'specific forms of violations' experienced by many East Timorese women during the nationalist resistance, documenting extensive cases of rape and sexual slavery.² Research has since examined not only state-sanctioned forms of violence inflicted on women, but also structural forms of gendered oppressions stemming from the militarisation of East Timorese society.³

This article unpacks the relationship between nationalism and feminism in the context of Timor-Leste's women's movement that developed alongside Timor-Leste's nationalist struggle for independence (1974-1999). An East Timorese national identity provided an important

mobilising force for Timor-Leste's women's movement in resisting the patriarchal structures of colonial rule. Nevertheless, Timor-Leste's nationalist resistance exemplifies the gendered dynamics of war and conflict that interrelate with patriarchal nationalist discourse.

Benedict Anderson's understanding of the nation-state as an 'imagined community' provides this article with a working definition of nationalism that emphasises the social constructedness of nations and nationalisms whereby social dynamics are invented and performed to produce a common identity.⁴ As systems of cultural representation, nation-states have relied heavily on constructions of gender to sanction social hierarchies.⁵ Familial language, such as 'motherlands', in nationalist discourse helps embed gendered social orders, defining women's domestic and reproductive roles in the national 'family'.⁶ As national symbols, East Timorese women's bodies were sites of violence during the Indonesian occupation.⁷ By tracking the evolving roles of women within Timor-Leste, as well as locating the influences of Portuguese colonialism, the Indonesian occupation, and periods of intense militarisation within conceptualisations of women post-independence, this article draws connections between contemporary gender inequalities and the country's extensive periods of war, conflict and heightened nationalism. It draws upon the growing body of literature that highlights the central role East Timorese women played in Timor-Leste's struggle for independence. The major contributions of Sara Niner, Hannah Loney, Irena Cristalis and Catherine Scott are key sources of inspiration and foundational to this research.

Central to the article are five case studies; semi-structured interviews carried out with women engaged in Timor-Leste gender politics, some of whom were directly involved in Timor-Leste's independence movement.⁸ The names of interviewees Ana Pieres, Isabel Pinto, Fernanda Barros and Ines Wati are pseudonyms to preserve privacy and safety.

Ines Wati is from Indonesia. She moved to East Timor during the Indonesian occupation to support the East Timorese nationalist movement and run workshops for women survivors of violence. These workshops evolved into one of Timor-Leste's most well-known women's organisations, *Fokupers*. After witnessing the extensive human rights violations in East Timor, she was heavily involved in the CAVR, recording atrocities committed under the occupation. She is currently working in the field of women and development in conflict areas.

Isabel Pinto is from Timor-Leste. She has a background in gender development and women's rights, working with the women's organisation, *Fokupers*, and The Asia Foundation's Nabilan Program that combats violence against women and children in Timor-Leste. Pinto was chosen due to her deep knowledge of contemporary gender dynamics, helping track shifts in gender-relations during the Indonesian occupation and post-independence.

Fernanda Barros is from Timor-Leste. She had just finished primary school when Indonesia invaded in 1975, spending her youth working as a political assistant for *Fretilin*, resisting in the mountains with *Fretilin*'s revolutionary army, *Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional de Timor-Leste* (Falintil) and clandestine networks. She continued to advocate for her country through a respected political career as an ambassador. In our interview, she shared her perspective on life as a young woman during the nationalist resistance and outlined some of the challenges for women post-independence.

Ana Pieres is from Timor-Leste. She was on the board of the women's organisation Pro-Ema that provides education for women and child survivors of sexual violence. She has worked for various gender equality development programmes and as a gender equality trainer and consultant. She is currently a member of one of Timor-Leste's major political parties. In our interview, Pieres outlined various ways in which women were politically engaged in the nationalist resistance and shared her personal experience of being a woman in politics in Timor-Leste.⁹

Dr Laurentina 'Mica' Barreto Soares is from Timor-Leste. She was studying in Central Java towards the end of the Indonesian occupation where she joined the Indonesian-based student resistance movement *Resistência Nacional dos Estudantes de Timor-Leste* (National Resistance of Students of East Timor-RENETIL) in 1998. She has worked as a national consultant for research on urban crime and violence in Dili and as a senior researcher and lecturer at the Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e (UNTL). She was awarded a Fullbright scholarship to complete her master's in International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame, and holds a PhD from Swinburne University of Technology, which focused on Timor-Leste/China relations. Soares

provides personal insight into gender dynamics during the nationalist resistance and how these have manifested in contemporary social structures.

THE EMERGENCE OF A WOMEN'S MOVEMENT (1974–1999)

The 1974 Carnation Revolution that led to the collapse of the authoritarian Estado Novo regime marked the end of the Portuguese Empire, sparking decolonial movements throughout Portuguese Africa and Asia. As East Timor was preparing for a new future, two main political parties emerged: the radical left-wing party, *Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente* (Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor-*Fretilin*) and the *União Democrática Timorense* (Timorese Democratic Union-UDT). On 28 August 1975, *Fretilin* established a women's front, the *Organização Popular da Mulher Timorense* (Popular Organisation of East Timorese Women-OPMT), which served to fight the struggles of both independence and women's emancipation.¹⁰ The establishment of OPMT, and its amalgamated projects of national independence and gender equality, has since been considered pivotal in propelling women's activism in Timor-Leste and marking the 'birth of an East Timorese women's movement'.¹¹

OPMT's support for women's emancipation was situated within broader nationalist visions of independence. Rosa 'Muki' Bonaparte Soares, the founding secretary of OPMT, articulated the inseparable relationship between decolonisation and women's liberation in a 1975 statement. Here she outlined OPMT's two key objectives: 'to participate directly in the struggle against colonialism, and ...[to] fight in every way the violent discrimination that Timorese women have suffered in colonial society'.¹²

The gendered foundations of European colonialism and the Western nation-state system are illustrated by Maria Lugones in her 2016 essay 'The Coloniality of Gender'.¹³ This described the perpetuation and global dominance of Western, patriarchal, heterosexual conceptions of sex and gender, adding to Aníbal Quijano's 'coloniality of power' framework—the prevailing hegemony of colonial power structures. Lugones' work identified the gendered logic of colonial modernity and located it within the capitalistic separation of private and public spheres that have subordinated women's political and economic power.

The frameworks developed by Lugones and Quijano can be applied to Portuguese Timor and the calcification of gender binaries during this period. Douglas Kammen and Hans Hägerdal have researched cases where the pre-colonial positions of women, some of whom held roles of significant political authority and power, were ultimately replaced with a lower societal status.¹⁴ In his 2012 article *Queens of Timor*, Kammen described two periods prior to Portuguese colonialism where some of these indigenous polities were ruled by queens (*rainha*), offering certain women considerable social power. During the early nineteenth century, reigning queens accounted for a quarter of rulers amongst the indigenous polities identified by the Portuguese.¹⁵ Matriarchal structures were especially prevalent in the region of Lacló, which



'Women's Wall', Dili,
Timor-Leste. Photo,
Phoebe Parsons, 2022

was ruled by three different queens during the years 1815, 1854 and 1879.¹⁶ Kammen highlighted the correlation between the decline of matriarchy and the arrival of the Portuguese, which he saw as 'a major factor in its disappearance'.¹⁷ Hägerdal's research also supports this: 'the political, diplomatic and religious networks that the white foreigners tried to construct were therefore oriented towards the male (*mont*) rather than female (*feto*) sphere'.¹⁸

The limited opportunities available to women under Portuguese rule were highlighted by two interviewees. Fernanda Barros, who grew up in Portuguese Timor, spoke of how:

During the colonisation, there were few opportunities for women. Some women went to school, but this was very rare ... Positions for women after school were also very limited. During colonial times there were no women in high positions. Women were usually teachers or nurses, but we never had women doctors. This is because education was very limited in the colonial period ... The culture was very patriarchal.¹⁹

Education under Portuguese rule was only offered to a selected elite. Dr Mica Barreto Soares also noted the uneven educational opportunities available for her family members during this period.

All my uncles had a very good education during Portuguese time ... They all went to college. My mother, she never went to school ... Although she really wanted to, my mother's father did not send her to school ... I remember my mother complaining about my grandfather's decision and him joking saying 'I didn't send you to school because you would have learnt to write secret love letters to boys and we would lose control of

you'.²⁰

Barros' and Dr Soares' examples highlight the calcification of gender binaries under Portuguese colonialism, pointing to the colonial undercurrents of gender inequality in contemporary Timor-Leste.

When analysing the position of women in Timor-Leste it is important, however, to consider alternative configurations of power that are not predicated on gender. In her work, Oyeronke Oyewumi has given examples of ways in which Western heterosexual understandings of gender do not translate in parts of West Africa, such as the Yoruba people of south-west Nigeria.²¹ 'Gender was not an organising principle in Yoruba society prior to colonisation by the West'.²² Similar patterns can be found in indigenous East Timorese social systems where other factors such as seniority can override gender in terms of social authority and power. In her research on indigenous East Timorese communities, Kelly Cristiane da Silva noted the significance of generational hierarchies which are 'often stronger than gender ideologies in the making of local systems of prestige'.²³ This can place *feto ferik* (elite women) in higher positions of power than some men.²⁴ Josh Trindade has outlined the differently conceived notions of gender in pre-colonial Timor in his 2012 article "Colonialism, Culture and Gender in Timor-Leste". Through the use of oral histories, he has located what older generations in Timor-Leste call the *tempu rai diak* [the tranquil time]. This was an 'egalitarian time' before the arrival of Europeans where both men and women displayed social, cultural, political and economic power.²⁵

While the examples above do not represent all Timor-Leste's indigenous social groups, nor the full extent of their complexities, they emphasise the heterogeneities in social organisation across Timor-Leste's ethnic groups, and sketch some of the social and historical factors that have produced patriarchal power dynamics in independent Timor-Leste.

The momentum gained by East Timor's women's

movement was soon thwarted by the invasion of Indonesian forces in 1975. The backdrop to East Timor's independence movement was the Indonesian government's methodical destabilisation of the region under 'Operation Komodo', its plan to annex East Timor as its twenty-seventh province. Concerned by the growing influence of *Fretilin's* leftist ideologies, the Indonesian government positioned *Fretlin* as a Communist threat to the more conservative Portugal-oriented UDT, fomenting conflict between the two parties.²⁶ This culminated in a short but bloody civil war in which *Fretilin* emerged victorious. The capturing of Phnom Penh, Vientiane and Saigon by communist forces in the same year, exacerbated fears in Jakarta, Canberra, and Washington DC that *Fretilin's* victory was a further 'domino falling' in Southeast Asia.²⁷ *Fretilin's* victory triggered Indonesia's full-scale invasion of East Timor, facilitated by members of the UDT and the tacit approval of Western nations. Muki Soares was one of the first to be targeted, captured, and shot alongside Isabel Lobato, the wife of the *Fretilin* Vice-President, Nicolau dos Reis Lobato.

The targeting of women during the resistance can be linked to the ways women have been positioned as symbols of a collective national identity in nationalist discourses. Sexualised violence against women during armed conflict can therefore hold a symbolic dimension, representing the 'conquering' and 'sully' of the enemy nation.²⁸ Dr Soares illustrated the punishments Timorese women would often receive on behalf of the nationalist front.

Many [women] were protecting their family, their brothers who were or already in the mountains. This meant that the soldiers often targeted women. They would say that 'because your brother or your husband or your father betray us and want to be independent, you must receive the consequences.'²⁹

Torture methods of the Indonesian National Army (TNI) and pro-Indonesian militia were often sexualised. In 1997, a collection of over 250 photographs taken by Indonesian soldiers of torture victims were smuggled out of East Timor and circulated internationally.³⁰ Approximately 40 of these photographs depicted highly sexualised torture methods carried out on women and young girls. The targets of this sexual violence were women associated with the resistance movement, or those demonstrating non-compliance with the Indonesian military. However, not all examples of torture were cases of individual punishment; the pervasive practice of sexual violence by the Indonesian military can be understood as part of a larger mission to demoralise and dehumanise the East Timorese population.

As a means of survival, some women entered long-term sexual arrangements with members of the TNI.³¹ Sexual slavery often resulted in children, adding another layer of trauma for these women, many of whom were subsequently shunned by their communities.³² Known derogatorily as 'military wives' or 'TNI wives', the stigmatisation continued post-independence.³³ In 2017, Abbey Boggs published a report of her investigations

into the struggles faced by survivors of sexual violence, and the issue of societal reintegration. She attributed the dominance of Catholicism, specifically its valorisation of 'purity and chastity', which added another dimension of stigmatisation that left survivors 'feeling ashamed and labelled'.³⁴ These examples highlight the deep institutionalisation of gendered violence during the Indonesian occupation, but also the many ways women resisted and ensured the survival of their children and families.

During the resistance, most women were responsible for the care of their families and children. In her interview, Ana Pieres spoke of the way gendered labour divisions were strengthened during the nationalist struggle and the implications of this post-independence:

... with the Indonesian invasion in '75 and all the twenty-four years of struggle, what happened was that the traditional role of women, staying home and taking care of the children and taking care of the house were reinforced because men were sent to fight in the resistance. So, after the restoration of independence, we had a society where the traditional role of women was reinforced.³⁵

As well as carrying out domestic responsibilities, many women were simultaneously engaged in the nationalist resistance, making up sixty percent of the clandestine networks.³⁶ Cooking for the guerrillas, hiding them in villages, and transmitting information between units, were some of the locally grounded strategies used to retaliate against the occupying power.³⁷ Some women, including Fernanda Barros, took up arms with the *Fretilin* revolutionary army, *Falintil*. In her interview she spoke of her responsibilities within *Fretilin* as a young teenager during the resistance:

I was fourteen to fifteen in 1975 when the war started. I had just completed primary school but already had two positions in the mountains. In one position I was the youth leader for seven villages, what we call '*suku*', then I also became a political assistant ... we tried hard to engage and contribute.³⁸

As a political assistant, Barros was responsible for educating young people about the nationalist movement as well as gathering support for *Falintil*. She spoke of her arduous schedule, which most days involved ten kilometres of walking barefoot between villages, all with the imminent threat from Indonesian troops. After surviving twenty-four years of resistance within *Fretilin* and clandestine networks, Barros joined the referendum committee directed by the newly formed National Council of Timorese Resistance (CNRT)—a united front of political parties fighting for independence. The turbulent events surrounding the 1999 referendum saw her blacklisted by the Indonesian military. She hid in a Catholic church with her young daughter as Indonesian-backed militia conducted a murderous rampage throughout the country.

When husbands and fathers were killed, women were often suddenly forced to make up for lost income while continuing with their domestic labour. Barros spoke

about making the dangerous journey to Dili to provide for her family. Due to her ties with *Fretilin* she did not have travel authorisation, and when travelling from Baucau to Dili she hid in the back of a priest's car.

I had to do something to earn money because my dad passed away and my mum was in a village with my brothers and sisters and so I could not survive if I did not work. I tried to get a job in Dili and was working in land property.³⁹

Acknowledging the gendered violence generated by the nationalist struggle should not undermine the dedication and loyalty many women had for the nationalist cause. However, acts of resistance cannot always be easily distinguished from methods of survival. When asked what motivated her in the struggle, Barros replied, 'we only had two options: *pátria ka morte*' [nation or death].⁴⁰

Women's political engagement continued to grow throughout the Indonesian occupation. In 1988, East Timorese scholars in Denpasar formed the *Resistência Nacional dos Estudantes de Timor-Leste* (National Resistance of East Timorese Students–RENETIL). According to Dr Soares, who joined RENETIL as a young student, anyone who wanted to take part in the nationalist struggle could be involved in RENETIL, 'it was not a question of gender'.⁴¹ She noted that women's growing presence in public spheres was not necessarily in the name of gender equality—the inclusion of women in nationalist organisations such as RENETIL was rather a means to maximise participation in the resistance effort.

I don't know whether to use the word deliberately or consciously, but back then the agenda was to fight for independence. We did not have any other agenda. The situation back then was about our preparedness. That was what mattered. There was no secondary agenda to fight for women's issues.⁴²

While women were present in spaces beyond the domestic sphere, according to Dr Soares, reconfigurations of gender roles were predominantly to serve the goal of independence. The growing political mobilisation of women did however provide fuel for the women's movement.

A number of women's organisations subsequently emerged, including *Forum Komunikasi Untuk Perempuan Loro Sa'e* (East Timorese Women's Communication Forum–*Fokupers*) in 1997, and *Gerakan Wanita Anti-Kekerasan* (East Timorese Movement Against Violence Towards Women and Children–GERTAK) in 1998. These organisations were instrumental in raising international awareness of the gendered forms of violence committed during the Indonesian occupation and providing support for women survivors. In advocating for women's rights, *Fokupers* also centred on advancing women's political engagement. In the lead up to the 1999 referendum, some *Fokupers* women worked alongside the CNRT, campaigning in rural districts and providing education on the ballot system.⁴³ Ines Wati, a founding member of *Fokupers*, highlighted the dualistic nature of the nationalist struggle in her interview

as both intensifying patriarchal social structures while simultaneously instigating change:

Gender dynamics are always played out and get exacerbated when there are these huge tsunami-like changes. At the same time, those times of change also provide the opportunity for rethinking and re-envisioning. In human history, we are always tinkering with our societies, and it is an exciting time when you can start being more conscious about the way you're organising your society and then making conscious choices about which path to choose.⁴⁴

For women activists such as Wati, Timor-Leste's self-determination could offer a step towards their own emancipation from the patriarchal structures established under Portuguese and Indonesian occupation.

WOMEN AND THE INDEPENDENT NATION

The fall of the Suharto regime in 1998 set in motion a tripartite agreement between Indonesia, Portugal, and the United Nations that would mandate the United Nations to facilitate a referendum on independence for East Timor.⁴⁵ Held on 30 August 1999, the ballot saw four out of five East Timorese vote in favour of independence from Indonesia. This outcome was met with a brutal retaliation by Indonesian forces and pro-Indonesia militias, resulting in the massacre of an estimated 1500 East Timorese. International outcry prompted the deployment of the International Force East Timor (INTERFET) to restore security under the United Nations. The United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) obtained full administration of the country alongside the CNRT until Timor-Leste's formal independence in 2002.⁴⁶

Periods of protracted conflict and a militarised transitional administration have perpetuated male dominance in Timor-Leste's public spheres. Cynthia Enloe observed how militarisation has worked to 're-entrench the privileging of masculinity — in both private and public life'.⁴⁷ This is evident in Timor-Leste's government, with its prevalence of the male military elite of the resistance, 'Generation 75'. When talking about her political career, Ana Pieres noted how 'politics in Timor is still a lot about the history', maintaining a heavily masculinised political sphere.⁴⁸ While the quota system may have increased women's political representation, it has not yet targeted patriarchal cultures within East Timorese politics. She spoke of the extensive sexism she has experienced as a politician:

The fact that I am a woman makes me more prone to attacks than if I were a man ... Women that speak up are usually seen as arrogant or hysterical. Those are some of the names I've been called.⁴⁹

She emphasised the importance of the quota system, but only as a first step to securing gender equity in politics, because otherwise, women's representation 'becomes a bit like ticking a box', without addressing the

structural barriers creating divisions in labour.⁵⁰ Dr Soares outlined a similar trend in academia where a recognition of women's disproportionate representation in relation to men, and the roots of this imbalance, is still lacking:

... In my department of the university where I work, I am the only woman. I feel sad that the influence of the patriarchal system continues to flourish, even in academic organisations. We women have still not been 'seen'... My colleagues in my department, they treat me as normal, but don't see that I am the only woman there.⁵¹

An emphasis on women's domestic responsibilities remains embedded within social structures post-independence. Pieres outlined some of the barriers these patriarchal social norms create for women to obtain and balance careers, particularly for lower socio-economic groups.

I struggled personally, for example, to deal with political work and my children at home. And I am one that is able to have support at home. My family supports me and I have the ability to hire support as well, which most women cannot do here in Timor. So it's even harder for the majority of women in Timor, not only in politics but in any career.⁵²

Issues surrounding health care and reproductive rights are also gendered. Pieres noted the complication of family planning for many women, which often requires authorisation from a husband or his family for women to access, and is complicated further by Timor-Leste's strong Catholic influence.⁵³ These structural barriers that widen gendered divisions in labour and socioeconomic freedom are intensified in rural areas.

Gendered legacies of the nationalist struggle are also found in the high rates of gender-based violence. Isabel Pinto, a Gender and Development specialist in Timor-Leste, has spoken of the cycle of violence impacting women, linking this issue to the gendered dynamics of the nationalist violence that has made most men 'used to violence and their power'.⁵⁴

... during the Indonesian time there was even violence in school. It was everywhere. They saw it. When there was a problem, violence was used to resolve it. When you witness this violence, you can become a victim but you can also become a perpetrator. Women victims of violence can also be violent with their children. It's a cycle.⁵⁵

The prevalence of violence against women in Timor-Leste cannot be understood without attention to the gender dynamics formed under periods of intense militarisation and nationalism.

Patriarchal configurations of gender, generated over centuries of colonial and nationalist conflict, reinforced the disproportionate socioeconomic agency between men and women post-independence. However, this does not overshadow the critical role of East Timorese women in the nation-building process. In February 2022, Kirsty

Sword, the Australian-born former First Lady of Timor-Leste, spoke out about the absence of women in Timor-Leste's nation building. In an article for *The Australian* titled 'Women Suffering in Silence', she wrote that the voices of East Timorese women have been 'drowned out by the din of the political clamourings of male leaders and the roar of the machinery of a peace-keeping operation directed and driven by men'.⁵⁶ As a consequence, 'they are virtually absent from discussions relating to East Timor's political future'.⁵⁷ Sword's opinion piece has been criticised by OPMT for undermining the integral role East Timorese women have and continue to play in the nation-building process. OPMT's response to the editor problematised Sword's 'simplistic depiction' of what continues to be 'a very complex and involved process' for East Timorese women.⁵⁸ While acknowledging the continued marginalisation of East Timorese women, OPMT believes their 'suffering' should not outweigh their deep historic and continuing engagement with Timor-Leste's process of nation building:

We are women who have been involved for decades in our national struggle, we are also women of *Fretilin* and are proud of that fact and the role we have played in our institutions towards the process of peace-building and reconciliation in our nation.⁵⁹

Simplistic, homogenous depictions of women in developing contexts, risk perpetuating what Chandra Mohanty has termed the 'third world difference'—a Western, paternalistic attitude to women in the 'third-world' who are presented as suffering, oppressed victims of their own society. Images of the underdeveloped, backward 'third-world' are subsequently pinned against Western 'progressiveness'.⁶⁰ Ramifications of this paternalistic rhetoric can be found in diplomatic relations between Timor-Leste and countries like Australia. Australia's engagement in Timor-Leste has been predominantly driven by Australia's self-interests, evidenced by Australia's spying operation in Timor-Leste in 2004 during oil and gas revenue negotiations.⁶¹ Foreign aid programmes in Timor-Leste can be forms of soft power that work to position East Timorese 'culture' in tension with Western 'modernisation'. International reports, such as the 2021 analysis 'Women and Girls Empowered' (WAGE) have consistently attributed gender inequality to the 'traditional patriarchal structure of Timor-Leste society', 'cultural values' and 'cultural practices that perpetuate gender inequality'.⁶² 'East Timorese culture' and 'tradition' become the key obstacles to obtaining Western standards of gender equality.

Victimising ethnocentrism has undermined the active role of women in Timor-Leste's nationalist movement and process of peace-building, as well as in the critical role East Timorese women's groups have played in ensuring the government maintains its gender mainstreaming initiatives. In their response to Sword's article, OPMT emphasised that women 'have been here; in the process of nation building, in the same way they were "here when the blood was spilt"'.⁶³

CONCLUSION

These five interviews, in dialogue with the academic scholarship presented above, offer complex and interwoven perspectives on the gendered dynamics of war and conflict within the context of Timor-Leste's nationalist resistance. The accounts given by the interviewees point to the specific ways women were impacted and faced forms of targeted violence during this period, and its effects on gender dynamics post-independence. While gender roles were in some cases reconfigured during the resistance, with women appointed to political and military responsibilities, this was done predominantly for the nationalist effort. Independent Timor-Leste exemplifies the consequences of protracted periods of heightened nationalism and militarisation, located in masculinised state systems that perpetuate gendered asymmetries in socio-economic freedoms.

A national, unifying identity provided an important, mobilising force for Timor-Leste's women's movement, where independence could potentially offer a dismantling of colonial, patriarchal state systems. East Timorese nationalism has to be contextualised within the country's history of colonial invasion and occupation, in order to appreciate its relevance to the decolonial project of independence. Whether Timor-Leste's formal independence can provide meaningful change in gender relations is yet to be determined. Western political influence in Timor-Leste continues to reinforce a Eurocentric blueprint of the nation-state and its tropes of modernity, progress and development.

While the patriarchal gender dynamics of colonial rule linger in independent Timor-Leste, East Timorese women activists and women's organisations have been articulating an alternative nation-state system, one built on the language of gender equality. The hard-fought achievements of these groups point to ways in which they are defying these entrenched patriarchal systems, and the continuing efforts to dismantle colonial power structures. Through renegotiating political and gender demarcation, the process of emasculating the Western nation-state and reimagining national communities has begun.

NOTES

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2. CAVR 2005 Part 7.7 *Chega! The Report of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in Timor-Leste. Sexual Violence*, 2.
3. Irena Cristalis and Catherine Scott, *Independent women: The story of women's activism in East Timor* (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 2005); Sara Niner, *Women and the Politics of Gender in Post-Conflict Timor-Leste: Between Heaven and Earth* (London: Routledge, 2017); Hannah Loney, *In Women's Words: Violence and Everyday Life during the Indonesian Occupation of East Timor, 1975-1999* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2018).
4. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. (London: Verso Books, 2016), p.6.
5. Feminist scholars, including Anne McClintock (1993), Cynthia Enloe (1998) and Nira Yuval-Davis (1989), have emphasised the ways in which war and nationalism are heavily masculinised projects, functioning on gendered distributions of power predicated on the subjugation of women.
6. Anne McClintock, 'Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family', *Feminist Review*, 44/3 (1993), 61-80.
7. In *War and Rape* Ruth Seifert examines the pervasiveness of sexualised war crimes in military conflicts that have arisen from these gendered images. She illustrates sexualised violence as 'part of male communication', with the rape of women representing the 'ultimate symbolic humiliation of the male enemy', Ruth Seifert, *War and Rape: A Preliminary Analysis* (London: Routledge 1993), 4.
8. This article draws upon Indira Chowdhury's understanding of oral history as an 'interpretive apparatus' and considers how oral histories can offer marginalised groups agency in establishing their historical narratives within national projects of remembering. Indira Chowdhury, 'Speaking of the Past: Perspectives on Oral History', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 49/30 (2014), 39-42.
9. The practice of oral history raises epistemological challenges of representation, both of the interviewees and the groups they are implied to represent. The experiences of my interviewees are rather points of departure to discuss the ways gender dynamics played out during Timor-Leste's nationalist resistance, rather than to build towards a monolithic, simplified 'experience' of women during this period. My own position as a white, Australian woman who doesn't speak Tetun, inevitably shaped the research. To ensure that topics were approached with sensitivity and understanding, I completed the Epigeum Research Integrity Core Course on 17 January 2022, after which an ethical review was conducted.
10. Timor-Leste Country Gender Assessment-Asian Development Bank, 2014. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/84126/timor-leste-country-gender-assessment.pdf>.
11. Cristalis and Scott, *Independent women*, 27.
12. Rosa 'Muki' Bonaparte, 'Women in East Timor: Statement by Popular Organisation of Timorese Women', 18 Sep. 1975, *Direct Action*, 4 Mar. 1976, 7.
13. Maria Lugones, 'The Coloniality of Gender', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Development*, Wendy Harcourt ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America', *International Sociology*, 15/2, 215-32.
14. Hans Hägerdal, 'Cycles of Queenship on Timor: A Response to Douglas Kammen', *Archipel*, 85 (2013), 237-51; Douglas Kammen, 'Queens of Timor'. *Archipel*, 84 (2012), 149-73; Douglas Kammen, 'Three Centuries Of Conflict In East Timor', *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 38/2 (2016), 330-32.
15. Kammen, 'Queens of Timor'.
16. Ibid.

17. Ibid, 115.
18. Hägerdal, *Cycles of Queenship*, 249.
19. Interview conducted with Fernanda Barros, 19 Mar. 2022.
20. Interview conducted with Dr Mica Barreto Soares, 13 Jan. 2022.
21. Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, 'Conceptualizing Gender: The Eurocentric Foundations of Feminist Concepts and the Challenge of African Epistemologies', *Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*, 2/1 (2002); Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí, 'The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses', *World Literature Today*, 72/4 (1998).
22. Oyèwùmí, 'Conceptualizing', 31.
23. K. da Silva, 'Women, gender and power among indigenous peoples of Portuguese Timor', *Anuário Antropológico*, 42/2 (2017), 199.
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25. Josh Trinidad, 'Colonialism, Culture and Gender in Timor-Leste', *East Timor Law and Justice Bulletin*, 15 Oct. 2012.
26. Elizabeth Kingston, 'Perpetuating Genocide: Intentional International Neglect in the East Timor Crisis' (Honors Project, Grand Valley State University, 2012), 149.
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DESCENT, INTEREST AND JOY: BEATRIX POTTER, LAND PRESERVATION AND HER CURATED IDENTITY

Helen Antrobus, Assistant National Curator (Cultural Landscapes), National Trust

In 2022, the National Trust and the Victoria & Albert Museum came together to open the exhibition *Beatrix Potter: Drawn to Nature*. For the first time, the two biggest Beatrix Potter collections in the world were united, acknowledging Potter not only as a beloved children's author, but also as a natural scientist, a farmer and a conservationist. As a curator for the National Trust and co-curator of *Drawn to Nature*, I was more at home in an archive or collections room than a rural landscape; but this exhibition took me from the tops of fells to lakeshore, to farms and, eventually, to Kensington, where Potter had spent the first forty-seven years of her life. I came to understand that the reason Potter chose to bequeath so much land to the National Trust arose from her personal experience of the landscapes in which she lived, as well as from what she wrote about in the pages of her books.

Those of us who know Potter often know her for the same reasons. Having spent over three years questioning this understanding - and arguably misinterpretation - of Potter, I began to question my own reading of other women connected to significant landscapes across the British Isles, both through a relationship with the National Trust and outside of this.

Women's advocacy and labour has always sat at the heart of the National Trust. Octavia Hill, co-founder of the Trust, is perhaps the most well-known of these women, and has set a precedent of how the women who followed her in acts of land preservation, conservation and fundraising are understood and interpreted. Hill's co-founding of the Trust in 1895 was the pinnacle of a career keenly focused on affording working-classes access to green space, decent housing and fresh air. Her philanthropic career was, in part, driven by both the need to financially support herself (she was unmarried) and to satisfy societal expectations of women that, though disenfranchised, they had moral, religious and social obligations to fulfil.

Hill firmly adhered to the belief that women could make meaningful change through charity work. She had been influenced, surely, by her long-time supporter and mentor, the writer, philosopher, and cultural visionary John Ruskin. Ruskin characterised the role of women as the help-mate of man in his lecture *Of Queen's Gardens* (1865), writing that women's power, 'is for rule, not for battle, - and her intellect ... not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision'.¹ Believing that women's self and purpose should not be independent from that of a man's, Ruskin was unconvinced by the

early tremors of women's enfranchisement. Hill's own views, published ten years after Ruskin's death, align closely with his assertion on the mission of women, when she wrote in a letter to *The Times* in 1910, 'I believe that a serious loss to our country would arise if women entered into the arena of party struggle and political life... Let the woman seek the quiet paths of helpful real work... on her duties, not her rights'.²

This question of rights over duty, of desire and wayfinding for oneself, rather than the immediate benefit of the many, is a critical one. This is especially true when Beatrix Potter, the beloved children's author, farmer and conservationist is cast as Hill's natural successor at the National Trust. Though she never held any seat on the committee, nor any official nor elected position of power, both public and organisational memory acknowledge the significance of her role with land conservation and cultural preservation, especially in the Lake District. Her married name - Heelis - is even the moniker of the Trust's headquarters in Wiltshire.

From its conception, Potter was aware and indeed interested in the mission of the National Trust (the



Fig. 1. Beatrix Potter at Hill Top, 1913 by Charles King. Wikimedia Commons.

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Beatrix_Potter_by_King.jpg

National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty, as it was known then). Her father was one of the first life members and in October 1901, perhaps not so coincidentally when the first edition of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* was published, Potter donated two shillings and sixpence to the Trust's public campaign to purchase Brandelhow, a parcel of land on the shores of Derwentwater. This interest undoubtedly came from the family's friendship with 'defender of the Lakes' Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley, another disciple of Ruskin and one of Hill's co-founders of the National Trust. Rawnsley is often credited with introducing Potter to the necessity of land preservation and the conservation of traditional cultural practices, which later became the foundation of her work with the National Trust. Hill's conscious preservation was guided entirely by public benefit, concerned that the loss of common land and space would put an end to the natural beauty, light and air that could change the life of the common man.

In *The Women Who Saved the English Countryside*, the remarkable study of prolific female preservationists, Matthew Kelly investigates the commonalities between Potter and Hill, and more importantly, their differences.³ Potter's acquisition of large parcels of land in the Lake District was, to a point, an example of 'purchasing to preserve', the sort of action that Hill also undertook. But Hill and Potter sit on two sides of a changing time for women. Hill embodied a cultural authority of Victorian women, who had little means to self-purchase, but a moral commitment to working on behalf of others. Potter, on the other hand, represented a new culture of women who did not seek philanthropic meaning, but a life without dependencies of one's own design; one that was curated by patriarchal expectations – even if that patriarch was John Ruskin.

Although somewhat sceptical of national politics and, like Hill, female enfranchisement, Potter

acknowledged and indeed took advantage of the shift from a woman's place in philanthropy to a more robust form of citizenship. Bolstered by inherited wealth and the fortune amassed by her books, Potter was able to reforge her identity, drawing on nostalgia, ancestry and knowledge to curate a version of herself separate from her Kensington upbringing. This new identity would be the driving force behind her own foray into land preservation, inspired not by a vocation to provide public benefit, but to preserve as much of the region that had given her a new chance at happiness as she possibly could.

To understand this new life is to understand the dual identities of Beatrix Potter, the writer and artist of Kensington, and Mrs Heelis, the farmer. Once the latter had been established, the former existed rarely outside of print. After her marriage to William Heelis in 1913 and her permanent relocation to the Lake District, Potter – who had always shied away from the public eye – grew evermore rooted in her private life, to such a drastic extent that her first biographer, Margaret Lane, wrote in 1946, 'When I grew up, I accepted without question the fairly general belief that Beatrix Potter was dead.'⁴

Her married name afforded her a sense of anonymity that made her difficult to locate and her publishers had strict orders not to hand out her address. There were few trails left to trace her back to Kensington; her father's death in 1914 saw her mother relocate to Lindeth Howe, a villa on Windermere, and after that, Potter rarely left the Lake District again. The Heelis' were an ancient, Lakeland lineage and by marrying into the family, a solid foundation for Potter's rejection of 'off-comer', or outsider status. Her world was firmly rooted in one definitive place.

Although reluctant to reveal much about this new identity to the public, there are some crumbs scattered throughout her tales that begin to reveal a version of 'Mrs Heelis' – farmer, local and professional authority - even before her marriage. These tales written after her purchase



Fig. 2. Hill Top. Photograph taken by author.

of Hill Top farm in 1905, show a move from illustrations set in vast, public landscapes, such as Squirrel Nutkin's journey across Derwentwater and Mrs Tiggy-Winkle's home nestled in Newlands Valley. Her local village of Near Sawrey, her own farmyard and the interiors of Hill Top become the primary locations of her characters and show Potter rooting herself and her home in the universe she had been creating in her books for over a decade. Far from being a tourist, her possession of land and farm sets out a new precedent of belonging. *The Tale of Pigling Bland* has even been interpreted as a symbol of her warm, happy marriage with William Heelis.

Later, reluctant biographical writing from Potter reveals what her recent biographers consider a solid fact; that Potter had aligned her identity with the Lake District much earlier than her marriage to Heelis, or even her purchase of Hill Top. In the years before her death, Potter was convinced by Bertha Mahoney Miller, her American friend, correspondent, and expert in children's literature, to write a short biographical piece for Miller's magazine *The Horn Book*. Here, she extolled her northern and rural roots, writing, 'My brother and I were born in London because my father was a lawyer there... but our descent – our interests and our joy was in the North country.'⁵ These joys and interests equipped Potter with local familiarity and knowledge that helped to root her in her Lake District life.

Although Potter consistently expressed her love of pastoral landscapes throughout her childhood and early years, never was there a suggestion in her letters or her diaries, that the life of a farmer would be her vocation. In those early years, the pastoral beauty of the Lake District shows no sign of triumphing over any other rural landscape; we find simply a love of green, of hills and muddy paths; of fresh air and clear-headedness. Potter was as comfortable in the wilds of Perthshire, where she spent her childhood summers, as she was at Camfield Place, the Hertfordshire home of her paternal grandparents. The clarity that she found within herself when in these spaces drew her towards rurality and, what she perceived to be, a simpler, happier way of life in the Lake District. Potter's comfort from the landscape deepened to curiosity and she collected traditions, local stories, myths and novelties, storing them away to use not only in her *Tales*, but to strengthen her feeling of locality and of regional understandings.

Whilst interest and joy were important to forming her authority in working and directing the conservation of her estate and farmlands, the root of her sense of belonging and indeed authority, possibly came from her claims of descent. Ancestral roots, beyond her husband's, helped to discourage any feeling that she was an outsider, especially in wider circles. It is telling that Potter referred to this lineage when writing in *The Horn Book* in 1929 on the beginnings of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. Potter places great significance on her own ancestral inheritance of northern identity:

The question of 'roots' interests me! I am a believer in 'breed'; I hold that a strongly marked personality can influence descendants for generations... I am

descended from generations of Lancashire yeomen and weavers; obstinate, hardheaded, matter of fact folk.⁶

Potter's interest in her family tree is captured in letters to her cousins, swapping stories, notes and sources. Much has been written about Potter's warm relationship with her grandparents; both grandfathers were industrialists who had made their fortune in the textile and shipping trades, whilst her grandmothers were Dissenters from old Lancashire stock. Potter's obsession with tracing her family was focussed on her maternal grandmother, Jessy Crompton's line. The Cromptons were religious dissenters and politically radical; Abraham Crompton, Jessy's father, is listed in 1820 as a contributor to a fund set up to support the political orator and campaigner Henry Hunt during his trial after the Peterloo Massacre of 1819. Although she herself was politically conservative, Potter aligned herself closely to this side of the family; they brought a valuable connection to her chosen home. Potter continued in her essay on 'Roots' for *The Horn Book*:

The most remarkable old 'character' amongst my ancestors - old Abraham Crompton, who sprang from mid-Lancashire, bought land for pleasure in the Lake District, and his descendants seem to have drifted back at intervals ever since - though none of us own any of the land that belonged to old Abraham.⁷

A little over a year later, Potter began the purchase that would become her largest and most prolific legacy to the National Trust. The Monk Coniston estate had come up for sale, consisting of approximately 4,000 acres of farmland, fells and the stunning vistas of Tarn Hows. Potter, with the legal guidance of her husband, acted swiftly. She purchased the estate whole, giving the National Trust time to raise funds through a public campaign. In buying half the estate from Potter (with the understanding that the remaining half would be left to the Trust on her death), the National Trust formally entered a partnership that has, in part, shaped the understanding of a broader, complex, working relationship. Potter continued to manage the whole estate, not in the employ of the Trust, but as an experienced Lakeland farmer in her own right. Although Potter confided in letters that the estate was in 'good hands' with the National Trust, this was not a purchase solely for the sake of preservation, nor did Potter express anything by way of the impact on national benefit. In letters to her cousins and regular correspondents however, she shared her delight that the Tilberthwaite farm (the land of her ancestor, Abraham) had come back into her possession, writing:

I have been much gratified to get back the bit of land at Tilberthwaite that belonged to my great grandfather Abraham Crompton. I should have liked to keep it for my lifetime but on the whole it seemed wiser to make a gift of it to the National Trust...⁸

Potter's relationship with the National Trust somewhat muddies the water when exploring the



Fig. 3. Mary Donaldson's home at Sanna, *Country Life Magazine*, 28 July 1928.

motivations behind her land preservation work. Being the recipient of Potter's bequest of fourteen farms and thousands of acres of land, holds the inference that she held to the same ethos of the Trust, and like the organisation, she too was primarily concerned with access and preservation for the nation. Monk Coniston, after all, is only one example of Potter's land purchasing for preservation in the Lake District. Her other purchases did not have the same ancestral significance and were much closer to Hill's motives of retaining rights of way and access. However, Hill was always sure in her identity as a campaigner for the Open-Air movement, for public good and for preservation. Potter meanwhile, remained primarily driven by the personal – her interests, her joys and descent.

The opening of *Drawn to Nature* at the V&A, rather than being the closing of a large research chapter, transformed into the beginning of something new. If it was wrong to cast Potter as Hill's successor, were there other women in the Trust's history who also have been misinterpreted, their own emotional attachments to land and place dismissed? I found myself revisiting the archives, exploring the public campaigns of the Trust that were both contemporary to, and after Potter's time. Hill may well have been the last of the Victorian set of paternalist philanthropists, imparting the good of clean air and open space onto the 'wretched poor' through land preservation. Potter was not the only woman working in land conservation whose motivations were forged not solely for public benefit, but rather, were influenced by memory, nostalgia and joy.

The homes and indeed landscapes connected to these women often survive in the care of the Trust today. Unlike the paths and hills that wind around Potter's landscape of Near Sawrey, Hill Top farm, and even in the sprawling vistas of Monk Coniston, there is often little of the women within the landscapes themselves. In the Autumn of 2023, on a beautifully sunny October day, I

visited the valley of Dyffryn Mymbyr, the home of Esme Kirby. From her farm in Dyffryn Mymbyr, she founded the Snowdonia Society in 1968. Kirby's story is closer to Potter's than Hill's. Relocating from London with her first husband Thomas Firbank, Kirby educated and immersed herself in the local practices and traditions of farming and, like Potter, gained both the acceptance and respect of the families who had been farming in the surrounding valley for centuries. Her journey to the mountain and subsequent advocacy for the protection of the landscape is too vast for inclusion here, however, there is no doubt that her work (preserving the landscape that had provided her with a home, a life and a purpose) was not driven by public benefit, but to preserve the environment itself, including the heritage and the cultural traditions that shaped it. Today, the farmhouse is a holiday home, but standing in the valley, experiencing the wilderness and the vastness, it is hard not to empathise and glean a little understanding of Esme's experiences, and how she found both hardship and joy here.

Many other women in the wake of, and sometimes contemporary to her, were also driven by the identities that they had formed through finding their own interest and joys in these rural landscapes. For Ethel Haythornthwaite, who helped found the Peak District National Park in 1952, the Peak District was the place where she recovered after the death of her first husband in the First World War. While further north, and much closer to Potter's own time, Mary Ethel Muir Donaldson, the English-born photographer and ethnographer, created books and took photographs that captured the post nineteenth-century romantic ideals of the Hebrides.

I first came across Mary Donaldson by chance, when looking at photographs from the collections of the National Museums Scotland. I had been to Sanna before, the place where she had built her home on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula on the west coast of Scotland [Fig. 3]. Returning to walk in her footsteps, only months



Fig. 4. View of Sanna Bay. Photograph taken by author.

after *Drawn to Nature* had opened at the V&A, I found myself unable to ignore the similarities between her and Potter. Ancestry was equally significant to Donaldson, but so was the possession of knowledge and authority on the cultural and natural heritage of the landscape itself; Donaldson hated the rise of modernity and uncharacteristic architecture in the hitherto romantic and 'traditional' Highlands and Islands. Donaldson wrote of the building process of her own home for *Country Life* in 1928:

When...I became able to undertake building a house for myself in my own country, I determined to...show what could be done...by reverting to native methods of building in natural materials...my object was to prove that every modern convenience could be combined with the picturesque appearance...⁹

From the shores of Sanna on a clear summer's day, it is possible to see the islands of Eigg, Rum and even Skye, rising out of the horizon. Like Potter, Donaldson rooted herself in the subject matter of her work. I pictured Donaldson, looking out onto the world that had inspired her, her own version of the interest and joy that had so possessed Potter [Fig. 4]. Unlike Potter, Donaldson left no expanses of land for public benefit, but her books and photographs provide cultural landmarks and wayfinders for those drawn to the Highlands and Islands.

Potter and Donaldson's ideas of identity, of nineteenth century romanticism of both the Lake District and the Highlands and the impact it had on their creative practices and ideas of tradition preservation, is worthy of another article. This research will continue, through the National Trust's own archives and beyond; through scant records of donations to public funds and through the biographical and autobiographical work about and by these women as well as their own creative outputs.

NOTES

1. John Ruskin, *Of Queen's Gardens* (London: George Allen, 1902), 21.
2. *The Times*, 14 Jul. 1910.
3. Matthew Kelly, *Women Who Saved the English Countryside* (London: Yale University Press, 2022).
4. Margaret Lane 'On the Writing of Beatrix Potter's Life Story', *The Horn Book Magazine*, 22/6 (1946), 438.
5. Jane Crowell Morse, *Beatrix Potter's Americans: Selected Letters* (Boston: Horn Book, 1982).
6. Beatrix Potter, 'Roots of the Peter Rabbit Tales', *The Horn Book Magazine*, 1929, 69.
7. *ibid.*
8. Judy Taylor, *Beatrix Potter: Artist, Storyteller, Countrywoman* (London: Penguin, 2012).
9. M.E.M Donaldson, 'House at Sanna Bheag, Ardnamurchan', *Country Life Magazine*, 28 Jul. 1928, 143.

MEMORIALS TO WOMEN IN SCOTLAND

Alison T. McCall, Administrator,
Mapping Memorials to Women in
Scotland Project

The Autumn issue of *Women's History Today* included an article by Professor Carrie de Silva on the 'Women in Street Names' Project. This article describes a comparable project: 'Mapping Memorials to Women in Scotland'. There are three main differences between the two projects. Firstly, the latter covers a much smaller area geographically - Scotland, rather than the whole of the United Kingdom. Secondly, it covers memorials of all types such as plaques, buildings and statues in addition to street names. Thirdly, the Mapping Memorials website is map-based with each entry pinned onto an interactive map that links to biographical and location details. The site can be searched by using a name or keyword such as 'writer', 'doctor' or 'suffragette' and it is also searchable by date. It aims to be user-friendly and accessible for purposes that range from the academic to 'is there a famous woman who shares my birthday?'

The two projects are complementary, with each hoping to support and encourage the other. Carrie de Silva's comment encapsulates our own experience:

Discovering forgotten lives, learning more about vaguely recalled names, along with reconsidering more well-known women has been a complete pleasure and indulgence with inspiration, awe and entertainment at every turn.

Projects such as 'Women in Street Names' and 'Mapping Memorials to Women in Scotland' are important. Memorials are intended to acknowledge significant people, but if there is no easily accessible information about those concerned, they will be forgotten. Experience tells us that women in particular tend to be forgotten.

The Women of Scotland website began life in 2011 as the 'Big Name Hunt', a project by GirlGuiding Scotland to encourage girls to look for memorials to women in their locality. As many Guide companies met in church or village halls, it was hoped that they might spot memorials that were not easily accessible to, or known by, the public. The Guides were encouraged to research the lives of the women commemorated; women of local importance rather than those who were 'famous'. Because this sort of research generally entails the use of original sources, it was no easy task, especially for girls of Guiding age with no previous experience. By the end of the year, it had become obvious that, while the concept of the website was a strong one, its development was outside the scope of the Guides. Accordingly, the project was taken over by the Glasgow Women's Library and Women's History Scotland and was relaunched in March 2012. Since then, it has been managed by Glasgow Women's Library, who provide the technical support, and Women's History Scotland, who provide the bulk of the research. The 1,000th memorial, a street in



Fig. 1. Josephine Tey plaque, Castle Street, Inverness. Photograph by author.

Dunfermline named after suffragette Anna Munro, was added on 28 November 2023. The 750th woman, writer Josephine Tey, to whom a plaque was unveiled on her family business in Inverness, was added on the anniversary of Tey's death on 13 February 2024 [Fig 1].

The reason for the discrepancy between the number of memorials and the number of women is because some individuals are memorialised many times. If every 'Victoria Street' in Scotland was mapped, there would probably be more memorials to Queen Victoria than all the other women combined. Current policy is to include only large memorials to Queen Victoria, such as the statues in Glasgow, Dundee, Aberdeen and Edinburgh, plus large buildings such as hospitals and schools. Queen Margaret (who is also St Margaret) is another woman who has multiple memorials throughout Scotland, and again, these are restricted, to avoid the site being overwhelmed. There are nine churches dedicated to St Margaret on the site, but many other churches have stained glass windows commemorating her. If every St Margaret stained-glass window was included there would probably be well over one hundred. The missionary Mary Slessor and Mary, Queen of Scots, come joint third in the number of memorials, with eleven apiece. Queen Charlotte has nine, including one of the most northerly, Fort Charlotte in Lerwick, Shetland. Jean Armour, the wife of Robert Burns, also has nine.

It is no surprise that the most memorialised women are royalty. Four of the top six are queens. Of the other two, Jean Armour was famous for being the 'wife of' and several of the streets bearing her name are part of a 'set' of streets with names connected to her husband Robert Burns. Mary Slessor, a woman whose fame spread throughout Scotland in her lifetime, still remains well-known today. She was one of the first women to feature on a Scottish bank note. When the Wallace Monument held a public vote for a woman to join the busts of famous men in their 'Hall of Heroes' in 2017, there were two clear winners: Mary Slessor and - only four votes behind - Maggie Keswick-Jencks, the founder of the Maggie's Centres for cancer support. The Scottish missionary Jane Haining who died in Auschwitz, having refused to leave the Jewish girls in her care, came third, but had considerably fewer votes. The huge discrepancy between



Fig 2. Allardyce Memorial, St Nicholas Church, Aberdeen.
Photograph by author.

the hundreds of memorials to Queen Victoria, the dozens to Queen/St Margaret and the eleven to Mary Slessor, illustrates one aspect of women's history that is all too familiar. A handful of famous women are used whenever reference needs to be made to a woman, to help balance out the plethora of men, and so public knowledge tends to focus on these few. This is one of the values of the Mapping Memorials project (as it is with the Women in Street Names project), it covers a wide range of women, telling their stories in an accessible way.

Memorials come in many forms. Statues, plaques, road names, buildings, cairns, stained glass windows and even wells have been recorded. The largest memorial on the website is the town of Helensburgh, named after Lady Helen Colquhoun. There are also several villages in Scotland named after women: Arabella, Bettyhill, Port Charlotte, Jemimaville and Maryburgh. The smallest memorials are brass plates, perhaps only a few square centimeters in size, stating that an object such as a desk, font or lectern, was donated in memory of a woman.

In recent years there has been considerable public interest in statues. Scotland has no contentious statues of women, largely because Scotland has very few statues of women at all! The proposed statue to Dr Elsie Inglis, who founded the Scottish Women's Hospitals during the First World War, will be the twenty-ninth. Of the eleven statues that pre-date the First World War, seven are of Queen Victoria. There was then a long hiatus with no further statues until Glasgow erected a statue of Dolores Ibarurri, La Pasionara, in 1979 (although she has no connection to Scotland). The remaining sixteen were all erected after 1996. Six of these are generic statues reflecting a town's heritage: the Prestonpans witches; the fishwives of Peterhead, Nairn, and Stornoway; the jute mill workers

of Dundee; and the Lumberjills of the Second World War. All are vital recognitions of the importance of ordinary women. Statues of named women have also been erected thanks to local campaigns. The political activist Mary Barbour's statue was unveiled in 2018, as was the statue of May Donoghue, the woman who changed consumer law by seeking compensation after having discovered the decomposing remains of a snail at the bottom of her bottle of ginger-beer. Both statues have generated considerable interest and press coverage. Even with this recent interest in new statues, the fact still remains that Edinburgh has more statues to animals than women. It is also the case that statues depicting a female form are likely to be a representation of some abstract quality such as 'peace' or 'justice' and indeed it might be argued that the statues of Queen Victoria represent 'patriotism' or 'civic pride' as much as Queen Victoria herself.

Memorials to those who benefitted from the slave trade are contentious. Memorials to female members of slave owning families have come under less scrutiny. One example on the website is the ornate marble Allardyce memorial in St Nicholas Church, Aberdeen. Alexander Allardyce made his fortune in Jamaica, then returned to Scotland and married Ann Baxter in 1787. Within a year she had died, following the birth of their son, Alexander. Allardyce spared no expense in commissioning an elaborate memorial [Fig 2]. Conversely, the website also includes the gravestone and life story of Malvina Wells. Born into slavery in the West Indies around 1805, she came to Scotland as a lady's maid. On her death in Edinburgh

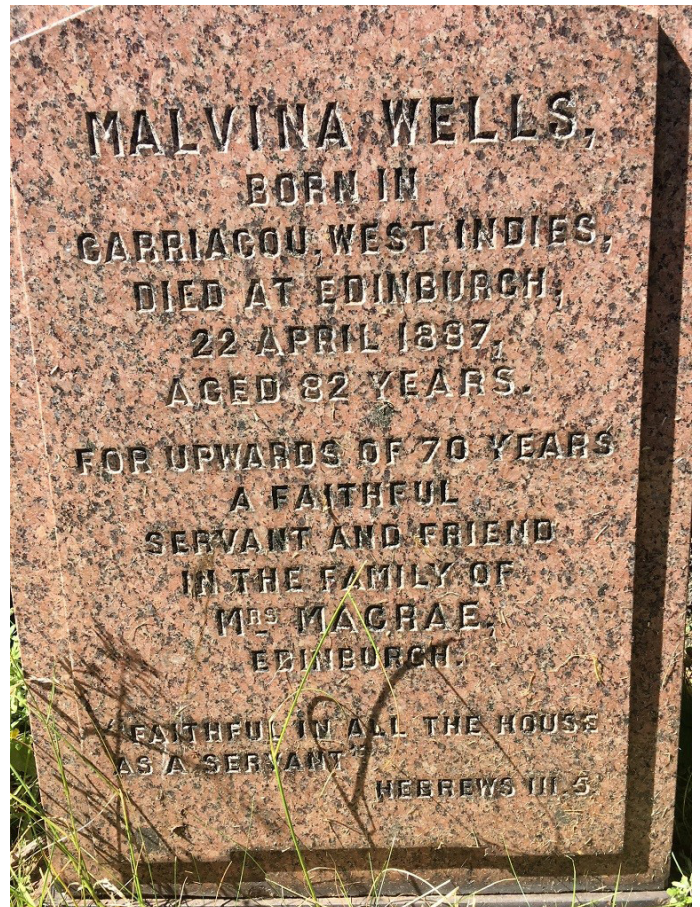


Fig. 3. Gravestone of Malvina Wells, St John's Church, Princes Street, Edinburgh. Photograph by author.

in 1887, she was buried alongside members of the MacRae family she had served. [Fig 3].

Gravestones feature on the website only if they have an additional aspect which makes them 'memorials'. This might be gravestones erected by public subscription, such as those of Agnes Smith 'Tifty's Annie' whose tragic love story lives on in the ballad which bears her name, and to the murder victim eight-year-old Helen Priestly, as well as the one erected on Flora MacDonald's grave in 1880. Commonwealth War Graves Commission gravestones to women are also included as are those that include significant biographical details. For example, the gravestone of Rachel Lumsden tells us:

Rachel Frances Lumsden Honorary Superintendent From 1877 to 1885 of the Royal Hospital for Sick Children and from 1885 to 1897 of the Aberdeen Royal Infirmary who died 22nd April 1908 aged 73 years.

Inevitably, a large number of memorials are to members of the aristocracy, particularly the marble tablets affixed to the walls of churches and private chapels. All too often these describe the woman through reference to her male relatives. She was the 'daughter of', 'wife of' or 'mother of'. There is an argument that a memorial to a woman whose only attribute is to have been born into wealth adds little to the site and it is always satisfying when further research broadens out the biographical details. However, even if details remain scarce, such memorials are added in anticipation of more information coming to light in the future.

More fascinating are the hidden stories. Rhoda A. Fraser's name can be found on the War Memorial at Holburn Church, Aberdeen which was her parish church. Her family home was nearby. It was our research that uncovered her story. A twenty-four-year-old typist with the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), she was one of nineteen women who died in a plane crash near Marseille on 4 October 1945. On the plane with her were seventeen other members of the ATS as well as two military nurses. Initially, news of their deaths was withheld in the belief that multiple female casualties would be bad for morale. Researching a name on a war memorial can thus expose an unexpected piece of history.

There is a memorial in Macduff to Isabella Henry who, we learned, became the magician's assistant 'La Belle Electra.' Two of her in-laws are also memorialised in the town – a portrait plaque to Marie Walford also known as 'Mystic Marie, the Electric-Magnetic Floating Lady' and a fountain to her niece Jeannie Bodie who performed in the 'Electrical Wizard' shows staged by her father, before her death at the young age of eighteen. The inscription on the fountain reads: 'Presented to the Burgh of Macduff by Dr and Mrs Walford Bodie in memory of their daughter Jeannie' [Fig 4]. A surprise discovery has been that Train Terrace in Rosyth has nothing to do with railways rather it commemorates the Town Councilor Janie Train, while a stained-glass window in Glenapp church commemorates Elsie MacKay, who died attempting to become the first woman to fly across the Atlantic, in 1928.

Currently, only memorials within Scotland are recorded, although the project may be extended in the

future. We know there are many memorials to Scottish women throughout the world, such as the Jennie Lee library in Milton Keynes; a statue of Mary Slessor in Nigeria; Jane Haining's name on the Yad Vashem Memorial in Jerusalem; the Agnes Henderson church in Nagpur, India; and a statue of Catherine Helen Spence in Adelaide, Australia. The birthplace or nationality of the woman is irrelevant to the site; if she has a connection to Scotland and a memorial here, she can be included. Examples of women born elsewhere who have enriched Scottish society and who are commemorated include the theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid, the scientist Charlotte Auerbach and the human rights campaigner Ruth Adler.

The project also has a list of forty mystery memorials, primarily street names. For example, Helen Row and Amy Row in Cowie, Stonehaven, were built around 1906, but it has proved impossible to identify the Helen and Amy after whom they were named. There are no fewer than eight streets in our mystery list named after unknown, forgotten Harriets. It is notable that streets named after men invariably use their surnames, unless the man was a member of royalty, such as King George, and known by his first name. Calling a woman by her first name whilst calling her male colleagues by their surname is a known form of gender discrimination. It is significant that this is replicated in street names.

Undoubtedly there are many, many more memorials waiting to be spotted and recorded, but we have no idea how many will eventually be on the website. Two thousand? Three thousand? More? What is clear is that this is a long-term project.

The Mapping Memorials to Women Project: <https://womenofscotland.org.uk/>



Fig. 4. Jeannie Bodie fountain, Crook O'Ness Street, Macduff. Photograph by author.

THE WOMEN WHO MADE SHAKESPEARE: NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE FEMALE RELATIVES OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

by Rosalyn Sklar

University of Brighton in collaboration with The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

Considering the multiple and complex ways we can begin to trace the histories of women, so often lost to the dominant narratives of their male counterparts, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust have dedicated their exhibition this year to the familial female networks that formed an important part of Shakespeare's life. For the first time, a series of documents and artefacts, images, manicules, marks and moments are brought together in conversation with one another. They will not only reflect the women being considered in relation to Shakespeare, but they will also be presented on their own terms, as far as we can reach them, and as respectfully as we can represent them.

SHAKESPEARE'S FEMALE RELATIVES AND SHAKESPEARE BIOGRAPHY

In 1557 a young woman named Mary Arden married, left her family home in Wilmcote and began her life on Henley Street in Stratford-upon-Avon. Mary was in her early twenties; within a year she had given birth to her first child and she would go on to have seven more children including her first son and the eldest of her children to survive to adulthood: William Shakespeare. The details of Mary's life are scant; what we know has been painstakingly uncovered in a desire to know more about her famous son and has largely been extrapolated from documentary evidence that survives relating to her husband. This article will show that an examination of the lives of Shakespeare's female relatives can contribute much to scholarship on women of the early modern period. Bolstered as it is by the depth of research on the life of William Shakespeare, the information uncovered about these women can be placed within a rich and detailed historical context. It is vital, however, to re-examine some of the many established narratives that have positioned them as satellites of Shakespeare to provide fresh perspectives on their lives and legacies.

Shakespeare's immediate female relatives were his mother, Mary (c.1535-1608); his sister, Joan (1569-1646); his wife, Anne (c.1556-1623); his daughters Susanna (1583-1649) and Judith (1585-1662); and his granddaughter Elizabeth (1608-1670). They lived and died in and near the small market town of Stratford-upon-Avon in the Midlands' county of Warwickshire with a population of approximately 2,000.¹ The dominant industries were wool

and leather-working but agriculture remained prominent and victualling was a common secondary occupation, mainly carried out by women. Stratford-upon-Avon received its charter of incorporation in 1553 and from then was governed by a Corporation of Aldermen and Burgesses. Prior to this it had been governed by the Guild of the Holy Cross and its right to semi-independence from the Diocese of Worcester continued with the vicar of Holy Trinity Church presiding over a church court.² In many ways the town, though it produced one of the best-known writers in the English language, was unremarkable. It typifies other small- to medium-sized provincial market towns across England though there is perhaps no other town of its like that has received as much attention by historians. The lives of Shakespeare's female relatives can, therefore, be richly contextualised.

The trend of Shakespeare biography has been, naturally, to view others in his life only insofar as they may be able to shed light on his own. Perhaps the most maligned figure has been his wife, Anne. Much has been made of the pieces of evidence that tell us of their marriage. Firstly, that she was several months pregnant by the time of their church marriage in November 1582; secondly that she was older than him by almost ten years; thirdly that she bore him three children; and finally that he left her his 'second-best bed' in his will of 1616.³ Shakespeare's earliest 'biographer', Nicholas Rowe, merely wrote in 1709 that 'he thought fit to marry while he was yet very Young' (he was eighteen).⁴ Others have speculated that she, an 'aged spinster', tricked him into a marriage that was 'a disastrous mistake' and thereafter loveless and unhappy, the culmination of which was the insult of his leaving her only his *second-best* bed.⁵ In recent years a revisionist approach, centred on Anne, has challenged these established narratives. Katherine Schiel asks 'is she [Anne] fair game, to be manipulated and exploited in order to create a particular Shakespeare?'.⁶ If we only examine these women in order to create a particular Shakespeare we miss an important opportunity to examine their lives both for their own sake and in relation to what they can tell us about the lives of early modern women.

WOMEN, LAND AND PROPERTY

In his will of 1556 Robert Arden left property in Wilmcote – a farm and associated land called Asbyes – to Mary, his youngest daughter. He also left her the sum of £6 13s 4d.⁷ Mary and her sister, Alice, were made executors of their father's will. Recent research into Stratford-upon-Avon wills has revealed that it was not uncommon for women to be made executors at this time. Data shows that women appeared as executors in over 61% of the 115 men's wills that survive in Stratford-upon-Avon for the period 1537-1649.⁸ Mary married John Shakespeare shortly after her father's death. Her property significantly bolstered John's at the time of their marriage and likely gave him the right to the title of yeoman.⁹ The property would have provided valuable income and would most likely have been passed on to the couple's eldest son,

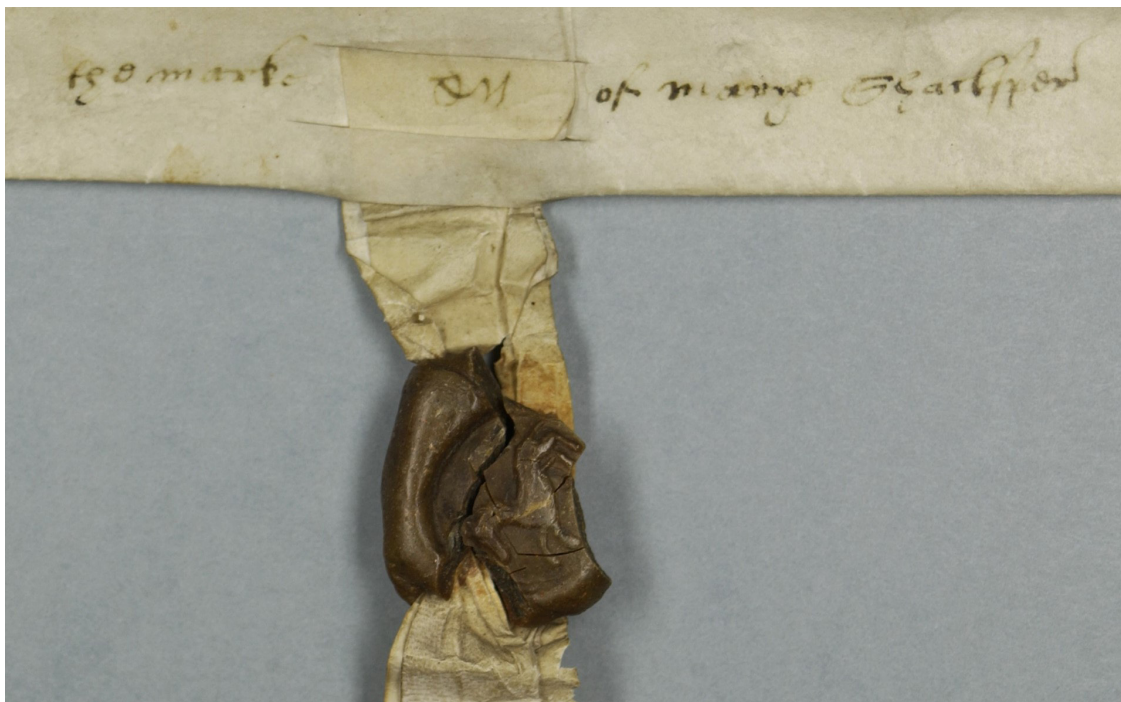


Fig. 1. SBT ER30/1: Conveyance by John and Mary Shakespeare to Robert Webbe of their share in two messuages in Snitterfield, 15 October 1579 [detail of Mary Shakespeare's mark]. Courtesy of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

William. In the 1570s, however, John began experiencing financial difficulties and in 1579 the couple sold land in Snitterfield that had come to Mary through one of her sisters as well as property on Greenhill Street in Stratford-upon-Avon that John had purchased in 1556. Mary was involved in the arrangements that were made in the 1580s in order to raise ready cash on Asbyes, 'the family's principal asset'.¹⁰ Her mark and seal appear on related documents [See Fig. 1].¹¹ Mary's brothers-in-law and nephews feature prominently in the sale of the Snitterfield land and the arrangements regarding Asbyes. What had started, perhaps, as an attempt to keep the property through agreements with family members, ended with a shift benefitting Mary's sister's families over her own. What might have been her feelings when her inheritance and childhood home were lost can only be surmised. The process starkly emphasises the vulnerability of married women to their husband's financial acumen and business dealings but it also reveals the complex and meandering network of family and kin that underpinned many property and financial transactions during this period.

William Shakespeare's own success allowed him to invest in land and property in and around Stratford-upon-Avon to add to the Henley Street property that his father had managed to retain. This he would eventually bequeath to his eldest daughter, Susanna. By the time Shakespeare purchased New Place, the largest house in the Borough, in 1597 he must have known it was unlikely he would have another son (Anne would have been around forty years old and there is no evidence that she gave birth to any more children after Judith and Hamnet in 1585). Perhaps he had begun looking for a sizeable property when his only son, Hamnet, was living but Hamnet died in 1596 and by the time the purchase was finalised he would have known that it would pass to his eldest daughter. Shakespeare's will is clear in leaving his estate to Susanna only in trust, in the expectation of heirs male. Circumstances, however, prompted Susanna to negotiate settlements in order to

keep the estate intact for her only child, her daughter.

Susanna married a physician, John Hall, and the couple had only one child, a daughter named Elizabeth (b.1608). Until the late 1630s, whilst Elizabeth's first marriage remained childless, it appeared as though the bulk of Shakespeare's land and property would pass from Susanna to her eldest nephew, the son of her sister Judith. Tragedy struck, however, in 1639 when both of Judith's sons, Richard and Thomas Quiney, died and were buried within a week of each other.¹² This event led to the first of Susanna's interventions regarding her father's will. John Hall had died in 1635 so Susanna, together with the help of two male trustees, had a new settlement drawn up that ensured that when she died the land and property she had inherited from her father would pass on to her daughter Elizabeth and Elizabeth's husband, Thomas Nash. In line with Shakespeare's wishes, the settlement anticipated a male heir. This 1639 settlement bears Susanna's clear and confident signature and a wax impression of her seal [Fig. 2].¹³ Elizabeth's first marriage never produced children. Thomas died in 1647 and left instructions in his will for some of Shakespeare's estate including New Place be left to his own kinsman. This time mother and daughter acted together. A new settlement was drawn up stating once again that the estate would pass to Elizabeth who was then thirty-nine.¹⁴ Later in life Elizabeth, who married for a second time and inherited Shakespeare's estate from Susanna, again acted to change the direction of her grandfather's will. Her second marriage was also childless and in her will she left New Place and its associated land in the hands of trustees who, once it was sold, would distribute the profit. The property on Henley Street that had originally been purchased by John Shakespeare was left to her second cousin (the grandchild of her grandfather's sister, Joan Hart).¹⁵ The instructions of Elizabeth's will divided the estate for the first time since Shakespeare's death. Susanna's and Elizabeth's actions suggest intelligent, capable women. Committed to



Fig. 2. SBT TR46/1/9: Settlement of the estates inherited from William Shakespeare by Susanna Hall and her daughter, Elizabeth Nash. Deed of settlement, 2 June 1647 [detail of the signatures of Susanna and Elizabeth]. Courtesy of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

the instructions of William Shakespeare to keep his estate whole and within the family, they took action to defend his wishes and their own rights. We cannot and should not ignore the importance of family and kin in these actions but the ongoing story revealed through Susanna's and Elizabeth's legal proceedings is one of agency and action by women in their own interests as well as those of their families.

WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN HOUSEHOLD MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS AFFAIRS

Whilst William Shakespeare was away in London, Anne would have acted as head of the household. How far her domestic management extended to involvement with and management of Shakespeare's business interests in Stratford-upon-Avon is not known. One tantalising piece of evidence is the will of a Shottery shepherd named Thomas Whittington in 1601 in which he instructed his executors to collect forty shillings 'from Anne Shakespeare, wife unto Master William Shakespeare'.¹⁶ This at least suggests that Anne had some involvement, or independence, in financial affairs.

Shakespeare maintained business interests in the town throughout the period that he is known to have been in London. Documentary evidence shows that he was both storing and selling malt in the late 1590s and early 1600s.¹⁷ Buying and selling malt was a common trade in Stratford-upon-Avon during this time and the bulk of the related work was done by women.¹⁸ Given the amount of malt that Shakespeare owned and evidence of his trading in that commodity it is possible that Anne, like so many of her townswomen, was active in this business.

Fresh perspectives on women's involvement in family business concerns opens up possibilities for Shakespeare's other female family members. In her study on women, gender, and guilds in early modern Europe, Clare Crowston acknowledged the importance of family relationships and familial networks in relation to trade.¹⁹ Mary and her daughters, for example, could have been active in the running of John's glove-making

and whitawing [leather-working] business. They could have assisted with making small leather goods. If Anne had been active in the malt trade, her daughter Judith could have brought valuable knowledge and experience to her marriage with the vintner, Thomas Quiney. Judith may also have learned from her mother-in-law, Elizabeth Quiney, who was heavily involved in her husband's business affairs and was licensed as a vintner in her own right.²⁰ We can speculate that Susanna may have played a part in her husband's medical practice, involved perhaps in the making of the medicines he frequently prescribed such as his steeled wine or antiscorbutic beer.²¹ Did her knowledge of her husband's practice, combined with tutelage in cookery and household medicine passed down perhaps by female relatives, make her an attractive prospect for ill and suffering Stratford-upon-Avon townspeople? Her epitaph encourages us to wonder:

Witty above her sex, but that's not all,
 Wise to Salvation was good Mistress Hall,
 Something of Shakespeare was in that, but
 this
 Wholly of him with whom she's now in
 blisse.
 Then, passenger, hast nere a tear
 To weep with her that wept with all
 That wept, yet set herself to chere
 Them up with comforts cordiall?
 Her love shall live, her mercy spread
 When thou hast nere a tear to shed.

There could well have been a double meaning intended in 'comforts cordiall'.²² The idea of cordial as relating to the heart (a precursor to our modern 'cardiac') was established by the seventeenth century and denoted warm, generous, kind feelings. At the same time it was used in early modern medicine to mean a medicine, food, or drink that invigorates or stimulates the heart. Does Susanna's epitaph, then, suggest that she was also a medical practitioner? Research on the social history of medicine has established women's involvement in all branches of medical practice including and beyond the domestic.²³

HIDDEN VOICES: EXHIBITION AT NEW PLACE

As this article has suggested, 'there is a history in all men's lives' (Henry IV, Part 2), and that history is women. The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's 2024 exhibition explores the lives and legacies of Shakespeare's direct female relatives. It opened on 16 March at New Place, Stratford-upon-Avon. More information can be found on the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's website: <https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/visit/whats-on/hidden-voices-exhibition/>

NOTES

1. The population of Stratford-upon-Avon was estimated to be around 2,000 in 1591, rising to around 3,000 in 1663. Jean E. Jones, 'A Community Study of Sixteenth Century Stratford-upon-Avon' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1991), 16.
2. The vicar of Holy Trinity Church presided two years out of every three, with the Bishop of Worcester taking over every third year. See Robert Bearman, 'The "Bawdy Court" of Stratford-upon-Avon', *Warwickshire History: The Journal of the Warwickshire Local History Society*, 18/3 (2021), 111.
3. For William Shakespeare and Anne's marriage see, for example: Diocese of Worcester x 797 BA 2783 marriage bond of William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway dated 28th Nov. 1582; for Susanna's baptism see Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (hereafter SBT) DR243/1: composite register of births, marriages and deaths for the parish of Stratford-upon-Avon (1558-1776), fol. 20v; For Shakespeare's will see The National Archives, PROB 1/4 (1), William Shakespeare's last will and testament, 25 Mar. 1616, proved Jun. 1616.
4. Nicholas Rowe, *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear; in Six Volumes. Adorn'd with Cuts. Revis'd and Corrected, with an Account of the Life and Writings of the Author* (London: Jacob Tonson, 1709), iv-v.
5. Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (New York: Norton, 2004), 140
6. Katherine Schiel, *Imagining Shakespeare's Wife: The Afterlife of Anne Hathaway* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), xiv.
7. B. Roland Lewis, *The Shakespeare Documents: Facsimiles, Transliterations, Translations & Commentary*, Vol.I (Stanford University Press, 1941), 90.
8. Stephanie Jane Appleton, 'Women and Wills in Early Modern England: The Community of Stratford-upon-Avon, 1537-1649' (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham) 48.
9. Bob Bearman, essay relating to SBT TR46/1/2: 'Conveyance from John Shakespeare to George Badger of a strip of land in Henley Street', <https://shakespearedocumented.folger.edu/resource/document/conveyance-john-shakespeare-george-badger-strip-land-henley-street> (last updated 21 May 2020: accessed 21st Feb 2024)
10. Lena Cowen Orlin, *The Private Life of William Shakespeare* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 30.
11. See, for example, SBT ER30/1: Conveyance by John

and Mary Shakespeare to Robert Webbe, for £4, of their share in two messuages in Snitterfield, 15 Oct. 1579.

12. Judith had also lost her first-born son, christened Shakespeare Quiney after his grandfather, in his infancy.
13. See SBT TR46/2/8: Settlement of the estates Susanna Hall inherited from her father to be held for the benefit of her daughter Elizabeth during her lifetime with reversion to her daughter Elizabeth and her husband, and their issue, 27 May 1639.
14. See SBT TR46/1/9: Settlement of the estates inherited from William Shakespeare by Susanna Hall and her daughter, Elizabeth Nash. Deed of settlement, 2 Jun. 1647.
15. John and Mary had named their fifth child Joan, the same name they had given to their first child who had died. The second Joan was born in 1569 and Shakespeare ensured her financial independence in his will, allowing her to live in one of his properties for the very low rent of twelve pence a year.
16. Orlin, *Private Life*, 121.
17. See SBT BRU15/1/106: A survey of those in the borough of Stratford-upon-Avon holding quantities of corn and malt, 4 Feb. 1598. Shakespeare is recorded as holding ten quarters of malt; SBT ER27/5: Declaration in the Stratford-upon-Avon court of record showing that Philip Rogers owed money to Shakespeare concerning the sale of malt, 1604.
18. Entries in the surveys of those with stores of corn and malt read, for example, 'Foulk Jhonson usethe the art of surgerye. His wiefte utterethe weekly iii strikes of mallet...', see Jones, 'Community study', 41.
19. Clare Crowston, 'Women, Gender, and Guilds in Early Modern Europe: An Overview of Recent Research', *International Review of Social History*, 53/16 (2008), 39.
20. Robert Bearman (ed.), *Minutes and Accounts of the Stratford-upon-Avon Corporation Vol.VI 1599-1609* (The Dugdale Society, 2011), 222.
21. A collection of John Hall's manuscript case notes survive in the British Library, see for example Greg Wells, *John Hall: Master of Physicke: A Casebook from Shakespeare's Stratford* (Manchester University Press, 2020).
22. A recent AHRC funded research project led by Dr Ailsa Grant Ferguson of the University of Brighton has examined Susanna's possible involvement in her husband's medical practice, see for example Ailsa Grant Ferguson's Research Conversation for the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust 'Looking for Susanna Hall' (13 Jul. 2022), <https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/education/research-scholars/research-conversations/> (accessed 21 Feb. 2024).
23. See, for example, Margaret Pelling, *The Common Lot: Sickness, Medical Occupations and the Urban Poor in Early Modern England* (London & New York: Longman, 1998) and Doreen Evenden Nagy, *Popular Medicine in Seventeenth-Century England* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1988).

FERTILITY FORUMS AS HISTORICAL ARCHIVES

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Soon after becoming pregnant last year, my mum gifted me the latest UK edition of *What to Expect When You're Expecting*.¹ First published in the United States in 1984, Heidi Murkoff's pregnancy guide has become a cultural cornerstone for prenatal and antenatal advice. Unable to find answers to questions she had during her pregnancy, Murkoff set about constructing her own guide. Since then, generations of women in the US and overseas have turned to *What to Expect* for information on conception, pregnancy and birth. The *What to Expect* brand today includes a mobile app, podcast and community forum, the latter of which I consulted far more often than my printed book (sorry, mum). Indeed, as soon as my due date was estimated in my university's OB-GYN clinic, I joined *What to Expect's* 'September 2023' baby forum. Too anxious in the early stages of my pregnancy to share the news with many loved ones, I found solace in this seemingly anonymous digital space. Social media and brands rivalling *What to Expect* also offer online platforms for users to discuss all aspects of (in)fertility.

UK readers will likely be familiar with *Mumsnet*, an influential forum created in 2000 by Justine Roberts – who, like Murkoff, was inspired by her own parenting journey – to help families find community. In contrast to traditional pregnancy advice literature, governed as they are by medical experts' evaluation of 'risk' during pregnancy, fertility forums are guided by personal experience, with knowledge passed from one mother to an expectant other. Transcending geographical limitations and bearing no direct cost to the user, they offer places for vast networks of people to connect. Whether searching for a dependable support network or seeking entertainment during sleepless nights, contemporary fertility forums constitute a rich archive of reproductive experiences. How might historians of the early twenty-first century make sense of and best utilise these ever-expansive digital spaces?

Analysed historically, twenty-first century fertility forums provide detailed insight into people's journeys through conception, pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing. Some users immediately take to these online communities to confirm their pregnancies. Search 'line eyes' into *What to Expect's* 'Trying to Conceive' forum, for instance, and you'll find a plethora of photos of pregnancy tests accompanying requests for visual confirmation of a double pink line. Affordable, over-the-counter pregnancy tests became readily available in the US in the late 1970s. A simple chemical test, home pregnancy tests have only become easier to use over time, and their use is now 'an expected ritual in our reproductive lives'.² The do-it-yourself technology not only enabled women to confirm their pregnancies before the detection of foetal movement in the second trimester, but also allowed women to make this discovery in the comfort of their own homes. Although positive tests then invariably led women to the doctor's office, the technology nevertheless had revolutionary

potential, for it provided women intimate insight into their reproductive bodies.³

These triumphs notwithstanding, historian Lara Freidenfelds explains that as 'often the only indicator of pregnancies destined to miscarry ... early pregnancy testing can create complicated and distressing reproductive histories from experiences that, as recently as a few decades ago, would have looked like relatively smooth and easy childbearing'.⁴ As such, Freidenfelds reasons that home pregnancy tests can 'create the experience of miscarriage'.⁵ The illustrious promise of self-testing can be ascertained in twenty-first century fertility forums. In these spaces, a community of peers works to affirm or deny the presence of faint pink lines well before a missing period or an ultrasound. Perhaps especially for women seeking 'certainty' before sharing news of their pregnancy with their family, friends, or physician, the appeal of accessing anonymised experiential knowledge cannot be overstated.

Whereas in-person, private conversations are seldom recorded, fertility forums provide documentary evidence of a whole host of reproductive experiences specific to the early twenty-first century US. User discussions of 'taboo' subjects such as abortion, for example, may be especially valuable to historians keen to unearth the impact of the Supreme Court's ruling in *Dobbs v. Reproductive Women's Health* (2022). With much uncertainty surrounding the legality of abortion in the immediate aftermath of *Dobbs*, some women turned to fertility forums to ask about local reproductive health services or exceptions to the ruling in instances of miscarriage or ectopic pregnancies. Analysing conversations about abortion on fertility forums – places where users may feel comfortable speaking candidly – could also provide historians insight into the diversity of reactions to the ruling. As spaces that seemingly offer privacy and protection to users uncertain of the ramifications of talking directly to their medical providers or others in their in-person networks, fertility forums may offer insight into the impact of the abortion wars on individual Americans.

Another development that affected early twenty-first century reproductive experiences was COVID-19. In the US and elsewhere, the pandemic exacerbated the gender imbalance of childcare, restricted access to in-person fertility treatments, and precluded loved ones from participating in doctor's visits and from entering the birthing room. In the wake of these socially isolating conditions, many turned to online spaces to find community and connection. Historians of reproduction in the US have shown that whereas many parturient women in the eighteenth century were surrounded at home by female friends, families, and neighbours, these networks gradually dissipated as births became more commonplace in hospitals – an early twentieth century shift accompanied by the rise of (male) physician's involvement in birth. Indeed, as medical professionals and their accompanying tools and technology filled the birthing room, there was literally less room for women-led traditional practices.⁶

Of course, this was not the experience of all women. Immigrants facing language barriers or with few familial ties in the US were often precluded from these social networks and others, hoping for safer outcomes, willingly traded home births for a more medicalised setting.⁷ And



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yet, experiential knowledge of reproduction – whether from female family members, midwives, or others in the local community – remained sought after.⁸ Today, whether exacerbated by the pandemic or other factors, the Internet is an especially valuable tool for women lacking in-person support networks. Given this, future scholars may interpret fertility forums as a digital incarnation of women's reproductive knowledge-sharing.

In contrast to traditional pregnancy advice literature's reliance on medical experts' evaluation of 'risk', fertility forums are informed by personal experience.⁹ Reflecting on her use of fertility forums in 2021, UK-based writer Alex Holder explains that they provided information on fertility treatments not 'readily available on mainstream medical sites'.¹⁰ Online forums thus not only offered Holder solace, but also insider knowledge on complex treatment plans. Writing in a context in which, similarly to the US, physicians had long been central to the management of conception, pregnancy and birth, Holder appreciated gaining direct insight into people's lived experiences. However, Holder soon found herself questioning why she put her 'trust in strangers instead of an expert clinician'.¹¹ As digital spaces that bypass professional expertise, fertility forums carry the risk of misinformation and thus have the potential of causing great harm. And yet, their side-stepping of medical jargon – much of which mystifies reproduction – has echoes of those women-led networks that historically preceded the medical management of fertility. Future scholars will have to grapple with the benefits and pitfalls of these forms of prenatal and postnatal knowledge-sharing in the digital age.

By digitising their existing collections, some traditional archives have opened the door to non-traditional scholars or those lacking financial support. Internet-based community forums – as easily accessible spaces – also offer more equitable opportunities to researchers. As spaces that bear witness to countless confessions about the struggles of fertility and postpartum, however, scholars may ponder the ethics of interrogating fertility forums. Although they cultivate the impression of being 'closed', private communities, one only needs to create an online account to access these vast archival spaces. And though many users tend to operate under anonymous usernames, some reveal personal details – such as their age, income status, and geographical location

– in their posts. Yet others post photographs of their children to these forums, presumably under the assumption that they will not be shared outside of the network. It will come down to individual historians to decide whether they feel comfortable tapping into fertility forums, but it is perhaps futile to endeavour to access past experiences without intruding. Indeed, scholars have long tapped into records not intended for public view, such as diaries and private letters, to understand their actors' lives. Fertility forums are not unique in this sense, but perhaps analysing them feels especially intrusive because they are so easy to access. It is certainly remarkable how much information regarding people's most raw and intimate experiences can be revealed through a few keyword searches.

To conclude, future historians will be able to utilise fertility forums to gain insight into the reproductive experiences of twenty-first century parents and parents-to-be. Consisting of interactions between strangers, many of these forums are nonetheless marked by a profound honesty and openness, perhaps attesting to users' desires to find community and connection in an increasingly socially isolated age. While some scholars may interpret fertility forums as the latest incarnation of women-centred networks of reproductive knowledge-sharing, others may find that these imagined communities are too loose, too expansive to draw any meaningful conclusions. And yet, as meticulously signposted spaces, fertility forums can offer insight into specific reproductive experiences with a simple keyword search. These digital communities represent a vast and rich archive for future scholars hoping to gain insight into the way twenty-first century actors felt and spoke about a host of issues pertaining to conception, pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing.

NOTES

- 1 Heidi Murkoff, *What to Expect When You're Expecting: 5th Edition* (London: Simon & Schuster UK, 2017).
- 2 Karen Weingarten, *Pregnancy Test* (London: Bloomsbury, Object Lessons Series, 2023), 112.
- 3 Sarah Leavitt, 'A Private Little Revolution: The Home Pregnancy Test in American Culture', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 80/2 (2006), 317-45.
- 4 Lara Freidenfelds, *The Myth of the Perfect Pregnancy: A History of Miscarriage in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 183, 185.
- 5 Ibid. 186.
- 6 Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Brought to Bed: Childbearing in America, 1750-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 30th anniversary ed. 2017).
- 7 Rima Apple, *Perfect Motherhood: Science and Childrearing in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006).
- 8 Wendy Kline, *Coming Home: How Midwives Changed Birth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
- 9 Marika Siegel, *Expecting: A Brief History of Pregnancy Advice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).
- 10 Alex Holder, "'It Became a Compulsion': How Fertility Forums Took Over My Life", <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/aug/14/fertility-forums-took-over-my-life> (accessed 11 Jan. 2024).
- 11 Ibid.

GLOBAL WORKPLACES IN TRANSITION: THE HISTORY OF TECHNOLOGY, GENDER AND EMOTIONS SINCE THE 1960s

Christiane Berth, University of Graz and
Helen Glew, University of Westminster

‘Global Workplaces in Transition: The History of Technology, Gender and Emotions Since the 1960s’ is a project funded by the Elisabeth List Fellowship Programme for Gender Research at the University of Graz, Austria. The project brings together scholars from Austria, Germany, Czechia and the United Kingdom whose specialisms encompass the history of technology, the history of gender in the workplace, and the history and development of software, including AI. The funding from the Elisabeth List Foundation has allowed visiting fellows to spend up to four months in Graz to facilitate collaboration, the exchange of ideas, and the opportunity to undertake intensive periods of research away from their regular academic responsibilities.

Technology has been a significant part of societies, workplaces and ways of living for centuries. However, the rapid changes in technology since the 1960s, and particularly the advent of the personal desktop computer and the internet, remain significantly under-analysed by historians. The same is true of the history of the office as a workplace in the second half of the twentieth century. As Allison Elias, among other scholars, has remarked, the office became so ubiquitous as an everyday space that the attention paid to it by historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has not been replicated in more recent decades.¹

This lack of research is particularly the case when we consider the interactions between emotions, gender and technology, and the compounding effect of these. The project seeks to delineate and understand these relationships. It examines the introduction of new technologies in workplaces and then often in wider society, considering for example that in the 1980s and 1990s, personal computers, word processing software and the internet coexisted with typewriters, telephones and fax machines. This required not only the retraining of staff but the reorganisation of business processes, ways of working and ways of structuring staff teams and working groups, as well as often physically redesigning office spaces. All of these innovations sparked a range of emotional reactions – from curiosity, to frustration, to fears of workers or people being rendered obsolete – which were expressed via humour, via workers’ petitions and trade union activism, via tacit acceptance and resignation, to name just a few. Furthermore, as workplace processes changed, the question of who got to use the new technology emerged, spurring new questions

about gender, technology and the presumed identities of computer users. These came up against, and in some cases were seen to confirm, stereotyped ideas about women’s capabilities in using technology.

Each of the project fellows is undertaking a discrete piece of research that contributes to the overall project theme. Christiane Berth, the project director, is examining the processes of computerisation in the German multinational firm Merck. She analyses how new office technology destabilised established patterns of gendered work distribution, for example in the cooperation between mostly male managers and female secretaries. In comparing the situation at the headquarters and in subsidiaries in different work regions, the project reveals how multinational companies tried to standardise software and hardware. The different priorities and needs caused severe conflicts and provoked emotional discussions throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Nina Jahrbacher, who is currently undertaking PhD research at the University of Graz, focuses on the Oesterrisches Bundesbahnen (OEBB), the Austrian federal railway system, and its changing employment practices – with regard to both gender and technology – from the late 1960s to the early 1990s. Martina Hessler, from the Technical University of Darmstadt, Germany, is interested in the development of computing and the (perceived) interactions between software and its human operators and in particular the ways that errors were understood and categorised.

Helen Glew, from the University of Westminster, United Kingdom, is focusing her research on the end of typing pools as the desktop computer was introduced in offices. She is interested both in the extent to which employers prepared their women typists for this change, as well as the wider cultural reactions to the demise of the typing pool as a way of organising and structuring this work. Often denigrated as ‘dead-end’ employment for women, there was, nevertheless, a perceptible anxiety and almost a nostalgia when typing pools began to disappear. Heidi Schweikert, a PhD researcher at the Technical University of Darmstadt, investigates the introduction of applied software focusing on the SAP company from the 1970s onwards. Based on documents from firm archives and oral history interviews, her research sheds light on emotional responses of software users, trade unions and software developers. Monika Arnez, a social anthropologist from Palacký University, deals in her research with emotional responses to drones in Indonesia in the early twenty-first century. She studies how emotional debates in the media affected the use of drones in Indonesian workplaces and also analyses the gender roles among local drone operators.

Overall, the research will show how emotional reactions to technologies varied over time and space. The team will carve out the whole range of emotional responses beyond enthusiasm and fear. Next, we aim to study how these emotions affected the use of technology at different workplaces. Finally, we explore different methodologies to better understand the dynamics between technology, gender and emotions. For example, we discuss if certain

technologies provoked the rise of emotional communities in workplaces.

The project runs until June 2024, when it will conclude with a final public workshop at the University of Graz and, stemming from that, a joint publication. In the meantime, project fellows will present their individual research at conferences and seminars. Those interested to hear more can check out episode fifteen of the *Gender Und Mehr* podcast recorded (in English) with four members of the project in the summer of 2023. Any readers of *Women's History Today* wanting to know more about the project or our activities may email Prof Christiane Berth at Christiane.berth@uni-graz.at.

Book Reviews

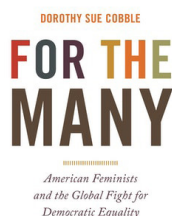
Dorothy Sue Cobble, *For the Many: American Feminists and the Global Fight for Democratic Equality*

Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2021. £30.00, ISBN 99780691156873

(hardback), pp. 1 + 572

Caroline M. McWilliams

University of St Andrews



Dorothy Sue Cobble is a titan of women's history, and her latest book is another important piece in the historiography of American women's movements. *For the Many: American Feminists and the Global Fight for Democratic Equality* tells the story of the women who altered American politics and were responsible for the American and global transition to more egalitarian and socially democratic societies. The women in question dedicated

themselves to creating a democracy that worked for the many, not the few. Some of Cobble's subjects are well-known figures such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Frances Perkins, while others are lesser-known grassroots activists such as Rose Schneiderman, Maida Springer Kemp and Esther Peterson. They all shared the desire to shape the world around them for the better and worked together to achieve this goal.

The research conducted for this book is truly impressive. Cobble undertook significant travel to capture the global aspect of her politically active subjects, who were often second-generation immigrants or globally-minded individuals, who spoke various languages and learned about social issues by collaborating with colleagues abroad. Cobble's research

NOTES

1. Allison Elias, *The Rise of Corporate Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022). For historiography on the office and office workers for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see, amongst a range of others: Gregory Anderson (ed.), *White Blouse Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); Susie Porter, *From Angel to Office Worker: Middle-Class Identity and Female Consciousness in Mexico, 1890-1950* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018); Graciela Amalia Queirolo, *Mujeres en las oficinas: Trabajo, género y clase en el sector administrativo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Biblios, 2018); Barbara Curli, 'Dames employées' at the Suez Canal Company: The 'Egyptianization' of Female Office Workers, 1941-56, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46/3 (2014), 553-76.

skills are reflected in the high-quality prose of her text and the effective use of impactful subheadings. The author knows how to take her reader on a journey of exploration through a contentious subject.

This is a book about women's politics, but it does not solely feature women, recognising that men helped shape the narrative and that women joined with like-minded men in political parties and grassroots movements. Yet, not all men were like-minded and many became adversaries, as well as other women, feminists and non-feminists alike. Wherever we find politics, we also find many clashing opinions and conflicts. Cobble deals with these effectively while emphasising that her subjects believed that the solution to all issues was to be found through education. In this vein, *Invisible Women* by Caroline Criado Perez (Vintage Books, 2020) would benefit the reader of *For the Many*. Criado Perez's case-study-based exploration of the gender gap and the women who have worked to close it, is revolutionary and helps the reader understand many facets of everyday life that have been specifically engineered to benefit men. She suggests solutions and highlights the ones that have already been developed.

While maintaining a clear objective narrative, Cobble's personality and beliefs shine through the pages, revealing an author who genuinely cares about her subjects and has great hope that the trajectory of feminism will continue in the direction of equity for all. Since the publication of this book, events in America have warranted an expanded epilogue, dealing with the Supreme Court *Roe v Wade* decision and the continued erosion of women's medical care. Regardless of one's political views, it is clear that not all areas of society work for the many and that too often, politics still works only for the few. Cobble's next book will deal with the ideas of labour thinkers in an attempt to help the reader see the potential for a fairer, more inclusive society in the United States.

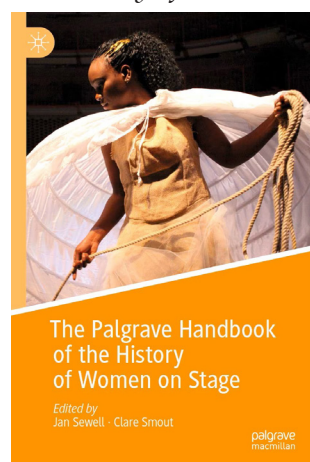
For the Many tells us a historical story, but it also sets itself up to educate a new generation of feminist activists, for whom it is important to distinguish individualism from

collective thinking. Cobble emphasises the importance of thinking collectively and avoiding a ‘me-first corporate feminism’ (p.417) mentality that advances some women but rejects the idea of the collective body. The importance of collectivity has been internationally recognised with the establishment of UN Women in 2010, which prioritises women’s economic and social equality.

At its heart, *For the Many* is a hopeful book. Cobble states that with the crises that took place in the twentieth-century, it would have been easy to give in to despair. However, some activists carried on the fight, and ‘chose hope over despair and by so doing improved the lives of many’ (p.416). This book is part of that fight and is very prescient in today’s 2024 world. Cobble quotes Zadie Smith: ‘History is not erased by change, and the examples of the past still hold out new possibilities for all of us’ (p.2). This is an apt sentiment, and *For the Many* successfully reminds the reader of it. Cobble does not wish to pit warring factions against each other but to remind us that ‘compromise and empathy and tolerance are what allow us to live together and thrive’ (p.425). Many of today’s politicians would benefit from reading *For the Many* to help them act for the benefit of the many.

Jan Sewell and Clare Smout (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of the History of Women on Stage*
 London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. £219.99,
 ISBN 978-3-030-23827-8 (hardback), pp. xxix +
 846

Paula Bartley
 University of Warwick



The *Palgrave Handbook of the History of Women on Stage* is a rich compendium of female performers across centuries, across the globe and across theatrical traditions. The editors persuaded an impressive list of over thirty international authors: academics, theatre directors, film makers, costume designers and a winner of the Man Booker prize to contribute. Reading the book is like entering a literary treasure trove: so many glittering gems in a very packed jewellery box.

The reader is helped to appreciate the precious nature of the box by excellent editorial introductions to each chapter.

The book is organised chronologically. Part I begins with Anne Duncan’s work on ancient Greece and Rome, traducing the myth that these theatres were all male. Greek lyric poetry in the seventh century BCE, for example, was written for public performance by young women; similarly, mime in the Roman Empire was a key performance area for women. The research and ideas in this chapter – and throughout the book – are innovative and imposing. Duncan painstakingly builds up her story from sources such as grave inscriptions, fragments of

texts, letters, wall paintings and contemporary works. Her chapter questions perceptions of what constitutes both drama and gender. One of the particularly intriguing considerations of this chapter is the idea that binary definitions of gender were post-Christian: both Greeks and Romans worshipped the God of theatre Dionysus and Bacchus, respectively, who epitomised this fluidity. The plots and actions of the female actors in less respectable productions could be outrageously raucous, sexually transgressive and obscene to modern eyes (for example, being fellated by a goose on stage). Women actors were gaining a reputation for being prostitutes or, at the very least, for being too sexually free.

With the spread of Christianity in the European world, dramatic performance fell into decline. Paradoxically, as the editors point out, Christianity later provided a range of opportunities for women. Part II covers mediaeval and early modern Europe, with four delightful chapters covering the drama of the Middle Ages, early Italian actresses, street performances and the role of queens in the theatrical revival of the period. Finding source material was challenging, but as Niebrzydowski so tellingly points out, ‘absence of evidence is not necessarily evidence of absence’ (p.82), an aphorism that resonates with historians of women. I found the chapter on nuns – not just famous ones like Hildegard of Bingen, but less known dramatists like Hrotsvit, with her outrageously transgressive depictions – particularly interesting. In 1642, English Puritans banned all acting and closed the theatres.

In 1660, a newly restored monarchy allowed theatres to reopen. Two years later, a Royal Decree made the casting of men and boys in female roles illegal: women now acted alongside men and a golden age for women began. Part III covers Restoration and eighteenth-century England, a time when the work and reputation of actresses improved, and female performers enjoyed a celebrity status. It was, as one historian says, ‘the age of the actress’ (p.197) which three contributors to this volume – in Jane Milling’s overview, Laura J. Rosenthal’s close textual readings, and Laura Engel’s links between acting and material culture – all engagingly demonstrate.

Part IV moves the story into the nineteenth century, and with this move comes a geographical broadening, covering in three distinct chapters America, Europe and Japan. Pam Cobrin explores how American theatre not only helped construct cultural stereotypes but forged a ‘disparate mix of social and ethnic groups’ (p.248) into a nation, sometimes by misappropriating the lives of indigenous women. Makiko Yamanashi examines the development of the professional actress in Japan, with its all-girl Japanese Revue and the establishment of female equivalents of *Kabuki* and *Kengeki* (Samurai drama) that undermined female stereotypes.

The arrival of radio, film and television significantly changed the dramatic oeuvre. In ten chapters, Part V and Part VI examine twentieth-century Greece, England, Russia and America. These chapters are wide-ranging and include the Harlem Renaissance, the lives of leading ladies on the Greek stage, the experiences of Russian actresses trained by Stanislavsky in the Moscow Art Theatre, a local Midlands group and Britain’s D/deaf and disabled theatre

company. In the final section, Part VII further widens its international scope to include Australia, India, New Zealand, South America, Oman and South Africa.

History of Women on Stage is breathtakingly innovative. The range, depth and quality of the research, the intellectual questioning of women in the performing arts, and the engaging quality of the writing are outstanding. Some chapters provide overviews, while others, like Roberta Barkers', provide close reading of texts. This variety is one of many strengths that make the book so special.

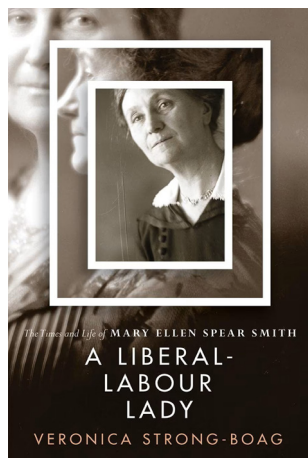
Veronica Strong-Boag, *A Liberal-Labour Lady: The Times and Life of Mary Ellen Spear Smith*,

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021. £31.00, ISBN

9780774867252 (paperback), pp. i + 272

Maggie Andrews

University of Worcester



Mary Ellen Spear was born into a Northumbrian mining family in 1863 and married the widower, miner, Primitive Methodist and trade unionist Ralph Smith when she was nineteen. She raised her stepdaughter and her own four sons. After emigrating to Canada with her husband in 1892 she became the first woman elected to the British Columbia legislature in 1918 and the first female Cabinet Minister in 1921. Upon her death in 1933, she 'lay in state

in Vancouver's St Andrew's Wesley United Church as men and women streamed by to pay their last respects and the flag flew at half-mast in front of the legislature in Victoria' (p.196). Yet, as Veronica Strong-Boag points out in this carefully researched biography, by the twenty-first century Mary Ellen Spear Smith had faded from public memory, side-lined in both popular and academic history. *A Liberal-Labour Lady* explores the life of this noteworthy early feminist and makes a convincing case for her significance for women's history.

Strong-Boag traces Mary Ellen Spear Smith's growing engagement in politics and the public sphere in the settler community of Nanaimo, 'the freight and distribution centre of Vancouver Island' and the 'second fastest-growing city in British Columbia' (p.34). It was there, in religious, women's and suffrage groups that Mary Ellen first developed what became well-regarded skills in speechmaking. Strong-Boag emphasises the significance of Mary Ellen's background in Methodism and her commitment to teetotalism, self-sufficiency and trade unionism which she shared with her husband and which led her to support workers' rights and the improvement of welfare legislation. The couple's politics lay on the boundaries of the Liberal and the Labour movement and emphasised co-operation, conciliation, pragmatism, gradualism and reform, rather than revolution. Such

terms tend to be undervalued by historians who often regard firebrands and those who articulate ideological certainty with greater sympathy.

Ralph and Mary Ellen's engagement within the public spheres of suffrage, religion and Liberal party politics enabled them to ascend the social ladder from mining families in Northumbria to the political classes in British Columbia and, at times, Ottawa. Ralph became MP for Vancouver in the Canadian House of Commons in 1900. He was re-elected in 1904 and 1908, but after a defeat in the 1911 election, he returned to provincial government. Like many women on both sides of the Atlantic, Mary Ellen's opportunity to enter formal politics came when she was widowed in 1917. She successfully contested what had been her husband's seat in the British Columbian legislature the following year. The couple's political activism was, it seems, grounded in a sense of service, resilience and sacrifice but brought little financial reward. Mary Ellen lived modestly and left little money when she died.

Strong-Boag's book explores not merely Mary Ellen Spear Smith's personal life and career, but the challenges faced by women who endeavoured to become politicians and lawmakers in the early twentieth century. Her first electoral victory was as an Independent, with an election campaign that emphasised how she would be able to bring a woman's perspective into political decision-making. She appealed to the newly enfranchised women voters who were aware of her work in the suffrage societies. However, to move from a seat in the legislature to government was more challenging and was facilitated by Mary Ellen's willingness to align herself with the Liberal Party. Strong-Boag interrogates the ambivalence with which Mary Ellen was regarded by the Liberal elite in the British Columbian legislature, who made her a Minister – and the first woman Cabinet Minister in the British Empire – without portfolio. On her resignation, after only eight months in the role, Mary Ellen pointed out 'a cabinet minister without portfolio is as a fifth wheel on the political couch, a superfluity' (p.156).

Through its investigation into Mary Ellen's life, *A Liberal-Labour Lady* raises other issues for modern readers. Women's growing political engagement in British Columbian politics accompanied the disenfranchisement of Chinese, Japanese, Hindu and Indigenous people. Mary Ellen's white-settler mentality and her racism make her a problematic topic for feminist historians. Yet the difficulty in understanding the politics of her culture, her prejudices and priorities according to the period of history in which she is situated, help us see some of the challenges of and reason for writing history, particularly biography. As a British reader, unfamiliar with Canadian History, at times I would have benefitted from more explanation and interrogation of the political structures and cultural context which Mary Ellen inhabited. This poses the question of whether these structures can be thoroughly explained by blanket terms such as empire or imperialism, terms that are arguably elastic, contradictory and contested. Nevertheless, this is a worthy, well-written and well-researched book that I thoroughly recommend.

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 to write interestingly about it are the most important things. Any suggestions for books to review are also welcome – just email the book reviews editor as above.

Tayo Agunbiade, *Untold Histories of Nigerian Women: Emerging from the Margins* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2023)

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

Michael Carny and Kate Murphy, *Hilda Matheson. A Life of Secrets and Broadcasts* (Handheld Press, 2023)

Gill Clarke and Steve Marshall, *Parallel Lives: Eight Women Artists* (Samson and Co., 2023)

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

Hugh Firth and Loulou Brown, *Love, Loyalty and Deceit: Rosemary Firth, a Life in the Shadow of Two Eminent Men* (Berghahn Books, 2024)

Jane Grant, *The Other Emmeline: the Story of Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence* (Francis Boutle, 2023)

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

Magdalene Keaney (ed.), *Francesca Woodman and Julia Margaret Cameron: Portraits to Dream In Hardcover Catalogue* (National Portrait Gallery, 2024)

Bronagh Ann McShane, *Irish Women in Religious Orders: 1530-1700* (Boydell and Brewer, 2022)

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

Joyce Milambiling, *Skyscraper Settlement: The Many Lives of Christodora House* (New Village Press, 2023)

Wendy Moore, *Jack and Eve: Two Women in Love and At War* (Atlantic Books, 2024)

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

Alexandra Rimer, *Seduced by the Light: the Mina Miller Edison Story* (Lyons Press, 2023)

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

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)

Jo Willett, *Sarah Siddons: The First Celebrity Actress* (Pen and Sword, 2024)

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

Betty Houchin Winfield, *We Few, We Academic Sisters: How We Persevered and Excelled in Higher Education* (WSU Press, 2023)

In Profile



JOY BURGESS, LANDSCAPE DESIGN
TUTOR AND PHD CANDIDATE,
UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

Tell us about your area of expertise?

My PhD focuses on women in post war landscape architecture. I am especially interested in understanding the unique pressures that have constrained women throughout history and the ways we can use these to centre their stories. For example, it's only when we recognise the full impact of something like marital status, that we can we begin to interpret the life and work of women professionals. I am also fascinated by the varied ways women have worked in the design professions. So often we find women supporting each other and collaborating in wide networks that crossed national borders. Another important part of rethinking the histories of the design professions is the need to broaden our definitions of what a designer was and is.

What motivated you to become an historian?

I always struggled with history in school. It somehow felt impenetrable – it was often too abstract or a list of dates that I would fail to recall! This is in part because of the types of people and the kinds of events that we have deemed worth remembering and retelling. The need for a more inclusive history is important in terms of how we see ourselves as individuals and societies more

broadly. Women's history has a role to play in telling stories that have traditionally sat on the margins. Taking part in this kind of work is a great motivation for me.

If you could travel back in time to witness an historical event, where and when would you return to, and why?

I would like to go back to 1929, to a tent at the Chelsea Flower Show in London, where a group of individuals met to discuss how they could support and establish the emerging profession of landscape architecture in Britain. This genesis moment has taken on an almost mythical dimension in the history of the profession, so I would love to have a chance to sit in that tent, to know exactly who was there and what was said! I often wonder what impact the political climate in Britain at that time, especially the recent change in women's rights to vote, would have had on the atmosphere that day.

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

Anything written by Elizabeth Darling! Suffragette City had a big impact on me in terms of bringing women from the margins of architecture and showing some of the many complex ways that women have been city makers throughout history. We need to see architecture as much more than just a building.

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

I have found engaging with academic groups with similar interests is a great way to share ideas and build a support network. Getting as much experience as possible speaking at conferences or writing articles is also valuable as it forces you to put pen to paper. Often hunting for information in archives and other places means you are handling a multitude of tiny fragments of information. Bringing these fragments together to create a broader narrative can be daunting, so the sooner you write the better. This is something I often fail to do myself, so it is advice I am always coming back to!

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 2024 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 2024 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

WHN COMMITTEE MEETING REPORT, FEBRUARY 2024

The February Women's History Network's Steering Committee meeting was conducted by email. The network continues to experience some administrative issues, but the CAF bank account is now up and running and it is hoped the issues with NatWest Bank will be resolved soon. There are still a number of vacancies to be filled and anybody interested should contact the Chair, Sarah Richardson.

Membership numbers remain fairly static; currently standing at 446. Social media channels continue to grow: X (formerly Twitter) has seen increased activity while the newsletter and blog also have a good number of readers – the newsletter particularly so. Since the New Year, the numbers attending the writing retreat have also gone up.

The main topic for discussion was this year's conference, which is being held jointly with Royal Holloway on the theme of 'Curating the Female Self'. The call for papers is now live and abstracts are already arriving. There are still a number of issues to finalise such as keynote speakers and the conference dinner. Everything is looking positive, especially because it will be the first in-person conference since 2019.

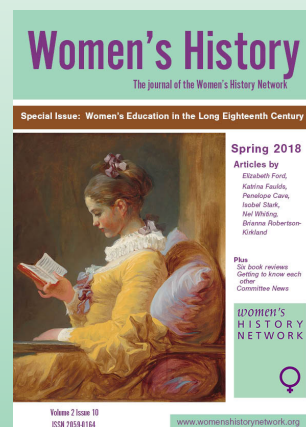
Women's History Back Issues

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

£7.50 (UK), £10.00 (Europe),
£12.00 (Rest of World)

Archived digital issues are available free to download from
womenshistorynetwork.org/womens-history-magazine-download-page/

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Publishing in *Women's History Today*

Women's History Today seeks to publish new and ongoing research into all aspects of women's history. We welcome contributions from established academics, less experienced scholars, postgraduate students and people from beyond academia. As well as academic articles, which are peer reviewed and subject to editorial standards, we also welcome articles about funded research projects, about using archives to explore women's history and about community/public history projects that focus on women's and gender history. We also welcome suggestions for themed issues on broader topics related to women's history.

For more information and to submit ideas please see our webpage: <https://womenshistorynetwork.org/womens-history-today/> or email the editor direct at: editor@womenshistorynetwork.org



Women's History Network National Steering Committee and Other Contacts—2024

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Social Media— Vicky Igilkowski-Broad

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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 January 2024 - Journal option - Download / UK / European / Rest of World

Community Group member	£15 / £30 / £40 / £45
Student or unwaged member	£15 / £30 / £40 / £45
Low income member (*under £20,000 pa)	£25 / £40 / £45 / £55
Standard member	£40 / £50 / £65 / £75
Life Membership (includes journal hardcopy)	£375 / £425 / POA/ POA
Retired Life Membership (includes journal hardcopy)	£195 / £245 / POA / POA

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>