Women's History Today

The journal of the Women's History Network

Special issue - Celebrating 30 years of the WHN Journal

Articles by:
Vic Pickup
Sheena Evans

Four Book Reviews
30 Years of the WHN Journal
In Profile
Doing History
Spotlight On Research

women's HISTORY NETWORK

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Women's History Network

33rd Annual Conference

Hidden in Plain Sight: Women in Archives, Libraries and Museums

4-5 September 2025

Fragments, silences, dust.

The 33rd annual conference will explore and celebrate women in archives, libraries and museums and the challenge of uncovering their presence. We encourage approaches that foreground marginalised voices and imaginative methods.

Papers which address aspects from all nations and time periods are welcomed.

More details about the conference, which will be online, and how to submit an abstract, will be available in the New Year at:

https://womenshistorynetwork.org/the-womens-history-network-annual-conference/

women's HISTORY NETWORK

EDITORIAL

Welcome to this edition of *Women's History Today*, which marks thirty years since the first 'journal' was published by the Women's History Network back in 1994 – *Women's History Notebooks*. We are delighted that one of the first editors of the *Notebooks*, Penny Summerfield, has contributed a piece to this issue about how the venture started and the richness of the articles that were included in those early years. This was until the *Notebooks* were incorporated into what then became *Women's History Magazine* in 2001/2. The journal has had a few adaptations of title over the years to reflect the changing landscape for women's history - both within academia and more generally - becoming *Women's History* in 2015 and more recently *Women's History Today*.

As well as looking back to those first editions of the journal, we are excited to be using our thirtieth anniversary to launch an Index of all the articles that have been published since the journal went online in 2002. It has been a huge project, one that first Susan Cohen and then Norena Shopland have been working on for several years. They have written a short piece about how the Index came about. The Index can be accessed through the journal webpage, as can past issues of the journal.

In addition to these two special features, we have a wide range of articles as you will have come to expect. Firstly, our two peer-reviewed contributions come from Vic Pickup and Sheena Evans. In her article 'Passion, profit and prejudice: the women behind the rise of Mills & Boon 1936-1976', Vic Pickup explores the lives of some of those who wrote for the iconic publishing house. Using correspondence from the company archives, which are held at Reading University, she has been able to flesh out the motivations - and struggles - of a diversity of women who made a living from their books. There is debate over the extent to which Mills & Boon writers might be labelled 'feminist', and this is a theme that runs through Sheena Evans article, 'Janet Vaughan: A Non-Feminist Fighter for Women's Rights?'. It is impossible to encapsulate Vaughan's professional life in a few words but, between the 1930s and 1970s, as a doctor, a leading figure in haematology, a passionate advocate of social medicine and an educationalist, she worked tirelessly to foreground and promote women.

'Spotlight on Funded Research' and 'From the Archives' also focus on professional women. Luca Csepely-Knorr, from the University of Liverpool School of Architecture, has written about the AHRC funded-project, 'The Women of the Welfare Landscape'. In particular, she has pinpointed the long career of the landscape architect, Brenda Colvin. The archive explored in this issue is that of the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET). Here, the IET's archivist, Anne Locker, reveals how women are represented in three collections: the papers of Caroline Haslett; the Women's Engineering Society and the Electrical Association for Women. Maggie Andrews, a former Chair of WHN, provides the 'In Profile'.

As is customary in the Autumn issue, we include a report from the annual WHN conference, which this year was held at Royal Holloway, University of London – our first in-person conference for five years. The Chair's report from the AGM is also published here.

Finally, we have our book reviews. These reviews are provided by our members and readers, so please do look through the Books Received list on p. 35 to see if there are any that interest you. And also, please don't forget that we are always looking for contributions to the journal whether from established academics, independent researchers or from those pursuing post-graduate qualifications. In addition, please let us know if you have ideas for special issues. The continuation of *Women's History Today* depends on you!

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

Contents

Cover Image

A selection of the WHN Journal covers from the last 30 years.

Passion, profit and prejudice: the women behind the rise of Mills & Boon 1936-1976

Vic Pickup

PhD student, University of Reading

Mills & Boon is one of the leading publishers of romantic fiction, with annual sales of over 200 million paperback novels in 100 overseas markets and translated into twenty-four languages.[1] Founded in 1908 by two former employees of Methuen Publishing, Gerald Mills and Charles Boon, the company was established as a general publisher producing books at a price that would make them accessible to a wide readership. Although the first title launched by Mills & Boon was a romance, the company did not focus on that genre until the 1930s when demand for escapist literature (during the years of depression) and a surge in the opening of commercial libraries led to a specialism in romantic fiction. Despite the success of the brand, little is known about the women who wrote the books that were produced in its name. Key texts written about Mills & Boon include Joseph McAleer's *Passion's Fortune,* which provides a thorough study of the company's history and also jay Dixon's *The Romance Fiction of Mills & Boon 1909-1990,* which focuses largely upon the texts themselves.[2] More recently, Jenny Haddon's *Fabulous at Fifty* delivers a collective memoir of members of the Romantic Novelists' Association who wrote for the broader romantic fiction genre between 1960-2010.[3] However, research into the publisher's background and history has been neglected for many years and, as yet, no study has focused upon the lives of Mills & Boon authors.

This article places a spotlight on the women writing for Mills & Boon during the period of growth that established the brand as a household name, revealing the ways in which they managed their writing alongside domestic duties, what they did with their newfound wealth and the obstacles they faced despite their achievements. The focus for this research is based on letters in the Mills & Boon archives, held in the Special Collections at the University of Reading, specifically the vast correspondence between editor Alan Boon (son of co-founder, Charles) and eighty-six female authors during the period between 1945 and 1977.[4] Ida Cook's published autobiography, *We Followed Our Stars*, has also been consulted, as her letters are not included in the archive, yet she remains a pivotal figure in the Mills & Boon story.[5] This research is the first in-depth study of the personal letters in the archive, examining what their contents reveal about the author's lives and the personal context in which they created fiction for a brand with English-language sales, in 1969 alone, reaching fifteen million.[6] This figure represents a broad demographic of readers; Ida Cook said, 'romantic fiction has more influence than anything to do with its literary worth, because it is read by unsophisticated people.'[7]

As this article explains, Mills & Boon authors came from a variety of backgrounds. Through the publication of their stories in the women's weeklies as serials, the accessibility offered by lending libraries and mass-market affordable paperback production, their writing attracted a market of working-class women previously excluded from traditional publishing.[8] With their novels having so great a reach during an era of social change, the lives of these female authors and the context in which they wrote is worthy of analysis. In her 2017 study of the cultural sociology of reading, Angèlica Thumala concludes that 'exposure through fictional texts to the plurality of the human condition, its vulnerability and its strengths, opens up for readers the possibility of conceiving and making sense of change in themselves and their situation.'[9] It seems undeniable that Mills & Boon books would have influenced intense readers to some degree, although whether the authors and their works could be perceived as supportive, or unsupportive, of feminism is largely beyond the scope of this article. However, the Mills & Boon archive offers the opportunity to examine a uniquely detailed and sizeable correspondence written by the 'influencers' themselves. The absence of literary agents acting on the behalf of these authors adds to the richness and revelatory nature of these letters, which provides insight into the lives of these prolific (yet largely anonymised) women writers and, in turn, affords further insight into what their books have come to represent.

How Mills & Boon authors came to be published

The typical route to publication by Mills & Boon was through the submission of an unsolicited manuscript. Women around the world were invited to submit without the need for an agent. If the company's in-house readers saw potential in the writing, Alan Boon would send a letter with an offer of acceptance, details of any amendments required and a contract—often proposing the publishing rights of three additional books. An advance was then paid with subsequent earnings coming through serialisation for women's magazines prior to the book's release, royalties and, later, translation rights. Whilst author earnings varied significantly, payments could add up to a sizeable sum. In 1949, the prominent author Sara Seale earned £2,370 from book royalties, serial rights and a film option, which in 2024 would translate as £105,000. By 1952, her annual pay had risen to an equivalent of £137,500.[10] Many of these novelists wrote prolifically, were published frequently and gained financial independence through the success of their books. By 1971, Mills & Boon had 109 authors under contract, collectively contributing 315 new titles a year.[11] Mills & Boon writers were housewives, nurses, teachers, elderly spinsters, mothers and carers. The most productive among the collective were some of the first female 'celebrity' authors, earning enough to invest in property, champion worthy causes and brave the public

eye through the publicity of their work. A prominent Mills & Boon novelist typically juggled multiple roles, often kept her writing secret, earned enough to support her family and paid high taxes. In doing so, these authors played a crucial role in the establishment of a publishing brand so famous, its name was added to the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1997, meaning 'romantic story book.'[12] The giant, known globally by the names of the two men who founded it, was built on the shoulders of women.

Beyond commercial success, Mills & Boon wielded influence through the volume of reading material they produced and the expansive audience garnered as a result. Early writers found popularity with the millions of women deprived of their fathers, husbands and sons in wartime Britain; their work was considered important enough for morale on the home front for their publisher to be granted exemption from paper rationing.[13] Through its evolution, all Mills & Boon fiction allowed for escapism; as Alan Boon stated, 'It has been said that our books could take the place of Valium, so that women who take these drugs would get an equal effect from reading our novels.'[14] Compared to an extension of the childhood fairytale, Mills & Boon stories indulged the fantasies of its readers by transporting them to a realm separate to their own.[15] With exotic settings and tasteful romancing, the books provided the reader with the predictability of a happy ending without risk of real-world trauma or sexually explicit 'strong meat'.[16] Mills & Boon novels were designed as liberation from the everyday, encouraging reader identification and awakening feelings of desire for the hero and lifestyle depicted in the stories. With a focus on accessibility made more achievable through the option of paperbacks, books were available to buy from newsagents and booksellers for half a crown, or 2*s.* 6*d.* (approximately £1.50 in today's money) making them widely available to the mass-market.[17]

In her book, *The Romance Fiction of Mills & Boon*, jay Dixon references the author Charlotte Lamb who said, 'women's choices in life [are] a purely personal matter, but the fact that they have a choice is a feminist achievement.'[18] Indeed, in seeking out a Mills & Boon book, a woman made a choice that displayed a recognition of self and a sense of agency Dixon attributes the following for her view that Mills & Boon novels are feminist texts:

> … both feminist philosophy and romance ideology demand a change in the way … relationships between men and women are conducted. They both have a Utopian vision of a society … where there is no perceived difference between the status and social position of men and women.[19]

There is ongoing debate about the contents of Mills & Boon novels and the extent to which they can be labelled feminist; as Teresa L. Ebert wrote in her 1988 article, 'the reality represented in any romance narrative … is overwhelmingly patriarchal, and any equality that is allowed is highly restricted and never significantly challenges male hegemony.'[20] The argument concerning the books' feminist values can only be truly evaluated with consideration of the historical and social context of the time in which the authors wrote, which is why a study of their lives is relevant and could help to inform this field of research.

Despite their popularity, Mills & Boon books were subject to the taboo and 'snobbery' associated with 'light romance' and, as such, several guises were donned by writers and readers seeking out this kind of fiction.[21] The titles of Mills & Boon novels were kept deliberately ambiguous to their romantic contents to avoid fear of judgement for the women who sought it out. Another mode of disguise existed in the aliases adopted by the authors themselves, with most writers assuming an alter ego under which they published. Sometimes more than one pseudonym was used, depending on the style of any given book. For many novelists at this time, they had to 'become other' to produce their work and see their successes realised under a name other than their own.

Authors often met derision for their brand of 'light fiction'. Labelled as 'terminally trashy' by *The Daily Mail*, blamed for rising divorce rates (as suggested by the Archbishop of York) and ousted from writers' society for being deemed 'non-literary', these enduring prejudices meant that Mills & Boon novelists rarely received recognition for their accomplishments.[22] In 1974, the author Alex Stuart was de-listed from the *Writers in Schools* scheme because, as she put it, 'the Arts Council refuse[d] to concede to romantic novelists the title of novelist or to accept that they are creative and imaginative.'[23] Indeed, despite the popularity of Mills & Boon's stories, some libraries deemed their books unsuitable to shelve, much to the chagrin of authors such as Jean Blyth, who wrote on 24 July 1970:

> They ought to give the public what they want, and most of them want light fiction! I object to being tacitly told what I ought and ought not to want to read. If I want to wallow in "Lerve!" why shouldn't I? After all, the books aren't pornography.[24]

These authors made strides in gaining financial independence while surrounded by the public (and sometimes private) reluctance to accept or acknowledge their achievements.

ALAN BOON AS EDITOR

Coming to his role as Editorial Director fresh from active service in the Second World War, Alan Boon's relationship with his collective of authors, labelled by writer Violet Winspear as his 'harem', was key to their ability to work.[25] The body of correspondence in the Mills & Boon archives shows the consistency and the individuality of the relationships Boon nurtured with his authors. This was quite a feat as most authors wrote to him twice weekly and he would reply to each letter.[26] As the author Jay Blakeney said:

> Everyone on his list liked and admired him, sometimes to the point of idolatry. With good reason. He gave us long vinous lunches at The Ritz and other elegant restaurants. He was lavish with praise and tactful with criticism. He sent flowers to our hotels

> and homes, telegrams of congratulation at every opportunity and always rang up on Christmas Eve. Our letters were answered by return. Every possible help and encouragement was given.[27]

Boon's role went further than business affairs: he arranged urgent medical appointments for authors in need; visited them in hospital; provided the advances they needed to buy property independently and strove to boost the confidence of his writers. Boon said, 'we became friends with the author', a statement he corroborated by continuing to publish writers with whom the firm had long-standing relationships. Such an example was the 'old-fashioned' Betty Neels whose books were regularly among the slowest sellers.[28] Boon demonstrated loyalty towards his authors, even when it did not appear to make financial sense to the company. He gave few guidelines to writers and frequently urged them to trust their instincts in the choices they made. This foundation of support and encouragement enabled his authors to realise their ambitions of success and financial independence. The author Olive Norton wrote to say that it was thanks to Boon that 'we do seem to have come to a point where we matter.'[29] In allowing his writers a sense of agency, Boon actively encouraged their self-reliance and ultimately their productivity.

REVELATIONS OF THE ARCHIVED LETTERS

The archives provide a perspective of the women writing for Mills & Boon and reveal rich details of their private lives that have previously been given little attention. Mills & Boon authors frequently refer in their letters to feeling that they were not taken seriously, regardless of the success they achieved. The author Gloria Bevan was described in *The New Zealand Herald* in 1974 as:

> … a fairly ordinary Onehunga housewife who 'loves scribbling'. Mrs Bevan admits to being 'completely unliterary' … A pleasant, modest, unassuming woman, she probably typifies… the unremarkable housewife who waits beside you at the supermarket cash desk.'[30]

The mundanity portrayed is commonplace in the press's descriptions of Mills & Boon authors, despite the purpose of such publicity being to highlight them as successful career women. Writing romance had more serious repercussions than confidence-bashing. For Jean Blyth, a hospital nurse in South Africa who penned her novels as a sideline, she faced the possibility of losing her job. Blyth's letters of autumn 1967 informed Boon that an Assistant Matron had advised against publishing her books as some might 'object to her new extra-mural activities'. Blyth continued, 'So I am going as fast as I can with the books as I don't want to be sacked before they can earn me enough to live on!'[31] Her letter, dated 6 September 1967, refers to the undercover nature of her writings, 'The anonymity holds good. One or two of the friends who are in on the secret tell that the Powers that be would take a very dim view of my literary activities!'[32] The South African Nursing Association did indeed take issue with Blyth writing without permission, which caused the author significant distress. Boon provided support and reassurance, even striving to serialise Blyth's work to increase her earnings as a safeguard should she be required to cease nursing.

EARNING POTENTIAL OF A MILLS & BOON AUTHOR

Mills & Boon provided an author with the opportunity to earn a sizeable income. Jay Blakeney recalled that in her third year of writing for the company (1958), she earned £811 from her books, plus £552 from serialisation payments. In 2024, these earnings translate to a combined figure of £40,000 achieved in her 'spare-time'.[33] For those whose novels provided them with a reliable income, some accomplished remarkable things with their earnings, such as Ida Cook (whose story we will come to) and Elma Buller, whose letter on 13 September 1977 declared that all funds from her book *Back of Beyond* would go towards the restoration of St. Mary's Church in her village.[34] Despite her earnings being ample (three payments referenced at this time are equivalent to £10,000, £20,000 and a further £9,000 soon after), Boon was still required to send a written assurance to her builders stating that Buller was able to pay for the renovations. She wrote, 'it's amazing how little faith the average man has in the continued earning power of a romance writer!'[35] Charitable endeavours were frequent for Mills & Boon authors who found themselves in the position for philanthropy. Lilian Chisholm stocked the Red Cross Hospital library with donations of books, having found there were not enough medical romances to go around and that they were too expensive to buy. She would frequently request more and Boon would willingly make swift arrangements. Not all causes were local – Vivien Mann, distressed by the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, wished to donate all proceeds of her book, *Serenade on A Spanish Guitar,* to the Red Cross Hungarian relief.[36]

While not all authors could afford to be as charitable, many relied upon the proceeds of their writing to fund their children's schooling and excursions, as well as covering household bills, thus easing the pressures significantly for their families, often without them knowing from where the money came. This is observed in Amanda Doyle's letter to Boon on 20 December 1966, in which she thanked him for an unexpected cheque that had instigated an intriguing discussion with her son, Duncan:

> Thanks so much for sending the cheque for Canadian royalties … a marvelous surprise for me, and superbly timed to swell the Christmas funds! The result – older son extremely puzzled as to why he can now have an air-rifle for Christmas when I've previously said he couldn't.
>
> Me: Well, Duncan, I've had a windfall.
>
> Duncan: What d'you mean, a windfall?
>
> Me: Well, someone sent me some money that I didn't know a thing about.

> Duncan: You mean, just out of the blue?
>
> Me: That's about it.
>
> Duncan (completely and utterly disbelieving): Aw, come off it, Mum, things like that don't ever really happen – not in real life.
>
> Me (firmly): They do to me.[37]

Sudden windfalls were common for early-stage novelists, when the first taste of success would come in the form of a surprise cheque delivered by post. There are many references to authors suddenly finding themselves in an affluent position through unexpected royalties, as shown in Betty Beaty's recollections:

> I didn't realise at first how well I was selling abroad … until I got a cheque for over £9,000 for a single North American edition. This was a large amount at that time, and I rang Mills & Boon saying I thought they'd made a mistake.[38]

The financial success of its authors rendered Mills & Boon progressive in an era of social change regarding the status of women. The wealth that came with the serialisation of their stories in women's magazines and book sales facilitated the move towards independence for many women writing for the brand. As a sideline to other roles they embodied, many women continued to write despite dealing with ill health and personal and financial difficulties. They also worked around domestic obligations and caring duties.

Selling 19 million books in 105 countries between 1957-97, the New Zealand author Essie Summers was the wife of a Presbyterian minister and mother of two children.[39] During her epistolary relationship with Boon, she cared for both her mother and mother-in-law at home, as well as being actively involved in many charitable causes which required frequent travel:

> Naturally, with my mother-in-law to be looked after, my writing time had to be shortened, but it is just as regular, and now I write four hours per day, four days per week, Monday to Thursday, and should any … trips with my husband … occur on these days, the four hours are made up another day.[40]

Summers was a diligent woman and maintained high standards throughout her work and domestic life. Despite her success and earning potential, her writing remained less of a priority than cleaning. Summers wrote that, having completed a charity clothes drive for refugees, 'now I am hoping to return to normal house routine instead of a mere flick with a feather duster. Oddly enough I never neglect house for my own writing. Mother's ghost would be on my trail.'[41]

The demands of supporting a family whilst maintaining a writing career were not lost on Boon, who told Dorothy Rivers in 1953:

> I suppose the really perfect publisher would have a mobile domestic help on his staff and when authors were in difficulties, the publisher would dispatch this member of their staff to the author's aid forthwith. I think it would pay the publisher in saving the author's time for writing.[42]
>
> Indeed, hiring domestic help was one of the first things authors did as soon as their earnings were sufficient to do so.[43]

REASONS FOR WRITING

Though the empowerment enabled through financial independence was important to novelists, there were other reasons they wrote. Ethel Connell made her first approach with a covering letter alongside her manuscript, dated 23 February 1968:

> Enclosed is my first attempt at writing a light romance. My mother, who during her lifetime was more or less an invalid, derived great pleasure from reading your books. I felt I wanted to contribute to giving that pleasure to others who, like mother, are never happier than when they are reading another light romance of Mills and Boons.[44]

Simple fulfilment was a key incentive for many Mills & Boon writers. Far from acknowledging their books as 'trash', they considered the brand's publications of great worth to the ordinary woman and were dedicated to being a part of this service that brought joy to others. On 3 June 1957, Joan Blair's letter informed Alan of a 'miracle':

> I took … *The Dominie's Lodging*, to one of my Red Cross welfare people who had just lost her husband and was inconsolable. She didn't care for TV, couldn't be bothered with the sound wireless, but did just murmur that she 'liked a love story'. So, on Easter Sunday I popped the book through the letter box … and when I went to see her next she said that it had made all the difference. She looked alive again. And she said it was the first thing that had meant anything to her. I must say that just about made the book worth writing as far as I was concerned.[45]

A box of Mills & Boon romances was swiftly dispatched to the lady in question. Such 'miracles' are recounted in numerous archived letters.

Taking an opposite stance from one affected by the 'literary snobbery' encountered, Mills & Boon authors took their writing seriously and the value of being amongst Boon's 'stable' of novelists was viewed by most as a privilege. It might be argued that such pleasure was naïve, or perhaps born from being raised in a culture where women would achieve little outside their caring and domestic roles or lowly employment status. Across the archive, a theme of low expectation arises, though there is also evidence of this attitude evolving when authors adjusted to consistent success, as in Jay Blakeney's letters (writing under the pseudonym Anne Weale): 'Please don't think I am developing megalomania. I know I am still very

small fry—-—but, as even smaller fry seem to be blowing their own trumpets wildly, with some effect, I don't think an occasional small blast from A.W. [Anne Weale] would be out of place.'[46] Jay's letters begin to reflect knowledge of her worth, as she informs Boon: 'I want to have a really first class plot so that I can have a stab at one of the R.N.A. [Romantic Novelists' Association] awards next year.'[47]

To represent the many stories held within the archives, three cases studies have been selected for a closer investigation of women who wrote prolifically for Mills & Boon between 1936-2002, largely under Alan Boon's editorship.

IDA COOK (1904–1986)

Fig. 1: Ida Cook.
MMB Add 7/1: Mills and Boon Collection, University of Reading, Special Collections.

Under the pseudonym Mary Burchell, Ida Cook wrote 112 romance novels for Mills & Boon between 1936-86. Prior to the commencement of her writing career, Cook and her sister Louise would save earnings from their civil service jobs to indulge their fanatical obsession with opera, travelling widely. Their loyalty to the operatic stars they worshipped turned stage-door encounters into friendships that lasted a lifetime. It was through Cook's association with the Austrian conductor Clemens Krauss and his wife, the Romanian soprano Viorica Ursuleac, that the sisters first learned of the persecution of the Jews in Europe in the late thirties. This knowledge led to their endeavours to secure British sponsorship for individuals whose lives were endangered by the Nazi regime. Cook's 1956 autobiography, *We Followed Our Stars*, explains the naive origins of their involvement:

> Ursuleac took us by the arm, and, with an earnestness and gravity that we could not quite understand, explained that this was a great personal friend of hers who was going to England for the first time … Would we please look after her? … In my mind's eye, I still see the scene on the platform at Amsterdam station as Ursuleac turned to her companion and said, in a tone of sombre satisfaction and confidence, 'Now you will be all right.' … we did not know it then, our first refugee had been commended to our care.[48]

It was owing to Cook's publishing contract with Mills & Boon (made initially with Charles Boon) that the sisters were able to secure the safety of many Jews thereafter attempting to escape. Funded with earnings from Cook's Mills & Boon novels, the sisters travelled to Germany on multiple occasions, their love of opera serving as a cover for their movements. By smuggling jewellery and valuable items into the UK, the sisters would satisfy British Security requirements for immigration:

> I received a mysterious message. Would I bring out a valuable diamond brooch? It represented someone's entire capital, and, if I could get it over the frontier and safely into England, there would be no difficulty in obtaining a guarantee for the owner… When the brooch was brought to me in Frankfurt, I was horrified. It was a great blazing oblong of diamonds … fortunately, however, I was wearing a six-and-eleven penny Marks & Spencer jumper at the time …and I thought, If I plaster this openly on my bosom, it will probably look like something from Woolworth. And that is what I did—and came over the frontier with a carelessly open coat and flying colours.[49]

Using her book-earnings, Cook purchased a flat in Pimlico as a 'safe house' ready to receive those whose entry she had secured. By the onset of war, the sisters had successfully enabled the escape of twenty-nine people fleeing Nazi Germany. Cook went on to volunteer herself for 'night-watching' services in a Bermondsey shelter during the Blitz, using the Pimlico flat herself when their own house was destroyed by a doodlebug.[50] Returning to her typewriter, Cook continued to write romantic novels after the war was over and used her earnings to support refugees and displaced persons.[51] For their charitable endeavours, in 1965 the sisters were honoured as Righteous among the Nations by the Yad Vashem Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Authority in Israel. In 2010 the British Government named each of them a British Hero of the Holocaust.[52] Cook also served as a founding member and President of the Romantic Novelists' Association from 1966 until her death in 1986.[53]

JAY BLAKENEY (1929–2007)

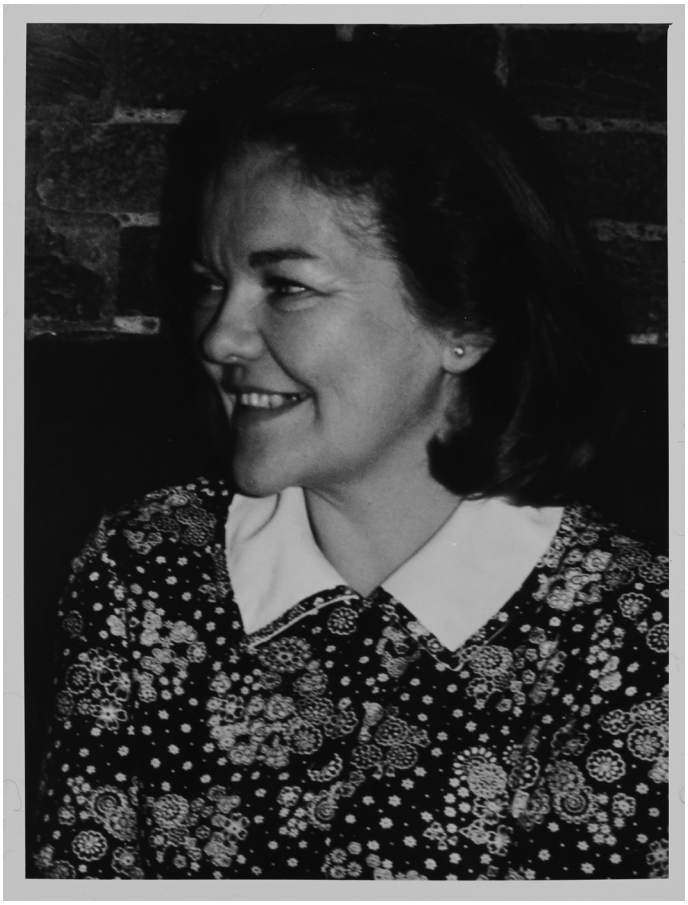

Fig. 2: Anne Weale, pen name for Jay Blakeney. MMB Add 7/1: Mills and Boon Collection, University of Reading, Special Collections.

Jay Blakeney began her career as a journalist, going on to write eighty-eight novels for Mills & Boon between 1955-2002 under the pseudonyms Anne Weale and Andrea Blake. The exotic settings found in Blakeney's books were often inspired by her own travels, which included two years living on a rubber estate in Malaya. Her lifelong ambition was to visit every country in the world and through her books she achieved international success.[54] Compared to the heroics of Ida Cook and her sister, Blakeney's story is humble. As a devoted wife, mother and journalist for the *Yorkshire Evening News*, many of Blakeney's letters detail her struggle to multitask her job and domestic duties. She represents a vast body of authors who worked, mothered, cared and managed households alongside their publishing careers. Blakeney's letters contain frequent references to her attempts to 'do it all' and repeated 'failures':

> Unfortunately getting this story done with one hand and stirring Christmas puds with the other has left me in far from sparkling condition for the junketings [a party or outing] on Tuesday. A heavy thud during the speeches will be me falling off my chair from sheer exhaustion.[55]

In many of her letters to Boon, Blakeney is concerned about failing to meet her obligations:

> I'm afraid that, as usual, my private life is conflicting with work. My husband has just demolished half the house and needs half-hourly mugs of tea and an unskilled labourer (me!) to help him re-build it. However, between sweeping up the debris and mixing cement, I am working on about four stories at once and will presently astonish you with my output – I hope! I think I would be a much better investment if I were an aged spinster with only a canary to look after![56]

It should be noted that at the time of writing, Blakeney would have likely known that she was expecting a baby, who was born six months later. This was not the only building project that interfered with her output, as she wrote in her letter of 1 May 1961:

> The next Andrea Blake is called The Doctor's Daughters and should be ready in June … This month has been a bit haywire as [my husband] suddenly decided to build a vast greenhouse and I've been called in for unskilled labouring. However, there are no more major projects afoot at present, so I hope to make better progress. Would you be interested in a textbook on 'How to survive on Home-made wines and Lettuces'?[57]

Blakeney's letters are frequently witty in tone, despite the obstacles and subsequent frustrations they describe:

> I haven't found that being pregnant in a heatwave is madly conducive to thoughts of romance. I daresay that a howling infant and festoons of nappies won't be very inspiring either, but at least I shall be able to get within range of the typewriter and not go to sleep quite so much. Anyway, I shall have to get cracking pretty soon or I'll be spending 1960 in jail for non-payment of income tax.[58]

Ten days after childbirth the author promised a manuscript to Boon and assured him of her ability to work post-partum – and even the happiness of the baby when listening to the sound of her typing. Six months later, Blakeney confessed to Boon that she had been unwell at the time. Struggling to reassure him that she had recovered, she apologised for her poor performance:

> I am so sorry about this long gap between books, but thank you for not chivvying me. Unfortunately I wasn't very well for some months after the baby arrived, but I'm quite fit again now and will try to make up for lost ground ... Once again, I do apologise for proving such a dead loss after all your efforts to get me established.[59]

Blakeney's letters imply a great amount of self-imposed pressure and expectation. Her comments reveal the hard work that went on behind the scenes of Mills & Boon by those who had to juggle multiple jobs, look after the home and meet financial obligations, particularly when earning

an income upon which the family relied.

VIOLET WINSPEAR (1928-1989)

Fig. 3: Photocopy of the Radio Times article mailed to Violet Winspear with the addition of 'You filthy creature!' written in the margin.
MMB Add 7/4: Mills and Boon Collection, University of Reading, Special Collections.

Violet Winspear's domestic struggles were also paramount in her letters to Alan Boon. Born in the East End of London in 1928, she began working in a factory at the age of fourteen. Before selling her first romance novel to Mills and Boon in 1961, Winspear had a series of jobs including: working as a dishwasher in a pie shop; as a bottler of pills and a maker of feather hats, Christmas decorations and artificial flowers. She became a full-time writer two years later. Winspear published seventy titles under her own name between 1961-87 and is still regarded as one of Mills & Boon's most progressive and influential writers. As Boon said, 'Violet Winspear… set new standards for the Mills & Boon novel, and in their success inspired—and elevated—the rest of the "team" of writers. Authors really take in each other's washing, if you like, and learn by reading each other's books.'[60] Despite rarely leaving the East End of London and never having been abroad, Winspear's writing frequently took readers overseas. A regular cinema-goer and library member, her imagination enabled her portrayals of places such as Greece, Spain and Africa to be appear highly authentic.

As Mills & Boon's top earner of the time and with an advance from Boon (women were unable to acquire a mortgage at this time), Winspear left her council flat in Hackney and purchased a house in which she and her elderly mother could live. In doing so, she not only moved home, she elevated her class and gained her independence from menial work.[61] This author's story is full of juxtaposition: factory worker and best-selling author; success story, yet regarded by some with contempt; a strong character, despite being extremely vulnerable; and while Boon later referred to her as 'highly sexed', she labelled herself an 'iron virgin'.[62] With these conflicts in mind, it may not be surprising that the major theme in Winspear's letters is the defence of herself and her writing, as well as the romance fiction genre in general, to which she owed her liberation from factory life. Her poor self-image was fuelled by the perceived vitriol from the press.[63] Ambitious and opinionated, she was not publicity-averse, but in the defence of her work, she was subject to attack. An honest, unguarded interviewee, Winspear was vulnerable to intrusive questioning from journalists. The most famous example of this was Molly Parkin's published interview with her in the *Radio Times* in 1970, [Fig. 3] which featured the comment:

> I get my heroes so that they're lean and hard muscled and mocking and sardonic and tough and tigerish and single, of course. Oh and they've got to be rich and then I make it that they're only cynical and smooth on the surface. But underneath they're well, you know, sort of lost and lonely. In need of love but, when roused, capable of breathtaking passion and potency. Most of my heroes, well all of them really, are like that. They frighten but fascinate. They must be the sort of men who are capable of rape: men it's dangerous to be alone in the room with.[64]

Unsurprisingly, during the era of second-wave feminism, the idea that Winspear's heroes were 'capable of rape' caused a public uproar, and she became the recipient of hate mail – as shown by a photocopy of the image of her which appeared in *The Radio Times*, with an additional handwritten scrawl, sent anonymously: 'You filthy creature!' [See Fig.3] This reception apparently fuelled Winspear's feelings of alienation, despite the ongoing popularity of her books, and, indeed, those heroes who were formed with such disreputable characteristics, as corroborated by the feminist writer Ann Barr Snitow, 'Cruelty, callousness, coldness, menace, are all equated with maleness and treated as a necessary part of the package'.[65]

The culturally accepted brutish hero figure, who was not only foreboding but also capable of brutality and inciting fear, is no better shown than in E. M. Dell's internationally best-selling romance of 1919, *The Sheik*.[66] The book's female protagonist, the strong-willed and courageous Diana Mayo, is held captive and raped multiple times by Sheik Ahmed Ben Hassan. The desert romance includes lengthy passages describing her fear of her captor as, 'Terror, agonizing, soul-shaking terror such as she had never imagined' and the knowledge of his intentions: 'The flaming light of desire in his eyes

turned her sick and faint … She understood his purpose with a horror that made each separate nerve in her system shrink'.[67] Despite her suffering and the resulting self-loathing, which results from her prolonged ordeal, the novel ends with declarations of mutual love. With such figures in mind, it could be argued that Winspear told the truth as she saw it and (had she realised the potential for her comments to be perceived as irresponsible for endorsing rape culture) she may have retracted her statement, given the opportunity. In an undated letter to Boon, she said, 'These darn books of mine, whether good or bad, liked or hated, are all I have and I care what people say about their author. Especially the young girls who buy the paperbacks.'[68] The implication here is that Winspear was concerned about her influence, and how she herself was perceived. These comments suggest a naivety and a lack of responsibility when it came to dealing with the press, rather than a deliberate attempt to gain publicity.

CONCLUSION

Whilst it is impossible to measure the influence the authors discussed in this article had, their reach is represented in the many millions of books sold and what they themselves signified in the production of them. As jay Dixon highlights: to 'organise society so that women can be mothers, lovers, nurturers – and also lead active and meaningful lives in a public sense' (Dora Russell, quoted in Spender, 1983:102) is a philosophy for which Mills & Boon authors have always argued.'[69]

Having made the name that has received global recognition for a century, these authors deserve recognition for their own merits, their identities having been obscured by the distinctive liveries of the product, as well as the acquisition of pseudonyms in order to sell more books. Through difficulties and domestic hindrances, Mills & Boon authors wrote to achieve success and wealth, demonstrating skill and the perseverance required to attract and sustain a vast readership, despite the snobbery they encountered. Whether viewed as pro-women's rights or counterproductive to the feminist movement, from an archival researcher's point of view, as Dixon says, 'Mills & Boon romances are historical documents and must be read in the context of the time and manner of their production.'[70] The texts provide great insight into the era, but cannot be critically viewed without knowledge of the circumstances surrounding their creation and a proper consideration of the authors' lives and influences. Through the study of correspondence held in the Mills & Boon archives, this article provides an introduction to the stories of those who played a significant role in the success of one of the most popular brands of women's fiction in the second half of the twentieth century.

NOTES

1. Sales recorded in 1998. Joseph McAleer, *Passion's Fortune: The Story of Mills & Boon* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 2-3.
2. jay Dixon, *The Romance Fiction of Mills & Boon, 1909-1990s* (London: UCL Press, 1999). The author's preference is for her name to be spelled with a lower case 'j'.
3. Jenny Haddon and Diane Pearson, *Fabulous at Fifty: Recollections of the Romantic Novelists' Association 1960-2010* (Great Britain: Romantic Novelists' Association, 2010).
4. Four male authors included within the archives wrote romance for Mills & Boon under female pseudonyms.
5. Ida Cook, *We Followed our Stars,* (Mills & Boon Limited: London, 1956).
6. McAleer, *Passion's Fortune*, 135.
7. Ibid., 4.
8. Dawn Cockcroft, 'The Rise of Sixties Feminism and Mills & Boon', *The Journal of Publishing Culture,* 9 (2019), 3.
9. M. A. Thumala Olave, 'Reading matters: Towards a cultural sociology of reading', *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 6/3 (2017), 433.
10. McAleer, *Passion's Fortune,* 105.
11. Ibid., 127.
12. 'Our History', Mills & Boon website – www.millsandboon.co.uk/pages/our-history (accessed 15 Jan. 2024).
13. Dixon, *The Romance Fiction of Mills & Boon,* 97.
14. McAleer, *Passion's Fortune*, 2.
15. See Laura Vivanco, *For Love and Money: The Literary Art of the Harlequin Mills & Boon Romance,* (Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks LLP, 2011).
16. A phrase frequently used in-house at Mills & Boon to signify sexually explicit romance.
17. Cockcroft, 'The Rise of Sixties Feminism', 7-8.
18. Dixon, *The Romance Fiction of Mills & Boon, 1909-1990s,* 194.
19. Ibid. 195.
20. Teresa L. Ebert, 'The Romance of Patriarchy: Ideology, Subjectivity, and Postmodern Feminist Cultural Theory', *Cultural Critique,* 10 (1988), 19–57, cited in Laura Vivanco, 'Feminism and Early Twenty-First Century Harlequin Mills & Boon Romances', *The Journal of Popular Culture,* 45/5 (2012), 1060.
21. McAleer, *Passion's Fortune,* 148.
22. Laura Craik, 'Mills & Boon books are considered to be trashy—you can't be seen reading them', *The Daily Mail*, 14 Aug. 2022. Originally published in 'You' magazine, (accessed 2 Feb. 2024); McAleer, *Passion's Fortune,* 5; Stuart, A., cited in Haddon and Pearson, *Fabulous at Fifty,* 13.
23. Haddon and Pearson, *Fabulous at Fifty,* 13.
24. Museum of English Rural Life (hereafter MERL), Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/011.
25. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/92, Correspondence from Violet Winspear to Alan Boon, undated.
26. McAleer, *Passion's Fortune,* 97.
27. McAleer, *Passion's Fortune,* 97.
28. Ibid. 4; Haddon and Pearson, *Fabulous at Fifty,* 214-5.
29. McAleer, *Passion's Fortune,* 141.
30. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/006, Iain Macdonald, 'The Pacific Paradise Called New Zealand', *New Zealand Herald*, 2 Jan. 1974.
31. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/011, Correspondence from Jean Blyth to Alan Boon, 11 Sep. 1967.
32. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/011, Correspondence from Jean Blyth to Alan Boon, 6 Sep. 1967.

33. McAleer, *Passion's Fortune,* 229.
34. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/014, Correspondence from Elma Buller to Alan Boon, 13 Sep. 1977.
35. Ibid.
36. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/060, Correspondence from Elma Buller to Alan Boon, 14 Nov. 1956.
37. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/055, Correspondence from Diana McGillivray to Alan Boon, 20 Dec. 1966.
38. 'Our History', Mills & Boon website – www.millsandboon.co.uk/pages/our-history (accessed 15 Jan. 2024).
39. Essie Summers, *The Essie Summers Story* (Fíor House: Kindle version, 2023, revised version of memoir first published in 1974), 411.
40. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/086c, Correspondence from Essie Summers to Alan Boon, 10 Oct. 1959.
41. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/086e, Correspondence from Essie Summers to Alan Boon, 20 Feb. 1963.
42. McAleer, *Passion's Fortune,* 104.
43. Ibid.
44. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/022, Correspondence from Ethel Connell to Alan Boon, 23 Feb. 1968.
45. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, MB/AB/1/008b, Correspondence from Joan Blair to Alan Boon, 3 Jun. 1957.
46. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/010, Correspondence from Jay Blakeney to Alan Boon, 9 Apr. 1962.
47. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/010, Correspondence from Jay Blakeney to Alan Boon, 4 Jul. 1961.
48. Cook, *We Followed Our Stars,* 88-9.
49. Ibid., 147.
50. Ibid., 183.
51. R. Pope and S. Leonardi, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (3 Jan. 2008) from https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/70841 (accessed 19 Jan. 2024).
52. Ibid.
53. Haddon and Pearson, *Fabulous at* Fifty, 38-48.
54. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/10, Correspondence from Jay Blakeney to Alan Boon, undated biography.
55. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/10, Correspondence from Jay Blakeney to Alan Boon, 3 Dec. 1961.
56. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/10, Correspondence from Jay Blakeney to Alan Boon, 9 Apr. 1951.
57. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/10, Correspondence from Jay Blakeney to Alan Boon, 1 May 1961.
58. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/10, Correspondence from Jay Blakeney to Alan Boon, 23 Sep. 1959.
59. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/10, Correspondence from Jay Blakeney to Alan Boon, 18 Apr. 1960.
60. Cited in McAleer, *Passion's Fortune*, 7.
61. BBC documentary: *Man Alive Special: Oh God, Nigel, I Can't Stand It Any More…* (aired 5 Aug. 1970).
62. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/92; McAleer, *Passion's Fortune,* 127.
63. She was not alone. Romantic suspense author, Anne Worboys refers to 'Remembering back to the "out of context" interviews some of our prizewinning members have suffered in the past', cited in Haddon & Pearson, *Fabulous at* Fifty, 62.
64. Molly Parkin, *Radio Times*, 30 Jul. 1970, 51.
65. Ann Barr Snitow, 'Mass market romance: pornography for women is different', in Ann Barr Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson, eds, *Desire: The politics of sexuality,* (London: Virago, 1984), 260.
66. E. M. Hull, *The Sheik* (Los Angeles, CA: Enhanced Media Publishing, 2017; original publication, 1919).
67. Ibid., 34-5.
68. MERL, Mills & Boon Archive, file MB/AB/1/92, Correspondence from Violet Winspear to Alan Boon, undated.
69. Dale Spender, *There's Always Been a Woman's Movement This Century* (London: Pandora, 1983), cited in Dixon, 187.
70. Dixon, *The Romance Fiction of Mills & Boon,* X.

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JANET VAUGHAN: A NON-FEMINIST FIGHTER FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS?

Sheena Evans

Independent scholar and biographer[1]

INTRODUCTION: WHO WAS JANET VAUGHAN?

Janet Vaughan, who lived for almost the whole twentieth century (1899-1993), was many things. First, a doctor: the sick always had priority with her. Next, a medical researcher, who became a leading specialist in haematology in the 1930s and in the effects of radiation on bone after the Second World War. Third, a social reformer, who believed in state provision for medicine (including preventive medicine) and within that, the provision of adequate housing, sanitation and open recreational space. Fourth, an educational reformer, particularly as regards medical study and training. Crucially, her motivation in choosing medicine as a career was twofold: biological studies fascinated her and a medical qualification would give her the knowledge and status to argue effectively for social reform.

Fig. 1: Portrait of Dame Janet Vaughan by Claude Rogers, 1957. Copyright: Crispin Rogers, Courtesy of the Principal and Fellows of Somerville College Oxford.

Vaughan always denied being a 'feminist'. She did not spell out what she meant by that word, but it did (during her lifetime) call up, for many, an image of an abrasive, aggressive activist who might lose more friends than she gained, especially among men. Her public attitude was that, if women wanted equal rights and opportunities, they should contribute equally with men in the workplace. Her actions, however, frequently belied or modified that stance. As second cousin and friend of Virginia Woolf, she owned first editions of all Woolf's books, including *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*, which she had helped to inspire. Her mother, a former friend of Woolf and the model for Sally Seton in *Mrs Dalloway*, was a frustrated writer and lover of the bohemian and the artistic, who passed on those tastes to her daughter whilst also making her aware of how her own ambitions had, often in subtle ways, been balked. The evidence of Vaughan's own life reveals a far more nuanced position than her public utterances.

That life began in the all-male world of the public school, where her father was a highly regarded headmaster – first at Giggleswick in Yorkshire, then Wellington: a stately pile in Berkshire with close links to the royal family. Will Vaughan's last post was at Rugby, taken up when Vaughan herself was twenty-one and starting on her last year at the all-female Somerville College Oxford. Educated at home by governesses until the age of fifteen and then at boarding school, there was never any science on her curriculum. Her father, at first, opposed her wish to study medicine and her mother was privately unhappy about it. But Vaughan inherited both decisiveness and a strong will from her father, who did fund her higher education once she had, after much cramming, achieved entry to Oxford. The public-school world of her youth was no bad preparation for the all-male environments she would encounter during her career.

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

As a woman making her way in medicine, research and academic teaching, Vaughan encountered plenty of obstacles and adopted various strategies for removing or, more often, circumventing them. The first was to aim high, work hard and refuse to be defeated by setbacks. Having decided to start at Oxford in the 1918-19 academic year, she crammed for nearly six months in order to pass the entrance exams at the third attempt; she went to Somerville in January 1919. Arriving with little or no science, she graduated with first class honours in physiology in 1922 and, spurning advice to train at the all-female London School of Medicine for Women, gained not only a place, but an entrance scholarship to the most academic of the London medical schools—University College Hospital (UCH).[2] Her brother remarked in letters on her habit of, to

Fig. 2: Janet Vaughan as a student, early 1920s. Courtesy of James Park.

his mind, overwork; she confirmed its continuance when writing to Vanessa Bell in 1938 that 'professional women seem to have to do twice as much work as the average man to be recognised as worthy of existence'.[3]

In 1931 she failed to get the permanent post she expected, that of assistant pathologist at UCH, because she was a woman.[4] In response, she continued to build her reputation through prestigious published research, started to write on haematology for the leading medical journal *The Lancet* and published an acclaimed book, *The Anaemias*, in 1934. When in that same year she failed, as a woman, to get renewal of a research scholarship won in 1931, she used her contacts to help gain continuing funding via the Royal College of Physicians and a different, recently established scholarship.[5] It was, after all, easier for women to gain research funding from such bodies, including increasingly the Medical Research Council (MRC), than it was to gain salaried permanent posts. Eventually the respect gained through her publications led to an appointment at the new British Postgraduate Medical School in 1935, where Vaughan was, by late 1936, a senior lecturer in pathology with an international reputation. Such success was egregious at a time when pathology was not always recognised as a specialism and when very few women were appointed to teaching posts in mixed-sex medical schools, especially in London.

Vaughan owed this achievement to hard work, her ability to network effectively and a capacity to find influential male mentors. A number of female contemporaries benefited from the willingness of some leading male scientists to admit them to their labs. These included the following: crystallographer and future Nobel prize-winner Dorothy Hodgkin (mentored by John Desmond Bernal at Cambridge); the eminent nutritionist Harriette Chick (whose director was Charles J Martin at the Lister Institute) and the biochemist Marjory Stephenson, one of the first two women elected Fellows of the Royal Society in 1945 (and who worked in the department of Frederick Gowland Hopkins of Cambridge). Vaughan's mentors included, most importantly, the leading pathologist and bone specialist Hubert Turnbull (London Hospital's Bernhard Baron Research Institute) and the American haematologist and Nobel prize-winner, George Minot (with whom she had a fifteen-year professional correspondence after spending a year in his lab on a Rockefeller travelling scholarship in 1929-30).[6] Unlike those mentioned above, neither of these men were noted as favouring women. Both were won over by Vaughan's ability, hard work and enthusiasm.

It is worth adding that Vaughan took steps to ensure that, whilst usually in a minority of one or two women in any room during her professional life, she could not be ignored. She made the most of her height (5 foot 8 and a half inches according to her wartime identity document) and strong physical presence; she always wore makeup and dressed well, including in striking and elegant evening clothes when appropriate. Her expertise in her own field meant that fellow professionals listened to her and on a public platform, her love of poetry gave her, on occasion, mastery of the dramatic phrase.

Women doctors were largely excluded from traditional medical societies and networks, but Vaughan built and maintained alternative systems—through parties, dinner parties and a voluminous correspondence with colleagues in this country and abroad. In play here was her genuine passion for medical research, the expertise that soon made her someone who others turned to for advice, her respect for the work of able colleagues and her habit of mentoring the younger ones (who were of course mostly male at this time)—plus her modesty about her own achievements. She was careful to avoid any appearance of threatening male self-esteem, while earning respect by showing both decisive leadership qualities and an unshakeable academic integrity. She also, where committees were involved, volunteered as scribe rather than chair, thus obtaining what was usually the most influential role while appearing unthreatening – a strategy most apparent in the 1939 committee, which established the blood transfusion service for London.[7] All this (combined with a lively personality, ready sense of humour and wide knowledge of literary and visual culture) made her a popular colleague.[8]

She knew, too, the value of supportive female friends and colleagues, starting from the example of successful women in her own family, including her maternal aunt Katherine Furse, head of the combined Red Cross and St John's VADs (partly trained nurses, primarily supporting the armed forces during the First World War) and the first head of the Women's Royal Naval Service with the rank of

rear-admiral. Lettice Fisher, wife of Vaughan's godfather Herbert, was an academic, suffragette and social reformer, whose example influenced her greatly. Her cousin Amabel Strachey, married to the architect Clough Williams Ellis, always pursued her own career as a writer. Virginia Woolf was a confidant, especially during the time from 1926 to 1939 when Vaughan lived in Bloomsbury. To these she added successful contemporaries like the maternal and child health specialist Cicely Williams (who had been a contemporary at Somerville), the cell biologist Honor Fell (of the Strangeways Laboratory near Cambridge) and the neuropathologist Dorothy Russell, whom she worked alongside in Turnbull's lab at the London Hospital. Her friendships with artists like Vanessa Bell, Nina Hamnet and the sculptor Dora Gordine, broadcasting pioneers Hilda Matheson and Maisie Somerville and journalists, such as Evelyn Irons (another Somerville contemporary), gave her knowledge of the treatment of women in other professions.

She also made shrewd and well-informed career choices. Women were effectively excluded from senior consultant posts in major hospitals. Vaughan chose instead the less prestigious career of pathologist and ,within that, the still unofficial specialism of haematology, in which she first made her mark through testing the 'cure' for pernicious anaemia, which was developed in the United States in the 1920s. Internationally eminent by the mid-1930s, her published work led to her membership of the Royal College of Physicians in 1933 and election as its seventh female Fellow in 1939. After the Second World War she saw and took the opportunity to research the effects of radiation on bone, when knowledge in that field was in its infancy.[9]

In fact, wherever she could, Vaughan seized the opportunities offered by serendipity. Her family background helped her to gain entry to pedigree-conscious Boston, USA, society in 1929-30 when working in Minot's Thorndyke Laboratory there. Her conversion to socialism as a medical student enabled her to join new left-wing networks, such as the Socialist Medical Association, founded in 1930, in which women were welcome. Both this and her prominence in the Spanish Medical Aid movement (from 1936-9) extended her access to female as well as male support networks. Her strong physique helped her to work the long hours she put in and to undertake the physically demanding aspects of pathology, including extensive autopsies, as well as sawing up bones to study the bone marrow. She was fortunate in meeting and falling in love with a man from a different class and background, with an intelligence, work ethic and independence of mind compatible with her own. David Gourlay, whom she married in 1930, had no difficulty in agreeing that Vaughan should keep her maiden name for professional purposes and each respected the demands of the other's career.[10]

Vaughan could (and did) bend and subvert established rules and conventions when necessary. The first major test of this came in 1932 when she was pregnant with her first child, Mary.[11] At a time when marriage bars were in force in many employment sectors, including local authorities and teaching, the medical profession was unusually liberal in its (at least theoretical) espousal of equal pay and conditions for men and women. Still, maternity leave was almost unheard of—even for doctors and researchers, though some continued to work before and after giving birth. Vaughan must have known, however, that Maisie Somerville had won maternity leave from the BBC, on a discretionary basis, in 1929; and her strategy for gaining it (in her own case) was to apply a month or so before the baby was due, imply that this pregnancy was an unfortunate mistake and assume, rightly, that there would be no paid leave.[12] Influential men vouched for the quality of her work and she was able to take five months off without pay, during which, of course, she continued to work on her own priority projects.

She was careful, in a profession that was predominantly rightward-leaning, to avoid any public declaration of her political beliefs; but her actions placed her on the left. In the 1930s she was active in the Campaign against Malnutrition, which aimed to publicise the facts about the cost of an adequate diet by comparison with the (inadequate) incomes of the poor. When the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, she chaired her local Spanish Medical Aid Committee, in Holborn and St Pancras, and joined the national committee in spring 1937.[13] Socialists and Communists were prominent in these committees and in the Socialist Medical Association but, as so many other doctors supported these causes, Vaughan's career, especially at the new and liberal-minded postgraduate school, was not in danger. Furthermore, the networks she

Fig. 3: Janet Vaughan with baby Mary in 1932. Copyright: Ramsey and Muspratt, Courtesy of James Park.

was part of enabled her to enhance her public standing considerably in the war years from 1939 to 1945, when the tide of medical and public opinion shifted to favour state provision of universally accessible health and welfare services.

Vaughan consciously learnt from her non-medical experiences, in terms of how to manage committees, publicity and volunteers, and also in her next career choice. After the fascist victory in Spain in early 1939, she gave refuge to (and learnt from) the head of the Barcelona blood transfusion service, Duran Jorda. During the Munich crisis of September 1938, she had experimented for the first time with collecting and storing blood; and from that time the Army was planning its own service with the Royal College of Physicians. There were no plans for civilians until Vaughan took the initiative in April 1939, with a group of London pathologists who met in her flat. By September, the service for London was in place, with Vaughan heading one of the four depots serving the capital. This provided the model for the regional service, which was in place from autumn 1940; thus ensuring the coordinated arrangements that proved so vitally important during the war and the establishment of the National Blood Transfusion Service thereafter.[14]

Thanks to this particular move, she lost her cutting-edge position in haematological research during the war years, though she never stopped teaching and researching. She made gains however, in terms of organisational and practical medical skills, and moved into public roles of national importance: the planning of reforms to medical education; as a founder trustee of the Nuffield Foundation (from 1943, where she acquired a major role in funding medical, scientific and social research—both nationally and internationaly); as the first woman ever elected to the Royal College of Physicians Council (from 1943-6); as one of a team of three sent to India in 1944 to advise on future health services there and finally, as a member of the Royal Commission on Equal Pay (from 1944-6). Accordingly, it was not surprising that she was chosen to be Principal of Somerville College Oxford in 1945. She had indeed won, through medicine, the public platform on which she had set her sights as a teenager.

Vaughan and her family had to accept personal costs along the way, including braving the censure of those who disapproved of married women who chose to have a career as well as children. The children remembered their early childhood in Bloomsbury as unconventional in some ways, but generally happy. Vaughan could afford to employ a nursery maid and a cook/housekeeper and her arrangements were comparable with those of friends, such as Vanessa Bell. A colleague at the London Hospital, however, who had married one of her Somerville friends and with whom she collaborated on research from 1931-5, disapproved of her continuing to work after the birth of her children. She maintained her friendship with his wife, but never saw them socially as a couple after the mid-1930s.[15] During the war years, the demands on her time meant that her children, living in the family's country home in the Surrey Hills until the end of 1944, saw little of her apart from snatched weekends and an annual one or two-week holiday. Gourlay was a temporary civil servant working in Scotland and Northern Ireland, so could also come only rarely to be with them. Again, her children's experience was not very different from that in many other families and was possibly preferable to being sent to stay with friends in the United States or Canada. Tongues wagged later however (against Vaughan as mother rather than Gourlay as father), especially when Cilla, as an adult, developed severe mental illness.

HOW DID SHE HELP OTHER WOMEN?

By the time she became Principal of Somerville, Vaughan was uniquely equipped by her own experience to advocate and defend equal rights for women, and to mentor them as they made career choices. She was always careful to disown that word 'feminism', maintaining that they must succeed on the same terms as men; but also realised only too well that they were operating under multiple handicaps. 'The same terms' must include, even if not stated as such, as much levelling up of the field for women as could be managed.

She had started on this course very early, not only leading by example but supporting the women around her and making sure that their contributions were recognised. Thus, she departed from the usual male practice of publishing under initials, rather than a first name or names. She always used a first name and ensured that her female collaborators did the same. This could be defended as avoiding confusion, but also helped to advertise the contribution of female researchers when they were still very few in number. The fact that the practice did not become universal was highlighted in a book chapter for which she was lead writer in 1973. Very unusually, she used gendered pronouns in referring to team leaders named in published work. This meant that of 309 published papers cited, women could be identified as contributors to at least 85; far more than if taking account only of those giving first names.[16]

In the 1930s, Vaughan was one of the few medical researchers to name, in published articles, the (usually female) graduate chemists who contributed to research projects. She also looked after their interests by commending their work and urging pay rises whenever appropriate.[17] And she always recognised and respected the expertise of the (mainly female) nurses, almoners, secretaries and others—including volunteers – a characteristic that both raised their self-esteem and earned the loyal support and affection of many.[18]

Her actions as head of the Slough Blood Transfusion Depot which, at the height of its wartime activity involved over a hundred people (most of them volunteers) are very revealing. At the beginning, in September 1939, twelve of the depot's roughly twenty-one paid staff, including two of the doctors, were female. By December 1943 there were five doctors, including one working half time; three graduate chemists supported by a former volunteer who was trained and then promoted to do all the blood grouping work; one senior and seven supporting technicians; between nine and twelve VADs, two secretaries and one driver/telephonist. Of these thirty-one point five staff, only the senior technician was male.[19]

Women no doubt played an increasing part at other depots, for which the staffing records are not so complete;

Fig. 4: Slough blood transfusion depot office at work, 1942. Courtesy of Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS. 13145.

but at Slough they contributed more to research. At least four female doctors participated in one or more research projects during their time there, and three of these produced or contributed to nine published and at least one unpublished paper (such papers do not always survive on the files). Three female BScs were named in five published and two unpublished papers. Two of those trained up as technicians were named in one published paper and a female social worker, engaged for a particular project, in another. The record of the other depots does not compare with this. Vaughan's interest in enabling staff at all levels to improve their qualifications and experience is clear; and she also encouraged women to return after maternity leave and to work part time in order to fit in domestic responsibilities. As vice chair and then chair of the new Oxford Regional Hospital Board from 1947 to 1951, she continued this practice by appointing married women as part-time doctors and nurses.

Vaughan never forgot her objective of speaking out, as a doctor, for social justice.[20] She was well aware of the obstacles faced by women from poorer backgrounds than her own. As a medical student, she had delivered babies in the slums behind Euston station, often in rooms with no furniture and only newspaper in which to wrap the baby. One of her 'odd jobs' after graduating was filling in for a doctor at a clinic in North Kensington, set up to advise married women on contraception. The clients, who had often undergone multiple pregnancies, were mostly too poor to bring up more than one or two children able to lead healthy lives.[21] And Vaughan's anaemia outpatients in the 1920s and 1930s were mostly women suffering the effects of a poor diet caused by poverty.

She not only worked to end such conditions through the Campaign against Malnutrition in the 1930s, but went on to use her fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) to speak out, joining the 'Younger Fellows Club' there to expand her network of like-minded doctors (nearly all of whom were male) and join with them in advocating change.[22] In December 1940 she became the first woman to speak in Comitia, the RCP's assembly of fellows, when she argued that public health and preventive medicine (soon summarised as 'social medicine') were more important than the examining, research or consultant practice which the College had previously prioritised. She and her allies ensured that the remit of a committee set up to plan for future health services included these aspects; and she was a member of both the main committee and its sub-committee for social and preventive medicine.

Thanks to these activities, Vaughan was, from 1943, the first female member of the RCP Council, or governing body. Her wider network of reformist colleagues ensured that she was also, from 1942, the only female member of the government's Interdepartmental (Goodenough) Committee on Medical Schools. In the RCP, she was an important ally of the President, Lord Moran, in securing fellows' support for the NHS Bill in 1946 and then the Act in 1948.[23] The Goodenough Committee secured an increase in the number of women recruited to the medical profession and the inclusion of social medicine in the preferred curriculum for trainee doctors. For many years she also represented the RCP at the Royal College of Nursing, and exercised an important behind-the-scenes influence there, both on the training curriculum and on industrial nursing provision (closely linked to the 'social medicine' agenda).

When the Nuffield Foundation set up its fellowship schemes for overseas graduates to come and study in the UK, Vaughan used the extensive network of contacts she had acquired in India, on her visit in late 1944, to help design the scheme and ensured that married fellows

were soon accompanied by their wives and then their young families.[24] At Oxford, too, she argued that overseas graduates should be accompanied by their wives so that these women could understand the context of their husbands' studies, and where possible improve their own attainments, as well as providing emotional support. During her time as Principal, Somerville greatly increased the number of overseas graduates studying there and built one of the first 'graduate houses' in Oxford for them, as well as UK graduate students. And in 1960 she was one of a university group which recommended (successfully) that, as well as funding colleges to make better provision for single graduates, the university should build flats for 200 married couples.[25] After an enjoyable week in Karachi in 1961 at an international conference, she noted in disappointment, in a letter written during the flight home, that 'far more than in India the women are still not part of working life.'[26]

In 1944-6 Vaughan served on the Royal Commission on Equal Pay, which, unusually, comprised four women and four men in addition to the chair (a male judge). She threw herself into the task with characteristic thoroughness, clashing with the male economist on the group in consequence. She narrowly missed persuading the majority to conclude that equal pay was justified in the private and public sectors and drafted a Memorandum of Dissent presenting the arguments for this, signed also by two of the other female members. Its cogency and clarity were praised by the *Financial Times* and, in 1947, by the Standing Joint Committee of Working Women's Organisations and the TUC Women's Advisory Committee, meeting at a conference in Westminster.[27]

In 1954, at the end of a year's service on a Treasury-led committee concerning the economic and financial problems of old age, she wrote a reservation to the final report, arguing for the restoration of pension age parity, which had, for technical rather than evidential reasons, been changed to sixty-five (for men) and sixty in 1940. Despite the incontrovertible fact that women generally lived longer than men, this was not a popular suggestion, except with the Medical Women's Federation: there was still parity in the medical profession. Only the *News Chronicle* supported Vaughan at the time, saying: 'Which of our … political parties is going to have the courage … of the lone woman member, Dr Janet Vaughan? Speaking … as one of the few really logical feminists … she says that if women want the same working conditions … they must wait as long … for their pensions.' In March 1955, *The Times* would also acknowledge the strength of her argument.[28]

As Principal of Somerville, Vaughan led by example and encouraged mentorship of undergraduates by eminent old Somervillians. Furthermore, she used this and her own extensive networks to help female graduates choose and make a start on their careers. Able students from the new state grammar schools were made welcome and Vaughan was ready to help smooth their path financially at times.[29] Her interventions, through advice on where to apply and also the references she gave for those making job applications (sometimes through discreet private notes to those she knew in the institutions concerned), were often crucial in advancing Somervillians' careers. Many undergraduates remembered her guidance with gratitude and her mentoring went on after she retired—both for old Somervillians and other young women in public roles. Amongst the advice she gave was to 'always wear pan-stick makeup', so that the men could not take advantage on days when one felt 'off-colour' and to dress to impress, for similar reasons. She still guided people through the career choices they could make and the rigorous questions they might face at job interviews. Furthermore, when once they obtained senior or 'national' positions, she advised how important it would be, for example, to 'always have plans on the drawing board' in case an unexpected pot of money became available.[30]

Vaughan's demand for effort and excellence from women in the workplace extended to her attitude at Somerville, where her quest was always for quality. Under her leadership, the college, which already had the reputation of being the most intellectually demanding of the five Oxford women's colleges, went from strength to strength. So far as possible she recruited dons who were not only able, but had flair and what she called 'style' – people the young could relate to and regard as role models. In the case of the crystallographer Dorothy Hodgkin and the philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe, Vaughan recognised their outstanding ability (as well as approving of their combining career with family, which she also regarded as setting a good example to the young) and took material steps not only to retain them as dons, but to assist them in their research. She constantly impressed on students that they could open all doors by hard work and determination as well as ability. Her profession, as well as her former bohemian life in Bloomsbury, meant that she was unshockable where sexual matters were concerned, whilst mindful also of the reputation of the college. As social attitudes changed, Somerville was always the first of the women's colleges to relax rules about male visitors and curfew times; and Vaughan tried, through a sympathetic GP, to ensure that advice on contraception was available to all.[31]

In addition to her college and university responsibilities, Vaughan entered a new research area, investigating the effects of radiation on bone, in 1947. After the first year she was funded on an annual basis by the Medical Research Council (MRC), starting from scratch with a small team of young graduates who mostly changed year on year and, like her, were learning by trial and error. She built on her wartime experience by quietly, without any fanfare, employing almost exclusively women and giving them maternity leave and part-time arrangements—to help them juggle work and domestic responsibilities. By the mid-1950s her lab had an international reputation and, in 1957, the MRC decided to adopt it as an official Research Unit (with 3-yearly funding and stable employment arrangements for the permanent staff). In 1959 the MRC Secretary noted that the 'peculiar' arrangement 'in which four out of the six scientific staff are mothers with young children' was working very well, with most of the work being extremely interesting and some of particular promise.[32] At least twenty female scientists and technicians worked in Vaughan's team during the twenty years for which she led it. Most continued in worthwhile, and sometimes distinguished, scientific careers in the UK

and around the world. In an article she published in 1965, she cited over 100 papers, of which more than one in five were by herself or her team; and in a book chapter written on plutonium in 1973, all except one (a haematologist) of the twelve British women contributing to a total of twenty-eight of the papers cited had been in her research unit or its successor in Oxford.[33] Since Dorothy Hodgkin adopted a similar policy, Somerville became known as the main female college in which to do science, with numbers of undergraduates and graduates in those subjects increasing accordingly.

For most of her time at Oxford, as in other contexts before, Vaughan took care to avoid overt championing of women. This comes across on the Goodenough Committee, where she was able to leave the task of publicly arguing that all London medical schools should (in future) admit women, to effective advocates among her male colleagues. This behaviour becomes even clearer years later, In a case where it had been agreed to co-opt a female colleague onto the medical faculty board at Oxford, Vaughan asked a male member to second (or even propose the co-option) since she did not want this to look like 'girls hanging together'.[34] It was a great relief when (after the Robbins Report of 1963, which urged the expansion of higher education, including in science and technology and numbers of women) she could speak out more boldly in giving evidence to the Franks Commission, which prepared Oxford's response.

In her written evidence to the Commission, Vaughan said that the quickest and cheapest way to increase the number of women at Oxford would be for some of the men's colleges to take women and reduce the number of men. In oral evidence, she said her science tutors would welcome common entry arrangements for men and women and that an increase in the number of women in higher education would benefit society. When questioned further on this, she cited two 'non-feminist' colleagues, recently involved in marking both arts and science degree papers, who had been shocked by the poor calibre of many male students (for whom the threshold standard of entry was much lower). Taking five hundred more women and losing five hundred men, Vaughan said, would not be a loss to society. In relation to the high workload of women tutors, she suggested that one way of meeting their needs, given that many were now married with children, would be to provide crèche facilities, such as Somerville already shared with another women's college. Somerville would also willingly double the number of graduate students it admitted (with the side-effect of increasing the pool of potential female tutors).[35] All of her points were taken on board in the final Franks recommendations.

In 1963, Vaughan faced a double crisis in her personal life: losing her husband and chief emotional support, David Gourlay and facing the complete breakdown of her younger daughter, Cilla, who had always been unstable, but who became psychotic that autumn.[36] From that time on, Cilla was Vaughan's chief priority. She visited her daily, when in hospital, and made sure there was always someone responsible on hand when she was living at home. This meant that she effectively retired from lab work on leaving the Somerville post in 1967, concentrating instead on books and major articles; but still managing to achieve an enormous amount. Indeed, work and her scientific colleagues and friends were clearly significant solace. In her mentoring, she was able to draw on the worst of her own experiences when advising others. One old Somervillian, who started teaching in a different college in the 1970s, told her that the family doctor thought her success as an academic must undermine her depressive husband's self-esteem. Vaughan replied that a psychiatrist had blamed her for Cilla's illness: there was no clear answer to the questions raised by such attacks, but one needed to reckon (and by implication somehow deal) with that kind of reaction. The younger woman felt strengthened and reassured by this understanding and fellow-feeling.[37]

CONCLUSION

Vaughan was not unique in the issues she faced, or the strategies she used to deal with them. Virtually all are reflected in a recent book by Kate Zernike about women scientists and their struggles with the academic establishment in the United States during the twentieth century.[38] She does appear practically unique, however, in the sheer range of her activities in the professional and the public spheres, and her clear-sightedness, from an early age, about the obstacles confronting her: from entrenched social attitudes and professional barriers through to conscious and unconscious bias. Her experience of the restrictions on female undergraduates in the Oxford of 1919-22 could, in part, explain this early degree of insight. She made it her business (from the way she dressed to the pioneering published work produced at such speed, and the influential people recruited in her support) to impress and to be impossible to ignore. At the same time, she made and used every opportunity she could to encourage and support young people in general, but in particular, she emboldened other women to surmount obstacles, persevere and, above all, to enjoy their careers.

That point about enjoyment is one key to her success. The pioneering American geneticist Barbara McClintock, writing about women in science in 1976, said:

> As for women, God help them. Their rewards must depend upon pleasurable mental activities overpowering cultural patterns of put-down. Successful competition with men is just out of the question … even when the woman is intellectually superior to most of her colleagues. In short, if you can't have fun stay out of the laboratory!'[39]

One of Vaughan's favourite phrases regarding her work was 'What fun we had!' and those in her lab found it pleasurable to work with her, just as those in Somerville and in the wartime blood depot felt swept up in a great, inspiring and enjoyable enterprise.

Vaughan's actions show that she was indeed both a declared 'non-feminist' and a fighter for women's rights. She was also, however, a fighter for social justice in society at large and around the world. This, in turn, points to a further nuance in her personal stance and beliefs. Her upbringing in various public schools, with compulsory chapel every Sunday as well as parents who

were convinced Christians, gave her a very thorough knowledge of the Bible, including the assertion that in Christ 'there is neither male nor female' (nor master nor slave, nor Jew nor Roman).[40] In other words, people should be respected and treated as individuals, regardless of sex or other characteristics: a more radical position than feminism as such.

As late as 1986 a correspondent, recalling a conversation with her, wrote: 'We must gain respect by doing the job well … I dislike being a "madam chairman" or a "chairperson". We are all men and part of mankind.'[41] But Vaughan's attitude as a woman is indicated by her response when Polly Toynbee, interviewing her in 1983 for the BBC programme 'Women of Our Century', asked how she wished to be remembered. She replied: 'As a scientist; but a scientist with a family'.[42] One could not imagine a man saying that.

Notes

1. The basis for this article is provided by the author's biography of Janet Vaughan: *Bloomsbury, Belsen, Oxford: Janet Vaughan, Medical Pioneer* (Chester: University of Chester Press, 2024).
2. She shared the entrance scholarship with Philip D'Arcy Hart (usually called, more briefly, Philip Hart), whose political sympathies always chimed with her own.
3. King's College Cambridge Modern Archives, CHA 1/641, VBMV 21, Vaughan to Vanessa Bell.
4. Harvard Medical Library Collection (hereafter HMLC), Minot: GA55, Box 3, f.38-39, Minot to Vaughan, 17 Nov. and 11 Dec. 1931.
5. This was a Leverhulme scholarship, overseen by a committee of the Royal College of Physicians. It enabled her to continue her research when denied further funding through the Beit Memorial Trust.
6. George Minot, head of the Thorndyke Laboratory in Boston, USA, shared a 1934 Nobel Prize for work leading to an effective treatment for pernicious anaemia.
7. Wellcome Collection, Vaughan papers, GC 186/1, note of meeting on 5 Apr. 1939.
8. Her references for scholarship and employment applications are all by men, and nearly all refer to her pleasing personality as well as her expertise.
9. The National Archives (hereafter TNA), FD 1/463, meetings on 10 May 1946 and 11 Oct. 1946 of an MRC sub-committee focussed on how to protect people from the effects of radiation.
10. Gourlay was the son of a carpenter and a gardener's daughter, a junior civil servant who had not been to university but was a conscientious objector during the First World War. He was joint founder of an idealistic travel agency in 1921, soon the agency of choice for Bloomsbury.
11. Her second daughter, Cilla, arrived in 1935.
12. Wellcome Collection, SA/BMF/A1/142, Vaughan letter to the Beit Memorial Trust, 4 Oct. 1932.
13. Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (hereafter MRCUW), TUC Archive, MSS 292/946/32/38, Vaughan letters 14 and 24 Jun. 1938.
14. The story of the wartime blood transfusion service is largely in TNA, MRC file series FD 1/5846 onwards.
15. Author's interview with the Hunters' daughter, Dr Elizabeth McLean, 18 Jan. 2007.
16. Janet Vaughan in collaboration with Betty Bleaney and David M Taylor, 'Distribution, excretion and effects of plutonium as a bone-seeker', in H C Hodge, J N Stannard and J B Hursh, eds, *Handbook of Experimental Pharmacology, New Series, 36, Uranium-Plutonium Transplutonic Elements* (New York, Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 1973), 349-450.
17. For example, see the case of a BSc at Hammersmith working on a Rockefeller-funded project researching jaundice: TNA, FD1/3194, Vaughan to MRC, 18 Nov. 1938.
18. This is most apparent in her papers making the case for 'social medicine' to pull together hospital and community services.
19. TNA, FD1/5859, Vaughan to MRC, 4, 6, 9 and 11 Sep. 1939; and total for 1943 calculated on basis of correspondence with MRC during that year. Staff numbers were constantly changing as individuals moved on and were replaced.
20. 'Jogging Along' (Vaughan's unpublished memoir), 14. (Copies are held by the Royal Society and Somerville College as well as by Mary Park and the author.)
21. Welcome Collection, NK 206/1-3, North Kensington Women's Welfare Centre Annual Reports 1924-8.
22. RCP MS 94, Formation of Younger Fellows Club, 1939-48.
23. RCP MS 4198-4205, College Annals, Comitia meetings, 16 May 1946 and 22 Mar. 1948.
24. Ronald W Clark, *A Biography of the Nuffield Foundation* (London: Longman, 1972), 25-26.
25. Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford Archives (hereafter OBLUA), HC 12/1/1-3.
26. James Park Papers, Vaughan to Mary Park, undated, written on flight home.
27. Trinity College Cambridge Archive, D H Robertson papers, B6/3, cutting from *Financial Times* dated 7 Nov. 1946; and MRCUW, MSS 119.1/4, Report of conference at Caxton Hall Westminster on 1 Feb. 1947 involving the Standing Joint Committee of Working Women's Organisations and the TUC Women's Advisory Committee. Whether the Memorandum was referred to by campaigners in later years is not currently known.
28. TNA, LAB 8/2170, cutting from *News Chronicle* dated 4 Dec. 1954; and TNA PIN 46/93, cutting from *The Times* dated 3 Mar. 1955.
29. In one case, for example, the rules were stretched so that the student could come a year early and so keep a vital state scholarship.
30. Joan Crouch, in Pauline Adams, ed, *Janet Maria Vaughan 1899-1993: A Memorial Tribute* (Oxford: Somerville College, 1993), 27; and interview with Anne Nelson, 12 Dec. 2006.
31. Evans, *Bloomsbury, Belsen, Oxford*, 245.
32. TNA, FD 23/696, file note by Harold Himsworth, 4 Feb. 1959.
33. Janet Vaughan, 'Non-uniformity of radiation dose in space with special reference to radiological protection', in *International Journal of Radiation Biology* (1965), 9(6), 513-43. And Vaughan, Bleaney and Taylor, 'Distribution, excretion and effects of plutonium as a bone-seeker', 349-450.

34. Wellcome Collection, W D Paton PP/WDP/B/1/46, Vaughan to Paton, 26 Jun. 1965.
35. OBLUA, HC 4/50/27, Franks Commission Oral Evidence.
36. Vaughan's mother suffered from depression and her brother Halford's career was blighted by increasingly severe mental illness.
37. Interview with Janet Howarth, 12 Jan. 2007.
38. Kate Zernike, *The Exceptions: Nancy Hopkins and the Fight for Women in Science* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2023).
39. *The Exceptions*, 175.
40. Letter of Paul to the Galatians, chapter 3 verse 28.
41. Wellcome Collection, GC 186/9, Glauert to Vaughan, 4 Sep. 1986.
42. Programme first broadcast on 3 Aug. 1984. Interview clip available at: https:/ /www.bbc.co.uk/archive/janet_vaughan/zhwht39 [accessed 14 Jun. 2023].

Women's History Notebooks 1994 - 2001: a Brief History

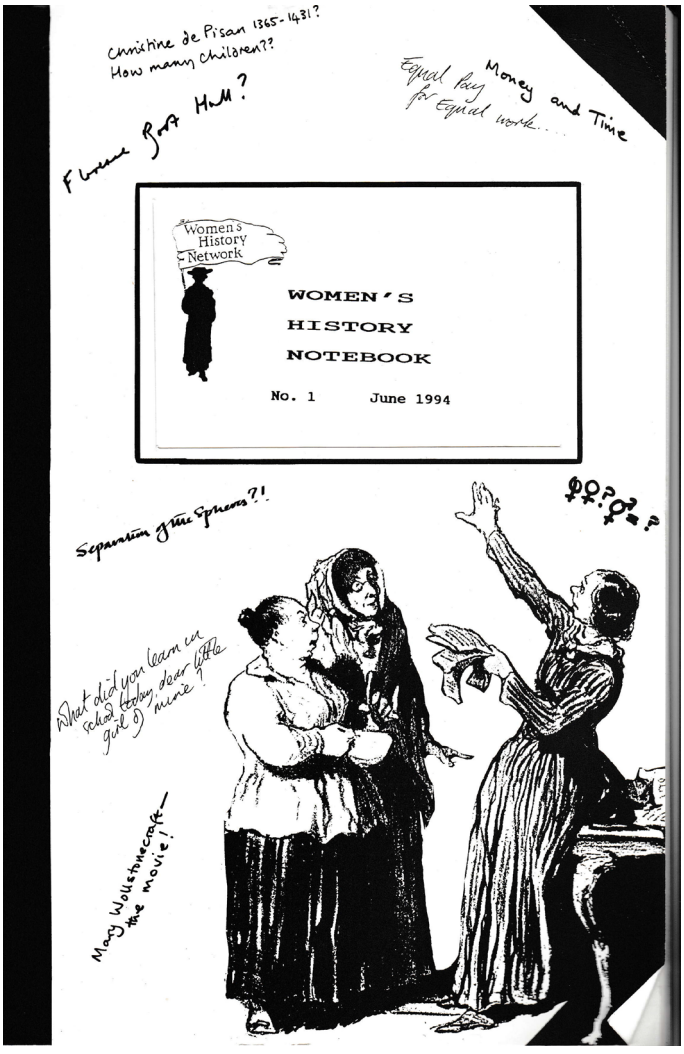
Penny Summerfield

It was a snowy day in December 1993. Shani D'Cruze and I were walking from Watermillock to Aira Force near Ullswater in the British Lake District. Shani was persuasively outlining the case for a new venture on the part of the Women's History Network. We should publish some sort of journal. We already had a Newsletter with announcements of, and reports on, meetings of the WHN steering committee, regional WHN activities and conferences. But wouldn't it be a good idea for the Network to provide a place where researchers could publish their ongoing work in women's history?

The context in the early 1990s was that relatively few established journals in the UK were keen to take articles on women's history. *History Workshop Journal*, with its sub-title 'a journal of socialist and feminist historians', was an honourable exception. The word feminist had been inserted in 1982, but the whole sub-title was removed with little explanation in 1995. The journal *Gender and History* started in 1989 and in 1992, June Purvis launched *Women's History Review*. However, it was only later that *WHR* developed close links with WHN. Shani and I felt that these welcome developments could be supplemented by a different kind of venture, geared particularly towards publishing the work-in-progress of post-graduate students and independent scholars who might find it hard to get their work into established journals. Furthermore, these discourses would be distributed as part of the annual subscription to all members of the Network.

Convinced, I agreed that we should put the idea to the next WHN Steering Committee, where it started to take practical shape, and Penny Tinkler joined Shani and me as founding editors. With the Committee, we agreed that we would referee submissions ourselves, calling on the expertise of other members of the Network as necessary. We proposed to work constructively with authors to achieve high quality outputs. We had all suffered from curt editorial responses and baffling readers' reports when we had submitted work to academic journals and we were determined not to inflict that particular form of torture on those who submitted their work to us.

We thought that, in addition to academic articles, we should elicit pieces about sources in women's history as well as discussions of its 'applications' in, for instance, schools, community groups and adult education. The title 'Notebooks' seemed to capture the spirit of dialogue that we had in mind: a place for new work that needed recording in lively, interesting ways, but might not be the author's last word on the matter. As for the cover, we passed a couple of sheets of paper round at the Steering Committee meeting, on which members jotted the sorts of things they might write in a notebook: 'Equal Pay for

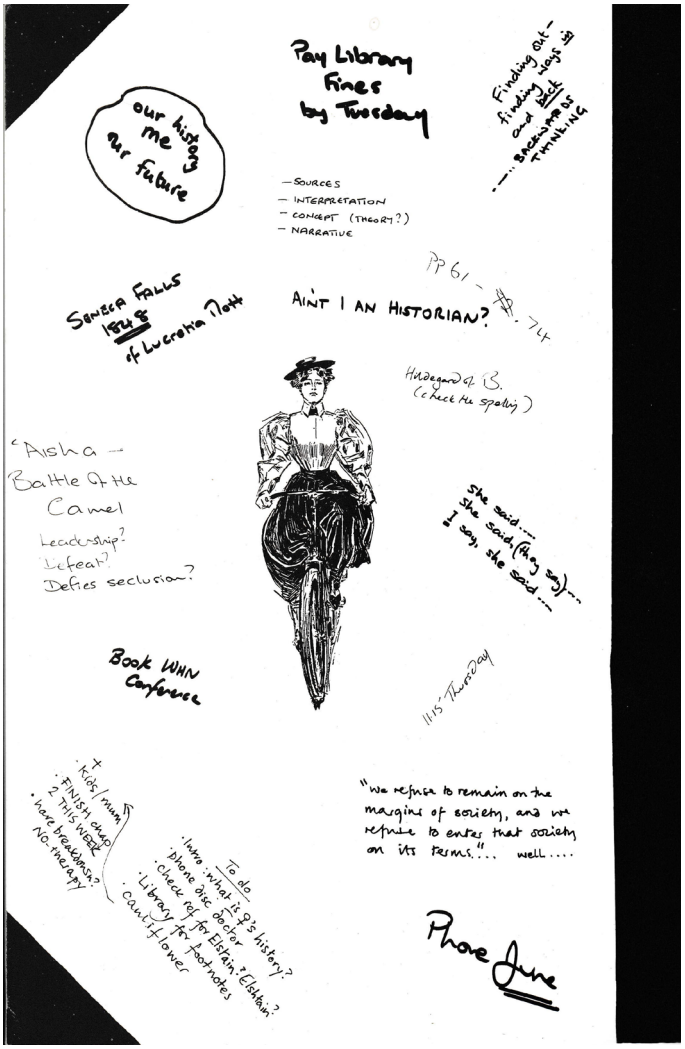


First edition of Women's History Notebooks - front cover

Equal Work', 'Separation of the Spheres?!', 'Christine de Pisan 1365-1431? How many children?', 'Book WHN Conference'. Shani found a wonderful cartoon by Honoré Daumier of a nineteenth-century woman, right arm raised, papers clutched in her left hand, addressing two enthralled working women about the position of women in French society, to offset these scribblings. We agreed that we should aim to produce two issues a year: summer and winter. With help from the Centre for Women's Studies at Lancaster University, where we could find volunteers prepared to stuff and address envelopes, the costs of printing, packaging and postage could be kept low.

Once the word got around, at the annual conference and through the Newsletter, submissions came in quite steadily. Sometimes we approached people who had given a particularly impressive paper at the conference - to encourage them to write it up and allow it to be considered for publication. 'Notes for Contributors' in each issue asked for short pieces, maximum length 3,000 words, written in an accessible style. These were pre-internet days, when email was in its infancy, so everything went to-and-fro by post. Only in Summer 1996 did we ask authors to submit accepted contributions on disc. Before that, the final version of each issue had to be typed out. In time the 'home' of *Notebooks* moved from Lancaster University to Manchester Metropolitan University, where Shani worked. While Shani and I sustained our initial commitment throughout the 1990s, as a core editorial team we were joined by other editors, depending on who was willing and available. Penny Tinkler stepped away in 1995 and we were joined by Alison Oram in 1997. Heloise Brown joined us in 2000, when Shani moved on to other things. Debbi Simonton came in 2001, on the tenth anniversary of the Network. At this point, after seven years of *Notebooks*, it was time for reflection. The Steering Committee decided that the Newsletter and *Notebooks* could usefully be combined in a new publication, *Women's History Magazine*, that would include a wider diversity of items, without losing sight of the work-in-progress by 'new' academics that we had originally prioritised.

I felt emotional looking through the fourteen issues of *Notebooks* that we produced between 1994 and 2001. Lots of articles were first publications based on PhD research, either while the author was still a student or soon after they had graduated. They speak to the launch of a number of careers. For example, Helen Rogers published an article about nineteenth-century needlewomen driven to prostitution by their poverty in the first issue of *Notebooks*, while she was a PhD student at York University. Helen became Reader in Nineteenth Century Studies at Liverpool John Moores University. Claire Langhamer, then a PhD student at University of Central Lancashire, contributed an article based on Manchester women's oral history accounts of their experiences of leisure and its meaning in their lives from 1920 to 1960, in volume 2.2. Claire is now Professor of Modern British History and Director of the Institute of Historical Research in London. Henrice Altink's article on representations of Jamaican slave motherhood from 1780 to 1828 was included in 6.2 when she was a research student at Hull University. Henrice is currently Professor of History at York University. There



First edition of Women's History Notebooks - back cover

are many more examples. About half of the research-based articles that we published were written by research students. However, established academics with books to their names also chose to publish their work-in-progress in *Notebooks*. These included Lynn Abrams (at the time a lecturer at Glasgow University) who contributed an article about women, housewifery and leisure in Weimar Germany to 3.1 and Anna Clark (then at University of North Carolina) who wrote about the models of same sex love that Anne Lister - later immortalised on television as 'Gentleman Jack' - found in classical literature, in 5.2. It feels good to have had this mix of papers in *Notebooks*, from more-, as well as less-experienced, women historians.

Notebooks also included a mix of genres. We had suggested that sources for women's history might be of interest, and we were not disappointed. We received articles offering careful guides, like Lesley Hall's 'Finding Women in the Archives', in 2.1, which introduced readers to sources for women's history in medical archives. In addition, we found that women historians wanted to write not just about the sources they found and used, but also about their relationship to these sources, including the emotional and ethical issues that they experienced. One example is Dorothy Sheridan's 'Getting on with Nella Last at the Barrow-in-Furness Red Cross Centre' in 5.1, in which she reflected on her twenty-three-year

long interaction with Nella Last's Mass Observation diary, and her changing feelings about this middle-aged, lower-middle-class woman who lived in Barrow-in-Furness from 1889 until 1968. Another is Katherine Storr's account, in 5.2, of basing a student dissertation on two diaries that a friend bought for her in a car boot sale, which were written by an anonymous woman. Katherine found, as she worked on tracing, deciphering and interpreting these diaries, that, despite trying to be detached, she was becoming increasingly involved with the diarist at a personal level. She was also wrestling with ethical problems raised by using diaries without either the diarist's permission or the possibility of obtaining it.

In the articles we received, there was a convergence between the theme of sources for women's history and that of 'applications' of women's history in the community, the third type of submission that we had originally suggested. Jo Stanley wrote, in 3.1, about her practice as an oral historian, which she saw in terms of close involvement with the communities in which she interviewed women. Jo wrote that she was inspired less by the idea of taking their words away for use in academia, and more by the idea that no-one should 'go to the grave without first telling their life story' (3.1, p. 23). The interactive dialogue between women historians and communities was also a theme of Cynthia Brown's article about doing 'living history' with immigrants in Leicester, and Annie Harris' and Maggie Hewitt's oral history work with Somali women refugees in East London - both in 3.2. Women's invisibility in the public record, in life as it is lived and the importance of historians' recuperation of women's lives and pasts, were strong themes running through *Notebooks*.

My memory of working as an editor is that the process was mostly fun and harmonious. But revisiting *Notebooks* reminds me that there were moments of controversy when the interpretation offered in an article was contested by another woman historian working in the same area. We introduced a section called 'Ideas and Exchanges' where challenges and differences could be explored. This happened quite gently and always constructively, of course. So, in 3.1, Angela John took Claire Tylee to task over her interpretation in 2.2 of the suffragist Elizabeth Robins' collection of political writings entitled 'Way Stations'. And Clare Midgley in 4.2 reflected incisively on women and nationalism in response to two papers in the same issue. These were by Joan Tumblety (on discourses of patriotism and maternity in the French Resistance press in World War Two) and Allison Wilke (on the representation of Palestinian women in the Arab and the English press in Mandate Palestine from 1929 to 1939), respectively.

I hope it is clear from the examples I have given that, in a mere fourteen issues, the sweep of papers published in *Notebooks* was wide, embracing many parts of the globe and different historical periods. Race, ethnicity, sexuality, social class, sexual violence, imperialism, pacifism, suffragism and radicalism were among the many themes that this new work in women's history (produced for the most part in the 1990s) addressed. In view of the diversity, originality and high quality of the material published, it is sad that the pre-digital origins of *Women's History Notebooks* mean that they are not available on-line, although it is hoped that this can be rectified. *Women's History Magazine* picked up the baton from 2001 to 2014, succeeded by *Women's History* and now *Women's History Today*. By the 2010s the academic landscape had changed. There was increasing emphasis on helping early-career historians, for all that their professional precarity was undiminished. Help included providing a variety of publishing opportunities as well as prizes for excellent post-graduate work, on the part of journals and historical associations. Work on women's and gender history had become far more mainstream than it was in 1994. I like to think that, inspired by that snowy walk that Shani and I took in 1993, *Women's History Notebooks* made a positive contribution to these developments.

Shani sadly passed away on 13 February 2021. Please see P. Summerfield et al., 'Remembering Shani D'Cruze (1954-2021)' in *Women's History Review*, Vol. 30 (3), 2021, pp. 351-53.

The Women's History Network Journal Index

Susan Cohen and Norena Shopland

This year the Women's History Network (WHN) is celebrating 30 years since the first edition of its 'journal' was published, as Women's History Notebooks in 1994. To celebrate this anniversary, we are pleased to be able to launch a new index which will, for the first time, provide readers and researchers with what we hope will be an efficient and valuable way of accessing the dozens of articles that have appeared since the journal went online in 2002. Between then and August 2024, 63 editions of the journal have been published containing a total of 275 articles, to say nothing of the feature items and the all-important book reviews, which are included.

Since 2002, the journal has appeared under three different titles, starting with *Women's History Magazine* (2002-2014), then *Women's History* (2015-2020) and currently *Women's History Today* (2021-). Three issues a year are published: Spring, Summer and Autumn/Winter, including special editions with a specific theme. The content of each is selected to appeal to anyone with a keen interest in women's and gender history and includes a variety of articles, book reviews and other material. For a detailed historic account of *Women's History Magazine*, see: 'Ten years on: reflections on the Women's History Magazine' by Deborah Simonton (2011). https://womenshistorynetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/whm_autumn_11_67.pdf

So how did this index project come about?

SUSAN

There were occasions over the decades when the committee raised the possibility of an index being

compiled, but it wasn't until Covid-19 hit us that the opportunity arose to make a start on this task. With some unexpected time on my hands I broached the subject with the journal's editorial team, who were keen for me to set the project in motion. So, I embarked on the laborious (but self-inflicted) task of collating articles by subject, title, geographical location, author and date of publication, creating an evergrowing spreadsheet. Although it was challenging, it was a real journey of discovery, as every journal revealed hidden gems of women's history and proved to be a beacon of light in the miserable months of lockdown. But my spreadsheet was just the beginning. It was only when Norena offered to apply her skills and work on the basic document that my list was transformed into the accessible resource that we are now able to launch.

NORENA

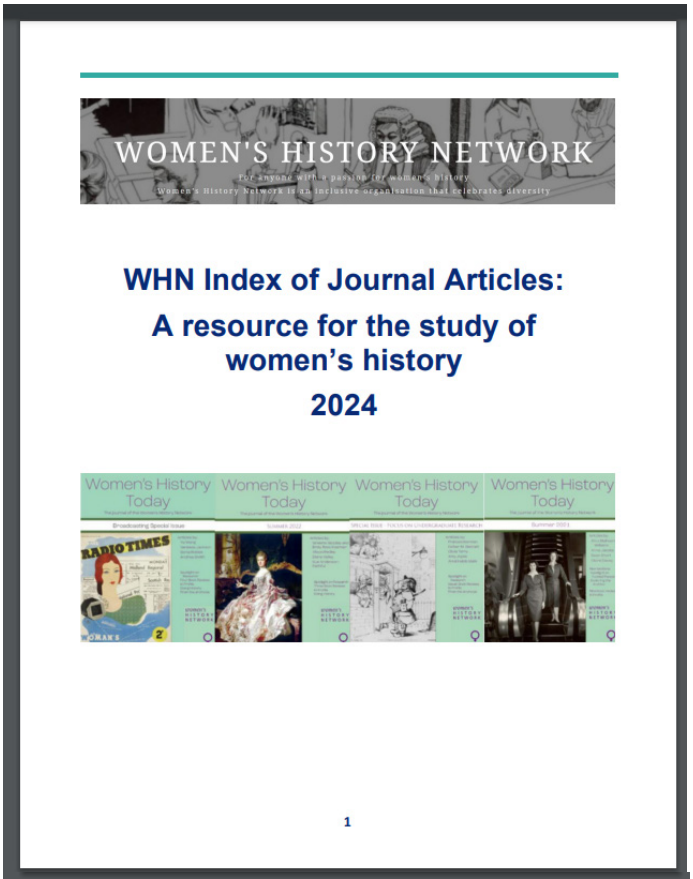
I adapted the list into general areas, i.e. nursing, LGBTQ+, wars and conflicts, disability and under author's names. Being subject driven, it means the index can act as a way of browsing through related areas of study, so enabling a dedicated reading list to be extracted. In addition, it offers possibilities to celebrate and raise awareness of extraordinary women from the past through multiple social media platforms and to enable this, we have made the index open access and available for free download from our website.

Our aims for the index are to:

- produce an informative and useful resource;
- provide listings that can be used and marketed during celebratory periods, such as Black History Month;
- enable our Social Media Officer, and external readers/researchers, to highlight dates and names at optimum times in the celebratory calendar;
- highlight areas which are underrepresented, such as disability;
- highlight women who are often missing from general history, particularly working-class women;
- provide reading lists to complement education courses;
- encourage a larger audience;
- raise awareness of author's other works published by the WHN.

The Open Access journals are fully searchable, as are our blogs and all other areas of the WHN website, so keyword/s searches can be performed. However, the difficulty with keyword/s searches is that researchers/readers may not be familiar with certain words or phrases and may, therefore, miss those articles not covered by their chosen search terms. The index rectifies this. In addition, the visibility of a list presents the reader with articles they may not have considered previously. Since June 2020, archive copies of journals produced by the WHN (issues that are more than 18 months old) have been freely available to the wider public *via* Open Access. To access these, please visit the 'Download Journal PDF' page.

This is only the beginning and it is intended to compile a similar list for the published blogs and to combine both lists to provide a comprehensive list of works published by the WHN. It is also hoped that, in due course, we can digitise and index the earlier Women's History Notebooks that kicked off the journal back in 1994. The index can be downloaded from https://womenshistorynetwork.org/whn-index-of-journal-articles


WOMEN'S HISTORY NETWORK

WHN Index of Journal Articles:

A resource for the study of women's history

2024

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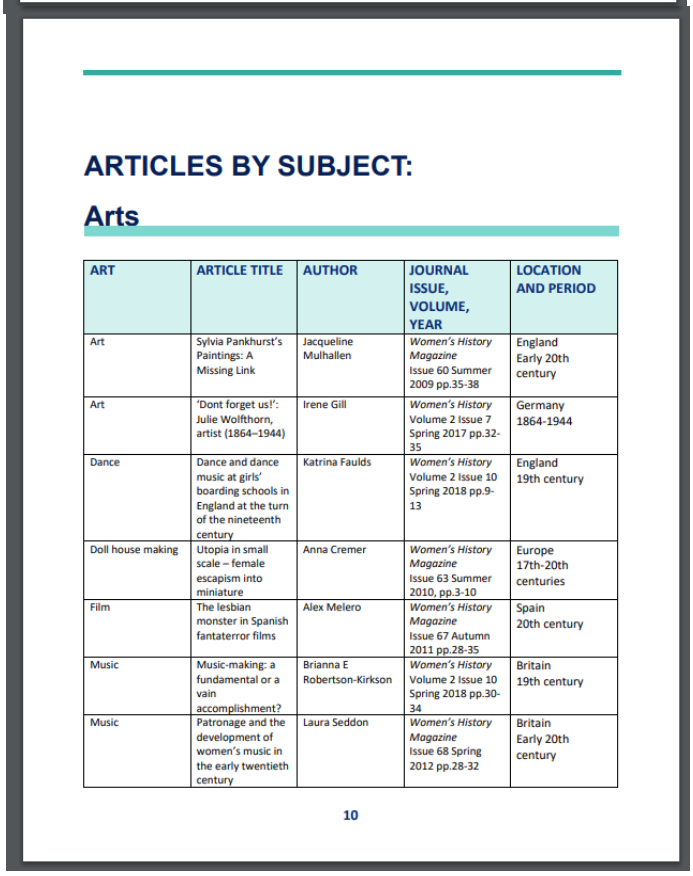

ARTICLES BY SUBJECT:

Arts

ART	ARTICLE TITLE	AUTHOR	JOURNAL ISSUE, VOLUME, YEAR	LOCATION AND PERIOD
Art	Sylvia Pankhurst's Paintings: A Missing Link	Jacqueline Mulhallen	*Women's History Magazine* Issue 60 Summer 2009 pp.35-38	England Early 20th century
Art	'Dont forget us!': Julie Wolfthorn, artist (1864–1944)	Irene Gill	*Women's History* Volume 2 Issue 7 Spring 2017 pp.32-35	Germany 1864-1944
Dance	Dance and dance music at girls' boarding schools in England at the turn of the nineteenth century	Katrina Faulds	*Women's History* Volume 2 Issue 10 Spring 2018 pp.9-13	England 19th century
Doll house making	Utopia in small scale – female escapism into miniature	Anna Cremer	*Women's History Magazine* Issue 63 Summer 2010, pp.3-10	Europe 17th-20th centuries
Film	The lesbian monster in Spanish fantaterror films	Alex Melero	*Women's History Magazine* Issue 67 Autumn 2011 pp.28-35	Spain 20th century
Music	Music-making: a fundamental or a vain accomplishment?	Brianna E Robertson-Kirkson	*Women's History* Volume 2 Issue 10 Spring 2018 pp.30-34	Britain 19th century
Music	Patronage and the development of women's music in the early twentieth century	Laura Seddon	*Women's History Magazine* Issue 68 Spring 2012 pp.28-32	Britain Early 20th century

10

Engineering women's history in the IET Archives

Anne Locker
Archivist

The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) is the largest professional engineering institution in Europe, with over 160,000 members in 150 countries. Like many learned societies in the UK, it has amassed collections of archives, books, artwork and the odd clock over its 150-plus years as a membership organisation. Most of its early special collections were donated by members, or acquired from their families, such as the personal papers of the telegraph pioneer Sir Francis Ronalds (SC MSS 001) or the correspondence and personal diaries of Michael Faraday (SC MSS 002). The IET Archives also hold some of the most important personal and corporate collections on the history of women in science, engineering and technology in the UK. These came to the IET from a different route.

In the early 1970s, the IET (then the IEE) was worried about preserving the records of the history of engineering in the UK. Organisations were changing and merging, and documents were being lost or destroyed. This led to a survey: the National Archive for Electrical Science and Technology, or NAEST. The IEE gathered information on electrical engineering archives across the country, identifying collections at risk and, where possible, asking organisations to donate them for posterity. The first collection to come to the IET was a series of records of power stations in the UK (NAEST 001).

The three NAEST collections I want to highlight here are: the personal papers of Dame Caroline Haslett

Fig. 1: Caroline Haslett photographed with her car, 1932
(IET Archives, NAEST 33/17/01/05.)

Fig. 2: Members and officers of the British Electricity Authority and Area Boards, January 1954 (IET Archives, NAEST 33/12/11).

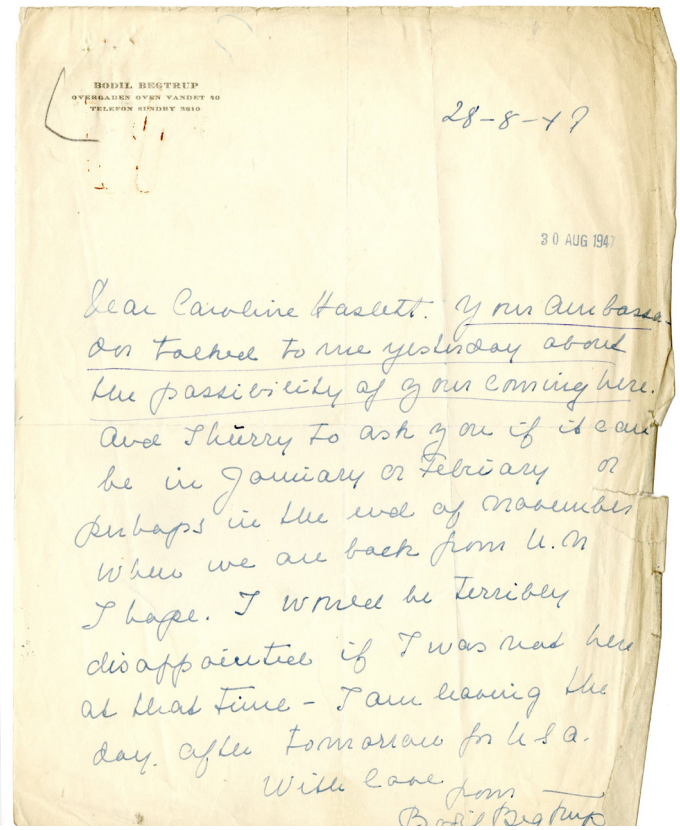
(NAEST 033); the archives of the Women's Engineering Society (NAEST 092) and the archives of the Electrical Association for Women (NAEST 093).

Papers of Dame Caroline Haslett (NAEST 033)

Dame Caroline Haslett was a key figure in electrical engineering in the UK: from the 1930s to the mid-1950s, she was often the only woman in the room when engineering policy was being discussed. She was the founder of the Electrical Association for Women (EAW). The first and, for many years, the only woman to be appointed to the British Electricity Authority [see Fig. 2] Dame Caroline was an engineering advisor to Ernest Bevin during the Second World War and the first President of the British Federation for Business and Professional Women. She was the only woman on the IEE post-war committee on post-war electrical installations, where she campaigned for safety features such as the three pin plug and shuttered socket. She knew everyone. Those she corresponded with ranged from Nancy Astor to Eleanor Roosevelt, taking in the American socialite and campaigner Margaret Thompson Biddle, the Australian aviator Maie Casey, and the actress and aviator Maysie Pender-Chalmers (later Maysie Forrest).

Haslett's personal archive was partly created and organised by past personal secretaries and came to the IET via her sister, Mrs Rosalind Messenger. It is heavily skewed towards her professional accomplishments: her work at the EAW; her links with the Women's Engineering Society and other professional organisations and her work with government. It includes copies of her many speeches and articles on women in engineering and business, along with photographs, reports and a large quantity of correspondence.

With the help of a series of chronically overworked



BODIL BEGTRUP
OVERGADEN OVEN VANDET 40
TELEFON SINDBY 3810

28-8-47

30 AUG 1947

Dear Caroline Haslett: Your cable arrived on Tuesday to me yesterday about the possibility of you coming here. And I hurry to ask you if it could be in January or February or perhaps in the end of November when we are back from U.S. I hope. I would be terribly disappointed if I was not here at that time - I am leaving the day after tomorrow for U.S.A.

With love from

Bodil Begtrup

Fig. 3: Letter from Bodil Begtrup to Caroline Haslett August 1947 (IET Archives NAEST 33/15/5A/17).

secretaries, Haslett was an inveterate networker and a prolific correspondent. Her network expanded beyond the UK, as seen in this letter from Bodil Begtrup. Begtrup was a Danish activist who chaired the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women; was a key figure in the creation of the first Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as becoming Denmark's first female ambassador in 1955 [Fig. 3]. Haslett's archive thus shows a woman at the heart of an international network of energetic and influential women, and is a rich source for the social and political history of this period.

Women's Engineering Society (NAEST 092)

The Women's Engineering Society was founded in 1919, and was the first professional organisation for women engineers in the world. Its archive came to the IET in 1986 and is a working collection which continues to be added to today. As Caroline Haslett was the first WES Secretary, the collection crosses over with NAEST 033 and includes correspondence that could have been added to Haslett's personal papers.

As well as membership records, correspondence, leaflets and photographs, the Women's Engineering Society has published a regular journal since 1919. This has been digitised and is available online, covering the period 1919-2014. It's an amazing source of information on women working in engineering and technology for nearly a century, including technical articles, news of members and photographs. It also includes personal accounts, such as Claudia Parsons' story of her trip across India by car in 1930 [Fig. 4]. An index of all the individuals mentioned in the journal has been compiled by the independent historian Nina Baker and is also available online, see links below.

Electrical Association for Women (NAEST 093)

Haslett co-founded the Electrical Association for Women in 1924 and was its Director until she retired due to ill health in the mid-1950s. The idea behind the EAW came from the electrical engineer Mabel Matthews, whose paper on the need for a new organisation to promote electricity in the home was published in the WES journal in 1924.

The EAW was a campaigning organisation whose slogan, 'Emancipation from Drudgery', encouraged women to use the new technology of domestic electricity to lighten the domestic load. It also acted as a consumer organisation, lobbying electricity supply companies and manufacturers to put women's needs at the centre of new developments. You can read more on the history of the EAW in Dr Eleanor Peters' WHN blog using the link below.

The EAW archive includes leaflets and reports on the rapid growth of domestic electricity supply in the UK and the opportunities this offered. Electricity was expensive compared to gas, and would have been restricted to the wealthiest households. EAW campaigns,

The Woman Engineer 39

WHAT NOT TO DO WHEN MOTORING ABROAD.

By CLAUDIA PARSONS.

There is so much written nowadays about motoring abroad, that I feel rather shy of setting down opinions derived from a very small amount of experience.

The leading Auto Clubs furnish all details and give every assistance to one who is about to take a car abroad, so I only intend to mention those matters that don't occur to the mind till the tour is in full swing, when at some not very convenient spot these matters may assume tremendous importance.

Generally speaking, the conditions that concern a car outside its native country are those of road surface and climate, and the difficulty of procuring spare parts if the car does not happen to be a "World's Favourite."

One should, therefore, look first and foremost to tyres and springs, while adjustable chains for the back wheels will probably prove invaluable.

In Morocco, I crossed virgin "scrub" in a Studebaker, a 1920 model. This is no reflection upon the roads, which were excellent, but one's interests sometimes lay in places where there were no roads, when the Studebaker took to the scrub-palm and low bushes like a duck to water, and proved the statement I have so often heard—"In England they don't know what a car can do!" Those obstacles we could not avoid we mounted, like a tank labouring upon its course, but the most willing engine cannot contend with bog, and our Studebaker floundered once, shortly after the rains, when we found ourselves in marshy ground.

There followed the usual programme of pushing dried palm leaves and sticks, and anything solid, under the back tyres to give a grip, but it is on account of just such a situation that I advocate carrying chains.

I may add that I never seem to have them myself, which negligence has found me tobogganning in a car down a grassy mountain track towards a yawning chasm! Brakes and steering wheel have not much influence on a sliding car. It has also found me scraping away snow, that froze as it fell, from under the wheels of a Hill-man in which I was trying to ascend a mountain pass when caught by a young blizzard.

Climatic conditions and unknown ground conspire towards these little jests, so that, mountain or valley, you never know when you will not encounter deep snow, deep swamp or deep sand, and even chains are not always the solution. Soft sand is peculiarly treacherous, while in Sweden I saw a car, with chains on all four wheels, toboggan in a sickening fashion, and with gathering speed, down a mountain road whose surface was frozen snow. As the roads have a severe camber with deep dykes on either side, the car seemed doomed, but the driver had the presence of mind to accelerate, so that the car came once more under its own power, and he was able to steer to the foot of the hill, which, happily, was a straight run.

In Northern Sweden, in the winter, the double line of grooves gauged out of the main roads by the sleigh runners, provide as much manœuvring for the motorist as the tram lines of Italy and Spain, that in places stand up some inches above the surface of the roads along which they run. Such obstacles can be treated systematically, but it is impossible to tackle with any system a continuous stretch of road with a broken under surface when driving the average British car whose springs are tuned for the English high road.

Nearly every car is adapted for the country in which it is built, and I am sure the high standard of British road surface is one of the reasons that British cars are not more extensively exported.

I had a chance of comparing a Delage and an English Talbot, from the springing point of view, on a tour last summer in France and Italy. On the good roads of the North of France I preferred driving the Talbot, which held the road admirably up to its maximum speed, while the Delage over 40 m.p.h. required a good deal more holding. But whereas the more flexible springing of the Delage was her enemy going at speed on the good roads, yet when we got up into the mountains and the rough roadways began, she was able to leap ahead unmindful of the surface. The Talbot, for its own sake and for the comfort of those who sat within, was obliged to reduce

A Talbot Scout Saloon.

Fig. 4: Claudia Parsons, 'What not to do when motoring abroad' from The Woman Engineer 1930 (IET Archives, NAEST 92/08).

such as the campaign for electricity in working class homes, highlighted the value of electricity supply for the poorest of urban and rural homes and underscored the massive difference it could make to women's lives it if were more accessible and affordable [Fig. 5].

The EAW also produced a journal and this year, as part of the EAW's centenary celebrations, it has also been digitised and is available for free online [see for example Fig. 6]. Although we do not yet have a full index of all authors and subjects, it is a fantastic source of information on individuals – such as the electrical engineer Margaret Partridge who wrote a series of technical articles for Girl Guides – and social and design history. Advertisements for electrical appliances, aimed at women in the home, show changing designs and changing attitudes to domestic roles.

Further records on the history of women in STEM

Alongside these collections, there are further sources in the IET Archives for the history of women in engineering. The IET's membership and corporate records include the names of the first women working in the electrical engineering profession: from Hertha Ayrton (elected in 1899) to Gertrude Entwisle (the first woman student member) and Elizabeth Laverick (the first woman Director). Other corporate collections in NAEST document the increasing number of women working in engineering companies, for example the photographic collections of STC (Standard Telephones and Cables).

Links and further resources

IET Archives online catalogue:
https://www.theiet.org/membership/library-and-archives/the-iet-archives/search-the-iet-archives

IET Archives blog: https://ietarchivesblog.org/

The Woman Engineer journal 1919-2014:
https://www.theiet.org/membership/library-and-archives/the-iet-archives/online-exhibitions/women-and-engineering/the-woman-engineer-journal

The Electrical Age journal 1926-1986:
https://www.theiet.org/membership/library-and-archives/the-iet-archives/online-exhibitions/women-and-engineering/the-electrical-age-journal

The Electrical Age front covers on Pinterest:
https://www.pinterest.co.uk/ietarchives/the-electrical-association-for-women/the-electrical-age-journal-front-covers-1959-1978/

STC images on Pinterest:
https://www.pinterest.co.uk/ietarchives/stc-ltd/

'Electric Dreams': celebrating the centenary of the Electrical Association for Women:
https://www.magnificentwomen.co.uk/electric-dreams.html

Dr Eleanor Peters' blog on the history of the EAW:
https://womenshistorynetwork.org/screwdrivers-scissors-and-pliers-the-electrical-association-for-women-in-interwar-scotland/

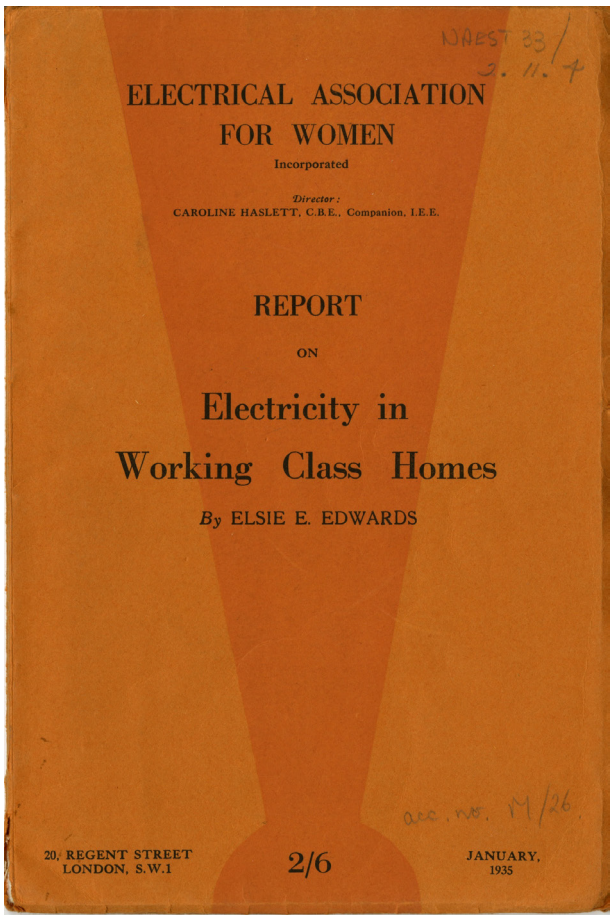


Fig 5: Elsie E Edwards, 'Electricity in Working Class Homes' 1935
(IET Archives, NAEST 93/01//1/07).

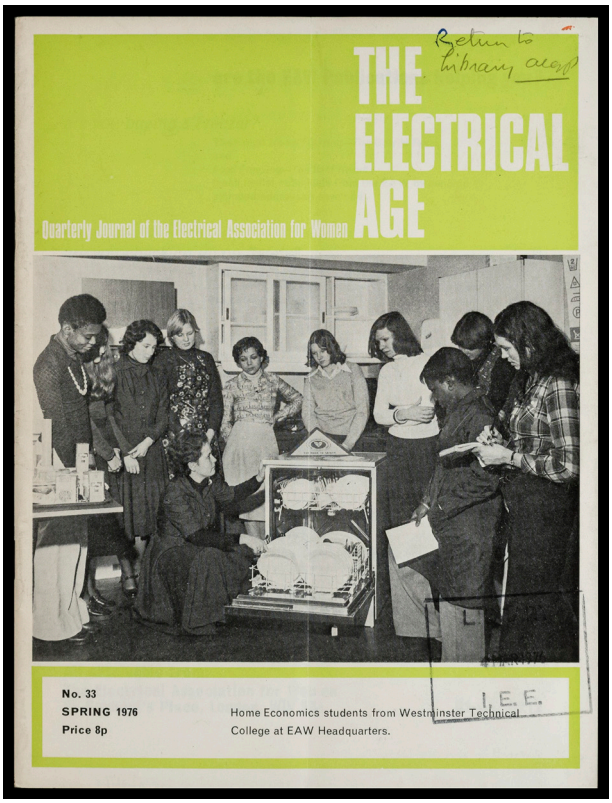


Fig. 6: Home Economics students from Westminster Technical College on a visit to EAQ HQ, from The Electrical Age 1976
(IET Archives, NAEST 93/01/08).

Spotlight on Funded Research: The Women of the Welfare Landscape project

Luca Csepely-Knorr

University of Liverpool School of Architecture

Since 2022, the *Women of the Welfare Landscape* research project, led by Professor Luca Csepely-Knorr and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), has been working to uncover the contribution of women to the creation, development and enhancement of landscapes in post-war Britain and beyond. The project centres its activities around the work and networks of Brenda Colvin (1897–1981) who, in 1951, was the first woman to be elected president of any leading built environment institute, when she accepted the role to lead the Institute of Landscape Architects [Fig. 1].

Colvin was born in Shimla, India, where her family had long-lasting connections. In her memoirs (kept in the archives of the Museum of English Rural Life at the University of Reading) she recalled her early education taking place on a houseboat; she described the surrounding

Fig. 1: Brenda Colvin ©MERL AR COL.

Fig. 2: Brenda Colvin's business card ©MERL AR COL.

landscapes and voiced her regret of not learning more about plants while she had the opportunity to spend time in India.[1] She then studied in England and France, after which she returned to India, living there during the First World War. After the War she returned to England and decided to 'take up some job after training.' Consequently, in 1918 she enrolled on the General Horticulture course at the female-only Swanley Horticultural College, changing to take Landscape Design within the first year. Colvin described the decision as one that 'promised to combine out-door life with Art in a form [she] could make a living in'.[2] The course was taught by another Swanley graduate, the successful designer and writer Madeline Agar (1874–1967). When Agar left Swanley in 1920, Colvin took the decision to also leave, taking up private tuition along with other Swanley students under Agar's direction. She started her professional career working for Agar as a clerk of works and site assistant at Wimbledon Common.

In 1922, at the age of 25, Colvin started her own independent garden design business [Fig. 2]. Her practice quickly grew, with commissions arriving through her network of family and friends, giving her a 'small but satisfying livelihood'.[3] Within a decade, she was exhibiting her designs at the Chelsea Flower Show and was one of the founding members of the Association of English Garden Designers, which later, in 1929, became the Institute of Landscape Architects (ILA). While her pre-Second World War work was mostly focused on private gardens, her vision for her profession was already much broader. In the 1930s, she sold her car and travelled to America with letters of recommendation from the architect and urban designer Thomas Adams (1871-1940), one of the early presidents of the ILA. Colvin's experience in America strengthened her understanding of the role of landscape architecture, which was to engage with the rapidly-changing world and large-scale planning projects—well beyond the scale of private gardens and public parks. Her post-war work showed her belief that the landscape architect was integral

to any project that dealt with questions concerning the landscape and countryside (whether it was industrial, infrastructural or corporate). Accordingly, Colvin wrote:

> We have seen a period when building and other new developments have been carried out almost without regard to their landscape appearance: when it was thought that any occasion to that aspect was of sentimental value only, a luxury which might or might not be applied when the project was complete. We have seen the results of such thinking, and we know that they reflect unhealthy social conditions … If the world is a stage, then landscape is the scenery … It is the setting for national and individual lives; and in so far as it is the result of human activities, it becomes a measure of underlying social structures.[4]

Beyond the landscape expressing the ideals of a society and the way a culture thinks about the welfare of its members, Colvin's approach was deeply concerned with the broader question of humanity's relationship to the landscape. In her pioneering book *Land and Landscape* (1948), she reminded her readers that, 'the control which modern man is able to exert over his environment is so great that we easily overlook the power of the environment over man … we seem easily to forget that man is just a part of the rest of nature'. She concluded that '[w]e have reached a stage where the control and conscious design of the landscape has become definitely a human responsibility. No longer can it be left to the hazards and chances of events. By refusing to acknowledge that responsibility we cannot evade it'.[5]

Fig. 3: The Women of the Welfare Landscape Travelling exhibition at the University of Lancaster ©Luca Csepely-Knorr.

ig. 4 Drakelow Power Station in the 1970s ©MERL AR COL.

Fig. 5: Drakelow Power Station in 2021 ©Luca Csepely-Knorr.

During the Second World War, Colvin was the first woman to start teaching landscape architecture to architecture and planning students in London; she taught at the Regent Street Polytechnic (today the University of Westminster) and also at the already well-known and highly respected Architectural Association based in Bedford Square. In 1948, she played a key role in the creation of the International Federation of Landscape Architects and in 1951, became the first woman president of the ILA. Her work not only defined the future of the Institute – and the profession – but also had a lasting impact on the education of landscape architects.

During her professional career, Colvin completed more than 600 design commissions of various scales, including: private gardens; public parks; New Town landscapes and large infrastructural designs like power stations and reservoirs. Although the focus of her praxis extended significantly in its scale after the Second World War, she never ceased to design gardens. Her own garden, Little Peacocks, and her final, unpublished book manuscript, entitled *The Constant Garden,* suggest her commitment to garden design. As her business partner Hal Moggridge wrote in her obituary, 'her creative energy was formidable' and 'her sparkling intellect led the creative thinking of all those committed to better landscape'.[6]

Drawing on Colvin's archive, the *Women of the Welfare Landscape* project, which is on-going, aims to reconstruct some of her professional and personal networks from, for example, her visitors book, her accounts books and her contact lists. Alongside these, other pertinent primary and secondary sources will be used. Through these investigations, we hope to be able

to uncover details of more women who worked with her. Beyond a greater understanding of her networks and collaborators, the project also aims to learn more about the impact of the landscapes Colvin designed. During the past two years, a series of public-facing events and activities have been delivered alongside project partners, including the Gardens Trust and the Museum of English Rural Life, Historic Environment Scotland and the National Trust. The aim here is to better understand the legacy of Colvin and her peers' contribution, and also to disseminate our findings to a wide audience.

A key part of the programme has been a travelling exhibition that has been installed in numerous venues including: the Library of East Kilbride (Scotland's first New Town, for which Colvin acted as landscape consultant); the Stanley Picker Gallery at Kingston University London; the University of Sheffield; the University of Lancaster; Manchester School of Architecture; Birmingham City University; the Museum of English Rural Life at the University of Reading and finally, in several National Trust properties. The latter has included the Quarry Bank Mill in Cheshire and the Buscott and Coleshill Estate in Oxfordshire, where the exhibition was complemented with materials from the Trust's own archive [Fig. 3]. The exhibition introduced the work of Colvin and eleven of her collaborators: landscape architects; writers; policy makers and campaigners, who played important roles in shaping the landscapes of the post-war British welfare state.

At every stop of the travelling exhibition, communal events were organised, with the aim of bringing the showcase closer to members of the public. Each common event was place-specific and focused on an aspect that was unique to that particular venue. For example, in Birmingham the work of trailblazing architect Mary Mitchell was celebrated, while in Quarry Bank Mill, the project worked with local primary schools to bring Colvin and landscape architecture (as well as the questions of climate and sustainability) to the children. An exhibition catalogue, capturing the rich visual materials of the exhibition, was published by the Modernist Society.[7]

A key part of the project has been the creation and expansion of an online, open-access archive on the HistoryPin website. By bringing together material from Colvin and her peers' dedicated archives (as well as other documents, archived and contemporary photos, films and other ephemera), this online collection helps to map and articulate the extraordinary scope and variety of the projects that these women worked on, such as the Drakelow Power station in Burton-upon-Trent [Figs. 4 & 5]. It is hoped that by including a wider variety of material—such as landscape architect Diana Armstrong Bell's photos of Mary Mitchell's Markfield play area in Tottenham, North London from the 1970s alongside current snapshots—a more nuanced legacy of landscapes can be documented, as they change and mature [Figs. 6 & 7]. This method of collating and curating a landscape architectural archive has not been tried before. Accordingly, by mapping sites and bringing together a range of materials that interest and engage a wide audience, it is hoped that the long-term care and preservation of post-war designed landscapes will be assured.

Email: womenofthewelfarelandscape@gmail.com
Web: https://www.virtual-lsa.uk/womenofthewelfarelandscape/
HistoryPin: https://www.historypin.org/en/women-of-the-welfare-landscape/
Instagram: @women.welfare.landscape
Twitter: @WomenWLandscape

Notes

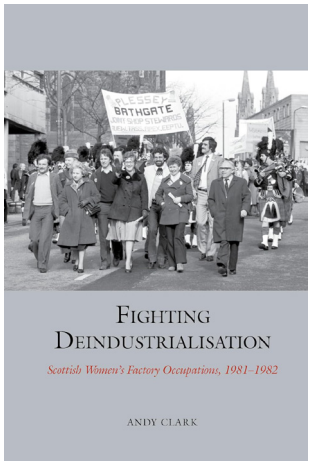
1. Museum of English Rural Life (hereafter MERL), Brenda Colvin Collection, handwritten memoir, AR COL B/3-4.
2. MERL, Brenda Colvin Collection: handwritten memoir, AR COL B/3-4.
3. MERL, Brenda Colvin Collection, Manuscript, 14 Jul. 1978, AR COL B/3-4.
4. Colvin writing for the Wartime Journal of the Institute of Landscape Architects.
5. Brenda Colvin, *Land and Landscape* (London: John Murray, 1948), 1, 5.
6. MERL, Brenda Colvin obituary by Hal Moggridge, AR COL B/3-4.
7. The catalogue is available from the Modernist Society: https://the-modernist.org/products/women-of-the-welfare-landscape

Fig. 6: Markfield Playground by Mary Mitchell in 1971
©Diana Armstrong Bell.

Fig. 7: Markfield Playground by Mary Mitchell in 2021
©Karen Fitzsimon.

Andy Clark, Fighting Deindustrialisation, Scottish Women's Factory Occupations, 1981-1982, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022. £24.99, ISBN 978-1-80207-712-4 (paperback), pp. 1 + 251.

Sue Bruley
Institute of Historical Research



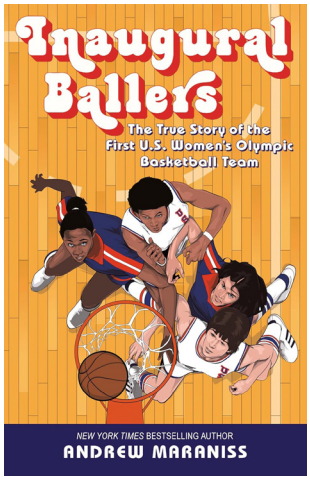
It is a pleasure to review a book based on women's working lives in late twentieth-century Britain. As far as women's labour history post 1945 is concerned, most attention has been directed at the Ford's strike of women sewing machinists in Dagenham, north London in 1968. It is especially welcome therefore, to see a work of this kind from Scotland. As the title indicates, the main focus of the book is deindustrialisation. This emerged in the 1970s when capital became more mobile and global, consequently moving plants more frequently in search of sites where profit margins would be maximised. This resulted in major dislocation and distress to local communities: unemployment, poverty, social problems and sense of 'loss'. The three factories concerned in this text were all in the West Lothian region. The process of industrial restructuring took off in the 1960s with the growth of new areas of manufacturing for consumer markets, helping to offset the decline in the industry staple of ship building. Companies benefitted from considerable assistance in the form of government grants and employee subsidies. At first it all looked very promising, but this changed in the 1970s. By the early 1980s, the new industries which seemed to hold such promise had become just as vulnerable to closure as the old staples, with 164,000 jobs lost in Scotland on 613 sites.

Chapter Two engages in a lengthy historiographical overview of deindustrialisation studies, which seems to be somewhat excessive. Chapter Three is devoted to why workers undertake collective action. This is interesting and informative, especially the understanding of collective action as a *process* rather than viewing occupations as isolated incidents. Chapter Four provides an overview of the Scottish economy and women's working lives. Emphasis is given to the move away from family-owned firms to multinational companies controlled from abroad, the woeful record of the labour movement in relation to women workers and the unofficial nature of women's activism. Andy Clark devotes the following three chapters to a detailed account of the factory occupations. He uses the factory militancy shown in Lee Jeans, Lovable (bras) and Plessey steel containers to illustrate worker resistance to closure, based on the notion of corporate greed and the fundamental injustice of closing viable factories in search of higher profit margins in cheaper locations. All three factories were foreign owned and very different in context and character but, when faced with closure in 1981-2, they all decided on occupation as the only viable tactic of opposition (following the example of the Upper Clyde shipbuilders in Glasgow in 1971). This decision was facilitated by the fact that the shop floor of all the sites was a female space of workers and supervisors who had bonded and developed solidarity and collective consciousness. All three factories managed to resist total closure for varying periods of time, albeit with a greatly reduced labour force, and by the end of the 1990s all the sites had closed for good. Clark conducted twenty six oral history interviews and also a great deal of archival research. It is fascinating to read directly from the women workers themselves with no attempt to modify the original local dialect. They have no interest in the menial assembly, but the women's enjoyment of workplace sociability is very clear.

There are a few problematic areas in this study. It is certainly the case that separate spheres ideology had been undermined by the 1980s and that Scottish women had always worked and were often breadwinners. It still remained the case, however, that industrial labour markets were segregated hierarchically by gender, as this text shows. The fact that women factory workers were regarded as inferior to men was due to the still-influential patriarchal ideology that for women's identity, work was secondary to home and family. The final part of the book is devoted to analysis and discussion. It is surprising that more use was not made of feminist approaches to oral history. No reference has been made to the classic text of Sherner Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (1991). Clark makes a valiant attempt to engage with the complex issue of collective memory, but the very lengthy descriptions of the masculine bias in popular culture at this time seem unnecessarily detailed. He does not make use of Penny Summerfield's important work, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives* (1998), which engages in depth with women workers and the production of memory. Leaving these issues aside, *Fighting Deindustrialisation* is a significant work of labour history shedding much light on women's industrial militancy in late twentieth-century Scotland, with relevance for the UK as a whole.

Andrew Maraniss, Inaugural Ballers: The True Story of the First US Women's Olympic Basketball Team, New York: Viking, 2022. $18.99, 9780593351246 (hardback), pp. 1 + 344.

Jodie Neville,
Manchester Metropolitan University



Andrew Maraniss' compelling narrative sheds light on the often-overlooked role of women in sports history. Maraniss skilfully intertwines the biographical journeys of key figures in US women's basketball with the broader socio-political landscape. Aimed at young readers aged 12 and above, the book provides a nuanced and contextualised understanding of the challenges experienced and the triumphs achieved by those involved. Photographs supplied by the media, athletics associations, universities and the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame are used throughout the book to bring the subject matter to life. The book begins in December 1891 and continues to the present-day, highlighting the legacy of the team and its impact.

Maraniss explores how sports interacted with political and legal developments, such as the women's liberation movement and the introduction of Title IX (pp. 19-23). By adopting a broadly chronological structure, evolving attitudes towards race and gender equality and the impact that these had on athletics are effectively highlighted. One particularly powerful example is that of Luisa Harris, a player who would eventually make the Olympic team, and her emergence from a world of 'brutally enforced segregation', which meant that she had never spoken to a white person before her arrival on campus at Delta State University (p. 118).

The book is made up of 26 short chapters. Each subdivision of the book tends to foreground one of three features: individual details, the political context or the chronicle of events. For example, in chapter 7, titled 'Head's Start', there is a biography of key player Pat Head, whose 'life had not been easy, but the hardships, she believed, had prepared her for this moment' (p. 43). On the other hand, in chapter 21, titled 'Woman's World', discrimination against female athletes through time is discussed, drawing attention to the political significance of the first US women's basketball team (p. 220). In chapter 25, 'Hooked on a Feeling', informs readers of the warm homecoming that players received following their Olympic success. These features are not discrete; an episode in the chronicle of events is often inextricable from its political context and biographies cannot be isolated from their circumstances. However, there is a broad tendency to alternate the prominence of these features, giving the book a dynamic and engaging appeal for young readers.

Drawing from a diverse range of sources, including archival material and historical accounts, Maraniss paints a comprehensive picture of both struggles and achievements. He illuminates the persistent challenges faced by women athletes, such as institutional bans on competitions and societal resistance to female participation in sports. The roles of coaching and administrative staff are also outlined, with the tenures of Cathy Rush and Sue Gunter exemplifying the work that went into building the team and their struggle to get support from uninterested male administrators (pp. 80-7; pp. 127-30).

The significance of support from parents, siblings and peers is a theme that runs through the book. The biography of Billie Jean Moore, the head coach of the team that would qualify for the 1976 Olympics in Montreal, is particularly deft and draws out the role of her relationship with her namesake father, who encouraged his daughter to play basketball at a time when women were not welcomed into competitive sporting environments (pp. 141-5).

Understandably, the book focuses on the history of women's basketball in the USA, but there is potential to expand on how the issues faced by the inaugural team apply to women in sport globally. The marginalisation of women in organised sports, as well as the disproportionate scrutiny they are often subjected to once permitted to participate, are not issues confined to the USA. There are many studies from around the world providing evidence of these pervasive phenomena. Maraniss does cite the example of 'femininity tests', whereby women had to have their sex confirmed by a gynaecologist at the 1966 European Track Championships, but there is an opportunity for a more nuanced geographical contextualisation that builds upon the themes of this book (p. 224).

There is useful detailing before the index, such as the roster for each of the Games covered, statistics on player performance at the 1976 Olympics, results, box scores, and medals, as well as a timeline of notable moments in US women's sports history (pp. 314- 28). However, the omission of a table of contents with section titles and page numbers at the beginning of the book makes it awkward to navigate. An absence of specific citations within the text hinders its utility for academic purposes, as readers cannot easily trace the origins of information to assess the reliability of sources. Although clearly well researched, this editorial choice also makes it difficult for points of interest to be pursued. There is a bibliography at the end of the book, containing a broad outline of primary and secondary sources, but there is no indication as to which section of the book the sources correspond.

Despite the shortcomings of the book for academic purposes, it is a valuable contribution to the popularisation of women's sports history. Maraniss has created an accessible and engaging narrative that will capture the interest of its intended young readers and introduce them to the broader interplay between sports, history and politics.

Mary Honeyball, Edith Summerskill: the Life and Times of a Pioneering Feminist Labour MP, London: Bloomsbury, 2022. £21.60, ISBN 978-1-350-25242-4 (hardback), pp. xiii + 259.

Paula Bartley
University of Warwick

Edith Summerskill: the Life and Times of a Pioneering Feminist Labour MP is a well-researched, well-structured, and innovative book. Mary Honeyball, former Labour MEP and skilled politician, has the right credentials to write a biography of this pioneering feminist. Certainly, the author uses her own experiences to bring this undervalued and remarkable woman to life. The result is a captivating exploration of one of Britain's more influential, yet ignored, political figures. *Edith Summerskill* has all the characteristics of a good historical biography: it is written in an accessible way and provides a substantiated, contextualised, and comprehensive profile of Summerskill.

Honeyball shows how Edith's early experiences shaped her political life. Born to a stay-at-home mother and a GP father, Edith was encouraged by both parents to pursue a medical career. On the surface, it was an idyllic family life, with both parents providing their daughter with loving support. However, her father was a serial philanderer, siring several children out of wedlock and expecting his wife to dole out maintenance payments. Edith witnessed these family dynamics and, according to Honeyball, this experience turned her into a feminist.

Edith became Dr Summerskill and started practising in the poorer areas of London. This exposed her to the healthcare strains of working-class people, the diseases of poverty, the lack of decent medical care and the struggle to survive. Honeyball speaks movingly about her heroine and how she witnessed, at first-hand, the links between ill health and poverty. Before the establishment of the National Health Service, women and children rarely visited their doctor due to the high costs of healthcare. All too aware of these issues, Summerskill charged a low fee, half of the usual sum. She also joined the Labour Party, conscious that her patients' poor health was associated with structural inequality.

One of the book's most compelling aspects is its examination of Summerskill's work for women's health. She was one of the first doctors to offer birth control advice: a brave decision given it was viewed with some distaste by the general public. More controversially, she supported legalised abortion – she had witnessed many deaths of women following botched attempts.

In 1938, Summerskill was elected as the Labour MP for Fulham West, remaining in Parliament until she retired in 1961. Undoubtedly, her medical experiences shaped her political practices: her commitment to improving nutrition, health, living conditions and disease prevention was a leitmotif throughout her career. One of her major concerns was tuberculosis, a disease that came from unpasteurised milk and which struck at the poorest. In 1939, 4,000 people died from it. Easily preventable, much harder to cure, Summerskill pushed hard for milk to be pasteurised. Eventually, in 1949 when she was Parliamentary Secretary at the Ministry of Food, she introduced mandatory pasteurisation.

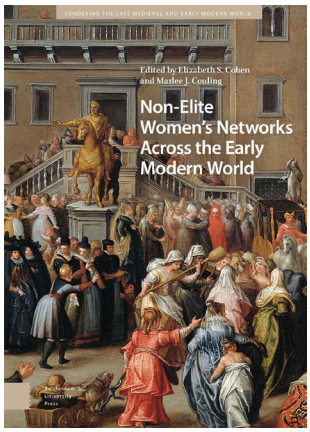
During the Second World War, she took over the Women's Home Defence (WHD), the female version of the Home Guard. Honeyball includes photographic evidence of Summerskill practising at a firing range (p. 146) – she was nicknamed Flossie Bang Bang. By 1943, there were 30,000 WHD members, fully committed to defending their country in case of invasion. In addition to pursuing a political career, she played a key role in the Eugenics Society (as did many socialists at this time); medical aid for the Spanish Civil War; was a founder member of the National Council for Civil Liberties and of the Socialist Medical Association (SMA).

In 1945, Labour won the election and set the country on a road to reform. It was then that the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, appointed Summerskill as Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food. Yet, Honeyball argues, Summerskill should have been awarded the Cabinet post of Minister of Health: she had a medical background, had strong links with the SMA and had promoted health issues all her working life. Instead, Aneurin Bevan was appointed. As Honeyball comments, Attlee obviously felt that appointing one woman – Ellen Wilkinson – to his Cabinet was enough. When Wilkinson died, it was expected that Summerskill might be promoted. She was not: Attlee presided over an all-male Cabinet.

Surprisingly, Honeyball insists that, unlike Summerskill and Rathbone, Ellen Wilkinson and the future Cabinet Minister Margaret Bondfield were not feminists. In my view, their records show otherwise. Wilkinson's behind-the-scenes advocacy of birth control, her weekly articles in the *Daily Mail* and her championing of unemployed women reflect a deep commitment to women's rights. Similarly, Margaret Bondfield fought hard for the rights of women. Nevertheless, Mary Honeyball's insightful analysis and engaging prose make this book essential reading for anyone interested in the history of women in politics and/or public health.

Elizabeth S. Cohen and Marlee J. Couling (eds), Non-Elite Women's Networks Across the Early Modern World, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023. £107, ISBN 978-9-46372-575-0 (hardback), pp. 1+257. 9789463725750

Julie Chamberlain
University of Leicester



This collection of ten essays, the 22nd volume in the 'Gendering the Late Medieval and Early Modern World' series, looks at the lives of women who are 'doubly invisible' by being non-elite or in marginalized positions in urban communities (p. 9). In the introduction, the editors discuss networks that, 'give value to patterns of social behaviour in which early modern people … made connections and exchanges with others in order to respond to trouble or to serve a larger goal' (p. 9). The discussions are organised geographically by dividing the chapters into three sections: Part I: Mediterranean Crossings; Part II: Local Networks in Europe and Part III: Body and Spirit in Colonial Spanish America. While this makes it easier for the reader to identify geographic areas of interest, different themes are discussed across the physical areas.

The idea of networks involving 'connections or exchanges with others' (p. 9) as stated in the introduction is not fully supported in the first essay, which looks at the life of an ambassador's wife Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who is viewed through her letters as a pioneering traveller in the Ottoman empire. Bernadette Andrea argues successfully that Montagu would not have gone out alone in society to baths and to harems. She finds various separate references to Montagu's British and eastern servants and concludes her travels were only possible because of 'a connected history across "the East/West divide"' (p. 40). However, although Montagu relied on her servants, Andrea finds no links or networking between the people who may have facilitated her travels, and who probably operated separately.

The networks of women who supported female victims of their husbands' violence is the focus of Marlee J. Couling's essay in Part II, which benefits greatly from her helpful definition of networks, 'the wide variety of relationships and patterns of sociability that women cultivated and utilized to survive and sometimes to thrive' (p. 121). Couling focuses on non-elite women's depositions at church courts, including the 1663 case of Cecily Bradley which took thirteen years, with forty-five deponents. Recognising the work of historians, including Bernard Capp (*When Gossips Meet: Women, Family and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England*, 2003), in examining gender roles in neighbourhood relations, Couling demonstrates how networks of female neighbours played an important role in curtailing violence, supporting litigation and vouching for women's good character. In Part III, Jacqueline Holler also examines the use of networks in colonial New Spain, 1550-1670, to combat male violence against women. She demonstrates how networks, often based on mother-daughter connections, or 'wall neighbours', offered physical support or tried magical means to stop assaults (p. 220).

Two essays in Part I focus on individual women. Elizabeth S. Cohen writes of Despina Basaraba, wife of a renegade French husband, who left Constantinople for Rome in 1598. As the prime evidence for Despina's networking to establish a new life comes from a court case alleging adultery with a papal steward, her networking was risky. Cristelle Baskins examines the escape of two kidnapped women from Algiers, where they had been married to Muslims in 1571. Their re-entry into Catholic life in Rome was mainly orchestrated by a bishop sent by the Pope; in both of these cases, the Catholic Church network seems the most effective in re-ordering the women's lives. Also in Part I, Shauna Huffaker examines the naming of Coptic and Muslim babies in sixteenth century Cairo, with the giving of non-religious, joyful, names to the majority of Coptic girls showing their families 'aspirations to live an assimilated lifestyle' (p. 58). She concludes that gendered naming practices would have circulated through women's social networks, although there is no evidence for this.

In the Venetian chapters in Part II, Saundra Weddle shows how sex workers in the sixteenth century 'exploited Venice's unique spatial syntax to serve their own needs' (p. 161). She effectively shows how they used Venice's water networks to move venues to identify high footfall, and used water-borne transport and cheap lodgings to find clients and stick together for safety. In the following chapter, Vanessa Tonelli explores the lives of singers and musicians, trained by the charitable Ospedali Maggiori. She argues that girls' esteem and careers depended on networks inside and outside the Ospedali (p. 165). Much of the networking consisted of requests to wealthy patrons.

In Part III, the account provided by Brianna Leavitt-Alcántara on the life of an abandoned wife who became a holy woman in Santiago de Guatemala, relies largely on a spiritual biography written after her death by her former confessor. Similarly, the chapter by Min Ji Kang in Part II, which examines the use of commensality to build alliances, uses the actions of fictional prostitutes in Spain and Rome who were created by male authors. Both seem weakened by the reliance on the male voice in the material.

This study is ambitious in its geographic coverage and use of sources. The chapters provide interesting and insightful stories about women, and will be useful for scholars interested in these locations. More chapters could have benefited from the author defining their idea of networks in their work. In many chapters the idea of networks working for a purpose, rather than being separate individual actions, is not apparent enough, possibly because the rich sources used just do not contain enough detail to make this clear.

BOOKS AVAILABLE FOR REVIEW: CALL FOR REVIEWERS

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

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

Alun Burge, *Minnie Pallister: The Voice of a Rebel* (Parthian Books, 2024)

Amy McElroy, *Women's Lives in the Tudor Age* (Pen & Sword, 2024)

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

Cristina S. Martinez, *Female Printmakers, Printsellers and Publishers in the Eighteenth Century: The Imprint of Women in Graphic Media, c. 1700-1830* (Cambridge University Press, 2024))

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

Elizabeth Block, *Beyond Vanity: The History and Power of Hairdressing* (MIT Press, 2024)

Filippo Forlani, Silvia Mas and Lukasz Zak (eds.), *Between Freedom and Submission: The Role of Women in the History of the Church* (Aschendorff Verlag GmbH & Co, 2024)

Graham Watson, *The Invention of Charlotte Brontë* (The History Press, 2024)

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)

Joni Buchanan, *Women of the Hebrides | Ban-eileanaich Innse Gall* (Acair Books, 2024)

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

Klara Naszkowska (ed.), *Early Women Psychoanalysts: History, Biography, and Contemporary Relevance (Routledge, 2024)*

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

Maggie Andrews, *Political Women: Fifteen Campaigns that Shaped Twenty-First Century Britain* (Pen & Sword, 2024)

Selina Gallo-Cruz, *Feminism, Violence and Nonviolence* (Edinburgh University Press, 2024)

Susanna Hoe, *The Isle of Wight: Women, History, Books and Places* (HOLO Books, 2024)

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

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

In Profile

Maggie Andrews, Emeritus Professor of Cultural History, University of Worcester

Tell us about your area of expertise?

I am a social and cultural historian of twentieth century British women, with a particular focus on housewives and domesticity. This has led me to explore organisations such as the WI Movement, domestic women's politics, broadcasting and the impact of the First and Second World Wars on women's domestic lives.

What motivated you to become an historian?

My early interest in history was sparked by my grandmother's stories of her life in the Second World War. Much later, as a mature student with children, I became enthralled by women's history. A wonderfully supportive lecturer — Ena Ainsworth — encouraged me to take an MA in History at Sussex University, which was the beginning of a career researching, teaching, writing and broadcasting in women's history.

What achievement are you most proud of?

One of my sons said my answer should be completing a doctorate with four young children, but I think I was as proud of being awarded a National Teaching Fellowship in 2016 or of the role I played as the historical consultant for the BBC Radio 4 drama, *Home Front* (2014-18).

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

At present I am researching the lives of twenty-five women who shaped the global home and wish I could bring some of them together, to discuss the impact of war on non-combatants. So, I would like dinner with women such as:

- Alice Dunbar-Nelson (1875-1935) an activist, writer and campaigner for African-American soldiers in the First World War.
- Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945) a German artist who became a fierce pacifist after her son died on the battlefield.
- Lady Trudie Denman (1884-1954) who led the Women's Institute Movement from 1917 and who became the Honorary Director of the Women's Land Army in 1938.
- Kalyani Bhattacharyee (1907-1983) an active member of the Indian independence movement who illuminated the suffering and deaths of women and children in the Bengal famine.
- Mabel Strickland (1899-1988) a newspaper proprietor on Malta, who helped keep up the morale of citizens during the intense bombing of the island.

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

As a student, I was inspired by reading a Virago Reprint of the Women's Co-operative Guild, *Maternity; letters from working-women* (G. Bell and Sons, Limited, 1916), which gave a voice to ordinary women and their heroic struggles as early twentieth-century mothers. More recently, I thought, Pat Thane and Tanya Evans', *Sinners? Scroungers? Saints? : unmarried motherhood in twentieth-century England* (Oxford University Press, 2012) was inspirational, as it is academically rigorous, an accessible read and politically relevant - as all women's history should be.

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

Remember, many people who care passionately about history do not study it formally. They read novels, books and biographies, listen to talks, radio programmes and watch films, visit heritage sites and undertake research – it is really important to create history they can engage with.

Report on the 2024 Women's History Network Annual Conference

Alexandra Hughes-Johnson

On 5 and 6 September 2024, the Women's History Network and the Bedford Centre for the History of Women and Gender were delighted to host WHN's first in-person conference since the Covid-19 pandemic. The 32nd Women's History Network Annual Conference was held at Royal Holloway University of London - who were celebrating 175 years of scholarship [Fig. 1]. The conference focused on the theme 'Curating the Female Self'. The topic had a broad focus and encouraged papers from a wide variety of perspectives to explore different approaches to agency, empowerment and identity, as well as concentrating scholarly attention on issues of intersectionality and context-specific identity formation. The conference welcomed scholars from various institutions and organisations from across the globe, with attendees traveling from within the UK, across Europe, from the Americas and from as far as Australia! WHN were also delighted to encourage PGRs, ECRs and Independent scholars to attend the conference by providing £1900 in bursaries to support travel, accommodation and registration fees. In all, seventy-four delegates attended.

The conference began on the evening of 5 September, with an imaginative and thought-provoking keynote from Professor Kate Cooper, who reflected on 'Curating the Constrained Self: Gender and the Problem of Agency in Ancient and Medieval Writing to and about Women'. Her address focused on the possibilities and pitfalls of exploring the experience of women and others living under constraint, and the role of fictive and fabulative techniques in allowing us to imagine their voices. Following the AGM the evening concluded with a conference dinner in the sensational Picture Gallery at Royal Holloway [Fig. 2].

The conference got into full swing on Friday 6 September, when, following breakfast, delegates were able to immerse themselves in a full day of parallel panels, where speakers examined the breadth and diversity of 'Curating the Female Self'. Papers ranged from exploring the curation of women as political actors and agents, the culture of curation through material culture, self-fashioning of professional and working women, as well as the representation of women in beauty, body, fashion and the home. On this day, delegates were also joined by Professor Margaretta Jolly and Pauline Rutter, who delivered two insightful addresses on the theme of 'Joys, Jitters and Jobs: Critical Perspectives on Curating Feminist Histories'. Their keynote reflected on varied experiences and different approaches to curatorial work: as academic advisors, curators, organisers, managers, editors, artists and engaged feminists. They took the delegates behind the scenes of two exhibitions: *Unfinished Business: The Fight for Women's Rights* exhibition (the British Library's landmark exhibition of 2020 that covered 200 years of UK activism) and *Lifting Us Up – Saluting Our Sisters* (a 2023 Brighton-based snapshot of the community organising of Black women of the Windrush era). The speakers' inspiring addresses celebrated the various ways that these stories of struggle could be framed, shaped, visited and newly shared. And they encouraged the audience to dig into challenges too – asking how we navigate the incitement to curate in today's visual and digital economies.

Fig. 1: Royal Holloway, University of London

Throughout the conference, delegates commented on how pleasant it was to have the opportunity to network in-person again and how impressed they were with the venue and organisation. Without doubt, conferences take a lot of administration and organisation to flow so smoothly. I would therefore, like to thank Susan Cohen and Emily Manktelow (as co-organisers of this year's conference) as well as the RHUL conference team, who supported us from the outset with the conference practicalities and requests. Thanks also to the student ambassadors, who helped throughout. Further gratitude must go to WHN Chair, Sarah Richardson and the University of Glasgow for hosting the booking site via Eventbrite. Also, Cat Crossley, owner of Clavis and Claustra, who generously donated a selction of sensational stationary. Most importantly, we would like to thank everyone who presented papers, chaired panels and attended the conference – we look forward to seeing you in 2025 for the next one!

Fig. 2: The Picture Gallery, Royal Holloway

Women's History Network AGM - Chair's Report

Sarah Richardson

This has again been a year dominated by administrative matters but the WHN has continued to be as active and innovative as usual.

The 2023 conference was again held online on the subject of 'Women and Migration' and was a successful event with many diverse speakers. We were delighted, though, to return in person this year for the first time since COVID-19 and I would like to thank the conference committee (Alex Hughes-Johnson, Susan Cohen and Emily Manktelow) for their tremendously hard work in organising such a successful event. The committee have decided to run alternate online and in person conferences to enable as many people as possible to attend and to speak.

We have continued with our other popular online activities including our successful online seminar programme and writing retreats. The committee continue to meet online, which is obviously a great saving for the network as there are no travel expenses.

I am hugely grateful for the commitment, hard work and goodwill of the WHN National Steering Committee who work tirelessly on our activities: publishing, running events, adjudicating prizes and much more! This year has seen another turnover of committee members and we have some vacancies. If people are interested in supporting the committee please do get in touch! There are some very rewarding positions open.

I would like to thank outgoing committee members: Rose Debenham, Samantha Hughes-Johnson, Urvi Khaitan, Hazel Perry and Katharina Perry. They have all done sterling work as you will see from some of the reports below.

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

coram better chances for children since 1739

Explore women's rare and intimate accounts in the Foundling Hospital Archive

Free online at archives.coram.org.uk

The children's charity Coram has digitised and transcribed 100,000 pages from its Foundling Hospital Archive. The Hospital was a residential home in London for children whose parents were unable to care for them. Starting in 1768, mothers had to petition the Hospital to admit their infants.

The digital archive contains more than 6,000 petition cases (over 35,000 pages), spanning 1768 to 1881. These unique records provide detailed and moving accounts of the women's circumstances, largely in their own words.

The digital archive also contains:

- The working lives of women
- Childcare
- Girls' education and apprenticeships
- Health, disability and childbirth
- Textile tokens and notes left by mothers for their children, 1741-1770

Made possible with Heritage Fund

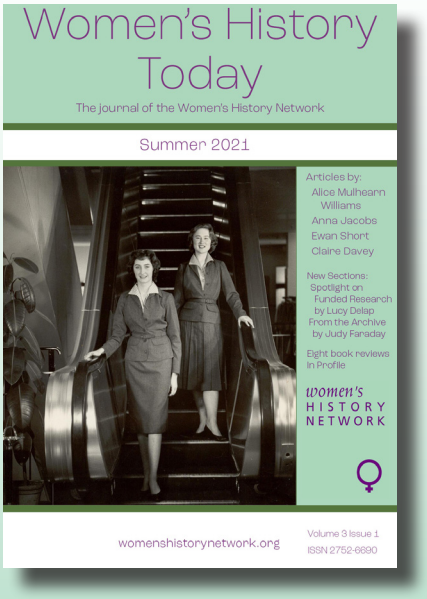
Uncover the untold stories of thousands of women and girls.

Housemaid Emma Bennett with her son John Feltham (Foundling No. 21151) before his admission in 1866. Valet George Masters promised her marriage. When Emma revealed she was pregnant, George revealed he was married. From Petitions Admitted bundle 75, case 39.

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

Chair: Sarah Richardson

Membership Secretary: Susan Cohen

(Archive) Secretary: Samantha Hughes-Johnson

Blog Editors: Lisa Berry-Waite, Beth Price and Amy Swainston

Social Media: Vicky Iglikowski-Broad

Conferences: Alexandra Hughes-Johnson

Publicity: Maria Georgouli Loupi

Prizes and Grants: Anna Muggeridge

Journal: Kate Murphy, Kate Terkanian, Angela Platt, Catia Rodrigues, Amanda Norman, Joy Burgess

Non-academic support: Vicky Holmes

Diversity Officer: Norena Shopland

Seminar Organiser: Anna Harrington

There are a number of vacant roles on the committee. We are always looking for new members so if you are interested, please get in touch with the chair.

Co-opted Members of the Committee

WHN Book Prize Panel Chair: Lucy Delap

WHN Journal Lead Editor: Kate Murphy

IFRWH rep: Gillian Murphy

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

Why not join the Women's History Network?

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

Conference

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

Prizes and Grants

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

Networking

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

Publication

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

WHN membership

Annual Membership Rates 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