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## Women historians in the twentieth century

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## 10. Women historians in the twentieth century\*

*Laura Carter*

In spring 1939 the Welsh food historian and journalist Dorothy Hartley (1893–1985) wrote to a production assistant at the BBC in an attempt to secure some broadcasting work in collaboration with Arthur Dodd, a professor of history at the University College of North Wales (Bangor). She appealed to the BBC as follows: ‘I could find friends at Cambridge, and elsewhere, who would assure Proff [*sic*] Dodd that I can be a very serious quiet historian, even though I do use popular Guide Books to earn myself a much-needed holiday.’<sup>1</sup> Hartley was not serious or quiet, but she knew that doing history in mid-twentieth-century Britain, even on the airwaves, meant negotiating the co-dependent hierarchies of gender and professional status.<sup>2</sup> The juxtaposition raised between Cambridge learning and her popular, commercial writing signalled that she understood that, from her position as a non-professional historian and as a woman, any claims to historical knowledge must be both verified and qualified.

The first aim of this chapter is to offer an overview of how a diverse range of women, including odd-jobbing populists like Hartley, practised history in the twentieth century. These women understood and used the term ‘professional’ in relation to the production of histories well beyond the confines of universities and academia, often seeing themselves instead as professionals in the fields of education, public service or activism. The second aim is to assess how gender has shaped the production of history in relation to the professional identity

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<sup>1</sup> BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham (hereafter BBC WAC), Dorothy Hartley talks file I: 1937–62, D. Hartley to Miss Quigley, 10 May 1939.

<sup>2</sup> On Hartley see the introduction to D. Hartley, *Lost World: England, 1933–1936*, sel. and intro. A. Bailey (Totnes, 2012).

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of ‘historian’. The chapter argues that focusing only on professional women historians in universities, especially around the eras of first- and second-wave feminism, blinkers our understanding of the gendered production of history in twentieth-century Britain. By thinking beyond the institutional barriers that made women historians precarious, this chapter investigates the changing texture of their liminal position, especially in the mid twentieth century. Was being a precarious professional ever productive and creative, as well as marginalizing and impoverishing, and what were the consequences for the politics, geography and reception of history in the twentieth century?

The Weberian category of ‘professional’ cannot fully accommodate how gender operates in nominally meritocratic social systems.<sup>3</sup> This has been widely noted in relation to a range of creative industries.<sup>4</sup> In the field of history, the existing literature on (mostly) English women historians is much more satisfactory for periods prior to the twentieth century, before the discipline professionalized.<sup>5</sup> Early modern scholars locate the standardization of historical method among men in the sixteenth century, but work on gender in relation to this change reveals that the persistence of a relative generic freedom allowed elite women to excel in the writing of history in other forms.<sup>6</sup> Megan Matchinske finds in the diaries of seventeenth-century noblewoman Lady Anne Clifford (1590–1676), for example, a personal and future-oriented form of history writing ‘peculiarly suited to female needs’.<sup>7</sup> Daniel Woolf has argued that women’s consumption of history in the early modern period had long-lasting consequences for how historical knowledge was organized thereafter, from eighteenth-century girls who were socialized on history’s entertaining qualities to women readers of history who were

<sup>3</sup> H. Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> J. Seddon, ‘Mentioned, but denied significance: women designers and the “professionalisation” of design in Britain c.1920–1951’, *Gender & History*, xii (2000), 426–47; A. Logan, ‘Professionalism and the impact of England’s first women Justices, 1920–1950’, *Historical Journal*, xlix (2006), 833–50; D. Kennerley, ‘Debating female musical professionalism and artistry in the British press, c.1820–1850’, *Historical Journal*, lviii (2015), 987–1008.

<sup>5</sup> For Ireland, see N. C. Smith, *A ‘Manly Study’?: Irish Women Historians, 1868–1949* (Basingstoke, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> N. Z. Davis, ‘Gender and genre: women historical writers, 1400–1820’, in *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past*, ed. P. H. Labalme (New York, 1980), pp. 153–82.

<sup>7</sup> M. Matchinske, *Women Writing History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 75–6. See pp. 4–5.

engrossed by familial and domestic aspects of the past.<sup>8</sup> More recent work by Benjamin Dabby on Hannah Lawrance (1795–1875) has shown how, in the nineteenth century, history written by women retained a strong moral edge.<sup>9</sup> This point is further reinforced by Martha Vandrei's tracing of the fate of Queen Boudica across the centuries; her story assumed a cautiously didactic character for women readers into the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Rosemary Mitchell has highlighted that the 'picturesque' united non-fiction and fiction in nineteenth-century popular historical cultures driven by women historians writing for a commercial market.<sup>11</sup> Bonnie G. Smith's portrait of similar late-Victorian women historians underpins a powerful feminist argument contending that male professionalism was originally wrought in opposition to female amateurism, leaving all Western historical practice gendered by default.<sup>12</sup>

The literature on women historians in the twentieth century is not as sensitive to the interplay of gender and genre because it is confined to the world of professionalized history. By the interwar period, history was an established professional discipline in British universities, with its own professorial chairs, learned societies and journals.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, the steady growth of women's participation in higher education since the 1880s meant that some women could realistically aspire to careers as professional historians. In Britain in 1928 there were forty women academic historians, only 16.5 per cent of the total community, but a figure still far higher than in other European nations.<sup>14</sup>

Within the University of London, a more recent calculation shows that the proportion of women historians peaked at 30 per cent between 1930 and 1931 and reached its lowest ebb between 1976 and 1986, at 17 per

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Woolf, 'A feminine past? Gender, genre, and historical knowledge in England, 1500–1800', *American Historical Review*, cii (1997), 645–79.

<sup>9</sup> B. Dabby, 'Hannah Lawrance and the claims of women's history in nineteenth-century England', *Historical Journal*, liii (2010), 699–722.

<sup>10</sup> M. Vandrei, *Queen Boudica and Historical Culture in Britain: an Image of Truth* (Oxford, 2018), pp. 124–34.

<sup>11</sup> R. Mitchell, *Picturing the Past: English History in Text and Image, 1830–1870* (Oxford, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> B. G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998).

<sup>13</sup> P. Mandler, *History and National Life* (London, 2002), pp. 47–60.

<sup>14</sup> M. O'Dowd, 'Popular writers: women historians, the academic community and national history writing', in *Setting the Standards: Institutions, Networks and Communities of National Historiography Comparative Approaches*, ed. I. Porciani and J. Tollebeek (Basingstoke, 2012), pp. 351–71, at p. 352.

cent, returning to the 30 per cent benchmark only in the early 2000s.<sup>15</sup> Most of these London women academics were naturally concentrated at Bedford, Royal Holloway and Westfield Colleges, which remained single-sex institutions for teaching women students until the 1960s.<sup>16</sup> The obvious mid-century lacuna of academic women historians can be partly explained by the wider stagnation of female participation in higher education between the 1920s and the 1970s, the fall in the age of marriage after the Second World War and the tremendous diversion of female scholarly and educational talent into the profession of school teaching across the mid-century.<sup>17</sup> From the end of the 1960s a fresh crop of women historians emerged. These scholars were often united by political feminism and committed to women's history. Inspired by socialist principles, they adopted a collective and interdisciplinary approach, and Women's Liberation women's history especially was nourished by literary, sociological and social policy research.<sup>18</sup>

A conversation within the Economic History Society during the 1980s about the declining presence of women within their subdiscipline generated the first thorough investigation of these twentieth-century trends.<sup>19</sup> This work offered a much-needed corrective to a tired androcentric tradition that chronicled the development of British historiography via the biographies of 'great men'.<sup>20</sup> This body of literature uncovered the stories of the first professional women historians and is embodied by Maxine Berg's 1996 biography of Eileen Power (1889–1940), which emphasized the role

<sup>15</sup> These figures were calculated by Caroline Barron using the University of London's 'White Pamphlets', historical history syllabi, which listed all of the history teachers and lecturers working at the federal University, for her paper 'Women historians at London University', presented at 'London's Women Historians: a Celebration and a Conversation', Institute of Historical Research, London, 13 Mar. 2017. I am grateful to her for giving me permission to reproduce these figures in this chapter.

<sup>16</sup> C. Dyhouse, *Students: a Gendered History* (London, 2006), pp. 158–61. Royal Holloway made the decision to admit men undergraduates in 1960, Westfield in 1963 and Bedford in 1963. In London degrees were already conferred upon women in the 1870s, but in Cambridge women were not officially allowed to receive degrees until 1923 and did not become full members of the university until 1948.

<sup>17</sup> Dyhouse, *Students*.

<sup>18</sup> S. Alexander and A. Davin, 'Feminist history', *History Workshop Journal*, i (1976), 4–6.

<sup>19</sup> For a history of this movement from the EHS point of view see H. Paul, 'Editorial: Women in economic and social history: twenty-fifth anniversary of the Women's Committee of the Economic History Society', *Economic History Review*, lxxviii (2015), E1–E17.

<sup>20</sup> Examples include J. Kenyon, *History Men: the Historical Profession in England since the Renaissance* (London, 1983), and D. Cannadine, *G. M. Trevelyan: a Life in History* (London, 1992). A similar feminist response has recently occurred in the history of archaeology: see L. Carr, *Tessa Verney Wheeler: Women and Archaeology before World War Two* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 5–8.

of networks, patrons and institutions in the careers of female historians.<sup>21</sup> Understanding how women negotiated the male academy demonstrated a distinctive female contribution to the discipline: a broad and comparative social-economic history that could speak to a wide range of publics.<sup>22</sup> Eileen Power's significance as a public historian continues to be reassessed, always on the assumption that her professional status as a fellow of Girton College, Cambridge, and later professor at the London School of Economics (LSE) make her the archetypal woman historian.<sup>23</sup>

These networks of women in social and economic history had petered out by the 1970s, partly as a consequence of the triumph of quantitative, data-driven economics in universities over the kind of historical economics favoured in Power's day.<sup>24</sup> This 'golden age to decline' narrative has strongly shaped the overall picture of women historians in twentieth-century Britain, but it is largely peculiar to economic history. Meanwhile, work on the history of women's history, notably Zoë Thomas's recent study of interwar women's groups' historical pageants, is beginning to forge new paths, but women's history is still only one part of the work of twentieth-century women historians.<sup>25</sup> Without dismissing the importance of pioneering women economic historians and historians of women's history, we still need an overarching narrative that applies across the board, outside of economic history and outside of the academy.

A recent collection edited by Hilda L. Smith and Melinda S. Zook, *Generations of Women Historians*, has significantly broadened the story. The book contains biographical essays on thirteen women historians in Britain, France and the United States. It shows how even women with professional jobs were on the fringes of academic life, and helpfully explores a series of women writing history in other genres and 'beyond the academy'. But the

<sup>21</sup> M. Berg, *A Woman in History: Eileen Power, 1889–1940* (Cambridge, 1996). See J. Thirsk, 'The history women', in *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women's Status in Church, State and Society*, ed. M. O'Dowd and S. Wichert (Belfast, 1995), pp. 1–11.

<sup>22</sup> Berg, *Woman in History*, pp. 5, 131.

<sup>23</sup> For a recent, misguided assessment see S. Collini, 'Historian-intellectuals? Eileen Power, Herbert Butterfield, Hugh Trevor-Roper', in *Common Writing: Essays on Literary Culture and Public Debate* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 241–65.

<sup>24</sup> P. Hudson, 'Women in economic history, past, present and future with special reference to the early Westfield connection', presented at the Economic History Society Women's Committee annual workshop, Institute of Historical Research, London, 22 Nov. 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Z. Thomas, 'Historical pageants, citizenship, and the performance of women's history before second-wave feminism', *Twentieth Century British History*, xxviii (2017), 319–43. See L. E. N. Mayhall, 'Creating the "suffragette spirit": British feminism and the historical imagination', *Women's History Review*, iv (1995), 319–44.

introduction to this collection frames the overall narrative in an American educational context that is different to that of Britain in important ways.<sup>26</sup> While both countries had a strong first generation of professional women historians that saw a decline between the 1930s and the 1960s, higher-education participation rates, overall and for women, were much lower in Britain than in the US for most of the twentieth century. Even middle-class young women far more frequently went on to the teacher-training colleges in Britain. University did not become a mass school-leaving choice for young women in Britain until the 1980s, when the arrival of the GCSE as a standardized route into A-levels and the conversion of polytechnics into universities helped to close the gender gap.<sup>27</sup> This chapter is thus more attuned to British educational norms, introducing the idea of cohorts of women historians.

### *Three cohorts of women historians*

For this chapter I have surveyed the lives of over 200 women historians using the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, obituaries, autobiographical sources and women's own history writing.<sup>28</sup> All of these women historians were active in Britain across the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and almost all were deceased at the time of writing this chapter. The list is not exhaustive and the definition of 'doing history' has been deliberately broadened beyond academics to include popularizers, activists and educators at all levels. If we look at these lives en masse, three clear cohorts emerge which closely mirror women's changing educational trajectories across each period.

The first cohort comprises those, like Eileen Power, who were born in the late nineteenth century and whose careers straddled the professionalization of history. Some of them worked as professional historians during the

<sup>26</sup> H. L. Smith, 'Introduction: Women's scholarship within and outside the academy, 1870–1960', in *Generations of Women Historians: Within and Beyond the Academy*, ed. H. L. Smith and M. Zook (London, 2018), pp. 1–21.

<sup>27</sup> In 1987, as the gap was beginning to close, still only 8.3% of boys and 6.6% of girls in England left school for a degree course. See Department of Education and Science, *Statistics of Education School Leavers CSE and GCE 1987* (London, 1988), p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> This research grew out of an exhibition and event at the IHR in March 2017, 'London's Women Historians: a Celebration and a Conversation'; many of the suggestions for and details of women historians discussed at that event and in this chapter were generously supplied through Twitter, email lists and other collective and crowd-sourced approaches in the true spirit of women's history. Much further in-depth biographical research on these women was undertaken during the summer of 2017 by Ishvinder Sohal as part of a King's College undergraduate research fellowship. This research has subsequently resulted in a partnership with the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* to diversify its current representation of women historians.



interwar period. The second consists of those born during the Edwardian and interwar periods who were adults in the mid twentieth century and had more diverse and precarious professional historical lives. The third cohort is made up of those born from the 1940s onwards, some (but not all) of whom benefitted from more equal professional opportunities for women as the century drew on. This chapter will have most to say about the mid-century cohort; as the historiography attests, they are the missing link in our existing narrative of women historians. Their working conditions were unique because of the low age of marriage, the persistence of de facto marriage bars and a higher-education system largely closed off and hostile to women, regardless of social class. This chapter is thus inspired by historians such as Claire Langhamer and Cairríona Beaumont, who have suggested more creative ways of understanding women's work and political agencies 'between the waves'.<sup>29</sup>

The biographical research undertaken for this chapter shows that women's historical expertise was spread thinly and widely across academic research, the university and college teaching professions, popular writing, archives, libraries and museums in the twentieth century. This spread grew as history in universities professionalized in the late nineteenth century, and then fragmented into the mid twentieth century. As more academic history jobs were created, women were squeezed out of the more secure or prestigious posts and pigeon-holed into particular fields and teaching roles.<sup>30</sup>

From the late nineteenth century talented women historians had found themselves appended to the historical pursuits of their male supervisors (or husbands, or fathers), as researchers, footnoters and indexers. The prominent University of Manchester medievalist T. F. Tout was good at publicly acknowledging the otherwise hidden labour of his female assistants in the early years of the twentieth century, who included Dorothy Broome and Mabel Mills.<sup>31</sup> More corrosive was the attitude of Edward A. Freeman, Regius Professor of History at the University of Oxford from 1884, who sought out female academic assistants for what he perceived to be their innate deference and thus suitability for the role.<sup>32</sup> The practice of women

<sup>29</sup> C. Langhamer, 'Feelings, women and work in the long 1950s', *Women's History Review*, xxvi (2017), 77–92; C. Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928–64* (Manchester, 2013).

<sup>30</sup> See Thirsk, 'The history women'.

<sup>31</sup> See T. F. Tout, Preface, *Chapters in the Administrative History of Mediaeval England*, 6 vols (Manchester, 1933), vol. i.

<sup>32</sup> E. Garritzen, 'Pasha and his historic harem: Edward A. Freeman, Edith Thompson and the gendered personae of late-Victorian historians', in *How to be a Historian: Scholarly Personae in Historical Studies, 1800–2000*, ed. H. Paul (Manchester, 2019), pp. 89–106.

historians working behind the scenes was, in general, widespread and was institutionalized at the Victoria County History project (VCH), founded in 1899. John Beckett found that between 1905 and 1911 women wrote 78 per cent of the social and economic histories in this series, and they also did the majority of the research, often working remotely as contractors. Some were graduates from the Oxbridge and London women's colleges and the LSE, while others had no qualifications but proved industrious and speedy workers, which suited the VCH's stringent publication targets.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, the History of Parliament project (established in 1928) employed women as research assistants whose individual contributions were absorbed into the large, multivolume project, as Linda Clark's study has revealed.<sup>34</sup>

After 1918 and into the interwar years, history quietly flourished in pockets of cultural life in England that were just emerging, often locally and linked to citizenship projects, including in museums and libraries, at the BBC and through popular educational writing. The First World War and its aftermath created these new sites of history. Wartime necessity forced museums to open up their doors as public spaces and to develop partnerships with local education authorities.<sup>35</sup> The post-war expansion of the Historical Association (HA), a professional organization for history teachers founded in 1906, enabled the army of woman schoolteachers to more successfully participate in intellectual exchange, through HA publications, committee work and conferences.<sup>36</sup> And the publication of autobiographical histories by suffrage campaigners between the

<sup>33</sup> J. Beckett, 'Women economic and social historians and the Victoria County History, 1899–1915', presented at the Economic History Society Women's Committee annual workshop, Institute of Historical Research, London, 22 Nov. 2014.

<sup>34</sup> L. Clark, 'The contribution of women to the History of Parliament', presented at 'London's Women Historians: a Celebration and a Conversation', Institute of Historical Research, London, 13 Mar. 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Board of Education, *Memorandum on Increased Co-operation between Public Museums and Public Educational Institutions* (London, 1931). See G. Kavanagh, *Museums and the First World War: a Social History* (London, 2014).

<sup>36</sup> Historical Association, *The First 50 Years: Historical Association Jubilee Pamphlet 1906–1956* (London, 1956). The HA was initially the brainchild of two female teacher trainers, although it quickly became dominated by men at the top and Erickson notes that, although Ellen McArthur was a founding member of the HA, she is missing from the official history. See J. Keating, D. Cannadine and N. Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History: Teaching the Past in Twentieth-Century England* (Basingstoke, 2011), pp. 31–2; A. L. Erickson, 'Ellen Annette McArthur: establishing a presence in the academy', in *Generations of Women Historians*, pp. 45–6.

wars primed the commercial book market for new genres of women's 'self' history.<sup>37</sup>

This altered landscape promoted new opportunities for women to engage with history, often precariously, as both professionals and volunteers. For example, in 1947 Enid Porter (1908–1984) switched from school teaching to curating and collecting local histories at the Cambridge Folk Museum (founded in 1936), where she stayed until her retirement in 1976.<sup>38</sup> Doris Langley Moore (1902–1989) collected historical costume and went on to open a museum of costume in 1955, which eventually found its home in Bath. She wrote and researched on the history of fashion throughout her life.<sup>39</sup> As a volunteer starting in the mid-1970s, Ann Heeley (1941–2017) gathered recordings of ordinary life in rural Somerset over forty years and contributed to the publications and educational resources of the Somerset Rural Life Museum, where her oral history archive was housed.<sup>40</sup> From different vantage points and through circumstances prescribed by their gender, these women contributed significantly to a history of everyday life that would not be recognized as legitimate in academic history until the end of the twentieth century.<sup>41</sup> As Kate Hill's work has shown, women's work opportunities in the mixed volunteer-professional economy of museums were fluid and the gender dynamics were complex before curatorship fully professionalized in the 1970s.<sup>42</sup>

Age is a particularly important category of analysis in understanding women's contributions to history. In the mid twentieth century most

<sup>37</sup> H. Kean, 'Public history and popular memory: issues in the commemoration of the British militant suffrage campaign', *Women's History Review*, xiv (2005), 581–602.

<sup>38</sup> C. Blacker, 'Enid Porter 1909–1984', in *Women and Tradition: a Neglected Group of Folklorists*, ed. C. Blacker and H. R. Ellis Davidson (Durham, NC, 2000), pp. 233–44. Blacker has Porter's date of birth incorrect.

<sup>39</sup> 'Moore, Doris Elizabeth Langley (1902–1989)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter *ODNB*), 23 Sept. 2004 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/40180>> [accessed 7 June 2021]. See D. Langley Moore, *The Woman in Fashion* (London, 1949) and *The Child in Fashion* (London, 1955). Moore's museum first opened in Kent but was permanently housed in Bath from 1963 and is today the Fashion Museum.

<sup>40</sup> M. Brown, 'Obituary: Ann Heeley', *Guardian*, 15 June 2017; See 'Somerset Voices: Oral History Archive, about the archive' <<http://www.somersetvoices.org.uk/about-the-archive/>> [accessed 11 Nov. 2018]. On museums and the prehistory of oral history see L. Carter, 'Rethinking folk culture in twentieth-century Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, xxviii (2017), 543–69.

<sup>41</sup> L. Carter, 'The Quennells and the "History of Everyday Life" in England, c.1918–69', *History Workshop Journal*, lxxxi (2016), 106–34.

<sup>42</sup> Kate Hill, *Women and Museums, 1850–1914: Modernity and the Gendering of Knowledge* (Manchester, 2016).

women's work had to be balanced with the demands of home and family. These factors often shaped more unconventional paths of history-making. Monica Baly (1914–1998) worked as a nurse and, later, as a campaigner for nurses' pay and conditions. These experiences led her to write histories of nursing later in life and to write a book on Florence Nightingale, an ever-popular women's history figure.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, Mavis Batey (1921–2013), a Bletchley codebreaker, became a conservation activist in her senior years, combining it with her passion for gardening to write popular books on garden and environmental history.<sup>44</sup>

Like so many women possessing further education qualifications in this period, Sheila Fletcher (1924–2001) worked in education and teaching; she went on to complete a PhD and write on the history of education, when her children had grown up.<sup>45</sup> Mary Prior (1923–2012) began her PhD project, supervised by Joan Thirsk, when her husband died in 1969, on the economic lives of a community of early modern women.<sup>46</sup> For those born before the mid-1930s, the proliferation of adult education and return-to-study opportunities (through extramural departments which women were also heavily involved in) from the 1960s and into the 1970s was crucial. These examples of women historians' lives demonstrate that women's pathways towards historical expertise were shaped by the gendered life cycle; they found time to do history later in life, once the demands of home and family had subsided. They also highlight how women's experiential working lives flavoured the histories they were compelled to tell.

<sup>43</sup> T. Bullamore, 'Obituary: Monica Baly', *Independent*, 18 Nov. 1998 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-monica-baly-1185620.html>> [accessed 7 June 2021]. See M. Baly, *Florence Nightingale and the Nursing Legacy* (London, 1997) and *A History of Nursing at the Middlesex Hospital, 1745–1990* (London, 2000).

<sup>44</sup> D. Lambert, 'Batey [née Lever], Mavis Lilian (1921–2013)', *ODNB*, 1 Jan. 2017 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/108264>> [accessed 7 June 2021]. Batey was heavily involved in the Garden History Society (established 1965), from the early 1970s. See M. Batey, *Oxford Gardens: the University's Influence on Garden History* (London, 1982) and *Regency Gardens* (London, 1995).

<sup>45</sup> M. Sheppard, 'Obituary: Sheila Fletcher', *Independent*, 24 Aug. 2001 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/sheila-fletcher-9220552.html>> [accessed 7 June 2021]. See S. Fletcher, *Feminists and Bureaucrats: a Study in the Development of Girls' Education in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1980) and *Women First: the Female Tradition in England Physical Education, 1880–1984* (London, 1989).

<sup>46</sup> M. Dodsworth, 'Obituary: Mary Prior', *Guardian*, 30 Jan. 2012 <<https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2012/jan/30/mary-prior-obituary>> [accessed 7 June 2021]. See M. Prior, *Fisher Row* (Oxford, 1982) and *Women in English Society, 1500–1800* (London, 1986).

Across all three cohorts there was a strong preponderance of women doing economic, social and local history, working on women and gender and on medieval and early modern history. The interwar ‘golden age’ of women medieval economic historians and their wider institutional networks explains some of these trends as legacies of the first cohort. Amy Erickson’s essay on Ellen McArthur (1862–1927) convincingly argues that McArthur was the foundational historian of that first cohort, through her tireless teaching and poorly acknowledged mentoring; ‘her legacy was her students’.<sup>47</sup>

Into the mid-century, local and family history projects were popular among women historians because women were more likely to have a role in public life at a local level and therefore to have access to records. One of the most prominent academic women historians of the mid-century and an inheritor of McArthur’s tradition, Joan Thirsk (1922–2013) was a champion of local and family history (at a time when there was little appetite for these topics in the academy) and of women historians more generally.<sup>48</sup> Dorothy Thompson (1923–2011), another mid-century historian, of Chartism and local activism, helped to ensure that local history did become more rooted in universities via the Workers’ Educational Association and extramural departments.<sup>49</sup> For the third cohort of women historians, which for the first time included women of working-class origins, local history could blossom in works such as Jill Liddington’s (b. 1946) study of Halifax suffragists.<sup>50</sup>

Unlike the academic women historians of the cohorts before and after them, the mid-century women were more likely to be conservative, or at least to be less committed to progressive political causes in their work. It was women activists outside of the universities, working in the tradition of the Fabian Women’s Group, that most often used history to address key social policy concerns.<sup>51</sup> As the social sciences established themselves academically from the 1950s, it is unsurprising that some of these departments in the new ‘redbrick’ universities nurtured scholars whom we would now recognize

<sup>47</sup> Erickson, ‘Ellen Annette McArthur’, p. 41.

<sup>48</sup> P. Sharpe, ‘The history woman: Joan Thirsk (1922–2013)’, *History Workshop Journal*, lxxx (2015), 335–41.

<sup>49</sup> S. Rowbotham, ‘Thompson [née Towers], Dorothy Katharine Gane (1923–2011)’, *ODNB*, 8 Jan. 2015 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/103564>> [accessed 7 June 2021]. See Z. Munby, ‘Women’s involvement in the WEA and women’s education’, in *A Ministry of Enthusiasm: Centenary Essays on the Workers’ Educational Association*, ed. S. Roberts (London, 2003), pp. 215–37.

<sup>50</sup> J. Liddington, *Rebel Girls: Their Fight for the Vote* (London, 2006).

<sup>51</sup> See S. Rowbotham, *Dreamers of a New Day: Women Who Invented the Twentieth Century* (London, 2010).

as women historians.<sup>52</sup> A foundational figure in this milieu was Leonore Davidoff (1932–2014), a mid-century woman historian whose vocation, after breaks to raise children and facilitate her husband's academic career, flowered in the sociology department of the University of Essex. The sociological lens through which she viewed history came to redefine how historians thought about family life in the past.<sup>53</sup>

The themes and chronologies chosen by twentieth-century women historians must have been influenced by the vibrant inheritance of nineteenth-century traditions of women's popular history writing, which did not die out when the subject professionalized but remained firmly rooted in amateur and commercial spaces. Historical biography was an enduringly popular mode of history-making for women, straddling the popular and professional divide, covering different topics and time periods.<sup>54</sup> This point is highlighted by recent essays on C. V. Wedgwood (1910–1997) and Nancy Mitford (1904–1973), two dazzlingly successful mid-century writers of history and biography for the popular market.<sup>55</sup> The dominance of male historians over the modern period in political and diplomatic history, which developed as fields in the late nineteenth century when history was first deemed appropriate training for a career in the civil service, reflected male hegemony over those aspects of national politics deemed to be of strategic importance.<sup>56</sup>

That is not to say there were not examples of women working in these fields, but it was often those atypical women who secured academic posts through traditional routes who went on to work on political and diplomatic history. Agatha Ramm (1914–2003), historian of nineteenth-century diplomacy, studied history at Bedford College and then worked at

<sup>52</sup> Among living historians, these include Pat Hudson (economics), Beverley Skeggs (sociology) and Pat Thane (social policy).

<sup>53</sup> Most famously in *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780–1850* (London, 1987), co-written with Catherine Hall, but the sociological foundations were laid in her MA dissertation at the LSE in the 1950s on married women's employment; see A. V. John, 'Obituary: Leonore Davidoff', *Guardian*, 6 Nov. 2014 <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/nov/06/leonore-davidoff>> [accessed 7 June 2021].

<sup>54</sup> R. Maitzen, "'This feminine preserve': historical biographies by Victorian women", *Victorian Studies*, xxxviii (1995), 371–93; A. Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (London, 1991).

<sup>55</sup> M. S. Zook, 'C. V. Wedgwood: the historian and the world', in *Generations of Women Historians*, pp. 115–35; J. P. Zinsser, 'Nancy Mitford: lessons for historians from a best-selling author', in *Generations of Women Historians*, pp. 273–95.

<sup>56</sup> J. O. McLachlan, 'The origin and early development of the Cambridge historical tripos', *Historical Journal*, ix (1947), 78–105.



Somerville College, Oxford.<sup>57</sup> With the injection of feminist politics into the work of women historians in the 1970s there was a clear propulsion forward into more modern topics among the third cohort. Writing in 1980, Anna Davin (b. 1940) reflected that the London Feminist History Group mostly discussed eighteenth- to twentieth-century topics and that more work on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would be welcomed by her colleagues.<sup>58</sup>

Conceptualizing women historians in twentieth-century Britain through these three cohorts usefully takes us out of the professionalization paradigm and highlights the broader forces of social change at work, especially for the mid-century cohort of mainly middle-class women whose working lives were so uneven. This chapter will now zoom in on three elements of doing history – politics, place and audience – aided by some more detailed biographical cameos, in order to analyse the circumstances and experiences of being a woman historian in each instance.

### *Politics*

Many women historians, like many men historians, have considered history a formidable tool for political thinking and activism. The women's history of the Women's Liberation Movement is the most obvious example of this. At the same time as uncovering the hidden histories of women's lives, prominent feminist activist-historians campaigned for improved working conditions, and for sexual and legal rights for women in the present.<sup>59</sup> Women historians of earlier cohorts had sought to combine historical and political pursuits to achieve goals that were not primarily articulated as feminist. Often this could be achieved only in limited ways by women, using the established channels of domestic British political life. For example, the Marxist historian Dona Torr (1883–1957) wrote history, including a biography of the early labour activist Tom Mann, from within the Communist Party of Great Britain, where she tutored and supported a number of male Marxist historians of the twentieth century, many of whom have subsequently become much more famous and lauded

<sup>57</sup> 'Obituary: Agatha Ramm', *The Times*, 16 July 2004 <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/agatha-ramm-m37pdf9tjklf>> [accessed 7 June 2021].

<sup>58</sup> A. Davin, 'Historian's notebook: the London Feminist History Group', *History Workshop Journal*, ix (1980), 192–4.

<sup>59</sup> S. Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight against It* (London, 1974). See S. Bruley, 'Women's liberation at the grass roots: a view from some English towns, c.1968–1990', *Women's History Review*, xxv (2016), 723–40.

than her.<sup>60</sup> Ellen Wilkinson (1891–1947) forged a pathway into the heart of government via a scholarship to study history at the University of Manchester in 1910, before going on to become a trade union organizer and prominent Labour MP.<sup>61</sup>

As much new work on transnational feminism is demonstrating, some women did exercise their political agency, however, through global rather than domestic networks.<sup>62</sup> These networks shaped the work of women historians and could direct them towards historical topics with a global, political urgency. This was particularly true of women historians of colour working across colonial networks, who are often absent in accounts of women's history-making in white, domestic contexts.<sup>63</sup> Yet women historians of colour working in the metropole in the middle decades of the twentieth century produced some of the most important and innovative early histories of Caribbean slavery. Elsa Goveia (1925–1980) arrived in London in 1945 from British Guiana to study history at University College London.<sup>64</sup> She completed her PhD at the Institute of Historical Research (IHR) with a thesis on slave society in the eighteenth century that adopted an anthropological reading of culture in the British Caribbean.<sup>65</sup> Goveia experienced racial discrimination in the British university system and felt that there was some resistance from English

<sup>60</sup> V. Kiernan, 'Torr, Dona Ruth Anne (1883–1957)', *ODNB*, 23 Sept. 2004 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/59174>> [accessed 7 June 2021]; D. Torr, *Tom Mann* (London, 1936).

<sup>61</sup> L. Beers, *Red Ellen: the Life of Ellen Wilkinson, Socialist, Feminist, Internationalist* (Cambridge, Mass., 2016), pp. 27–8. Beers notes that Wilkinson was awarded the Jones Open History Scholarship at the University of Manchester to study history in 1910, and that at the time more women than men read history there.

<sup>62</sup> K. Gleadle and Z. Thomas, 'Global feminisms, c.1870–1930: vocabularies and concepts – a comparative approach', *Women's History Review*, xxvii (2018), 1209–24.

<sup>63</sup> In Smith and Zook's edited collection, *Generations of Women Historians*, all of the women discussed are white, although for two of them, Ruth Benedict and Eleanor Flexner, race was a central topic of intellectual enquiry in their work. At the time of writing in July 2019 there was only one black female professor of history in the United Kingdom, Professor Olivette Otele at Bath Spa University, appointed in October 2018.

<sup>64</sup> M. Chamberlain, 'Elsa Goveia: history and nation', *History Workshop Journal*, lviii (2004), 167–90.

<sup>65</sup> Goveia's trajectory indicates the continuation of the 'golden age' of women economic historians into the new field of imperial history. Her thesis was supervised by Eveline Martin (1894–1960), who taught history and became an assistant lecturer at Westfield College in 1923 after covering a period of leave for her supervisor, Caroline Skeel (1872–1951). Skeel was an important node in the interwar networks of women historians. Martin became University Reader of African and Imperial History in 1932, and later taught at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. I would like to thank Pat Hudson for this information.



academics to colonial postgraduate students wanting to work on their own national histories.<sup>66</sup> Nonetheless, she sought to understand slavery as a form of social organization in which all actors were complicit, an approach that yielded explanations for the challenges of Caribbean society in the present and stretched the boundaries of the place of activist politics in the subdiscipline of imperial history. Goveia's historical formulations were an essential contribution to London's mid-century, predominantly male, Caribbean and African intellectual community, and were vital in critiquing and reworking empire from within in the era of decolonization.<sup>67</sup> This work was continued by one of Goveia's doctoral students at the University of the West Indies (where Goveia became the first woman professor in 1961), Lucille Mathurin Mair (1924–2009), whose work in the 1970s on the intersections of gender, race and class in slave societies is widely regarded as pioneering.<sup>68</sup>

Goveia and Mair were explicit about their politics and its relationship to their history writing, and both established elite professional careers against the odds of gender and racial discrimination. A more hidden contribution to the anticolonial discourse in London was made slightly earlier by an African American woman named Ruth Anna Fisher (1886–1975). Fisher was from Ohio, and first came to London in 1920 to study political science at the LSE. She went on to work for the Library of Congress in Washington, where she was charged with locating, identifying and copying archival material relating to American history in British archives.<sup>69</sup> She settled in London in the 1930s, registering at the British Museum Reading Room in 1920 with a Bloomsbury address. She went on to occupy an office at the British Museum for five years.<sup>70</sup> She worked mainly on the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century papers of the British Foreign, Colonial, War and Navy Offices and the private papers of William Gladstone and Edmund Burke.

<sup>66</sup> M. Matera, 'Colonial subjects: black intellectuals and the development of colonial studies in Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, xlix (2010), 388–418, at p. 408.

<sup>67</sup> M. Matera, *Black London: the Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Oakland, Calif., 2015), pp. 266–8; Chamberlain, 'Elsa Goveia'.

<sup>68</sup> B. Bush, 'Lucille Mathurin-Mair (née Waldron), 1924–2009: pioneer of Caribbean women's history', 21 Mar. 2011 <<https://womenshistorynetwork.org/womens-history-month-lucille-mathurin-mair-nee-waldron-1924-2009-pioneer-of-caribbean-womens-history/#more-719>> [accessed 11 Nov. 2018]; L. Mathurin-Mair, *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655–1844* (Kingston, 2006).

<sup>69</sup> S. L. Render, 'African-American women: the outstanding and the obscure', *Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress*, xxxii (1975), 306–21, at pp. 315–19.

<sup>70</sup> G. Romain, *Race, Sexuality and Identity in Britain and Jamaica: the Biography of Patrick Nelson, 1916–1963* (London, 2017), p. 77.

During this time Fisher became a quiet and subversive vessel of transatlantic knowledge exchange between the 'official' spaces of British and American national history. In the interwar period she joined the British Labour Party and wrote on European affairs for the African American magazine the *Messenger*, advancing internationalist arguments against British imperialism for a black audience.<sup>71</sup> She shared in the optimistic, pro-democracy Anglo-American wartime discourse of the 1940s, publishing stalwart letters sent to her in Washington by English friends (she had to leave London in 1940 when her flat was bombed).<sup>72</sup> Most importantly, although Fisher never published a history book herself, she did write a series of articles in the *Journal of Negro History* based on her archival findings.<sup>73</sup> Despite the fact that she was not vocal in the era of civil rights politics, in her historical research she was committed to uncovering black experiences both in Africa and in the New World through reading between the lines of the British colonial records that she was sending back to her bosses in Washington.<sup>74</sup> Her affectionate tone towards the virtues of British national identity and 'Blitz spirit' was always laced with a strong critique of the legacies of British slavery, suggesting a subtle articulation of black Britishness in her writings, although Fisher was herself African-American. Referring to the Englishman, she wrote, 'the very system which he now wished to abolish had bred up a class of his own race which regarded these liberal principles as a menace to its existence and which to this day remains one of the chief obstacles to putting them into full practice'.<sup>75</sup>

Goveia and Fisher do not fit neatly into a traditional, white picture of women historians. They were engaged in a transatlantic political discourse more concerned with race and nation than with class or gender. As women of colour, they worked on the precarious margins of professional history and of 'Black London'. But these circumstances also allowed them to reconfigure their histories from within, with unmistakable consequences for both the content and methodologies of colonial and imperial history writing in the future.

<sup>71</sup> R. A. Fisher, 'Lessons from Egypt', *Messenger*, June 1925, p. 235.

<sup>72</sup> R. A. Fisher, 'England today', *Phylon*, ii (1941), 155–61.

<sup>73</sup> R. A. Fisher, 'Materials bearing on the negro in British archives', *Journal of Negro History*, xxvii (1942), 83–93; 'A note on Jamaica', *Journal of Negro History*, xxviii (1943), 200–203; 'Granville Sharp and Lord Mansfield', *Journal of Negro History*, xxviii (1943), 381–9; and 'A note on "divide and conquer"', *Journal of Negro History*, xxx (1945), 437–8.

<sup>74</sup> Towards the end of her life, Fisher attended the march on Washington in 1963. She first met W. E. B. Du Bois at the Third Pan African Congress held in London in 1923; see Render, 'African-American women', p. 319.

<sup>75</sup> Fisher, 'Materials bearing on the negro', p. 93.

### *Place*

Place and spaces of work shape the output of all historians. In the mid twentieth century, when two world wars prompted vast movement within Europe through forced displacement and voluntary migration, women historians worked between and across national and imperial spaces. London, the metropolitan capital of a decolonizing empire, with its only quasi-institutional libraries at the IHR and the British Museum, was naturally a city of diasporic historians. One of the first historians of early modern women's lives in England, Patricia Crawford (1941–2009), found networks and collaborators in London during the twelve years of temporary contracts that marked her early academic career in Australia.<sup>76</sup> The federal University of London's mid-century structure included constituent bodies dedicated to European language and culture, including the School of Slavonic and East European Studies. This naturally attracted women historians who left their home countries in the 1930s and 1940s. Olga Crisp (1921–2010) fled Poland for England in 1946 after having worked for the Polish resistance. Crisp did graduate work in London throughout the 1950s on Russian economic history and went on to become a professor of Russian history at the IHR in 1979.<sup>77</sup> Other examples include the Spanish historian of Russia Isabel de Madariaga (1919–2014) and the Norwegian-born scholar of European diplomacy Ragnhild Hatton (1913–1995).<sup>78</sup>

The women cited above marshalled their extraordinary talents and diasporic experiences to establish elusive academic careers in the mid twentieth century. But for other women historians, the gender implications of place had different consequences, because women were always much more likely to be producing history in liminal spaces such as libraries and archives. Archives and information management were burgeoning historical enterprises in mid-twentieth-century British culture and society. As Margaret Procter has argued in her study of the gendered networks of Public Record Office (PRO) archivist Hubert Hall, large swathes of women with historical training ploughed their energies into the semi-professionalized field of archives from the early twentieth century.<sup>79</sup> Local government and

<sup>76</sup> Private information supplied by Laura Gowing.

<sup>77</sup> G. Hosking, 'Obituary: Olga Crisp', *Independent*, 8 Mar. 2011 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/professor-olga-crisp-resistance-worker-who-became-an-authority-on-russian-economic-history-2235748.html>> [accessed 7 June 2021].

<sup>78</sup> On de Madariaga see W. Sunderland, 'The historian and the empress: Isabel de Madariaga's Catherine the Great', in *Generations of Women Historians*, pp. 181–94.

<sup>79</sup> M. Procter, 'Hubert Hall (1957–1939): archival endeavour and the promotion of historical enterprise' (unpublished University of Liverpool PhD thesis, 2012). Hall worked as a civil servant at the PRO, reaching the post of assistant keeper in 1912.

its bureaucracies expanded in Britain from the 1880s, resulting in more opportunities for women to follow professional paths involving historical work without facing the marriage bar. This was certainly the trajectory of Joyce Godber (1906–1999), a history graduate who, after working at the IHR and a short stint in publishing, rose up the ranks of the archives profession to become county archivist of Bedfordshire between 1946 and 1968.<sup>80</sup> She wrote an important regional study, *History of Bedfordshire, 1066–1888* (1969), from that position and maintained horizontal links with the demographers at the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure in its early days.<sup>81</sup> In a less professionalized but all too familiar set-up, Rachael Lane Poole (1860–1937), whose husband was the Oxford University archivist, spent her married life cataloguing important artworks across the colleges, university and city of Oxford.<sup>82</sup>

The central civil service, especially during and after the Second World War, was also a significant site of historical activity. Wartime service in high-level intelligence and administrative roles closely informed the work of a whole generation of post-war historians in Britain, women as well as men. They went on to see their historical research as closely related to government policy in the present. This was true of Ragnhild Hatton, the historian of Spain Jean Lindsay (1910–1996) and the historian of science and technology Margaret Gowing (1921–1998), all of whom undertook wartime government service.<sup>83</sup> Gowing continued working in the Cabinet Office from 1945 to 1959 on the official histories of the Second World War. Afterwards she was appointed as the official historian and archivist to the UK Atomic Energy Authority, which led to the publication of her *Britain and Atomic Energy, 1939–1945* (1964).<sup>84</sup>

Before policy-makers shifted to a wholesale reliance on the social sciences in the 1960s, the Foreign Office also supported significant historical research in the post-war period. Luke Gibbon has recently forensically

<sup>80</sup> ‘Joyce Godber’, Bedfordshire Historical Record Society <<http://www.bedfordshirehrs.org.uk/content/publication-author/godber-joyce>> [accessed 11 Nov. 2018].

<sup>81</sup> Private information supplied by Deborah Thom.

<sup>82</sup> R. Williams, ‘“By herself”: rediscovering the history of women at St John’s College, Oxford’, St John’s College Library Oxford Special Collections, 7 Feb. 2018 <<https://stjohnscollegelibrary.wordpress.com/2018/02/07/by-herself-rediscovering-the-history-of-women-at-st-johns-college-oxford/>> [accessed 11 Nov. 2018].

<sup>83</sup> M. Bryant, ‘Lindsay [née McLachlan], Jean Olivia (1910–1996)’, *ODNB*, 23 Sept. 2004 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/65734>> [accessed 7 June 2021]; R. Fox, ‘Gowing [née Elliott], Margaret Mary (1921–1998)’, *ODNB*, 23 Sept. 2004 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/71257>> [accessed 7 June 2021].

<sup>84</sup> M. Gowing, *Britain and Atomic Energy, 1939–1945* (London, 1964).



Figure 10.1. Dame Lillian Penson running her seminar at the Institute of Historical Research, London, June 1957. Image reproduced by permission of the Institute of Historical Research and Walter L. Arnstein.

pieced together the scale and nature of Lillian Penson's (1896–1963, see Figure 10.1) hitherto unacknowledged contributions to editing the famed *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898–1914* series while she was working for the civil service as a research assistant to two male historians.<sup>85</sup> Penson eventually gained acclaim in her own right as an academic historian and as the first female vice-chancellor of the University of London, in 1948. Both Gowing and Penson were mid-century women historians who researched, worked and taught in traditionally masculine fields of history. Their pathways to these topics through wartime service and policy concerns suggest that women had to prove themselves through applied historical labour in order to excel in these fields. At the same time, this practical experience yielded histories that were alert to public policy needs in a way that later history writing from within the professionalized academy was not.

<sup>85</sup> L. Gibbon, 'The unknown editor: Lillian Penson and *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898–1914*', presented at the 14th International Conference of Editors of Diplomatic Documents, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, London, 29 Apr. 2017. See Z. Steiner, 'On writing international history: chaps, maps and much more', *International Affairs*, lxxiii (1997), 531–46, at p. 533.

### *Audience*

Women historians in the twentieth century frequently faced set expectations about who their histories were supposed to be for. As work on the nineteenth century has shown, there was a strong assumption that women were suited to writing history for children and commercially for non-elite audiences.<sup>86</sup> Twentieth-century publics were better educated and thus more demanding of their histories, as history itself fragmented under the weight of professionalization and the proliferation of new media and technologies. Gendered assumptions about audience did not subside, however; rather they evolved in line with changing ideas about gender and social class. Histories produced by women continued to be regarded as most appropriate for non-academic consumers, be they post-war housewives or working-class pupils in secondary schools.

Some women historians, including Eileen Power, used their professional platforms to advance social reform agendas relating to peace and women's rights. Parallel to this endeavor, women continued to produce popular histories specifically aimed at 'ordinary' people throughout the interwar years, leaving highbrow historical writing (mostly) to male historians, professional or otherwise.<sup>87</sup> The gender division in history writing for different audiences was in part imposed by gatekeepers (especially publishers) but also by a bottom-up demand for women's writing that recounted cosy, intimate and humanistic versions of the past. This mode of history writing was finessed by middle-class writers such as Margaret Jourdain (1876–1951), Elizabeth Pakenham (1906–2002) and Cecil Woodham-Smith (1896–1977) throughout the mid twentieth century.<sup>88</sup> The expansion of secondary and then higher education after the Second World War diversified tastes, expanded horizons and enabled working-class women who decisively challenged these genres to become historians and writers.

The case of Dorothy Hartley, with whom this chapter began, demonstrates how audience demands for certain types of history could facilitate careers for women historians outside of the academy. Hartley was an eccentric who made a living through a combination of journalism, travel writing and broadcasting on historical themes relating to everyday life in England. Like many academics, she carried out her research in the British Museum

<sup>86</sup> Mitchell, *Picturing the Past*.

<sup>87</sup> See V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* [1929] (London, 2000), pp. 55–7.

<sup>88</sup> See, e.g., M. Jourdain, *English Interiors in Smaller Houses from the Restoration to the Regency, 1660–1830* (London, 1933); C. Woodham-Smith, *Florence Nightingale* (London, 1950); E. Pakenham, *Victoria R. I.* (London, 1964).



Reading Room when she visited London.<sup>89</sup> She was politically conservative and her commitment to recovering the practical elements of a bygone past clearly reflected her preference for an 'organic' social order.<sup>90</sup> In the 1930s Hartley wrote a series of lively and informal columns on the history of food for the *Daily Sketch*, covering topics as diverse as seaweed, toffee apples and clotted cream.<sup>91</sup> These were the product of her extended travels around Britain by bicycle and by car, a less high-profile, conservative version of J. B. Priestley's famed *English Journey* (1934).<sup>92</sup> An essay on the history of tea opened with light-hearted portraits of daily life in 1930s England, with the wife leaving a tea caddy scoop out for her husband showing him how much to use and the apprentice boys in a factory fetching their cans at 'mashing time', their tea break.<sup>93</sup> Hartley eventually covered similar topics in some one-off radio broadcasts on the BBC Empire Service.<sup>94</sup>

In 1954 she published *Food in England* with the non-academic press Macdonald, and in doing so invented a new genre of history book, using historical recipes to illuminate past practices of cooking and eating with one eye on the present.<sup>95</sup> This model, grounded in mid-century domesticity, captured female audiences with no apparent interest in history in its 'official' guise. Women historians were well placed to explore this fluidity between genres and to write for women audiences in the mid twentieth century. Although a later cohort of socialist women historians would credibly denounce these domestic discourses as oppressive and restrictive, they resonated with a public raised on banal austerity and wartime patriotism.

Situated awkwardly between these two positions sits another mid-century popularizer, Jacquetta Hawkes (1910–1996). Hawkes publicly voiced her disdain for the Women's Liberation Movement in 1980, but she spent most of her public and personal life defying established expectations

<sup>89</sup> BBC WAC, Dorothy Hartley talks file I: 1937–1962, D. Hartley to R. Power, 17 May 1938.

<sup>90</sup> Introduction to Hartley, *Lost World*; M. Wondrausch, 'Hartley, Dorothy Rosaman (1893–1985)', *ODNB*, 23 Sept. 2004 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/50449>> [accessed 7 June 2021].

<sup>91</sup> Reproduced in Worsley, Bailey and Hartley, *Lost World*, pp. 35–301.

<sup>92</sup> J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London, 1934).

<sup>93</sup> Hartley, *Lost World*, p. 243.

<sup>94</sup> BBC WAC, Dorothy Hartley talks file I: 1937–1962, D. Hartley to Miss Quigley, 12 May 1939. Hartley's first broadcast, which explained the medieval tradition of 'Ox-Roasting', aired on the Empire Service on 21 June 1937.

<sup>95</sup> D. Hartley, *Food in England* (London, 1954).

of how female academics should behave.<sup>96</sup> She trained and began her career as an archaeologist but during the Second World War transitioned into journalism and worked for the Ministry of Education and UNESCO on a special ‘visual education’ unit, making popular films about the Iron Age, while moonlighting as a poet.<sup>97</sup> Consulting for the BBC in the late 1940s, Hawkes prepared scripts and guidance notes for teachers on recent domestic excavations in Britain.<sup>98</sup> Within BBC schools broadcasting, female historical expertise was particularly ubiquitous. In fact, the most prolific schools history writer and broadcaster of the mid-century was Rhoda Power (1890–1957), a historian and the younger sister of Eileen Power.<sup>99</sup> Rhoda Power collaborated closely with Hawkes on ‘illustrated’ history talks for the radio with music, sound effects and dramatic interludes, a form of history she herself invented.<sup>100</sup> Both women displayed technological mastery and a keen pedagogical understanding of how to prepare suitable history resources for a school-age audience.

Hawkes courted middlebrow, adult publics with her published books; in them her easy spirituality and frank sexuality breathed life into mid-century history writing. *A Land* (1951) combined lyricism, history and geography to tell the entire natural history of Britain.<sup>101</sup> It was a book about the growth of consciousness in the introspective, post-war moment: ‘consciousness has now reached a stage in its growth at which it is impelled to turn back to recollect happenings in its own past, which it has, as it were, forgotten’.<sup>102</sup> A later work, *A Quest of Love* (1980), reimagined seven historical periods through the mind of a partially autobiographical universal woman.<sup>103</sup> Hawkes said that she tended to ‘write books that fall between all the shelves’.<sup>104</sup> Particularly difficult for the disciplinized professionals to swallow was the commingling of psychology and New

<sup>96</sup> ‘Jacquetta Hawkes’, *Desert Island Discs*, BBC Radio 4, 21 Nov. 1980 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p009mvrp>> [accessed 7 June 2021].

<sup>97</sup> ‘Jacquetta Hawkes’, *Desert Island Discs*.

<sup>98</sup> BBC WAC, S68/6/1, J. Hawkes to R. Power, 12 Oct. 1947.

<sup>99</sup> See L. Carter, ‘Rhoda Power, BBC Radio, and Mass Education, 1922–1957’, *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique*, xxvi (2021), 1–16; K. Murphy, *Behind the Wireless: a History of Early Women at the BBC* (London, 2016), pp. 135–7.

<sup>100</sup> This is usually mistakenly reported as Eileen Power’s innovation. See: BBC WAC, S68/9, R. Power, ‘Broadcasting history lessons’, 25 Feb. 1933.

<sup>101</sup> J. Hawkes, *A Land* (Boston, Mass., 2001).

<sup>102</sup> Hawkes, *A Land*, p. 11.

<sup>103</sup> J. Hawkes, *A Quest of Love* (London, 1980).

<sup>104</sup> ‘Jacquetta Hawkes’, *Desert Island Discs*.



Ageism with the 'hard' sciences of archaeology and geology in *A Land*, and Hawkes was largely disregarded by the academic community once she began to write these popular works. But she was embraced by the literary and educational establishments alike in the mid twentieth century for her creative and personal renderings of prehistoric Britain and its environmental and sensory links to the post-war, Cold War present. Considered collectively, Hartley, Power and Hawkes demonstrate how women historians in the mid-century carved their own idiosyncratic paths, with commercial and popular success, to wider audiences for history.

This chapter has displayed the diversity of women's historical work in the twentieth century, showing that a focus on professional women historians and the traditional pathways of the university are only one part of a broader story. The history of women doing history in Britain was not just about the conservative politics of universities, or the socialist politics of women's history. It was about the politics of everyday life. Women's age, race, nationality, locality and past work experience all placed parameters on their claims to the identity of historian, and were always set in relation to a male, professional academic norm.

In particular, the experiences of women historians in the mid-century cohort deepens our understanding of the gendered conditions of doing history outside of the academic profession. The first and third cohorts of women historians in Britain, working in the interwar and the post-1960s periods respectively, worked during a time of more buoyant (although still highly unequal) female employment in higher education and in the political context of two women's movements. Between the 1930s and 1960s women did also contribute to the production of historical knowledge, but they did it for different causes and audiences and in alternative spaces to those women who came before and after them. Very often those women who took long career breaks to raise a family, the professional identities of women historians in the mid-twentieth century were frequently not as 'historians' at all. Their identities and enterprises spanned the precarious professions, from archivists and curators to educators and writers. But their methodological, pedagogical and practical legacies have been essential to both the professional lives of later women historians and to how history has been consumed beyond the academy into the twenty-first century.

