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Woman and Womanhood in the Posters of the Great War  
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## **ANNOTATION**

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to analyze a shift in the depiction of women in various British posters during the First World War (1914–1918). The first chapter provides a theoretical background to British womanhood prior to the war (1910–1914), as well as during the course of the conflict until its end in 1918. The second chapter examines posters depicting prevailing gender stereotypes of women that appeared in the early years of the war. The third chapter deals with posters portraying women in roles that conflict with or conform to the gender perception of femininity.

## **KEYWORDS**

Britain, women, posters, womanhood, Great War, perception of femininity

## **NÁZEV**

Žena a ženství v plakátech z první světové války

## **ANOTACE**

Tato bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na změnu ve vyobrazení žen v britských plakátech z první světové války. První kapitola poskytuje teoretický rámec k britskému ženství, a to bezprostředně před válkou (1910–1914), v průběhu válečného konfliktu, až do jeho konce v roce 1918. Druhá kapitola zkoumá plakáty z prvních let války, ve kterých převládá vyobrazení genderových stereotypů žen. Práce pokračuje třetí kapitolou zabývající se ženami, které byly v plakátech zachyceny v souladu nebo rozporu s genderovým vnímáním ženskosti.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Británie, ženy, plakáty, ženství, velká válka, vnímání ženskosti

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## Introduction

The First World War, also known as the Great War, was the first global military conflict involving the United Kingdom. Britain entered the war on August 4, 1914, when the German Empire rejected an ultimatum ordering its withdrawal from Belgium. Further, this armed conflict was the first total war in the British history. While its previous wars took place in relatively distant countries and did not directly affect civilians at home, the Great War exposed them to completely new experience. The so-called home front was imperiled by dangerous state of affairs such as “Zeppelin” raids bombing cities or submarines stopping the import.

In the early years of the Great War, there was a belief that fighting would be over in a short period of time; thus, the integration of women into the war effort was not the subject of government debate. The prevailing perception of women from the Edwardian era as inferior to men still existed and, hence, women were expected to take care of children and the household or work in “feminine” occupations. Unlike men, the female population did not have the right to vote, which was one reason the streets of pre-war Britain were full of demonstrations led by organizations demanding equality and women’s suffrage. However, as the war proceeded, a number of influences caused women to enter vital industries. Assembling munitions was one essential occupation that tested women’s patriotism, and after women entered this industry, the Board of Agriculture and a number of military forces quickly established branches looking for a female workforce to work in agriculture or in a variety of support roles in the military.

This gradual change in women’s roles in the war period was progressively reflected in a variety of posters. Radio and television were not widely utilized; thus, posters were often used as a tool of mass communication, present on every corner across Britain and containing impressive images and influential messages directly aimed at the population. Furthermore, as David Bowness and Robert Fleming explain, it was possible to maximize posters’ “potential display opportunities” by distributing them in a variety of formats and by manufacturing them in bulk for a relatively low price.<sup>1</sup>

This bachelor thesis focuses on the analysis of the First World War posters depicting females in distinctive forms. The first chapter examines the historical progress of British womanhood and the perception of women from the pre-war years until the end of the war

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<sup>1</sup> David Bowness and Robert Fleming, *Posters of the First World War* (London: Shire Publications, 2014), part 1, Adobe Digital Editions EPUB.



(1910–1918). The second chapter, divided into two sub-chapters, analyzes gender stereotypes of women as “Mothers and Wives” and “Victims.” The third chapter, also divided into two sub-chapters, analyzes posters that depict women in their typical “feminine” occupation and new roles that emerged as the war and British womanhood progressed.

# 1. The Progress of British Womanhood

Pre-war Britain belongs among historical periods that were not named after the reigning monarch. In 1910, the Edwardian era ended with the death of Edward VII who acceded to the throne after his mother, Queen Victoria. However, it did not mean that previous gender barriers or perception of females and their role immediately changed or disappeared. Gender stereotypes that considered women to be inferior to men prevailed even in this part of British history. Women were still inseparably linked with domesticity, had limited working opportunities, and had not the right to vote.

The Edwardian era was crucial in the efforts of the women's suffrage movement which actively stood up against gender inequalities. The most visible campaigns in the pre-war years were organized by the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). For better understanding, it is necessary to distinguish between the suffragettes and the suffragists. The suffragettes (WSPU) or the so-called "militant suffragists" used aggressive actions to obtain their demands, whereas the suffragists (NUWSS) believed in peaceful protests that would not harm the reputation of the female population. The WSPU, which adopted the motto "Deeds, Not Words," was founded by the British political activist Emmeline Pankhurst and had clear objectives already from its beginning: to reach equal voting right and "to uncover women's 'hidden masculinity' to prove women's ability to enter the public sphere on the same and equal terms with men."<sup>2</sup> Feminist idol Millicent Garrett Fawcett led the NUWSS, and the aim of this union became "the vote for women on the same terms as it was and may be given to men."<sup>3</sup>

While members of the WSPU and NUWSS were fighting for equal rights, married women did their feminine "duty" at homes. Alan O'Day asserts that women were pushed to fulfil their maternal obligation and to raise children for the Imperium.<sup>4</sup> As O'Day continues, by doing so, the women played an essential role to secure the future prosperity of the country because Britain sustained a rather low birth rate while the population of Germany and the United States grew. Such population trends could significantly influence economic as well as political chances of the British Empire.<sup>5</sup> Without class differences, married women were expected to stay home

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<sup>2</sup> Sophia A. van Wingerden, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain, 1866-1928* (Houndmills: Macmillan Press, 2002), xxiv.

<sup>3</sup> Wingerden, *Women's Suffrage*, 68.

<sup>4</sup> Suzann Buckley, "The Family and the Role of Women," in *The Edwardian Age: Conflict and Stability 1900 – 1914*, ed. Alan O'Day (London: The Macmillan Press, 1979), 136.

<sup>5</sup> Buckley, "Role of Women," 136.

and take care of children. As a result, those “who worked full-time incurred a great deal of criticism.”<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Roberts considers that the majority of working-class women sought to balance their family budgets due to the fear of being in debt.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the difficult financial situation forced working-class women to go to work. Roberts continues that some families managed to double their “family incomes” because of a woman started to work.<sup>8</sup> They usually worked as domestic servants or cooks, just to mention some occupations. However, it did not mean that the women would not have time to “rear healthy members of an imperial race.”<sup>9</sup> Roberts explains that they usually asked neighbours and family members to take care of their children for a reasonable price.<sup>10</sup> Unmarried women of different social classes chose from a range of occupations available for them. Middle-class women, as Alan O’Day observes, benefited from the expansion of newly opened positions in the government services, education, medicine, and the Civil Service.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, men applying for these positions had equally educated female rivals who gained benefits from the enlargement of education opportunities.<sup>12</sup> Working-class women were usually employed in domestic service, which also represented the most common type of employment. Of course, there were other more prestigious working opportunities such as the textile industry, agriculture, or shop-work. The lives of unmarried working-class women were highly restricted and stereotypical. Thus, O’Day claims, they had common desires and dreams to escape in order to experience an escapade.<sup>13</sup> Although the educated middle-class women could, in some cases, compete with men, gender inequality that affected females of all classes still prevailed in the majority of occupations. As O’Day further claims, there was a high demand for newly established professions; nevertheless, the employers would rather employ men than women.<sup>14</sup> Lower wages paid to women constituted another problem. This inequality in wages was based on the prevailing stereotype that saw women as inferior to men. Each gender had its sphere in society; unfortunately, the feminine sphere was highly limited. Criticism of the gender distinction can also be found in the book *A Room of One’s Own* written by Virginia Woolf:

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<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Roberts, *Women’s Work 1840-1940* (London: Macmillan Education, 1988), 44.

<sup>7</sup> Roberts, *Women’s Work*, 81.

<sup>8</sup> Roberts, *Women’s Work*, 47.

<sup>9</sup> Anna Davin. “Imperialism and Motherhood,” *History Workshop*, no. 5 (Spring 1978): 13. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4288158>.

<sup>10</sup> Roberts, *Women’s Work*, 46.

<sup>11</sup> Buckley, “Role of Women,” 136.

<sup>12</sup> Buckley, “Role of Women,” 136.

<sup>13</sup> David Silbey, *The British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War, 1914–1916* (Abingdon: Frank Cass, 2005), 74.

<sup>14</sup> Buckley, “Role of Women,” 141.

All this pitting of sex against sex, of quality against quality; all this claiming of superiority and imputing of inferiority, belong to the private-school stage of human existence where there are ‘sides’, and it is necessary for one side to beat another side, and of the utmost importance to walk up to a platform and receive from the hands of the Headmaster himself a highly ornamental pot.<sup>15</sup>

The text may be interpreted as an apotheosis of the modern era where trivial and obsolete stereotypes of gender roles with one sex standing hierarchically above the other have no place. Woolf does not specify which gender has a better position in society, so the interpretation might be that both, males and females, are exposed to expectations that do not need to meet their best interest.

One of the last and most massive pre-war marches against the gender inequality took place from June 18<sup>th</sup> to July 26<sup>th</sup>, 1913, when the NUWSS organized the Women’s Suffrage Pilgrimage that was attended by 50,000 people. Groups of suffragists marched to Hyde Park in London from various places all across Britain. Among other things, the march focused on emphasising the peaceful nature of the NUWSS. However, there were a few problems when the public did not distinguish between the suffragists and the suffragettes, which resulted in “hostile encounters.”<sup>16</sup> However, despite minor difficulties, Stanley Holton observes, that the NUWSS managed to make a good impression because “even anti-suffragists within the Liberal [...] and the suffragist ministers each agreed subsequently to receive a NUWSS deputation.”<sup>17</sup>

A significant change occurred on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1914 when the United Kingdom entered the war. Sophia A. van Wingerden states that going to war meant the end of the suffragettes’ campaign ultimately.<sup>18</sup> “All the leading suffragists” had the same concerns.<sup>19</sup> Although the WSPU’s campaigns for the equal voting right stopped, Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Christabel did not remain inactive and fully embarked themselves on the war efforts, as is evident from the biography of Emmeline Pankhurst:

Mother and daughter skilfully presented themselves as British patriotic feminists as they wove into their speeches themes about the nation, patriotism, imperialism,

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<sup>15</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* (London: Grafton, 1977), 114.

<sup>16</sup> Vicky Iglkowski, Dr Matthew Smith, and Katie Carpenter, “The 1913 Suffrage Pilgrimage: peaceful protest and local disorder,” The National Archives, last modified November 15, 2018, <https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/blog/the-1913-suffrage-pilgrimage-peaceful-protest-and-local-disorder/>.

<sup>17</sup> Sandra Stanley Holton, *Suffrage Days: Stories from the Women’s Suffrage Movement* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 190.

<sup>18</sup> Holton, *Suffrage Days*, 152.

<sup>19</sup> Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907-1948* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 46.

democracy, internationalism, men's and women's contribution to the war, the benefits of women's war service, and women's enfranchisement.<sup>20</sup>

Their involvement was vital at the outbreak of the war when the willingness of women to participate in the war effort was ignored. Emmeline and Christabel fought against it by calling "for equality of service and citizenship for men and women."<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Emmeline was the editor of a newspaper called *the Suffragette* (in 1915 renamed to *Britannia*) where she regularly published her articles. The NUWSS did not fall behind with the war effort and decided to help by offering their "organizing and money-raising power."<sup>22</sup>

In the early years of the war, women were targets of propaganda encouraging them to support men to enlist. Lucy Noakes argues that women were simultaneously "reminded [...] their corresponding duty to the nation: motherhood."<sup>23</sup> Noakes continues that the propaganda promoted the importance of masculinity in the war by stressing the disparities between women and men. Men were connected with politics and paid occupations while women were associated with domesticity.<sup>24</sup> However, it is necessary to take notice of working-class women. As Angela Woollacott observes, the taboo did not stop them because they had no choice whether they want to work or not.<sup>25</sup>

The government and public saw nursing as the proper place for women, and it was perceived, as Angela Woollacott stresses it out, as "an occupation for which they had a natural qualification."<sup>26</sup> At the beginning of the war, it was not an easy task for women, who were not professional Red Cross nurses, to convince the government that they were capable of serving in the field. A charity organization called the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) sent women volunteers abroad as nurses. However, they were not part of the British Red Cross or the British army. Besides FANY, there was the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) that assisted the Red Cross, but it mostly focused on welfare work. Sharon Ouditt observes that "The loudest and most persuasive call to women was to come from the Red Cross and Order of St John via the VAD organisation."<sup>27</sup> The British Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) was established

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<sup>20</sup> June Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography* (London: Routledge, 2002), 269.

<sup>21</sup> Noakes, *British Army*, 49.

<sup>22</sup> Millicent Garrett Fawcett, *The Women's Victory—and After: Personal Reminiscences, 1911-1918* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1920), 87.

<sup>23</sup> Noakes, *British Army*, 44.

<sup>24</sup> Noakes, *British Army*, 42.

<sup>25</sup> Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 20.

<sup>26</sup> Susan R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 193.

<sup>27</sup> Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994), 8.

in 1909 and provided a range of occupations for both male and female population. According to the British Red Cross, each member obtained a first aid training and some of them even specialised training in nursing, cookery, hygiene or sanitation.<sup>28</sup> However, Ouditt states that the recruiting campaign focused only on women from middle- and upper-class who were considered representative groups; working-class women were marginalised.<sup>29</sup> Women frequently volunteered as nurses because “this position was seen by many as women’s nearest equivalent to that of the fighting male.”<sup>30</sup> The Red Cross helped to develop their skills and expertise, and in the time of the Great War, they were deployed in different places across the world.<sup>31</sup> Women, who enlisted as VAD nurses, perceived it as an opportunity to leave their homes and serve abroad under “coherent and authoritative identity.”<sup>32</sup> It is without any doubt that the uniforms contributed to their new status. According to Ouditt, “This apparent loss of freedom, therefore, can be seen as a means of gaining access to new and more glamorous freedoms: to be a nurse in wartime was a fitting occupation for a woman.”<sup>33</sup> When those women wore identical uniforms, they lost their unique features but obtained an opportunity to contribute to the war effort under a unified identity.

However, the real determination of women was tested in the second half of the war. In January 1916, single males between 18 to 41 years of age were conscripted, which meant they had to enlist. As men left the country to serve on the front, it was evident that women, still in the shadow of prejudice, would be needed. The next phase of the fight for gender equality was caused not only by the conscription but also by other circumstances. According to Angela Woollacott, the fact that a substantial number of women started to work in the industry, which was indispensable, was caused by “economic forces, patriotic propaganda, and the loosening of trade union restrictions and employers’ prejudices.”<sup>34</sup>

The increased number of soldiers considerably raised the munitions consumption, and the munitions industry struggled with a lack of workforce as the result of the conscription. This industry provided a wide range of occupations and, thus, one of the earliest working opportunities for women from all classes. Assembling of deadly shells was in sharp contrast

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<sup>28</sup> “What we did during the war,” British Red Cross, accessed January 14, 2019, <https://vad.redcross.org.uk/en/What-we-did-during-the-war>.

<sup>29</sup> Ouditt, *Fighting Forces*, 19.

<sup>30</sup> Ouditt, *Fighting Forces*, 9.

<sup>31</sup> “What we did.”

<sup>32</sup> Ouditt, *Fighting Forces*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Ouditt, *Fighting Forces*, 17.

<sup>34</sup> Woollacott, *Munitions Workers*, 75.

with the perception of women who were deemed to be “life-givers, not life-takers.”<sup>35</sup> Because the production of ammunition could not stop for a second, the positions originally occupied by men were now available for women even though it was not in correspondence with the gender perception of femininity. Hazardous and dangerous work with TNT, gunpowder, and other explosive substances was predominantly a matter of working-class women. However, Katie Adie emphasizes that the women gained “a golden opportunity.”<sup>36</sup> Woollacott describes the benefits for working-class women when she says that they “learned new skills with machinery and experienced sharp increases in pay.”<sup>37</sup> Only a small number of middle- and upper-class women produced ammunition alongside working-class women. Woollacott continues that the middle-class in particular “held quasi-professional jobs such as welfare supervisors, factory inspectors, and women police and patrols.”<sup>38</sup> As was already mentioned, working-class women left their homes and travelled to different cities all across the country in order to work in a range of munitions factories where they earned more money. This opportunity enabled them to escape from their stereotypical lives and spend money on things that were predominantly intended for women of other classes. As Katie Adie states, women who were initially maids acted as mistresses and bought ribbons, hats, brooches and alcohol. People with strict moral attitudes were convinced that those women broke their moral principles; however, the women workers merely wanted to enjoy their free time, which was restricted.<sup>39</sup>

The question of whether women’s engagement in physically demanding occupations may have a potentially negative effect on their reproductive role in the future of the nation was highly debated throughout society. It was hard to guess what had priority – motherhood or production of ammunition; however, the concept of women as “mothers of the race”<sup>40</sup> represented a strong argument on behalf of the motherhood. As Elizabeth Leigh Hutchins argues, the fact that the survival of the nation and the state depends on the mother who gives birth is an indisputable truth.<sup>41</sup> For this reason, the authorities took necessary steps and established a system that would prevent conceivable health problems for future mothers. According to Susan Grayzel, there was

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<sup>35</sup> Kate Adie, *Fighting on the Home Front: The Legacy of Women in World War One* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2014), 127.

<sup>36</sup> Adie, *Home Front*, 126.

<sup>37</sup> Woollacott, *Munitions Workers*, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Woollacott, *Munitions Workers*, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Adie, *Home Front*, 160.

<sup>40</sup> Davin. “Imperialism,” 13.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth Leigh Hutchins, *Conflicting ideals: two sides of the woman’s question* (London: T. Murby, 1913), 11.

apprehension that pregnant working-class women would do anything to keep their positions. Thus, they remained occupied, but in the progressed months of their pregnancy, they were gradually given easier work to do.<sup>42</sup>

In 1916, an idea arose about the potential introduction of women conscription. Elisabeth Shipton observes that the army was looking for the ways to release men holding secondary positions in order to strengthen fighting forces on the front.<sup>43</sup> The idea was that women would be conscripted to cover the shortage of soldiers serving in supporting posts. However, Sharon Ouditt asserts that the conscription was strictly refused because of the necessity to maintain the “stereotypical presentation of women as war’s ‘other’ on which so much of the ‘home fires’ mythology depended.”<sup>44</sup> This concept seems to be corroborated by the fact that even though women gradually filled the positions of men and helped as nurses or volunteers, they were still at the beginning of the second half of the war considered to be of secondary importance.

Since 1915, several organizations were established that supplied farms with the female workforce. Hard work on the land was predominantly a specialization of males, and for this reason, women had to face the unjustified prejudices of farmers. However, the turning point occurred in 1917, when the German U-Boat Campaign essentially halted the import. This threat was taken seriously because Britain “produced only about one-third of its food”<sup>45</sup>; hence it was necessary to increase the home production. Bonnie White emphasizes the critical moment when she states, “Despite deep-rooted prejudice on the part of farmers, it was clear that women were needed.”<sup>46</sup> As a result, the Women’s Land Army (WLA) was founded. In the book *The Women’s Land Army in First World War Britain*, Bonnie White describes objectives of this organization:

The term ‘Land Army’ was used to convince farmers that the women would be disciplined, hardworking, and well trained, in the same way that posters of the motherly Land Girl tending to animals in a bonnet-style hat and long-waisted coat aimed to assure farmers and the public alike that the ladies of the Land Army would not be masculinised.<sup>47</sup>

Even though the Land Army girls worked in a variety of weather conditions, were doing male work, and were as disciplined as men, it was still necessary to convince the public that women

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<sup>42</sup> Grayzel, *Women’s Identities*, 116.

<sup>43</sup> Elisabeth Shipton, *Female Tommies: The Frontline Women of the First World War* (Stroud: The History Press, 2014), chap. 8, Adobe Digital Editions EPUB.

<sup>44</sup> Ouditt, *Fighting Forces*, 15.

<sup>45</sup> Ann Kramer, *Land Girls and Their Impact* (Great Britain: Lamorna Publishing Services, 2008), chap. 1, Adobe Digital Editions EPUB.

<sup>46</sup> Bonnie White, *The Women’s Land Army in First World War Britain* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 4.

<sup>47</sup> White, *Land Army*, 48.



kept their femininity. The concept was of great importance for the Land Army and, therefore, it marketed itself as a “middle-class organization of trained, dedicated, and disciplined women.”<sup>48</sup> The WLA had also a branch called the Women’s Forestry Corps, which focused on production of timber and other forest products. Nevertheless, it was not an easy task to convince women to do hard work in the fields and woods when there were other employment opportunities, such as Voluntary Aid Detachment, Women’s Royal Naval Service, Women’s Royal Air Force, or occupations for middle-class women in munitions factories. Bonnie White points out that the farmers were forced to offer reasonable wages that would compete with other occupations.<sup>49</sup> Some women saw this occupation as a patriotic duty, others as a possibility to leave home and be “free for the first time from family disapproval.”<sup>50</sup> Katie Adie states that the Land Army girls “found wartime life – though full of hard slog – unimaginably liberating,”<sup>51</sup> even though they were far from home doing physically demanding work in challenging weather conditions.

In 1917, after years of attempts to enter the army, women finally succeeded when the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) was officially established. Hellen Gwynne-Vaughan and Mona Chalmers Watson who “wanted the WAAC to be seen as a military organisation on a par with the men”<sup>52</sup> became the Chief Controllers. According to Elisabeth Shipton, when recruiting, the WAAC focused on working-class women because they had the necessary practical skills from their previous manual professions.<sup>53</sup> Similarly to the situation in the munitions industry, the middle-class women served as supervisors, which gained them higher positions in the occupational hierarchy. The entrance into the military did not mean that the women fought along with men in trenches; instead, the nature of their work was to provide “support and substitution–replacing man-power.”<sup>54</sup> Also, their service was divided into five categories: “domestic, cookery, mechanical, clerical and tending war graves.”<sup>55</sup> It is worth mentioning that a few women from the WAAC were entrusted with a special assignment. Shipton explains that they helped to “decipher coded German messages, which were transmitted

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<sup>48</sup> White, *Land Army*, 48.

<sup>49</sup> White, *Land Army*, 55.

<sup>50</sup> Adie, *Home Front*, 161.

<sup>51</sup> Adie, *Home Front*, 161.

<sup>52</sup> Shipton, *Female Tommies*, chap. 8.

<sup>53</sup> Shipton, *Female Tommies*, chap. 8.

<sup>54</sup> “Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps,” *The Public Health Journal* 9, no. 12 (December 1918): 587.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41997221>.

<sup>55</sup> Noakes, *British Army*, 69.

over the wireless and intercepted by the British.”<sup>56</sup> Because of this, these women were called “Hushwaacs.”

With the establishment of the WAAC, official military female uniforms were introduced. Lucy Noakes observes that they tested the boundaries of the gender system in 1917 and became a symbol of development.<sup>57</sup> Despite the efforts of the WAAC members, unpleasant stories started to circulate among the public. There was a common notion that the women in the army were only for the pleasure of soldiers. However, in order to better understand these accusations, it is necessary to go back in time. At the beginning of the war, a moral panic called “khaki fever” spread across Britain that concerned the sexual behaviour of youthful British women. According to Angela Woollacott, they “were so attracted to men in military uniform that they behaved immodest and even dangerous.”<sup>58</sup> Noakes points out that even the well-being of soldiers was in jeopardy due to promiscuous girls whose behaviour posed a threat to the whole nation.<sup>59</sup> Especially the traditional part of society adhering to the pre-war principles saw their sexuality and eccentricity as unacceptable. The consequence of the “khaki fever” – the number of babies that were born to unmarried couples caused a panic among the public.<sup>60</sup> The WSPU got engaged in this problem and provided help for the war babies. However, E. Sylvia Pankhurst reports that the WSPU helped only five babies.<sup>61</sup> Noakes emphasizes that there is no evidence confirming “an increase in illegitimate births” during the war.<sup>62</sup> Thus, it is evident that the “war babies” affair was probably exaggerated.

The reputation of WAAC women also suffered harm due to similar unsubstantiated allegations because they were deployed along with soldiers in France. These defamations were fuelled by the public perception of France as a country of sinful behaviour and prostitution.<sup>63</sup> Neither the women in the VAD escaped the public eye; however, “the social class [...] protected them from the worst of the accusations.”<sup>64</sup> For the women in the WAAC, it was much harder to defend themselves because of their working-class status. The reputation of the organization was at stake. According to Noakes, the Ministry of Labour set up a commission that “visited 29

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<sup>56</sup> Shipton, *Female Tommies*, chap. 8.

<sup>57</sup> Noakes, *British Army*, 69.

<sup>58</sup> Angela Woollacott, “‘Khaki Fever’ and Its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 2 (April 1994): 325. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/260893>.

<sup>59</sup> Noakes, *British Army*, 75.

<sup>60</sup> Noakes, *British Army*, 45.

<sup>61</sup> E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Home Front: A Mirror to Life in England During the First World War* (London: Ebury Press, 1987), 175.

<sup>62</sup> Noakes, *British Army*, 45.

<sup>63</sup> Noakes, *British Army*, 77.

<sup>64</sup> Noakes, *British Army*, 76.

camps in France and interviewed over 80 people.”<sup>65</sup> Consequently, the *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps in France* proved that the rumours were not based on the truth.<sup>66</sup> In April 1918, a change occurred when Queen Mary became a commander-in-chief, which resulted in renaming the organization to the Queen Mary’s Army Auxiliary Corps.

As already noted, the middle-class women gained various working opportunities in the Women’s Royal Naval Service (WRNS) and the Women’s Royal Air Force. The WRNS came into existence in November 1917 and immediately started recruiting. Shipton notes that the Navy pressed women to learn everything as soon as possible; even immediately after putting on their uniforms.<sup>67</sup> As Ursula Stuart Mason notes, the WRNS provided a wide range of occupations for women; “those chiefly required were cooks, waitresses, laundresses, book-keepers, telegraphists, telephonists, wireless operators, motor drivers and other technical experts.”<sup>68</sup> Katharine Furse observes that the women worked only on the land and, therefore, the motto “Never at Sea” appeared.<sup>69</sup>

Similarly, the Royal Air Force was not idle and, in April 1918, established its own branch called the Women’s Royal Air Force (WRAF). According to the Royal Air Force Museum, 9,000 members of the WAAC and WRNS became part of the WRAF.<sup>70</sup> The work was divided into four trades: “Clerks and Storewomen, Household, Technical and Non-Technical.”<sup>71</sup> Both organizations – the WRNS and WRAF – designed original uniforms with specific badges, which provided women with a sense of pride. In this respect, the achievements and engagement of the former well-known British nurses – Elsie Knocker (later known as Baroness de T’Serclaes) and Mairi Chisholm – in the WRAF provided valuable feedback. Shipton claims that they worked “as officers, which brought the corps a certain amount of positive publicity.”<sup>72</sup> Shipton continues that the leaders of the corps were very well aware of the importance of positive public opinion and with the employment of T’Serclaes and Chisholm inevitably

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<sup>65</sup> Noakes, *British Army*, 80.

<sup>66</sup> Ministry of Labour and National Service, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry appointed by the Minister of Labour to enquire into the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps in France*, (London: H.M.S.O, 1918), 3.

<sup>67</sup> Shipton, *Female Tommies*, chap. 8.

<sup>68</sup> Ursula Stuart Mason, *Britannia’s Daughters: The Story of the WRNS* (Pen & Sword Military, 2011), chap. 1, Adobe Digital Editions EPUB.

<sup>69</sup> Katharine Furse, *Hearts and Pomegranates: The story of forty-five years, 1875 to 1920* (London: Peter Davies, 1940), 569.

<sup>70</sup> “Women’s Royal Air Force (WRAF) 1918 – 1920,” Royal Air Force museum, accessed February 10, 2019, <https://www.rafmuseum.org.uk/research/online-exhibitions/women-of-the-air-force/womens-royal-air-force-wraf-1918-1920.aspx>.

<sup>71</sup> “Women’s Royal Air Force.”

<sup>72</sup> Shipton, *Female Tommies*, chap. 8.

attracted the attention.<sup>73</sup> Even though the working-class women were not excluded from enlisting to the WRAF, they had to face certain challenges. According to the Royal Air Force Museum, the recruitment procedure was strict and “stringent health checks often excluded many poor candidates from polluted cities.”<sup>74</sup>

It is necessary to add that each one of the already mentioned organizations needed to reach as many women as possible in a relatively short period of time. For this purpose, they used posters that represented widely spread means of sharing information during the war times. Additionally, Pearl James states that the posters “became emblematic of one’s national identity and one’s place within a collective effort to win the war.”<sup>75</sup>

The long-awaited moment came after more than four years, when, on November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1918, Germany signed the Armistice, which meant the definite end to the World War I. British men came back home to their previous occupations and replaced women who were expected to continue with their pre-war lives. Ammunition was not needed anymore and, thus, the factories were closed. Gradually, organizations such as the VAD, WLA, WAAC, WRNS, and WRAF were disbanded; however, they became revived in the World War II. Although the war effort of women might seem unnecessary, the opposite is true. In the end, they have gained more than it might seem at first glance. They launched fundamental changes in the British womanhood, which benefited them not only at the end of the war but more importantly in the future. The NUWSS leader Millicent Garrett Fawcett clearly illustrates the change in the British womanhood in her book called *The Women’s Victory—and After: Personal Reminiscences, 1911-1918*:

The war revolutionized the industrial position of women. It found them serfs and left them free. It not only opened to them opportunities of employment in a number of skilled trades, but, more important even than this, it revolutionized men’s minds and their conception of the sort of work of which the ordinary everyday woman was capable<sup>76</sup>

Another revolution represented the reform called The Representation of the People Act 1918 that allowed women, who were over 30, to vote. The suffrage movement finally reached its goal after many years of campaigns. As Sophia A. van Wingerden observes, the gender “barrier” was overcome, when the women gained partial voting right after efforts of half

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<sup>73</sup> Shipton, *Female Tommies*, chap. 8.

<sup>74</sup> “Women’s Royal Air Force.”

<sup>75</sup> Pearl James, “Reading World War I Posters,” in *Picture This: World War I Posters and Visual Culture*, ed. Pearl James (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>76</sup> Fawcett, *Personal Reminiscences*, 106.

a century long.<sup>77</sup> According to Angela Woollacott, although all women did not acquire the right to vote, it was “a highly important breakthrough.”<sup>78</sup> The majority of women working in the munitions industry was too young and, thus, did not reach the set age limit. This fact was in sharp contrast to the notion that proclaims that the voting right “was a token of gratitude” for all women workers.<sup>79</sup> However, by working in secluded munitions factories, the female workers escaped from their pre-war identities and started experiencing the wild way of life. Furthermore, the “khaki fever” also disrupted the stereotypical image of sexual affairs, which were seen by the public as highly inappropriate. The occurrence of such behaviour among British girls reflects the term “flapper,” which had not a positive reputation at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Billie Melman comments that the term “‘flapper’ [...] became applied to humans – invariably females – and at the same time became distinctly derogatory.”<sup>80</sup> Above all, Millicent Garrett Fawcett emphasizes that the war efforts of women left a significant legacy and “ploughed up the hardened soil of ancient prejudice, dissolving it and replacing it by a soil capable of fructifying the seeds of new ideas.”<sup>81</sup> It is undeniable that the First World War meant a huge step forward towards the better tomorrows of the British womanhood.

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<sup>77</sup> Wingerden, *Women's Suffrage*, 169.

<sup>78</sup> Woollacott, *Munitions Workers*, 189.

<sup>79</sup> Woollacott, *Munitions Workers*, 190.

<sup>80</sup> Billie Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1988), 27.

<sup>81</sup> Fawcett, *Personal Reminiscences*, 106.

## 2. The Stereotypical Depiction of British Women in the Posters

At the beginning of the war, there was a belief that it would be over “by Christmas,” therefore, there was not any interest of the government in the active participation of British women in a war effort. But women were involved by the local authorities who urged them to encourage their male counterparts to go to war. Posters played an important role in this aspect. As Katie Adie observes in her book called *Fighting on the Home Front: The Legacy of Women in World War One*:

Posters reached a huge audience; the tone of many was not so much an order but a call to examine your conscience, to feel a moral obligation. As women were commonly considered to be the more moral and virtuous side of society, they were the target.<sup>82</sup>

In 1914 and 1915, recruiting posters which aimed directly at consciousness of British men, predominantly depicted women in two forms. Firstly, the behavior of the female figures in the posters represented a certain gender role that “cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing, and submissive.”<sup>83</sup> Secondly, female figures were visually depicted as victims of the real or potential German aggression. A massive recruiting campaign helped to spread these posters across the entire area of the United Kingdom. According to Maurice Rickards, it was “the one big instrument of mass communication” because it was “accepted and understood by the public at large; it was tried and tested—and it was cheap.”<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, these posters started decreasing in number by the end of 1915 and in 1916 were gradually replaced by new types of images.

### 2.1 Women as Mothers and Wives

In the posters published during 1914 and 1915, British women were shown as passive participants of the war. They are usually standing in the safety of their houses and provoking masculine figures – mainly sons and husbands, who are cowardly staying at home, to go to war. In these posters, it is possible to see the Edwardian ideal of a woman, an angel protecting her children, a cherishing wife making a great effort to keep her household clean and comfortable. As Susan Grayzel observes, “When Britain’s sons were to go to war, her ‘daughters,’ the mothers of these sons, had the ‘sacred duty’ of sending them readily into the fray, as was

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<sup>82</sup> Adie, *Home Front*, 8.

<sup>83</sup> Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-friendly Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 85.

<sup>84</sup> Maurice Rickards, *Posters of the First World War*. (London: Adams & Mackay, 1968), 8.

evident in a range of propaganda posters.”<sup>85</sup> According to this, one of the hardest tasks for women was to send their beloved husbands and sons into the war.

In December 1914, an illustration was published in which two main female figures were used to spread an influential message. The illustration depicts a mother and her daughter sitting opposite a man in a public transport. The man is wearing an elegant suit, sitting with the single leg crossed, smoking a cigarette and reading a newspaper. The daughter is looking at her mother with an unbelievable expression on her face, at the bottom of the page, text reflects the amazement of the young girl. “Child (much impressed by martial emblems opposite)”<sup>86</sup> (1914, Appendix 1). “Mother is that a soldier? Mother. No darling, Child. Why not?” Furthermore, on the edge of the left side, there is another female participant making the situation even more embarrassing because of her steady gaze which falls upon the man. On the opposite side of the illustration, there is another man who is probably hiding because he is a witness to the conversation between the mother and daughter. This demonstrates how the female passengers, mainly the mother and her daughter, were used to force civilian men to enroll in the army service. An inactivity was believed to be one of the female gender roles, men were expected to be strong and to protect their country. Apparently, the aim of this illustration was to raise the number of military volunteers by showing the embarrassing situation when men did not enlist in the army. In the same year as this illustration was published, in the cities of Britain a movement emerged whose purpose seems identical to the illustration. This so-called “White Feather” movement provided women with one single mission: to shame ordinary British men who walked through the cities instead of fighting on the front. Although, this movement might appear as established by a woman, the founder was a man called Charles Penrose Fitzgerald. As Katie Adie notes:

He chose women to undertake his mission, and within a couple of weeks of the start of the war, on 30 August 1914, thirty women went on to the streets of Folkestone in Kent armed with white feathers to give able-bodied men not in uniform.<sup>87</sup>

As Adie continues, Manliness was a notion, which played a great part in education of boys and men; thus, a disgrace in a form of avoiding their burden of responsibility would be against “men’s behavior,” which was considered as ideal.<sup>88</sup> But as James Taylor comments, the “White Feather” movement was ineffective in contrast with the advertising.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Grayzel, *Women’s Identities*, 86.

<sup>86</sup> John Christopher, *British Posters of the First World War* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2014), 143.

<sup>87</sup> Adie, *Home Front*, 14.

<sup>88</sup> Adie, *Home Front*, 14.

<sup>89</sup> James Taylor, *Your Country Needs You: The Secret History of the Propaganda Poster* (Glasgow: Saraband, 2013), chap. 2, Adobe Digital Editions EPUB.

Posters published in 1915 mostly depicted women as somebody who is staying near their children and encouraging males to enlist. One of the general perceptions of British women was to stay feminine. They should be affectionate wives and caring mothers, whose part in the society was to be alongside their hard-working men. This perception represents a well-known British poster of the First World War called “Women of Britain Say GO!”<sup>90</sup> (1915, Appendix 2), which was produced by E. V. Kealey. In the foreground of the poster, there are three figures, a woman and a refugee with her child. The presence of the refugees is the result of the German invasion, and the following occupation, of Belgium, which happened in 1914. According to Stéphanie Borrell-Verdu, the German invasion was successful even though the Belgium’s army tried to slow it and withstand the attacks.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, the support provided by the British army was ineffectual; thus, Belgium remained occupied until November 11, 1918, when the Armistice was signed. The beginning of the occupation brought almost 160 000 Belgian refugees into the United Kingdom. “No one had expected them – and certainly not a massive exodus – but the news from across the Channel was so shocking that the British immediately agreed to take people in.”<sup>92</sup> The faces of the two women in the poster, except for the child, are in profile, which allows the viewer to see their facial expressions. All three figures are in an interior of a house and standing next to a widely opened window. In the background of the poster, there is the last row of the marching battalion of British soldiers. In the middle of the poster, there is a little hill in the distance covered with beautifully colored grass and trees. The upper space of the picture contains the phrase “Women of Britain Say” written in capital letters and followed by a massive word “GO!” which is also written in capital letters and underlined to emphasize its magnitude. On a closer look at the facial expression of the British woman, it is possible to see she is worrying about her man who apparently is one of the soldiers in the battalion marching away. The British woman, providing home for the refugees, and the lovely landscape in the background portray the beautiful Britain and the true family values which the soldiers on the front were expected to fight for. Furthermore, the phrase in the poster “Women of Britain Say GO!” supports the previously mentioned claim that at the beginning of the war, the hardest, as well as the most important, task for women was to encourage their husbands and beloved men to go to war.

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<sup>90</sup> Christopher, *British Posters*, 138.

<sup>91</sup> Stéphanie Borrell-Verdu, “Belgium, U.S. involvement in World War I,” U.S. Army, last modified February 16, 2018, [https://www.army.mil/article/200760/belgium\\_us\\_involvement\\_in\\_world\\_war\\_i](https://www.army.mil/article/200760/belgium_us_involvement_in_world_war_i).

<sup>92</sup> Adie, *Home Front*, 27.



Such an appeal to women to encourage recruitment is rather plentiful in posters from the early years of the war. A similar interpretation in a form of the word “GO” contains a poster called “Go! It’s Your Duty Lad”<sup>93</sup> (1915, Appendix 3). This poster at first glance appears simple, but its message is more than clear. In the poster, there are only two figures, an old lady whose arm is resting on the back of a younger man wearing a perfectly fitting formal suit. The woman who is, in all probability, a mother of the man is pointing her right arm at the word “GO” in an encouraging manner. The eyes and smile on the face of the mother indicate that she loves her son. She probably played an important role in his adolescence as a protective and caring being. The roles changed when he became an adult and then, his sacred duty was to protect his mother by joining the army.

Another poster depicts a mother who is sitting at a table with her three children. “Single Man Show Your Appreciation”<sup>94</sup> (1915, Appendix 4), this poster contains two rectangular pictures which are placed at the top and bottom. In the middle of the poster, there is an inscription “Hundreds and thousands married men have left their homes to fight for KING and COUNTRY,” which indicates that the male readers should have enlisted as soon as possible to follow their “Noble Example.” The upper picture includes the mother and her three children enjoying their dinner. Opposite the woman, there is an empty chair that, together with the inscription, indicates that her husband is missing. A closer inspection of the picture at the bottom shows several soldiers lying in a trench and shooting. These two pictures stand in juxtaposition of completely dissimilar environments. In the first picture, there is the protective mother and loving wife whose feminine role is to look after her children. The setting is a warm, colorful and protective interior of their home. On the other hand, the other picture depicts the evil face of the war in a form of soldiers who are lying outside in mud and shooting at their enemies. The text in the poster “Married men have left their homes” aims to tickle the consciousness of the males on the home front who should enlist in order to help the soldiers on the battlefield to win the war, so they could return to their wives.

The separate gender spheres are also depicted in a poster entitled “Royal Fusiliers”<sup>95</sup> (1915, Appendix 5). Two women are standing by a gate and looking at a seemingly endless row of soldiers, who are marching away. Moreover, one of the women is holding a tissue in her right hand and waving it in a goodbye manner. As with the previous posters, the female figures are in roles of passive participants of the war, while the roles of the female figures are

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<sup>93</sup> Christopher, *British Posters*, 141.

<sup>94</sup> Christopher, *British Posters*, 72.

<sup>95</sup> Christopher, *British Posters*, 12.

in correspondence with the perception of manliness. Moreover, the poster contains a phrase “Recruits Needed at once to complete this fine battalion,” which refers to the image of the marching soldiers. The presence of the women in this poster might also be interpreted as motivation for the potential recruits because besides the country, soldiers also fought for the safety of their wives and families.

Not all the wartime posters contain impressive colorful pictures that depict female figures. For instance, “To the Young Women of London”<sup>96</sup> (1915, Appendix 6) includes only sentences held within the border, which is in the shade of shimmering red. The text “If he does not think that you and your country are worth fighting for—do you think he is WORTHY of you?” is written in an influential manner and it evidently aimed at women. According to Deborah Thom, “War emphasizes gender difference as men’s work becomes predominantly to enlist and to fight.”<sup>97</sup> If a man did not go to the army when his country needed him, he would be seen as a coward. For this reason, the text in the poster indicates that the man who does not comply with gender stereotypes and expectations is neither a man nor a suitable partner for the future life. On the other hand, as this sentence illustrates “Think it over—then ask him to JOIN THE ARMY TO-DAY,” the role of women, similarly to the previous posters, was to send their men directly in the recruiting offices. Moreover, the poster includes quite personal messages, for instance, “If your young man neglects his duty to his King and Country, the time may come when he will NEGLECT YOU.” One of the purposes of such sentences was to scare wives and girls whose fears were based on the possibility that their boys might have left them single.

## 2.2 Women as Victims

In the posters from the first years of the war, women are not only depicted as taking care of children and actively urging men to enlist. They are also depicted as victims who are suffering, even though they are not physically on the battlefield. The primary focus of such posters is to emphasize the helplessness of the female figures. More precisely, males are presented as powerful and fearless beings whose natural role is to ensure that their female counterparts are in safety. For this reason, women are depicted as incompetent and without the ability to defend themselves. The creators of these posters benefited from the German acts

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<sup>96</sup> To the Young Women of London, 1915, letterpress, 75,9 x 50,8 cm, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/28305>.

<sup>97</sup> Deborah Thom, “Gender and Work,” in *Gender and the Great War*, ed. Susan R. Grayzel and Tammy M. Proctor (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 46.

of barbarism and cruelty that were committed against Belgium and the United Kingdom. At the beginning of the war in December of 1914, the Raid on Scarborough took place by Imperial German Navy. In consequence, more than 130 people died, and hundreds were wounded. In the following year, the people on the home front experienced, for the first time in the British history, the so-called “Zeppelin raids” that were carried out by German airships. According to History Extra, “During 1915, there were 20 raids from Northumberland to Kent, leaving over 200 dead, including the first raids on London on 31 May 1915.”<sup>98</sup> As mentioned in the previous subchapter, Belgium was occupied by Germany. Especially at the beginning of the invasion, As Sophie De Schaepdrijver observes, “From Liège to Diksmuide, invading troops destroyed houses, used locals as living shields [...] 5,500 men, women and children were killed in this way.”<sup>99</sup> Women were also among the targets of these atrocious acts, mainly rapes, which were committed by the invading troops. According to Susan Grayzel, “Wartime rape [...] supported an understanding of gender that placed motherhood at the heart of civilization and emphasized women’s primary status as passive victims of the war.”<sup>100</sup> The fact that a number of victims were women contributed to the production of propaganda posters. The depiction of the British victims was an influential marketing tool that exploited to help to spread negative emotions and patriotism among the non-combatants, whose response would be an immediate enlistment in the army.

The event in Scarborough was portrayed in a poster “Men of Britain! Will you Stand This?”<sup>101</sup> (1915, Appendix 7). It includes a picture in which there is a little girl who is carrying a toddler outside a collapsed house in Scarborough. The frightful atmosphere of this scene is enlarged by the heart-stopping sentences placed below the picture: “It was the Home of a Working Man. Four People were killed in this House including the Wife, aged 58, and Two Children, the youngest aged 5.” What is even more shocking is the fact that the picture also contains a reference to an address of the house in Scarborough. The ruins of the house and its description correspond with the real fate of the Bennett family, who were killed in the raid. Moreover, there is possible to see statistics that states the number of women and children casualties in Scarborough. The occurrence of these numbers indicates that Germans did not have problems with attacking defenseless women and innocent children. According to Grayzel,

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<sup>98</sup> “In pictures: Zeppelin raids on First World War Britain,” History Extra, accessed January 14, 2019, <https://www.historyextra.com/period/first-world-war/in-pictures-zeppelin-raids-on-first-world-war-britain/>.

<sup>99</sup> Sophie De Schaepdrijver, “Violence and Legitimacy: Occupied Belgium, 1914-1918,” *The Low Countries: Arts and Society in Flanders and the Netherlands*, no. 22 (2014): 47. <https://www.onserdeel.be/frontend/files/userfiles/files/SophieDeSchaepdrijver.pdf>.

<sup>100</sup> Grayzel, *Women’s Identities*, 52.

<sup>101</sup> Christopher, *British Posters*, 132.

“Those ironically both left behind and under attack were ‘only women and children,’ and yet they demonstrated the ‘calm’ heroism of combatants.”<sup>102</sup> This illustrates the initial resistance against the gender expectations of British women during the First World War. At the top of the poster, there is the enormous text “Men of Britain! Will You Stand This?” which refers to the women and children that were killed or wounded. All this information was undoubtedly a powerful tool of propaganda.

It was already mentioned that Germany used airships in order to attack the home front. Such raids and the following aftermaths are often depicted in posters. “The Zeppelin Raids the Wow of Vengeance”<sup>103</sup> (1915, Appendix 8) serves as an example of the German brutality on British civilians. Probably a mother with his son standing next to the dead body of an old lady, possibly their grandmother. Anger and the sense of vengeance is represented by a soldier who, in a furious manner, is pointing his fist at the “Zeppelin” airship flying away. Grayzel argues that in the course of the war, these onslaughts were denounced by public accounts and the harm of women of all ages was accentuated in an unacceptable manner.<sup>104</sup> The depiction of the mother who is hugging her crying son after the terrible moment, means that the women did not only worry about their husbands on the front, but newly also about their children and relatives at home. The black and white color scheme, together with the emotional responses of the figures, emphasize the dramatism of this dreadful incident.

Not all the posters are based on such true events, some of them focus only on possible scenarios, largely similar to the ones in the occupied Belgium. The term “Rape of Belgium” derives from the extreme violence committed against the population of Belgium. In the public mind, rape was a violent act historically associated with the victimization of women even though the victims were not entirely females. Stacey Reed observes this term in her article entitled “Victims or Vital: Contrasting Portrayals of Women in WWI British Propaganda”:

The use of this therefore gendered term, the Rape of Belgium, was twofold. Partially, it linked back to the idea of the personification of the country of Belgium as a woman, but it also evoked the specter of violence against women, which men should join the army to prevent.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Grayzel, *Women’s Identities*, 46.

<sup>103</sup> Christopher, *British Posters*, 128.

<sup>104</sup> Susan R. Grayzel, “Gender and Warfare,” in *Gender and the Great War*, ed. Susan R. Grayzel and Tammy M. Proctor (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 180.

<sup>105</sup> Stacey Reed, “Victims or Vital: Contrasting Portrayals of Women in WWI British Propaganda,” *Hohonu* 13, (2014): 82.

The immediate situation after the invasion of Belgium, in a contrast with England, is portrayed in a poster “The Hun and the Home”<sup>106</sup> (Appendix 9), from 1914. It contains two pictures, the first one represents “a bit of England” and the second one “a bit of Belgium.” England is depicted with bright colors of unharmed buildings and with images of women and children who are safely walking without any fear near their typical English houses. In contrast, the picture representing Belgium shows consequences of the German terror. A woman and man leaving an area of destroyed houses which appear more like ruins in the aftermath of some attack. The scene depicted in this picture is matched with the term “Hun” adopted by Attila the Hun who was “the barbarian leader of Hunnic Empire”. As Bruno Waterfield notes:

It became applied to Germany after a notorious speech by Emperor Wilhelm II in 1900, when he bade farewell to German soldiers sailing to China to put down the Boxer Uprising - and urged them to be ruthless, and to take no prisoners.<sup>107</sup>

This term also corresponds with the text below the Belgian picture. As an example, the sentence “THEIR Women are murdered & worse.” is in the contrast with the text “OUR Mothers & Wives safe” below the image of England on the left of the poster. This juxtaposition points out the obvious: British women were still without any real threat on the home front, but it might have been only a temporary situation before becoming victims of Germans and having to face the same fate as Belgian women.

A possible scenario shows a poster titled “Is Your Home Worth Fighting For?”<sup>108</sup> (1915, Appendix 10), This recruiting poster depicts a scene where German soldiers with their bayonets are forcing the entrance through the doors of a house. Inside, there are four people representing the ideal British three-generational family. Near the entrance doors, there is standing a woman whose left arm is leaning on the cupboard while her child is sitting between its father and grandfather, in the foreground of the poster. The facial expression of the woman shows fear because she did not expect that the war would come to her threshold. The text in the poster “It will be too late to fight when the enemy is at your door” indicates that the men should enlist as soon as possible because if they hesitate, the following day might have been the day, when their wives and children will be attacked by invading Germans.

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<sup>106</sup> David Wilson, *The Hun and the Home*, 1914, chromolithograph, 75,7 x 50,8 cm, <https://collection.nam.ac.uk/detail.php?acc=1977-06-81-25>.

<sup>107</sup> Bruno Waterfield, “Here comes the Hun: how First World War cemented a popular term for Germans,” *The Telegraph*, last modified August 25, 2014, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/belgium/11053788/Here-comes-the-Hun-how-First-World-War-cemented-a-popular-term-for-Germans.html>.

<sup>108</sup> Christopher, *British Posters*, 135.

A similar recruiting idea is to be found in a poster designed to warn women against possible German atrocities in the United Kingdom. A poster entitled “To the Women of Britain”<sup>109</sup> (1915, Appendix 11) does not include any female figures but only striking sentences, which aim directly at the British women, on the orange background. “You have read what the Germans have done in Belgium. Have you thought what they would do if they invaded this country?” this set of words promotes the idea that in case of the invasion of Britain, the women will become the victims of rapists. As Grayzel observes, the emphasis placed on attacks against women was considerably more substantial than on any other individuals because assaults on women were considered as assaults on the reproductive future of the nation.<sup>110</sup> This is one of the reasons why the gender expectation of the British men was to protect women, because “vulnerability of the invaded nation found its embodiment in the vulnerability of the violated woman.”<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Christopher, *British Posters*, 144.

<sup>110</sup> Grayzel, *Women's Identities*, 84.

<sup>111</sup> Jovana Knežević, “Gender and Occupation,” in *Gender and the Great War*, ed. Susan R. Grayzel and Tammy M. Proctor (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 136.

### 3. The Traditional and Breakthrough Roles of Women in the Posters

In the second half of the war, the visual images depicting females as mothers who are encouraging their husbands to go to war and as victims of barbarous acts gradually disappeared. The participation of British women in the war effort and their entrance into new spheres of employment was reflected in a variety of posters. According to David Bowness and Robert Fleming, “Perhaps the most striking change for traditionalists imbued with firm views on domestic roles was the reappraisal of ‘women’s work’ and its place in securing victory.”<sup>112</sup> Women were no longer of secondary importance; they were now indispensable. This transformation was apparent in the posters produced after this change had taken place. Females workers assembling munitions in factories, land girls at work, and female members of armed forces were images that disturbed the stereotypical depiction of femininity. In terms of occupation, an evident example of such a depiction was of women working as nurses: they appeared in a range of posters throughout the whole period of the First World War.

#### 3.1 Women as Nurses

From the beginning of the war, nursing was one of the few occupations that was generally considered feminine; thus, this perception was conducive to the production of posters. The British Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) that was closely associated with nursing services as well as other organizations and charity funds also depicted nurses in posters.

In 1915, the female author Denny Joyce created a poster, “V.A.D.”<sup>113</sup> (Appendix 12), for the Voluntary Aid Detachment. In the foreground of the poster, three V.A.D. female members are standing in front of a colossal Red Cross sign. For the VAD nurses, this symbol was an essential part of their uniforms, and had a symbolic purpose for both genders: “For the fighting male, the cross signalled sanctuary,”<sup>114</sup> while “For the nurses it was, like the nun’s cross, the badge of their equal sacrifice.”<sup>115</sup> One of the sacrifices of the VAD members was their work in countries considerably remote from Britain. These countries are depicted in the upper space and on both sides of the poster, and they represent the diversity of VAD deployment. Moreover, the VAD abbreviation occupies an area below the female figures, along with a list of distinctive occupations, such as “NURSING MEMBERS”, “COOKS” and

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<sup>112</sup> Bowness and Fleming, *Posters*, part 2.

<sup>113</sup> Joyce Denny, *V.A.D.*, 1915, lithograph on paper, 77.1 x 51.1 cm, IWM, London, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/7402>.

<sup>114</sup> Ouditt, *Fighting Forces*, 9.

<sup>115</sup> Ouditt, *Fighting Forces*, 9.

“KITCHEN MAIDS.” These professions constitute roles typically recognized by the public as feminine; however, the poster also mentions a need for “MOTOR-DRIVERS.” According to Thekla Bowser, the military authorities initially rejected female motor-drivers even though they possessed advanced driving skills, but as the war escalated and more men were required for active duty, the authorities agreed to employ them. This established “two motor ambulance units”<sup>116</sup> deployed “in different districts in France.”<sup>117</sup> The urgent need to bolster the workforce is indicated in the highlighted text “ARE URGENTLY NEEDED.” Among the volunteers who enlisted for the VAD in 1915 was Vera Brittain, who described her feelings, prior to enlistment, in a memoir entitled *Testament of Youth*:

I was terrified of going abroad – so much publicity was now given to the German submarine campaign that the possibility of being torpedoed was a nightmare to me – but I was even more afraid of acknowledging my cowardice to myself, let alone to others.<sup>118</sup>

As is evident, she overcame the fear of death rather than see herself as a coward. In addition, a sense of patriotism and determination to help the British soldiers motivated British women to enlist for the VAD.

Nurses are also depicted in a poster entitled “The Y.M.C.A. Service for Relatives of Dangerously Wounded”<sup>119</sup> (1915, Appendix 13). The primary focus is on the foreground of the picture, where a patient is lying in a hospital bed, while a visiting woman is sitting on a chair by the bed. Furthermore, next to the patient, whose head is bandaged, a male doctor is standing next to a nurse, who is wearing a Red Cross sign on her dress. The nurse is dressed in a typical uniform conforming to strict requirements: “collars were to be stiff, white, 23/8 inches deep; cuffs stiff, white, 33/8 inches deep; belts stiff, white, 3 inches deep.”<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, the depiction of a male instead of a female doctor reflects the gender inequality in this profession. This poster was made in 1915, when the government still refused female doctors who were willing to enlist. An anecdote from suffragist Dr Elsie Inglis highlights this. She tried to enlist in order “to show what women doctors could do, and [...] to promote suffrage,”<sup>121</sup> but she was rudely rejected by the authorities who told her: “My good lady, go home and sit still.”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Thekla Bowser, *The Story of British V.A.D. Work in the Great War* (London: Imperial War Museum, 2003), 232.

<sup>117</sup> Bowser, *British V.A.D.*, 232.

<sup>118</sup> Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* (London: Phoenix, 2014), part 2, Adobe Digital Editions EPUB.

<sup>119</sup> Christopher, *British Posters*, 182.

<sup>120</sup> Adie, *Home Front*, 17.

<sup>121</sup> Shipton, *Female Tommies*, chap. 4.

<sup>122</sup> Shipton, *Female Tommies*, chap. 4.



A change emerged in 1916 when women finally started being employed because “Britain faced a severe shortage of doctors.”<sup>123</sup> Unfortunately, as Elisabeth Shipton observes, female doctors served without any rank and on short-term contracts, which resulted in inconvenience in the form of lower status.<sup>124</sup> Thus, in the work hierarchy, women were considered “inferior to the male doctors and treated as such.”<sup>125</sup> The background of the poster depicts another nurse, who is wearing the same uniform and is taking care of other patients. However, she is separated from the situation in the foreground by a cubicle curtain, the purpose of which is to provide privacy for friends and relatives of the wounded in hospitals. The poster is marked by the sign of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) in the bottom right-hand corner. Additionally, this particular poster refers to the return of wounded soldiers to the United Kingdom. A website of the Young Men's Christian Association emphasizes that the “YMCA found itself working alongside the Royal Army Medical Corps and Red Cross in hospitals and convalescent camps, helping relatives to visit their sons.”<sup>126</sup> Nurses not only appeared in the posters at the beginning of the war, but also in the following years.

Evidence is provided in a poster entitled “FAG DAY”<sup>127</sup> (1917, Appendix 14) that reminds a date when a specific collection for soldiers takes place. The poster depicts a sailor with a fractured left hand in a plaster of Paris cast and a soldier with an underarm crutch, and both are smoking. Cigarettes were indispensable stress-relievers for soldiers on the front. For this reason, there was a fundraising organization called the Smokes for Wounded Soldiers and Sailors Society which organized the so-called “FAG” DAY collection on Tuesday, May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1917. Although the negative effects of cigarettes were publicized, the Smoke Fund was officially approved by the War Office and Admiralty. Behind the men in the poster, a nurse is approaching, with the Red Cross on her uniform. Furthermore, her facial expression indicates that she does not mind seeing the men smoking. Such behavior is understandable because a smoking habit was an essential part of soldiers during the First World War.

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<sup>123</sup> Shipton, *Female Tommies*, chap. 4.

<sup>124</sup> Shipton, *Female Tommies*, chap. 4.

<sup>125</sup> Shipton, *Female Tommies*, chap. 4.

<sup>126</sup> “YMCA and WWI,” YMCA, accessed January 15, 2019, <https://www.ymca.org.uk/about/history-heritage/ymca-and-ww1>.

<sup>127</sup> Bert Thomas, *Fag Day*, 1917, lithograph on paper, 73 x 50 cm, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/26181>.

### 3.2 Women as Workers and Auxiliary Corps

A large part of the first chapter of this thesis was devoted to the munitions industry along with the many organizations and units that affected the status of womanhood in many ways. Furthermore, to a certain extent it is possible to track the progress of women through a variety of posters. Producers focused their creative minds on the “posters that would stimulate and not depress.”<sup>128</sup> Thus, it is crucial to bear in mind that the demanding nature of female work was often hidden from the public eye.

An iconic poster “On Her Their Lives Depend”<sup>129</sup> (1916, Appendix 15) is based on a photograph taken in the field depicting soldiers of the British artillery as they are preparing shells for a heavy gun the BL 6-inch Mark VII. The original size of this photograph was cut, and a female munitions worker was added for propaganda purposes. The poster allows the viewer to see her facial expression indicating pride. Such pride is understandable because these women were helping British soldiers. The work in munitions factories “challenged the gender order through [...] patriotic skilled work.”<sup>130</sup> The female in the poster is putting on a cap and is wearing a typical ankle-length jacket made of a heavy fabric. Because this type of uniform was uncomfortable and inconvenient, trousers were introduced in the later years of the war. The majority of women praised the functionality and safety of trousers in the workplace, yet there were those who refused to put them on. It was believed that “women’s legs were a measure of their emancipation,”<sup>131</sup> and by wearing the trousers they were “outwardly adopting masculine style.”<sup>132</sup> In the upper space of the poster, there is placed the sizeable text “ON HER THEIR LIVES DEPEND,” which directly indicates that the fortunes of the soldiers are in the hands of the female munitions workers. Although they were operating in factories, their significance and contribution to the war effort were comparable to the servicemen.

Another recruiting poster with an analogous theme is called “These Women Are Doing Their Bit”<sup>133</sup> (1916, Appendix 16). In the foreground, a female munitions worker is putting on an ankle-length jacket, and it is evident that the jacket is worn over a normal dress.

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<sup>128</sup> Taylor, *Propaganda Poster*, chap. 2.

<sup>129</sup> *On Her Their Lives Depend*, 1916, lithograph on paper, 76,6 x 49,1 cm, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/27761>.

<sup>130</sup> Woollacott, *Munitions Workers*, 3.

<sup>131</sup> Adie, *Home Front*, 130.

<sup>132</sup> Woollacott, *Munitions Workers*, 212.

<sup>133</sup> Septimus E. Scott, *These Women Are Doing Their Bit*, 1916, lithograph on paper, 76,6 x 51 cm, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/24057>.

On the left side of the background, a soldier is approaching a door while waving to the female munitions worker in an appreciative manner. On the other side, four more female workers are already working. Furthermore, two are operating a lathe, which was a crucial tool in production of ammunition. The most important part of this poster is the presence of yellow that fills the door and windows in the background, with a shade of yellow covering the skin of the female worker in the foreground. As Terry Charman observes, this yellowing of the skin is a reminder of an unwanted distinguishing characteristic of the female munitions workers caused by TNT exposure, with no way of simply washing it off.<sup>134</sup> For this reason, the workers were nicknamed “Canaries.” The text stating “These women are doing their bit” stretches along the upper space of the poster and indicates that the women were no longer passive participants because they had found their place in the war effort. A song of munitions workers called “Canaries” captures the importance of these women:

Same as the lads  
Across the sea,  
If it wasn't for the ammunition girls  
Where would the Empire be?<sup>135</sup>

The lyrics support the previously mentioned claim in the analysis of the poster “On her Their Lives Depend” (1916, Appendix 15) that the female munitions workers made a comparable contribution to the war effort as the men across the sea.

It was already stated in the theoretical part of this thesis that women worked in numerous munitions factories across the whole of Britain. A good portrayal of such buildings can be found in a poster entitled “Free Training for Munition Workers”<sup>136</sup> (Appendix 17), which was published in 1917. The upper part of the poster contains an illustration of an unspecified munitions factory full of female workers. At first glance, it is impossible not to notice the seemingly endless length of the hall. Four rows of female workers are spread across the interior of the factory; furthermore, each worker is involved in the production process. In spite of the fact that the females worked on the home front, danger lurked on every corner in the munitions factories. Precautions against explosions were poor, and no equipment could protect the workers from inhaling perilous chemicals, not to mention the everyday fear of potential “Zeppelin” raids. Explosions in the factories were generally fatal. The Silvertown Explosion in 1917, with 70 deaths, and the explosion of the Chilwell National Shell Filling

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<sup>134</sup> Terry Charman, *The First World War on the Home Front* (London: Carlton Publishing Group, 2015), 153.

<sup>135</sup> Charman, *World War*, 152.

<sup>136</sup> *Free Training for Munition Workers*, 1917, lithograph on paper, 152 x 100,7 cm, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/28479>.

Factory in 1918, with 134 deaths, serve as notorious examples of the factory disasters. Going back to the content of the poster, it is essential to mention the text in an orange frame below the illustration that states: “Women urgently wanted to train for full time employment.” It should be noted that the employment of women munitions workers escalated in 1918. According to Angela Woollacott, “The Secretary to the Minister of Munitions publicly announced in May [...] that there were 1,000,000 women working in munitions industries.”<sup>137</sup>

While the above posters depict women as producers of military weapons who are enclosed in factories full of people, the visual images of the Women’s Land Army (WLA) frequently depict an appealing rural scene with isolated female figures caring for farm animals or operating farming equipment. After the U-boat campaign, Britain started producing its own food, which was not possible without bolstering the workforce through increased recruitment. A poster entitled “National Service – Women’s Land Army – GOD SPEED THE PLOUGH AND THE WOMAN WHO DRIVES IT”<sup>138</sup> (1917, Appendix 18) encouraged women to become members of the WLA. The instruction at the very bottom, which says “Apply for enrolment forms at your nearest post office or employment exchange,” serves as evidence. The background of the poster depicts a country landscape and a sunrise behind the mountains with its beams falling upon the center, where a lone Land Army worker is plowing a field with a horse. The woman’s uniform consists of a mackintosh coat, breeches, gaiters, and a hat. This uniform, together with an instruction handbook, was given to each woman immediately after her acceptance into the service of the WLA. As is evident from the poster, plowing with a horse was one of many physically demanding tasks to which women were exposed. Ann Kramer claims that as time passed, women, through “their efforts, commitment and hard work finally overcame male prejudice, [with] farmers seeing for themselves just how hard the women worked.”<sup>139</sup> In the lower part of the poster, there is a motivational text in the form of a prayer, as well as an emblem of National Service. As was already mentioned, the Land Army girls were provided with the WLA handbook which, among other things, specified the indispensable terms and conditions of their service. Although the WLA women wore similar clothes to men and did masculine work, they were urged to remain feminine. According to the *Women’s Land Army Handbook*, each female land worker was reminded to “behave like a British girl who expects chivalry and respect from everyone she meets.”<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Woollacott, *Munitions Workers*, 18.

<sup>138</sup> Christopher, *British Posters*, 148.

<sup>139</sup> Ann Kramer, *Land Girls and Their Impact* (Great Britain: Lamorna Publishing Services, 2008), chap. 1, Adobe Digital Editions EPUB.

<sup>140</sup> Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, *Women’s Land Army L.A.A.S. Handbook*, 5.

A similar poster published in 1918 and entitled “Recruits Required Immediately for the Women’s Land Army”<sup>141</sup> (Appendix 19) also places emphasis on the countryside. Its function was to attract potential recruits needed for production of forage and timber. The upper background of this poster is split into two parts. On the left side, there is a field with a number of piles of hay, which corresponds with the word “forage.” On the opposite side, there are some high trees which refer to the word “timber.” The foreground of the poster shows a full-length female figure with a WLA emblem on her left arm; she is holding a calf. In the middle, there is a rectangle filled with lines of text that block the situation on the field. Because of this, there is only a partial view of another female worker sitting on a horse-drawn mower. The text in the middle urges British women to enlist and also provides further information about the recruitment. The crucial part of this poster is the mention of timber and the depiction of trees. Female land workers did a wide range of work and some belonged to the Women’s Forestry Corps, which was “a sub-section of the WLA.”<sup>142</sup> As Ann Kramer comments, “These women did valuable work felling and sawing timber for pit props, trench poles, railway sleepers and paper.”<sup>143</sup> Performing such strenuous tasks exemplified the true patriotism of women. In April 1918, *the Landswoman* magazine published a poem called “Timber” by B. Channier, which reflects the patriotic mentality:

We work in this northern clime,  
 With the saw in front-nipped hands,  
 Women instead of men,  
 At a heavy thing.  
 For the sake of a better time,  
 When all the suffering lands  
 Shall bloom and be happy again  
 In a peaceful Spring.<sup>144</sup>

One of the possible interpretations is that female woodworkers worked in uneasy conditions of the northern climate in order to have enough timber for the future, when the war is over and peace is declared. When the U-boat campaign emerged, it also affected imports of timber. Thus, Britain had to rely on its own wood supplies, and with the departure of men to the front, women were called into duty.

It is noticeable from the previous posters that animals are an indispensable part of each one of them. Besides patriotism, females also had other motives for working on the land.

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<sup>141</sup> *Recruits required immediately for the Women’s Land Army*, 1918, lithograph on paper, 76,2 x 49,4 cm, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/41293>.

<sup>142</sup> Kramer, *Land Girls*, chap. 1.

<sup>143</sup> Kramer, *Land Girls*, chap. 1.

<sup>144</sup> B. Channier, “Timber,” *Landswoman*, April 1918, 63.

As Bonnie White comments, a number of women decided to enlist in the WLA because of the work with animals.<sup>145</sup> For this reason, White argues that the posters “appealed to ‘a girl’s love of animals and the outdoors’ [...] the care of young animals, and horse work.”<sup>146</sup> A representative example is provided by a poster entitled “National Service Women’s Land Army”<sup>147</sup> (1917, Appendix 20) that depicts an adult horse and a foal eating hay from a wooden feeder. A female figure, who, according to the emblem on her left arm, is a WLA worker, is standing next to them. Furthermore, she is holding a sack full of hay from which she is filling the feeder for the horses. Because of the perspective, the trees with thin trunks in the background appear to be of the same size as the female. It is possible to find a symbolic meaning in the depiction of the isolated female worker who is surrounded by animals in the countryside. As White states: “The ideal of a country girl’s innocence, sheltered from the sexual adventures of the city, reinforced both traditional femininity – with childlike undertones – and an image of a nation worthy of sacrifice.”<sup>148</sup>

If one imagines the typical content of a military poster, it would be a patriotic soldier proudly saluting the British flag. In 1917, poster production reflected situation that disrupted the male-dominated sphere of military images. With the establishment of the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), the question emerged of how to present women in these posters. In one poster dating to this period, a massive United Kingdom flag separates a waving woman with a genuine smile on her face from her WAAC colleagues in a poster entitled “WAAC - Every Fit Woman Can Release a Fit Man”<sup>149</sup> (1918, Appendix 21). Moreover, the poster depicts the WAACs in khaki military uniforms designed with the female body in mind. As Lucy Noakes explains, it was necessary that the uniform’s design remain feminine to be distinctive from the uniforms of combatant men.<sup>150</sup> Additionally, the badges denoting rank on the WAAC uniforms were modified, as Noakes continues: “The crowns, crosses and bars of the army were replaced by a set of flower insignia, predominantly the rose and the fleur-de-lys which were felt to be more feminine.”<sup>151</sup> The poster further contains messages that tempt the female population to enlist. The phrase “Every fit woman can release a fit man” placed immediately below

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<sup>145</sup> White, *Land Army*, 76.

<sup>146</sup> White, *Land Army*, 76.

<sup>147</sup> *National Service: Women’s Land Army*, 1917, lithograph on paper, 75 x 49 cm, <http://cdm16630.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/p16630coll2/id/686>.

<sup>148</sup> White, *Land Army*, 50.

<sup>149</sup> *W.A.A.C - Every fit woman can release a fit man*, 1918, photolithograph, 76.4 x 51 cm, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C96827>.

<sup>150</sup> Noakes, *British Army*, 72.

<sup>151</sup> Noakes, *British Army*, 72.

the female figures refers to women replacing men in supporting roles in the army, and the presence of the Union Jack emphasizes the importance of national pride. A November 24, 1917, article in *the Daily Telegraph* quotes the officer commanding a base depot in France, who highlights the patriotic efforts of the WAAC's domestic service: "These women have not come out for the sake of money, as their pay is that of a private soldier"<sup>152</sup> but rather they "do their best to make things more comfortable for the men."<sup>153</sup>

The renaming of the WAAC affected the production of posters. A homonymous name of this newly renamed organization contains a poster entitled "Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps"<sup>154</sup> (1918, Appendix 22) In the center, a circle surrounds a line of six QAAC members and the message "We're looking to you to join our circle." Furthermore, the message also corresponds to a lone woman standing outside the circle and pointing her finger in an encouraging manner. This gesticulation is largely similar to a notorious pose from a 1914 poster depicting Lord Kitchener encouraging Britons to join the army. Additionally, each woman is wearing a khaki uniform. Uniforms became an essential part of women's identities because they symbolized their contribution to the war effort. As Noakes remarks: "The appearance of large numbers of women in military uniform did provide a visual reminder of the shifts in gender roles which had come about since the beginning of the war."<sup>155</sup>

With the foundation of the QAAC (originally the WAAC), it was only a matter of time before other military organizations formed separate female units. The Royal Navy's establishment of the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS), for example, was accompanied by recruiting campaigns that included posters. These images are distinctive from others because of the presence of water and the color blue. In a poster "Women's Royal Naval Service"<sup>156</sup> (1917, Appendix 23), a number of objects connote the concept of "Navy": The background includes a sea coast with a lighthouse and four flying seagulls, and a ship sailing toward the open sea in the distance. Most importantly, a large-scale woman in the foreground has open arms welcoming potential WRNS enlistees. As stated in the first chapter of this thesis, women were needed for a range of occupations; however, they were divided into two categories. According the Torpedo Bay Navy Museum, the first category, "immobile," included women working near their homes; the second, "mobile," consisted of women working everywhere else,

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<sup>152</sup> "Women of the Army," *Daily Telegraph*, November 1917, 8.

<sup>153</sup> "Women of the Army," 8.

<sup>154</sup> *Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps*, 1918, lithograph on paper, 73.6 x 49.4 cm, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C96828>.

<sup>155</sup> Noakes, *British Army*, 72.

<sup>156</sup> Joyce Dennys, *Women's Royal Naval Service*, 1917, lithograph on paper, 75.5 x 49.1 cm, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C100751>.

including overseas.<sup>157</sup> The woman in this poster is between the sea and land. The side with the sea might represent work overseas (mobile), while the second side with land might refer to work near the home (immobile). Moreover, she is standing on a cliff, which corresponds to the adopted motto “Never at Sea,” and wearing an authentic WRNS uniform, consisting of “shapeless dress, in the middle, with a small version of a Naval rating’s collar, pudding basin hat, thick black stockings and heavy footwear.”<sup>158</sup>

It was uncommon for two organizations to appear in the same poster, although such collaboration of the WAAC and WRNS is depicted in a poster entitled “Women Wanted Urgently”<sup>159</sup> (1917, Appendix 24) In the upper-middle of the poster, Britannia is wrapping her arms around the shoulders of two women, with each woman wearing a distinctively colored uniform (the WAAC in khaki, the WRNS in blue). Britannia was a symbol of the British Empire for centuries and served as a propaganda tool in times of war. As Mina Gorji explains, “Britannia was a personification of the nation and the freedoms of the constitution, but she also came to represent the might and authority of the British Empire.”<sup>160</sup> Britannia was used not only in a range of posters but also in other situations; for instance, this national symbol was conducive to suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst’s magazine adopting the name *Britannia*. The poster further contains text within a black border. Among the names of the organizations and information about enrollment, a bold phrase in red states, “Women wanted urgently,” which emphasizes a need for new recruits.

The last female military organization that started producing posters before the end of the war was the Women’s Royal Air Force (WRAF). If the WRNS posters’ distinguishing features were water and blue, WRAF posters’ were the sky and airplanes. These features are depicted in a poster “Women! The Royal Air Force Needs Your Help!”<sup>161</sup> (1918, Appendix 25), which is divided into two parts. The lower portion has a massive Royal Air Force roundel with recruiting messages such as “There is fit work for every FIT WOMAN”; this text might refer to the strict recruitment standards that eliminated women not considered fit enough. The upper portion depicts a British biplane being repaired by two male Royal Air Force members, as well

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<sup>157</sup> “Womens Royal Naval Service,” National Museum of the Royal New Zealand Navy, accessed February 14, 2019, <http://navymuseum.co.nz/womens-royal-naval-service/>.

<sup>158</sup> Mason, *Britannia’s Daughters*, chap. 1.

<sup>159</sup> *Women Wanted Urgently*, 1917, lithograph on paper, 74,1 x 50,1 cm, IWM, London, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/31387>.

<sup>160</sup> Mina Gorji, *Rude Britannia*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 5–6.

<sup>161</sup> *Women! The Royal Air Force Needs Your Help!*, 1918, lithograph on paper, 75.5 x 50.5 cm, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/31372>.



as hangars and three other biplanes flying above them. However, the most crucial part is a saluting WRAF member standing in the middle. Taking into consideration the posters from previous years, this image presents a breakthrough in the depiction of women: a saluting member of the WRAF in a military uniform complemented by the text “WOMEN: The Royal Air Force needs your help” highlights a shift in images of women from the First World War.

## Conclusion

At the end of this bachelor thesis, it is essential to summarize the transformation of females in the British posters from the First World War. Posters that appeared between the years 1914–1915 depict female figures as passive participants in the war. They are shown generally standing in the safety of their houses and encouraging their male counterparts to enlist in the army. These female figures are in most cases surrounded by their children. Moreover, there is a clear distinction between the male and female spheres. While men are depicted as soldiers, or those who should protect the family and nation, women, on the other hand, are shown inferior to them with their natural role in the domestic sphere. These stereotypical images reflect the perception of women from the early years of the war. More precisely, the perception and gender inequality were aspects, which prevailed from the Edwardian era. If categories of married and unmarried women are taken into consideration, then the posters definitely depict those united in marriage. Their role in society was strictly bound to domesticity. Once they were married, there was an expectation to leave their occupations and raise healthy children for the future of the nation. However, propaganda messages in these posters were evidently aimed directly at women of all classes. For the reason that in the early years of the war, conscription that would order British men to enroll was not there. Thus, women were prompted through posters to urge the male population to enlist in the army.

However, women are also depicted as “victims” of barbarous acts of the German army. Such posters focus on gender stereotypes where the weak and helpless female victims should evoke protective instincts and patriotism in British men. These images are in most cases accompanied with strong propaganda messages whose role was to increase pressure on male civilians.

It is essential to mention that nursing was a female occupation in correspondence with the gender perception of femininity. Hence, this female role appeared in a number of posters throughout the whole period of the war. The figures in such posters are mostly depicted as wearing the Red Cross sign and taking care of wounded soldiers.

However, the 1914–1915 posters started decreasing and were gradually replaced by new types of images. It is unquestionable that the evolution of British womanhood in the second half of the war had an impact on the depiction of females in the posters. The establishment of conscription was among other influences one of the main reasons why many female organizations and units were founded. Furthermore, together with other industries they urged females to participate in the war effort by entering occupations predominantly restricted

to the male population, at the outbreak of the war. This caused a shift in the depiction of women in a range of posters. Munitions work was one of the earlier working opportunities; however, its propaganda posters started appearing along with other organizations and units since the second half of the war. Undoubtedly, great importance was given to the production of munitions; thus, this industry addressed women through posters to assemble munitions and help Britons to win the war. Further, the gradually formed female organizations: Women's Land Army, Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, Women's Royal Naval Service, and Women's Royal Air Force, also used this effective form of mass communication in order to attract potential female recruits into their services. Women are no more depicted as passive participants, but as contributors to the war effort under similar terms as men. They now appear in breakthrough roles in contrast with their earlier depiction in the posters. Plowing a land with horses, taking care of animals, wearing distinctive type of clothes are attributes in direct opposition with the female inactivity in the 1914–1915 posters. Although women took place in masculine occupations and worked under similar conditions as men, there was still a need to ensure the public that they remained feminine. This assertion is reflected in the depiction of uniforms in posters that emerged after 1915. At first glance, they are clearly recognizable as feminine because of ankle-length jackets, coats or hats designed keeping the female body in mind. However, women were proud of their uniforms because they fueled them with a sense of pride and patriotism. Posters with women dressed in various military colors, proudly staying around the Union Jack, or saluting in front of a biplane, etc. indicate a gradual escalation in their depiction. The more interesting is the fact that the posters in this bachelor thesis to a certain extent reflect the change in the British womanhood through the years of the First World War.

## Resumé

Cílem této bakalářské práce je prozkoumat a zmapovat způsoby, jakými byly ženy vyobrazeny v britských plakátech z první světové války. Tato práce obsahuje celkem tři kapitoly, z nichž ta první poskytuje teoretický rámec pro zbylé dvě analytické části.

První kapitola se zabývá proměnou ženy a ženství v Británii, počínaje předválečným rokem 1910 a konče závěrem první světové války v roce 1918. Tato část bakalářské práce nejdříve zachycuje přetrvávající nerovnost pohlaví a vnímání ženy z Eduardovského období, které ovlivňovalo jak vdané, tak i svobodné ženy všech sociálních tříd. Prostředí domu bylo viděno jako přirozené místo vdaných žen, avšak největší míra důležitosti byla přiřazována mateřské povinnosti, která představovala zplození a následné vychování potomka pro budoucí prosperitu britského impéria. Svobodné ženy byly – bez rozdílu sociální třídy a v porovnání s jejich mužskými oponenty – vystavovány, i přes světlé výjimky, nerovným podmínkám. Pozornost je věnována také ženskému hnutí za rovnocenné volební právo, které bylo v té době mužskou výsadou. Proti tomuto zažitému společenskému stereotypu vystupovaly především dvě organizace bojující za práva žen: Ženská sociální a politická unie společně s Národní unií ženských volebních spolků. Teoretická kapitola se dále postupně dostává k období, kdy vypukla první světová válka. Popisuje proměnu ženských organizací bojující proti nerovnoprávnosti žen, které se začaly naplno věnovat problémům na domácí frontě a vystupovat proti počáteční lhostejnosti k začlenění žen do válečného procesu. Dále se objevují zaměstnání, která začala vznikat v průběhu první světové války, jelikož vstup žen do nových odvětví průmyslu, organizací a oddílů byl klíčovým zlomem vedoucím k rozdílnému vnímání ženy a ženství. Tato část nejdříve rozebírá ženy, které pracovaly jako dobrovolné zdravotní sestry. Daná činnost byla vnímána jako ideální uplatnění ženského potenciálu. Výcvik budoucích sester byl zprostředkován několika dobrovolnickými organizacemi, avšak prostor je vymezen především té oficiální s názvem Britské oddělení dobrovolné pomoci. Význam je přikládán také oficiálním uniformám, které byly klíčovým prvkem v utváření jednotné identity. Teoretická kapitola se dále přesouvá do druhé poloviny války uvedením branné povinnosti, která nařizovala mužům okamžité narukování. Toto opatření nemělo vliv pouze na zvýšení poptávky po ženské pracovní síle v továrnách na munici, ale také na vytvoření ženské organizace zaměřující se na práci v zemědělství a dále na vytvoření několika ženských oddílů ozbrojených složek. Nutno podotknout, že každá organizace nebo oddíl poskytovaly nejrůznější pracovní místa, která byla určena pouze pro ženy určitých sociálních tříd. Tento fakt je v průběhu celé teoretické části bakalářské práce zohledněn. Výroba munice neměla vliv

pouze na vnímání žen ve společnosti, ale také na možná zdravotní rizika, vznikající kvůli manipulaci s nebezpečnými látkami. Je důležité si uvědomit, že tato práce nabídla především ženám z nižších tříd zcela nový způsob života. Jak už bylo dříve zmíněno, je dán prostor také organizaci, která se specializovala na ženskou práci v zemědělství a dále také nově založeným ženským oddílům spadajícím pod armádu, námořnictvo nebo letectvo. Nově vzniklé pozice se podílely na prolomení stereotypního vnímání žen ve společnosti a nabídly vkročení žen do míst, která byla dříve určená výhradně mužskému pohlaví. Kapitola je završena bezprostředním obdobím po skončení první světové války. Je zde popsán vliv válečného období na změnu ve vnímání žen a posun britského ženství.

Druhá kapitola je rozdělena do dvou podkapitol a analyzuje stereotypní zobrazení žen v plakátech, které se objevovaly od roku 1914 do roku 1915. Dobové plakáty, které jsou použity v bakalářské práci, jsou čerpány především z oficiálních online databází, jako Imperial War Museums, National Army Museum, Australian War Memorial nebo z knihy *British Posters of the First World War* od Johna Christophera. První podkapitola vyobrazuje ženy jako matky a manželky, což se vyznačuje několika situacemi. Velmi často se objevují v prostoru domu se svými dětmi nabádající své mužské protějšky k rekrutování. Dále se v těchto plakátech ve velké míře objevují vojáci, kteří bojují nebo pochodují do bitvy. Každý plakát je doplněn o slogany a hesla apelující jak na britské ženy, tak i muže. Muži byli prostřednictvím plakátů nabádáni k naplnění jejich mužské povinnosti tím, že budou bojovat za svou vlast. Ženy jsou v této podkapitole dále zachyceny v situacích, které mají za cíl evokovat v mužích nepříjemné okamžiky. Jde především o formu zesměšňování, která měla v mužích vyvolat pocit zahanbení z toho, že se nachází doma v Británii, zatímco ostatní bojují na frontě za svoji vlast. Druhá podkapitola vyobrazuje ženy jako oběti války. Jedná se buď o reálné situace pramenící z válečných událostí v Belgii a Británii, nebo o možné budoucí scénáře, které jsou založeny na skutečných událostech. Tento styl plakátů využívá stereotypní zobrazení žen, jakožto slabých a zranitelných bytostí. Muž byl ve společnosti vnímán jako hlava rodiny, která je nadřazena své ženě. Je evidentní, že tyto plakáty cílily na mužskou populaci, protože jejich povinností bylo ochraňovat své ženy, které byly nezbytně nutné pro budoucnost národa.

Třetí kapitola obsahuje rovněž dvě podkapitoly, z nichž ta první se zaměřuje na vyobrazení ženy, coby zdravotní sestry. Tato pracovní pozice byla od začátku války vnímána jako ženská. Z tohoto důvodu se zdravotní sestry objevovaly v plakátech po dobu celého válečného konfliktu. Nejčastěji byly zachyceny v situacích, kdy se starají o zraněné vojáky nebo kdy se nacházejí poblíž znaku červeného kříže. Červený kříž je navíc přítomen na všech uniformách zdravotních sester. Tento znak neměl symbolický význam pouze pro ženy starající

se o zraněné a nemocné lidi, ale i pro muže bojující ve válce. Druhá podkapitola analyzuje plakáty z druhé poloviny války, tedy od roku 1916 až do roku 1918. Nejdříve jsou analyzovány ty plakáty, které zobrazují ženské postavy v blízkosti munice nebo přímo v továrnách na munici. Jsou zde znázorněny typické uniformy, které tyto ženy z bezpečnostních důvodů nosily. Přítomna jsou také propagandistická hesla, která poukazují na důležitost těchto pracovníků nebo fráze, které vyzývají ženy ke vstupu do tohoto zaměstnání. Podkapitola dále pokračuje plakáty, v nichž jsou ženy obdělávající půdu na poli nebo starající se o hospodářská zvířata. Tento druh práce se podílel na redukci předsudků vůči ženám. Bylo to velice namáhavé zaměstnání, které otestovalo skutečné odhodlání a patriotismus žen. Další zásadní změnu ve vyobrazení žen poskytují plakáty Ženského podpůrného sboru, který byl odnoží britské armády. Poprvé můžeme zaznamenat ženy v barvě khaki, které navíc hrdě mávají poblíž vlajky Spojeného království. Následují plakáty dalších armádních složek, a to jmenovitě námořnictva a letectva. Námořnictvo lákalo ženské rekruty pomocí oddílu s názvem Dámská královská námořní služba. Typickým znakem těchto plakátů bylo moře a všudypřítomná modrá barva. Zajímavým aspektem těchto plakátů jsou ženské uniformy, které měly za úkol nejen reprezentovat námořnictvo, ale zároveň působit ženským dojmem. Ke kompletnosti této kapitoly už zbývají pouze plakáty leteckého oddílu pod názvem Dámské královské letectvo. Podobně jako v případě námořnictva, i plakáty letectva obsahují nezaměnitelné prvky. Nejsou to pouze letadla a letecké hangáry, ale také insignie britského letectva. Tyto plakáty žen patřily mezi poslední svého druhu, které vznikly před koncem první světové války.

Výsledkem této práce je doložení změny v zobrazování ženy a ženství v britských plakátech od počátku první světové války do jejího konce. Na začátku války byly ženy ve stereotypním stínu Eduardovského období, což odrážejí plakáty, které zachycují matky a manželky, jejichž přirozeným místem je domácnost. Tyto ženy se nepřímou podílí na válečném úsilí tím, že buď nabádají, nebo provokují muže k narukování do armády. Avšak nesmí být opomenut fakt, že se objevovaly také plakáty, které vyobrazovaly ženy jako oběti. Tento druh plakátů dokládá další stereotypizaci, a to především slabost a bezmocnost žen. Muži byli společností vnímáni jako nadřazené pohlaví, proto bylo jejich mužskou povinností ochránit své ženy tím, že se přihlásí do armády. Práce zdravotní sestry byla od začátku války vnímána jako typicky ženská, proto není překvapením, že plakáty zobrazující zdravotní sestry se objevovaly po celou dobu války. Avšak řada vlivů, v čele s povinnými odvody, zapříčinily změnu na poli zaměstnanosti žen všech sociálních tříd. Ženy se staly potřebnými a vstoupily do několika druhů zaměstnání, které byly testem jejich válečného úsilí. Tuto transformaci

odrážejí plakáty z druhé poloviny války, ve kterých jsou ženy zastávající role, které jim byly především na začátku války odepřeny. Tyto plakáty dokládají, jaký ohromný kus cesty prodělalo britské ženství za dobu čtyř let, po kterou probíhala první světová válka.

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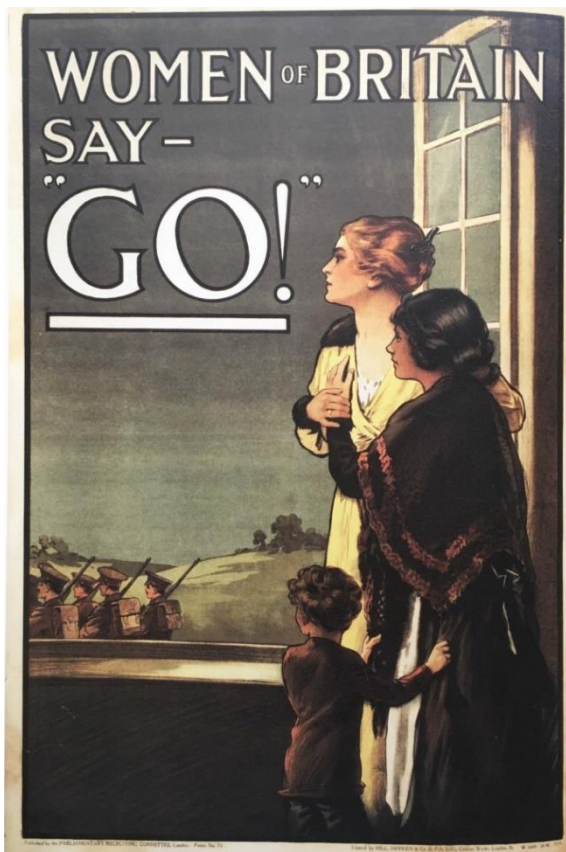
# Appendices



Appendix 1



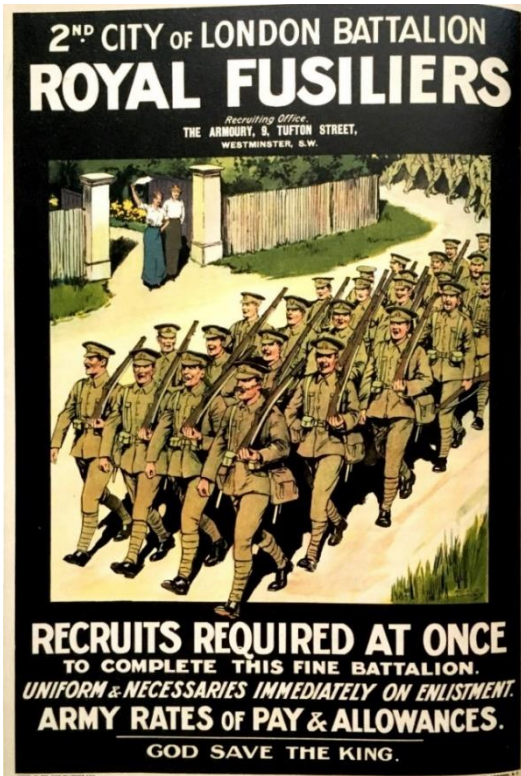
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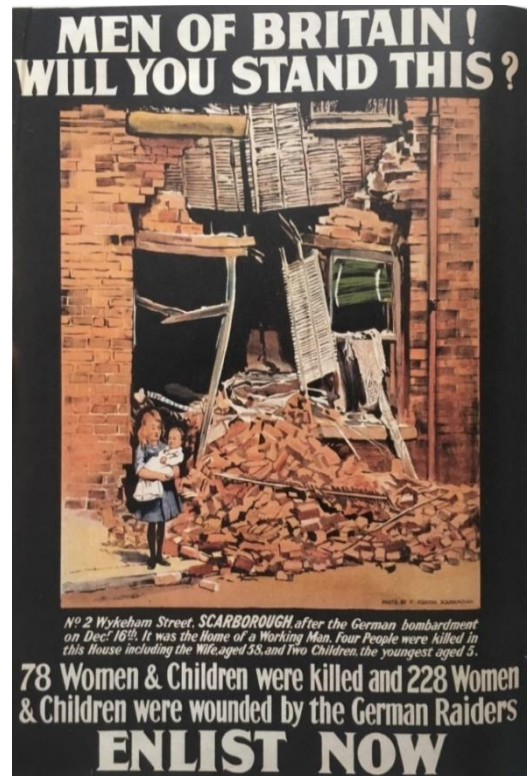
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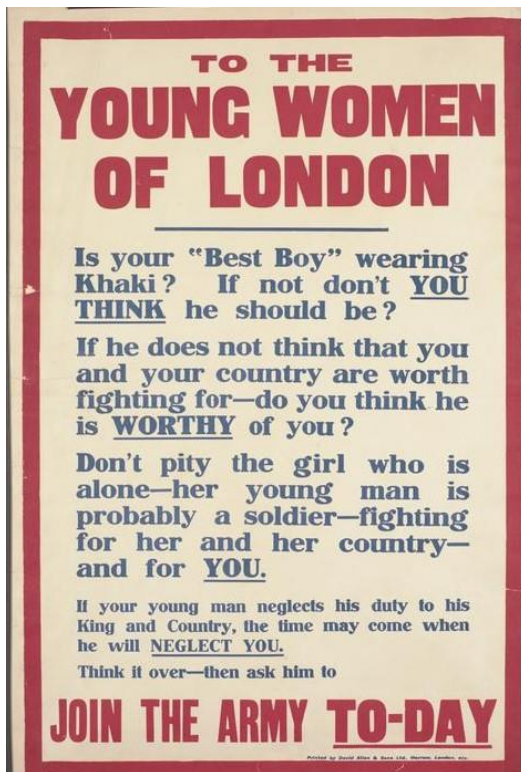
Appendix 4



Appendix 5



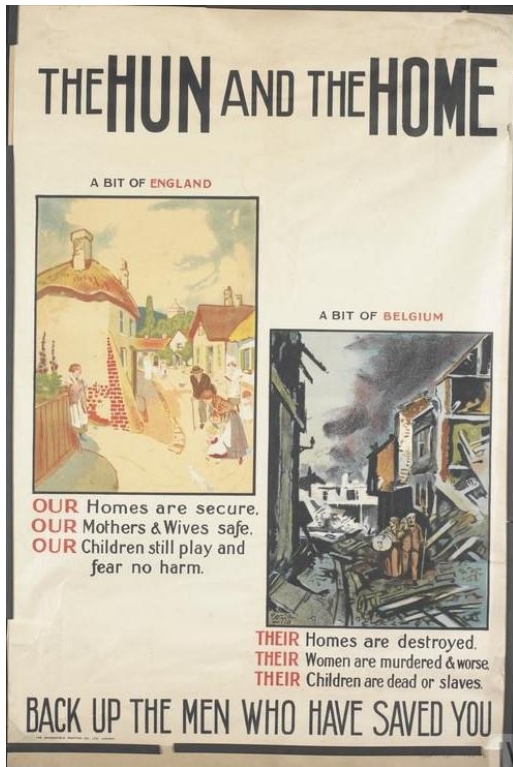
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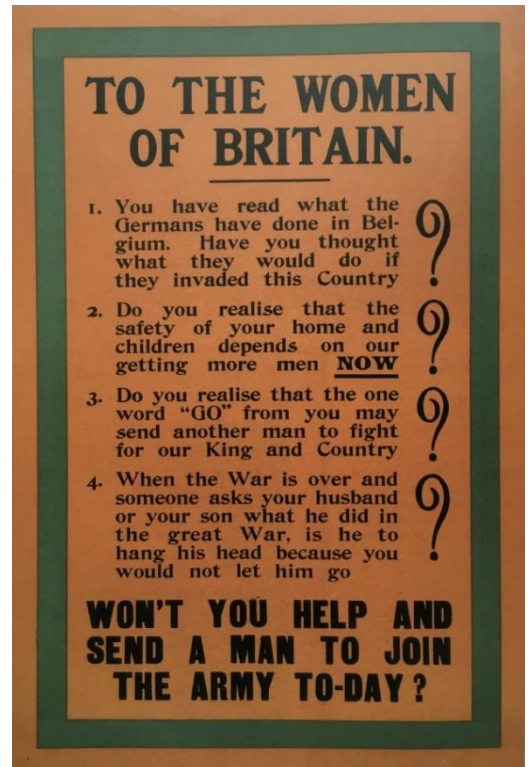
Appendix 6



Appendix 8



Appendix 9



Appendix 11



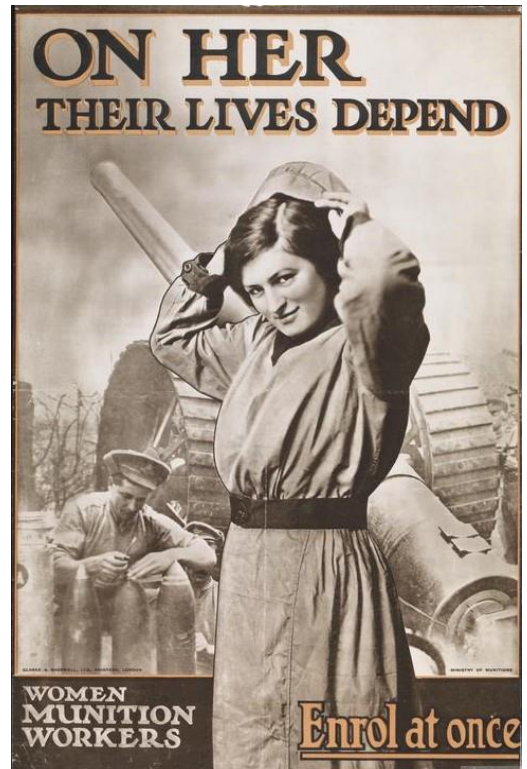
Appendix 10



Appendix 12



Appendix 13



Appendix 15

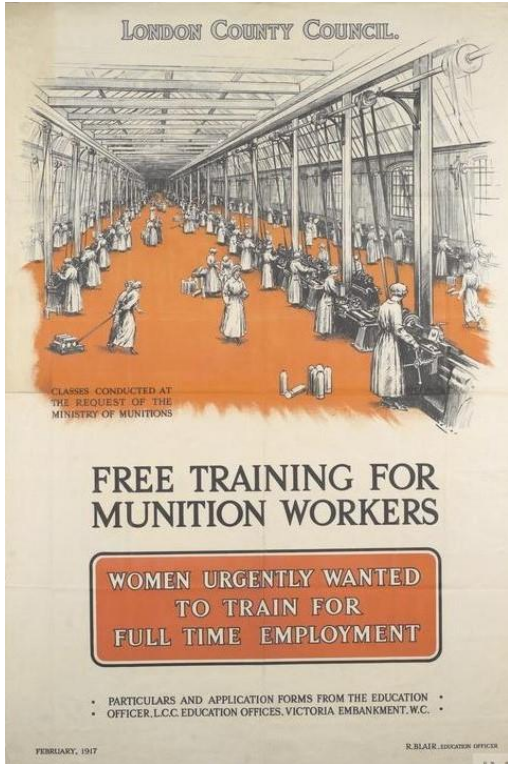


Appendix 14

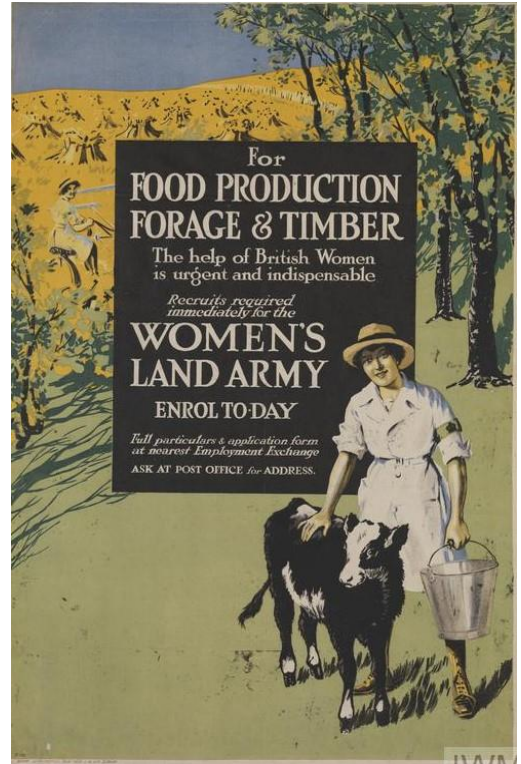


Appendix 16





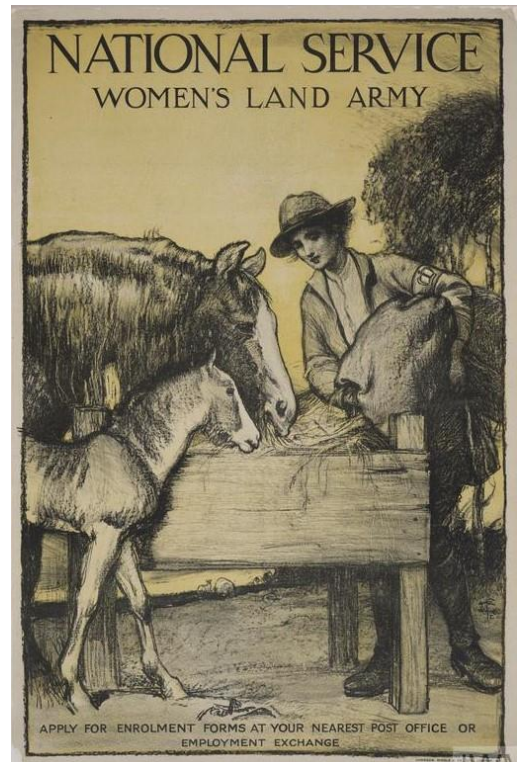
Appendix 17



Appendix 19



Appendix 18



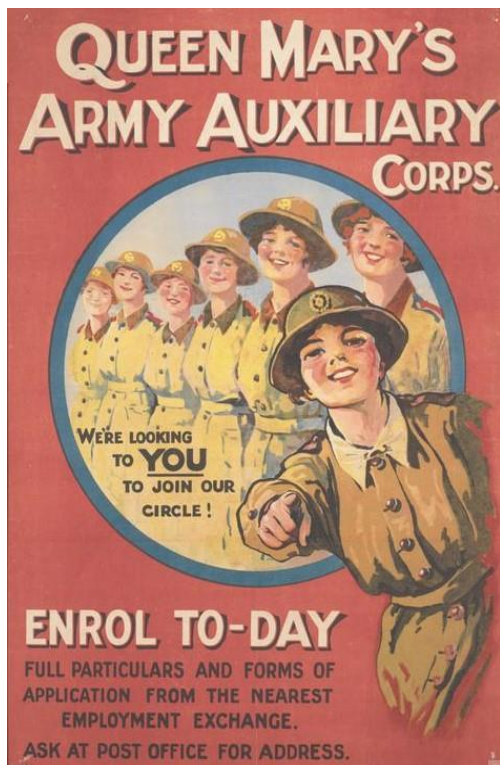
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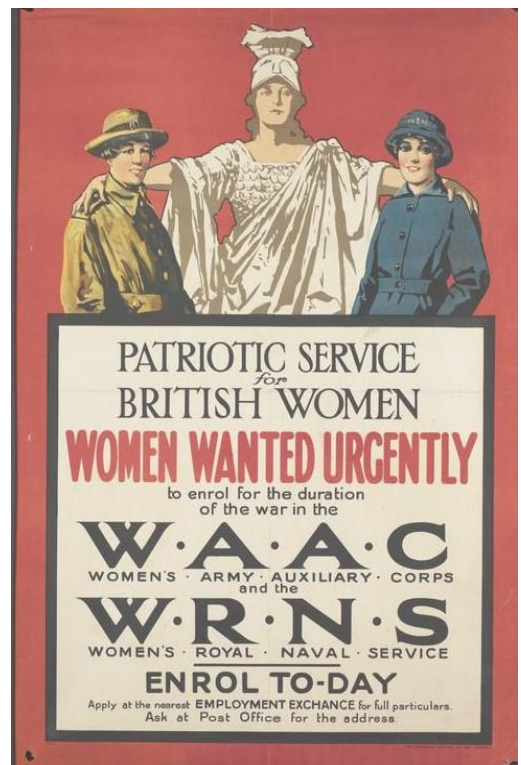
Appendix 21



Appendix 23



Appendix 22



Appendix 24



Appendix 25