

**‘Witness to the Oneness of Humanity’: The
Contribution and Significance of British Women
Pacifists in the Era of World War Two**

Steven Illingworth

M.A. in History by Research

University of Huddersfield

September 2022

Contents

Copyright Statement.....	3
Abbreviations.....	4
Abstract.....	5
Chapter 1 – Introduction: British Women Pacifists in the era of World War Two.....	6
Chapter 2 - The Nature of Women’s Pacifism in World War Two.....	21
Chapter 3 - Applied Pacifism – Agency or Impotence?.....	37
Chapter 4 - Pacifist Women and the Challenge to the Wartime Consensus.....	51
Chapter 5 - The Contribution of Pacifists to Post-War Reconciliation.....	62
Conclusion.....	73
References.....	76

Copyright statement

i. The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns any copyright in it (the “Copyright”) and he has given The University of Huddersfield the right to use such Copyright for any administrative, promotional, educational and/or teaching.

ii. Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts, may be made only in accordance with the regulations of the University Library. Details of these regulations may be obtained from the Librarian. This page must form part of any such copies made.

iii. The ownership of any patents, designs, trademarks and any and all other intellectual property rights except for the Copyright (the “Intellectual Property Rights”) and any reproductions of copyright works, for example graphs and tables (“Reproductions”), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property Rights and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without permission of the owner of the relevant Intellectual Property Rights and/or Reproductions.

Abbreviations

CO – Conscientious Objector

FAU – Friends Ambulance Unit.

FRS – Friends Relief Service

PPU – Peace Pledge Union

WCG – Women’s Co-operative Guild

UNRRA - United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration

WIL – Women’s International League, the British branch of the wider international group
known as the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)

Abstract

Women pacifists in World War Two Britain have received little attention from historians. On the rare occasions where this subject has been addressed, there has been a tendency to underestimate the significance and successes of the women who opposed the war, as the typical focus has been on a handful of intellectual women from privileged backgrounds. This thesis challenges the limitations of this approach, mainly by defining pacifism more broadly and by using a wider range of sources. These sources include the journals documenting the activities of working class pacifists and also the oral archives. Both of these have captured the voices of women from a variety of backgrounds in addition to those from intellectual circles. The result is a wide-ranging analysis of women pacifists in this era, placing their ideas and actions from the 1940s into the wider development of feminist ideology across the twentieth century and demonstrating the deep significance and impact they had on British society at this critical time.

Introduction: British Women Pacifists in the era of World War Two

There is usually a feeling that a large amount of attention has been devoted to the topic of World War Two and that, especially in a British context, there has been a high level of enthusiasm sometimes bordering on obsession to study the 1940s. However, in terms of the analysis of pacifism in Britain, the 1940s have often been marginalised by historians, who focus much more on the influential peace movements of the 1930s and then resume the story with the anti-nuclear protests starting in the 1950s. In particular, there has been a paucity of attention devoted to the British women who opposed World War Two, whether by voicing their concerns about governmental policy or by becoming conscientious objectors when conscription for women was introduced from 1941. A detailed analysis of British women pacifists in the 1940s will help to shed light on important developments in the wider history of pacifism that have been overlooked by most historians. It will also provide important insights into British society in one of the most important decades in the country's history.

The term 'pacifism' needs some clarification, as its definition has been debated. Defining pacifism is more straightforward when studying the British peace movement in the early 1930s, when there was widespread opposition to the possibility of further conflict. The years 1934 and 1935 witnessed the Peace Ballot and the creation of the Peace Pledge Union (PPU), where hundreds of thousands of British people gave written notice of their commitment to a peaceful resolution of international affairs.¹ At this stage a general renunciation of war was enough to define a pacifist. Later, specific events would complicate this situation by demanding difficult choices from those who claimed to be against the use of force.

By the late 1930s, any definition of pacifism had to be more nuanced as the movement became splintered, as those advocating peace reacted to key events in different ways. Some, like pioneer preacher Maude Royden were disenchanted by the unwillingness of the League of Nations to be more assertive against Italian aggression in Africa and German expansion in Europe.² Prominent Labour politician Ellen Wilkinson had been a pacifist since

¹ See pp. 38-39 and p. 45 of this thesis for further explanation of the Peace Ballot and the Peace Pledge Union.

² Gottlieb, J. (2014). 'The Women's Movement Took the Wrong Turning': British feminists, pacifism and the politics of appeasement. *Women's History Review*, 23:3, (pp. 453-459).

World War One but the Spanish Civil War convinced her and many other left-wing thinkers that defeating Fascism was more important than maintaining peace at all costs.³ When war broke out in 1939 many longstanding opponents of war, like lecturer and publisher Mary Sheepshanks, were disillusioned that their efforts had failed to prevent armed conflict and renounced their pacifism in support of the British government's struggle against Nazi Germany.⁴ On the other hand, many pacifists retained their opposition to war but there were serious tactical divisions within their ranks about how to react after war had broken out. Some, like PPU official Sybil Morrison, refused any kind of co-operation with the authorities, while others like author Vera Brittain were willing to work alongside non-pacifists to mitigate some of the worst excesses of the conflict.⁵ The events of the late 1930s and these divergent reactions to them meant that pacifism became harder to define precisely.

Martin Ceadel, one of the leading historians in this field, defines 'pacifism' narrowly as 'the absolute renunciation of military force' and uses the separate term 'pacificism' for those who generally oppose war but are willing to make short-term compromises with the use of force to bring about long-term peace.⁶ His definition has been accepted widely by other historians.⁷ This thesis will accept Ceadel's terms of reference partially, accepting that people like Maude Royden, Ellen Wilkinson and Mary Sheepshanks should not be considered as pacifists because, even though they had opposed the idea of war in general, they decided that the specific circumstances of the late 1930s led them to support participation in World War Two.

However, there are problems with Ceadel's definition in the context of World War Two, where the demarcation between British combatants and non-combatants became much less clear. Large parts of Britain became battle zones due to much higher levels of aerial bombardment than those witnessed in previous conflicts. In this context it was difficult for

³ Perry, M. (2014). *'Red Ellen' Wilkinson; her ideas, movements and world*. Manchester University Press. (p. 186)

⁴ London School of Economics Library. Archive of the Women's International League. WILPF. *Executive Committee Minutes, 1942, March 4*. 1/18.

⁵ Morrison, S. (1962). *I renounce war: The Story of the Peace Pledge Union*. Sheppard Press. (p. 58).

⁶ Ceadel, M. (1999). A Legitimate Peace Movement: The Case of Britain, 1918-1945. In *Challenge to Mars: Pacifism from 1918 to 1945*. University of Toronto Press. (pp. 134-135).

⁷ For example, Ceadel's distinction between 'pacifists' and 'pacificists' is adopted by Josephine Eglin. Eglin, J. (1999). Women Pacifists in Interwar Britain. In *Challenge to Mars: Pacifism from 1918 to 1945*. University of Toronto Press. (p. 150).

pacifist men and women to remain aloof from the suffering around them, especially when it was often their compassion for humanity that had made them oppose war in the first place. As pacifist Patricia Knowles explained, 'if you were in the midst of it, you couldn't really avoid it' (helping people in air raids).⁸ Most British pacifists, such as the men and women in the Friends Ambulance Unit (FAU), opted to involve themselves in 'helping the victims of aggression'.⁹ This choice entailed a certain amount of compromise with regard to their principles, as they would often work alongside the armed forces in providing medical and moral help for the victims of war. They were conscious that saving the lives of civilians in air raids and providing comfort to those who had lost their homes would ultimately provide a boost for morale and would assist the practical prosecution of the British war effort. However, most members of the FAU and people like them still retained their core belief that war was fundamentally wrong and, despite being involved in activities that could have provided indirect support for the war policies of the British government, those providing aid in this way are included within the definition of pacifism throughout this thesis.

Similarly, for peace campaigners like author Vera Brittain, the definition of 'absolute renunciation of military force' could also exclude them from being 'pacifists' in the eyes of Ceadel and others who accept his definition. This is because their campaigns often focused on specific aspects of the war such as civilian bombing and an allied blockade of Europe that caused serious food shortages, rather than campaigning against the war in general. Critics of Brittain, such as prominent member of the Peace Pledge Union Sybil Morrison, claimed that Brittain's stance against the bombing of civilians implied that the bombing of military targets was acceptable. Morrison and others also argued that Brittain's specific campaign against the allied blockade suggested that she was condoning other strategies used by the British government to prosecute the war.¹⁰ With both these campaigns, Brittain's pragmatic approach to mitigate the effects of conflict also led her to work alongside people who supported the general principles behind the war, thus compromising her pacifism further in the eyes of her critics. However, Brittain's deeply-held opposition to World War Two and

⁸ British Library Sound Archive (1997-1998). *Patricia Knowles*. C880/24.

⁹ The phrase was used by Isabella Thorley, President of the Women's Co-operative Guild. *What a National President Learned in Office*. *Co-operative News*, 1940, July 6. (p. 13).

¹⁰ Morrison. *I renounce war*. (p. 58).

her strong desire to be a 'witness to the oneness of humanity' lasted throughout the war and for the rest of her life.¹¹

The definition of pacifism needs to be wide enough to encompass people like Brittain and those involved in relief work during the Blitz. All these people took pragmatic steps to try to mitigate some of the worse aspects of the war, even if this meant a grudging acceptance that stopping the entire conflict immediately was beyond their powers. In terms of this thesis, pacifism will be used as a term that embraces all those who believed that World War Two was not justifiable. This definition will include, but is not limited to, those who chose total disengagement with the war and all that was related to it, such as Peace Pledge Union 'absolutists' like Sybil Morrison. However, this definition goes further than the narrow one suggested by Ceadel by also including those who chose to focus on relieving the worst effects of the conflict. This would include campaigners like Vera Brittain, as well as those members of the FAU and Women's Co-operative Guild who opposed the war but helped the victims of bombing raids. All these people made different choices about the extent to which they would become involved in activities designed to ease the suffering of war. Despite these varied approaches, though, all of them believed that World War Two was wrong for a range of reasons, which will be explored later. Therefore all these people, according to the definition to be used here, warrant the label of 'pacifists'.

The significance of these women pacifists in World War Two Britain has rarely been explored by historians. It is true that recent decades have seen more attention being paid to the role of British women during the war. However the focus for these studies has been mainly on women's active support for the war effort in the auxiliary units of the armed forces or their work in industry and agriculture.¹² Very little has been written about the many thousands of British women who opposed the war. The two main scholarly studies of resistance to war in Britain in World War Two devote very little space to the part played by women in this struggle. Rachel Barker's book on conscientious objectors in Britain during World War Two devotes just two paragraphs to women who refused to be conscripted.¹³

¹¹ Cited in Black, M. (1992). *A Cause for our Times: Oxfam, the first 50 years*. Oxford University Press. (p. 21).

¹² For example, Braybon, G. & Summerfield, P. (2012). *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars*. Taylor & Francis Group.

¹³ Barker, R. (1982). *Conscience, Government and War: Conscientious Objection in Great Britain, 1939-1945*. Routledge and Kegan Paul. (pp. 110-111).

Martin Ceadel's book on British pacifism devotes a 21 page chapter to World War Two but there is no mention at all of conscription for women or the fact that over a thousand of them became conscientious objectors.¹⁴ He does mention the pacifist Women's International League but dismisses them as being 'doctrinally too confused ever to become important'.¹⁵ A book by Lucy Noakes, specifically about gender issues in wars involving Britain from the 1930s to the 1990s, gives details of male conscientious objectors in World War Two but nothing about the women who had the same status.¹⁶ Even Jill Liddington, whose book has a focus solely on women's peace activism, devotes just three short paragraphs to the years of World War Two, with one chapter finishing at 1939 and the next one starting at 1954.¹⁷ The most recent substantial scholarly work on the topic of British World War Two pacifists, by Tobias Kelly, does devote more space to the role of women than previous studies.¹⁸ However, Kelly minimises the impact of the women pacifists on British society and politics by claiming that 'their pacifism was not usually seen as disruptive'.¹⁹

It is true that the experiences of women pacifists have received some attention in various works published from the late 1990s, drawing mainly on oral interview projects established by the Imperial War Museum and the British Library in the final two decades of the twentieth century.²⁰ For example, accounts by women working for the Friends Ambulance Unit are included in Lynn Smith's history of the organisation and stories told by women conscientious objectors are conveyed in Felicity Goodall's book about men and women refusing to support the two world wars.²¹ However, these accounts are mainly descriptive and used primarily as a vehicle to capture in print the voices of the women who took part in these oral interview projects. There is little analysis by these authors of the historical significance of women's pacifism in World War Two.

¹⁴ Ceadel, M. (1980). *Pacifism in Britain, 1914–1945: The defining of a faith*. Clarendon Press.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* (p. 61).

¹⁶ Noakes, L. (1998). *War and the British: Gender and National Identity, 1939-1991*. I.B. Tauris. (p. 97).

¹⁷ Liddington, J. (1989). *The Long Road to Greenham: Feminism and Anti-Militarism in Britain since 1820*. Virago. (pp. 152-172).

¹⁸ Kelly, T. (2022). *Battles of Conscience: British Pacifists and the Second World War*. Penguin Random House.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* (p. 145).

²⁰ Imperial War Museum Sound Archive, 1980-1989; British Library Sound Archive 1997-1998.

²¹ Smith, L. (1998). *Pacifists in Action: The experience of the Friends Ambulance Unit in the Second World War*. The Ebor Press; Goodall, F. (1997). *A Question of Conscience: Conscientious Objectors in the Two World Wars*. Sutton.

One reason why historians have neglected the historical study of women's pacifism is the timing of relevant events during the war. While men were conscripted in Britain from 1939, women were only compelled to perform war service from December 1941. By this time, most historical accounts of pacifist activity make the assumption that opposition to the war had become much less intense, as the peril of Britain's situation and real threat of invasion had become highly evident during the Battle of Britain in 1940-1941. If this assumption is valid, then it follows that the women conscientious objectors, making their protest from 1942 onwards, were less significant in a phase of the conflict when dissenting voices were largely drowned out by the efforts of total war. Ceadel claims that opposition to the war became less significant after the fall of France in May 1940.²² Barker would support this analysis and her book has very few examples from the final four years of the war, with an implication that the issue of opposition to the conflict had largely petered out by 1941. She argues that the issue of conscientious objectors no longer interested the public who now 'devoted their energies to other topics'.²³ However, these assumptions can be challenged and it will be seen that the opposition of many women to the war continued to have a significant impact on British society and the assumed wartime consensus well beyond 1941.

Another reason for the limited space given to women's pacifism in World War Two is that many historians see the movement as a narrative of failure, which therefore had little impact on general discourse about the war. Julie Gottlieb describes how, for many women pacifists, the outbreak of World War Two 'shattered their faith in women's power to deliver peace'.²⁴ Her study has an almost exclusive focus on the women who renounced their pacifism in the late 1930s, with hardly any mention of those who retained their opposition to war.²⁵ With regard to the wider pacifist movements in Britain, historians have noted how these groups failed to prevent a world war despite their vibrancy in the 1930s, how several influential pacifists deserted the cause, how campaigns to limit the effects of war had limited success and how some pacifists became tainted with accusations of being pro-Nazi. Sybil Morrison, member and historian of the Peace Pledge Union, admitted that the peace

²² Ceadel. *Legitimate Peace Movement*. (p. 142).

²³ Barker. *Conscience*. (p. 77).

²⁴ Gottlieb, *Women's Movement*. (p. 459).

²⁵ Gottlieb. *The Women's Movement*.

movement was 'exhausted and flat' by the end of World War Two.²⁶ Richard Rempel describes 'the record of pacifist failures during World War II'.²⁷ Andrew Rigby ends his analysis of the PPU in World War Two on a note of despondency and failure with the disillusioned reflections of peace campaigner Lily Butcher.²⁸ Liddington devotes much of her brief discussion of pacifism in World Two to describing the suicides of prominent pacifists Helena Swanwick and Virginia Woolf.²⁹ Ceadel agrees with this verdict of failure, saying that 'at the end of the war ... pacifism had lost much of its political optimism and had failed to create the nucleus of a new society'.³⁰ He concedes that the relief work of pacifists had been 'constructive' but says 'it had done nothing to cause supporters of the war to question their own position'. He sees pacifism becoming in World War Two just 'a matter of individual conscience' with 'little political relevance'.³¹

The early years of the twenty first century have seen some challenges by historians to this interpretation of the failure and insignificance of British pacifism in the 1940s. Richard Overy argues 'that a more positive view can be taken of the survival of pacifist discourse and of pacifist agency'.³² He says that the archives 'reveal an extensive pacifist voice from every part of the country' and that 'it is important that this voice should be incorporated in narratives of the British wartime experience'.³³ Paul Berry and Mark Bostridge, biographers of prominent pacifist Vera Brittain, agree with Overy's view of strong pacifist discourse and agency. Berry and Bostridge emphasise 'the influence of the pacifist as a perpetual evangelist for peace' during World War Two, suggesting that some pacifist campaigns had a clear impact on public opinion.³⁴ One such campaign, spearheaded by Brittain, was famine relief for the people of Greece to alleviate the effects of an allied blockade, where Aleksandra Bennett has argued that the efforts of pacifists like Brittain had both immediate

²⁶ Morrison. *I renounce war*. (pp. 65-66).

²⁷ Rempel, R. (1978). The Dilemmas of British Pacifists During World War II. *The Journal of Modern History*, 50(4), (p. 1228).

²⁸ Rigby, A. (1999). The Peace Pledge Union: From Peace to War, 1936-1945. In *Challenge to Mars: Pacifism from 1918 to 1945*. (pp. 168-185). University of Toronto Press.

²⁹ Liddington, *Long Road*. (pp. 170-171).

³⁰ Ceadel. *Pacifism in Britain*. (pp. 310-313).

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Overy, R. (2013). Pacifism and the Blitz. *Past and Present*, 219, (p. 202).

³³ *Ibid.* (p. 203)

³⁴ Berry, P. & Bostridge, M. (2008). *Vera Brittain: A Life*. Virago. (p. 389).

and long-term significance.³⁵ Hazel Nicholson has demonstrated convincingly that the extent of British women's opposition to World War Two was much greater than the actual numbers of women conscientious objectors would suggest.³⁶ This thesis aims to build on the arguments of these later historians and provide a wide-ranging and comprehensive analysis of the strength, significance and impact of women's pacifism in Britain in the 1940s.

This thesis will also explore new areas that have received only very limited attention from previous historical publications, even those where women's pacifism has been portrayed in a positive light. One such area is the work done by pacifists with regard to post-war reconciliation, where attempts were made to create positive and harmonious relationships between Britain and Germany. Existing studies in this area have had a focus on specific organisations such as the Friends Relief Service.³⁷ There has been little attempt to provide an overview of the principles and impact of reconciliation programmes and this more analytical approach will be undertaken here. This detailed discussion of the impact of pacifists' attempts at reconciliation will provide a strong challenge to those historians like Richard Rempel who have claimed that 'pacifist political impotence ensured that their influence on postwar policy was minimal' and Martin Ceadel who criticises the pacifists for failing to create a 'new society'.³⁸ It will be seen that the work of British women pacifists, both at home and on the European continent, did make a significant contribution to the restoration of more harmonious relations between Britons and Germans after 1945.

The activities of women pacifists and the attitudes towards them also provide insights into debates about the extent to which British society was united during World War Two. Popular memory of wartime Britain is of 'a historical moment when the nation was truly united' and differences were put aside.³⁹ This view of national unity during World War Two, often described as 'the spirit of the Blitz' or the 'Dunkirk spirit', remains part of political

³⁵ Bennett, A. (1996). A Question of Respectability and Tactics: Vera Brittain and Food Relief for Occupied Europe, 1941-1944. In H. Dyck, (Ed.). *The Pacifist Impulse in Historical Perspective*. (pp. 384-396). University of Toronto Press.

³⁶ Nicholson, H. (2007), A Disputed Identity: Women Conscientious Objectors in Second World War Britain. *Twentieth century British history*, 18(4), (pp. 409-428).

³⁷ Wilson, R. (1952). *Quaker Relief: an Account of the Relief Work of the Society of Friends, 1940-1948*. Allen & Unwin; Von Borries, A. (2000). *Quiet Helpers: Quaker Service in Postwar Germany*. Quaker Home Service & American Friends Service Committee.

³⁸ Rempel. *Dilemmas*. (p. 1228); Ceadel. *Pacifism*. (p. 310).

³⁹ Rose, S. (2003). *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945*. Oxford University Press. (p. 1-2).

debate well into the twenty first century as it is still invoked by politicians and other modern commentators when appealing for public unity and self-sacrifice at times of crisis. The notion of a unified British society in the World War Two years is also supported by some academic historians, such as Robert Mackay who argues that 'what the test of war above all revealed about Britain was that it was a cohesive society'.⁴⁰ Other historians have questioned this view of cohesion, expressing doubts about the strength of the 'the spirit of the Blitz'.⁴¹ A study of pacifist women in the 1940s can provide insight into the nuances of this debate. On the one hand there is evidence of women who opposed the war gaining respect and understanding as they undertook humanitarian work alongside supporters of the war, helping to heal divisions between supporters and opponents of the war. However there are also several examples of lasting bitterness and hostility towards pacifists, with many women being abused and victimised for the anti-war stance to which they adhered. It is therefore important that a study of pacifist women provides a less polemical assessment of the extent of Britain's wartime unity, an issue still very relevant to the country's self-perception of its past struggles.

Another new angle to be explored in the thesis will be the importance of working-class women's pacifism in the form of the Women's Co-operative Guild. The Guild had been formed in the 1880s as a women's section of the Co-operative Movement, mainly to promote the economic interests of working-class housewives. By the 1930s, the WCG and its 80,000 or so members had adopted a strong pacifist position and introduced the idea of the white poppy. Despite an element of internal self-doubt after 1939, the Guild continued its opposition to war throughout the 1940s and its members were involved in a range of humanitarian work. Ceadel does not mention the WCG at all while Barker's only reference to the organisation is to include it on a list of seven groups who 'had an interest in the plight of conscientious objectors'.⁴² Both Overy and Bennett, despite their positive views of the impact of pacifists, fail to mention the important contributions of the WCG to humanitarian work during the Blitz and to overseas famine relief.⁴³ The recent detailed study into World War Two pacifism by Tobias Kelly only mentions the WCG once, in a list of groups who took

⁴⁰ Mackay, R. (1999). *The Test of War: Inside Britain 1939-45*. UCL Press. (p. 232).

⁴¹ For example, Juliet Gardiner provides a complex picture of wartime Britain where both cohesion and dissent could be witnessed. Gardiner, J. (2004). *Wartime Britain 1939-1945*. Headline Book Publishing.

⁴² Ceadel. *Pacifism in Britain*; Barker. *Conscience*. (p. 102).

⁴³ Overy. *Pacifism and the Blitz*; Bennett. *Question of Respectability*.

part in a 1939 march against conscription.⁴⁴ Even more remarkable is that the main historical study of the WCG, by Gillian Scott, takes the story from the movement's origins in the 1880s but then stops abruptly in 1939, dismissing the World War Two years in a short paragraph.⁴⁵ An assessment of the peace policy of the WCG and the impact of its work is essential to provide a corrective to the implication in some historical accounts that women's pacifism in Britain was simply the preserve of middle and upper class intellectuals.

With regard to both the importance of the WCG and the debate about national unity, the selection of relevant source material by the historian is crucial. Too much reliance on the memoirs of well-known pacifist women can distort the overall picture and imply that opposition to the war was confined to the wealthier and more educated classes. Historians can be misled by the fact that there is a greater amount of written testimony relating to women of high social status. This is because these women were perhaps more confident to speak out about their work due to higher levels of education, were more likely to have connections and influence with the press or in some cases were more inclined to write about their endeavours and have them published. The fact that some of these intellectual women could be dismissive of working class peace activists may have served to reinforce further this neglect by historians of pacifist thinking among less privileged parts of British society. Both Vera Brittain and Virginia Woolf, for example, could come across as patronising towards the working classes and were often keen to emphasise the intellectual distance between the upper and lower orders, even though Woolf in particular had links with the Women's Co-operative Guild.⁴⁶ Historians have generally relied too much on these testimonies by more privileged opponents of the war, alongside official governmental records. Therefore it is important for this thesis to explore sources relating to a wider range of social groups. Studying the records and journals of the Co-operative Movement, for example, provides a much broader and more accurate view of opposition to war. These sources reveal that thousands of working class women remained active within the WCG and

⁴⁴ Kelly. *Battles*. (p. 83).

⁴⁵ Scott, G. (1998). *Feminism, Femininity and the Politics of Working Women: The Women's Co-Operative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War*. UCL Press.

⁴⁶ Wood, A. (2014). Facing 'Life as We Have Known It': Virginia Woolf and the Women's Co-operative Guild. *Literature and History*, Volume 23, Number 2, (pp. 18-34); Periyar, N. (2020). Online talk on 'A good democrat?: Vera Brittain and meritocracy', given to the Working Class Movement Library on 2 December, 2020. Can be accessed at <https://www.wcml.org.uk/whats-on/events/online-talks-by-clara-jones-and-natash-periyar-on-labour-women>.

also demonstrate that the organisation maintained its anti-war stance. This more comprehensive use of source material gives a completely different perspective on the depth of pacifist feeling across Britain.

Similarly, historians examining the issue of national unity have often concluded that opposition to the war was largely tolerated by the authorities and wider British public, because they have looked only at parliamentary legislation and the broad-minded views expressed by senior politicians such as Chamberlain and Churchill.⁴⁷ By examining the memos written by governmental officials, in the National Archives, it can be seen that senior civil servants did not always show the same degree of toleration towards pacifists as the government's political rhetoric suggested.⁴⁸

A picture of everyday discrimination against women pacifists also emerges at ground level when the detailed oral testimonies of some of these women are examined, such as the collections made by the Imperial War Museum and the British Library in the 1980s and 1990s.⁴⁹ The main purpose behind these oral interview projects was to capture the stories of individuals from the era of World War Two, while the interviewees were still alive and young enough to recall events accurately. Hundreds of people were able to provide their detailed testimony in these ways, including over a hundred men and women who had opposed the war. The British Library project was undertaken with support from the Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.⁵⁰ It might be expected that the involvement of these groups would lead to an over-representation of interviewees from Quaker backgrounds but this is not the case. The three main British Library interviewees referenced in this thesis – Jessie Baston, Patricia Knowles and Margaret Sharp – all mentioned religious convictions but none were Quakers at the time of the war. These interviews reveal that discrimination by local employers and landlords was the experience of the majority of pacifists and that abuse from other members of the public was an everyday occurrence. Therefore the research methodology of the historians exploring the nature and scale of women's opposition to the war is crucial if they are to achieve a

⁴⁷ Calder, A. (1969). *The People's War: Britain 1939-45*. Pimlico. (pp. 494-495).

⁴⁸ National Archives. Inspectors' Memos. *Board of Education. Employment of Conscientious Objectors. Memo to Inspectors*. N.S. No. 186 Gen. 26 November 1943. ED135/3.

⁴⁹ IWM and BL archives.

⁵⁰ British Library website – bl.uk/collection-guides/oral-histories-of-womens-history

sufficiently diverse picture. It is important that they use oral sources as well as written ones and that they look at documents relating to a broad range of geographical and social spheres.

The study of women who opposed the war in the 1940s needs to be placed within a context of the history of feminism in Britain in the twentieth century, to explore whether there was continuity or change in the approach and philosophy of the World War Two women in comparison to earlier anti-war protests by women. Women's struggle for political equality from the 1890s to the outbreak of World War One in 1914, often identified by historians as the first wave of feminism, had strong links to pacifism as many women believed that their achievement of the franchise and other forms of political influence would create a more peaceful world. Even before World War One had started, Olive Schreiner had written in 1911 that wars would cease when women had gained 'an equal share in the control and governance of modern national life'.⁵¹ In 1915 the newly-formed Women's International League for Peace and Freedom demanded a place for women in future peace negotiations because women had a 'special point of view on the subject of war'.⁵² This thinking in the World War One era was often based on ideas about the maternal instincts of women, suggesting that the unique bond between mother and child made women more protective and less likely to contemplate the harming of other humans. For example Olive Schreiner claimed that a woman's knowledge of the effects of warfare was 'superior' to that of a man because 'she knows the history of human flesh'.⁵³ The work of historians such as Ingrid Sharp, Sarah Hellawell and Julie Gottlieb has explored these links between feminism, maternalism and pacifism in the era of World War One and into the inter-war period.⁵⁴ Less attention has been paid to the motives of women pacifists in the 1940s. For example, Jill

⁵¹ Cited in Sharp, I. (2020). Love as Moral Imperative and Gendered Anti-war Strategy in the International Women's Movement 1914-1919. *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 31(4), (p. 641).

⁵² London School of Economics Library. Archive of the Women's International League. WILPF. *Report of the International Congress of Women, The Hague – the Netherlands. April 28th to May 1st 1915*. No place of publication. P. 20: <https://archive.org/details/internatcongrewwom00interich/page/n1>.

⁵³ Cited in Sharp. *Moral Imperative*. (p. 641).

⁵⁴ Sharp, I. & Stibbe, M. (2017). Women's International Activism during the Inter-War Period, 1919–1939. *Women's History Review*, 26(2), (pp. 163-172); Sharp, I., Acsady, J. & Vukov, N. (2017). Internationalism, Pacifism, Transnationalism: Women's Movements and the Building of a Sustainable Peace in the Post-War World. In Sharp, I. & Stibbe, M. (Eds.). *Women Activists Between War and Peace: Europe, 1918-1923*, Chapter 2, (pp. 77-122). Bloomsbury Publishing Plc; Hellawell, S. (2018). Antimilitarism, Citizenship and Motherhood: the formation and early years of the Women's International League (WIL), 1915–1919. *Women's History Review*, 27(4), (pp. 551-564); Sharp. *Moral Imperative*; Gottlieb. *Women's Movement*.

Liddington's book on 'feminism and antimilitarism' in Britain since 1820 devotes only three short paragraphs to the years of World War Two.⁵⁵ A comparative study of World War One and World War Two would be useful in this context, to analyse whether women's opposition to war in the 1940s was based on similar gendered principles to the ideas underpinning their thinking in the 1910s or whether other less gendered influences had become more important by then.

The decision to focus this thesis on a study of women pacifists requires some explanation and justification for twenty first century readers, for whom gender has generally come to be accepted as a more fluid and less static concept than it has been for previous generations. However, a study of Britain in the era of World War Two does necessitate a gendered analysis because distinctions between male and female roles were deeply engrained in the philosophies and policies of both governments and pacifists at that time. On the side of the peace campaigners, there were significant pacifist organisations open to women only, such as the Women's International League and the Women's Co-operative Guild. Initially the Peace Pledge Union was for men only, as its founder Dick Sheppard assumed that women were generally in favour of peace anyway because 'up to now the Peace Movement has received its main support from women'.⁵⁶ The British government's conscription laws reinforced this gendered approach by making a clear distinction between the roles to be undertaken by men and women compelled to support the war effort. Conscription for men was introduced in 1939 and a completely separate conscription act was passed for women in 1941. Men were called up to the armed services and would carry weapons; women were required to work in industry or to join the auxiliary armed forces in a non-combatant role without a requirement to carry weapons.⁵⁷ Mothers with children up to the age of 14 were exempt from conscription, while fathers were not. In all these ways, gendered distinctions were clearly very important to both the government and the peace movements in the 1930s and 1940s, with the result that a study of the specific opposition to the war shown by many women is both meaningful and justified when considering the era of World War Two.

⁵⁵ Liddington. *Long Road*. (pp. 170-171).

⁵⁶ Cited in Hetherington, W. (2014). *Swimming Against the Tide: The Peace Pledge Union Story, 1934–2014*. Peace Pledge Union. (p. 6).

⁵⁷ Barker. *Conscience*. (p. 110).

The focus of this thesis on the specific role of women pacifists is a corrective to the over-emphasis of male actors in traditional histories of war. This 'privileged place' for male soldiers, as Lucy Noakes calls it, has also been seen in commemorations of World War Two, such as the fiftieth anniversary of VE Day (Victory in Europe) in 1995, as well as in both scholarly and popular written accounts.⁵⁸ Alison Fell argues for the importance of 'gendering the war story', noting that military history has often been the story of men's deeds written by male historians. She cites a story of a female historian being heckled by a man at a conference with the retort that military matters were 'a gender-free zone', much to the approval of many male voices in the audience.⁵⁹ Fell goes on to argue that 'perhaps the time has come for 'gender studies' to no longer be seen as the domain of specialist, feminist scholars, but to be integrated into the mainstream of war and culture studies'.⁶⁰ This thesis takes up Fell's challenge. A study of women's pacifism can make a contribution to Fell's objective, especially if it provides more than just an analysis of the impact of pacifism on the development of feminist thinking and activity. To be fully 'integrated', in the way that Fell would like, such a study also needs to consider the wider impact of pacifist women on issues such as British politics and society during wartime and also the effects they had on reconstruction and reconciliation in post-war Europe. It is important too to take Fell's argument further and avoid a situation where male historians are the only ones writing about military campaigns and the female historians are the only ones writing about women's impact on the war. In this context, a detailed study of pacifist women in this thesis by a historian identifying as male can make a significant contribution to the breaking down of these traditional gender divisions in the writing of history.

Overall, it can be argued that there are significant gaps in existing historical studies of the British experience of World War Two. Women's pacifism has been dismissed as being on a scale too small to be noticed, of being too inconsequential and of being essentially a story of failure. Even those historians who have highlighted some of the successes of pacifist women have overlooked some important areas of study. They have paid too little attention to the influence of pacifist women on post-war reconciliation projects and too much attention to the pacifist campaigns of individuals from privileged backgrounds or on organisations

⁵⁸ Noakes. *War and the British*. (pp. 2-3).

⁵⁹ Fell, A. (2007). Gendering the War Story. *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 1(1), (p. 53).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* (p. 55).

dominated by such women. This thesis aims to fill these gaps and to correct this imbalance, by taking a broader look at the source material. This material will include oral interviews as well as written sources; the records of working class organisations such as the Women's Co-operative Guild and not just the words of pacifists from privileged backgrounds and an examination of the everyday impact of pacifists across the country in addition to the impact on governmental circles in London.

In this way, questions relating to the wider significance of women who opposed World War Two in Britain will be addressed. First, the specific nature of women's pacifism in World War Two will be explored, showing the development of ideas within the context of mid-twentieth century events and considering the implications for the wider feminist movement. This will lead to an exploration of how these ideas influenced the actions of women pacifists. The existing narrative of 'impotent' failure for British pacifism in the 1940s will be challenged strongly, with an examination of evidence suggesting that many women pacifists actually had a real sense of 'agency', producing a noticeable impact on both British society during the war and also on post-war reconciliation after 1945. Moreover, the depth of women's pacifism during the war will be explored, challenging the conventional assumptions that it was largely confined to women from higher social classes. In these ways the thesis will provide fresh insights, not only into developments in pacifism, but also into the wider ideas and practices of British society at one of the most crucial points in its history.

Chapter 2 - The Nature of Women's Pacifism in World War Two

World War Two occurred a generation after the women's suffrage campaigns of the early twentieth century and a generation before the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement starting in the late 1960s. The period of the 1920s from the 1950s has often been seen as 'an interregnum in the story of the organised feminist movement' and 'as a period of relative stillness' between what historians have termed the First and Second Feminist Waves.⁶¹ Recent scholarship by Julie Gottlieb and others has challenged this notion of an 'interregnum' and has argued that significant feminist activity was happening in Britain in the period leading up to and during World War Two.⁶² A study of women's pacifism in the 1930s and 1940s makes a contribution to this debate. The activities and campaigns undertaken by British pacifist women in the World War Two era were evidence of feminist agency, providing a degree of continuity with both the preceding campaigns for voting rights in the early years of the twentieth century and also the subsequent struggles for equality from the 1960s onwards. Therefore the degree of feminist activity in the 1940s showed continuity.

However, there was a significant difference in terms of the ideas behind this activity. It will be seen that the nature of women's pacifist arguments in the 1930s and 1940s provided divergence rather than continuity in relation to the earlier and later feminist movements. The pacifist women of the World War Two era expressed their views mainly in terms of reasoned political, economic and religious arguments, with less emphasis on the distinct emotional and maternal insights of women. Linked to this was a greater tendency for women pacifists in the middle years of the twentieth century to collaborate with men in promoting their ideas, diverging from the earlier and later strategies of a distinctive feminist approach to anti-war campaigning. In this way, the period between the First and Second Waves of Feminism did see continued feminist activity but, as far as the women pacifists were concerned, the ideas were articulated in a manner that was different from what came before and after.

⁶¹ Gottlieb, J. (2014). Introduction: 'flour power' and feminism between the waves. *Women's History Review*, 23:3. (p. 327),

⁶² *Ibid.* (pp. 325-329).

During World War One and into the inter-war period, this link between feminism and pacifism had indeed featured strongly in the discourse of many women who opposed the conflict, as demonstrated by the work of historians such as Ingrid Sharp, Sarah Hellowell and Julie Gottlieb.⁶³ Less attention has been paid to the motives of the pacifist women of World War Two and, in the few cases that have been studied, the focus has usually been on the ideas of women from educated and socially-privileged backgrounds, particularly those who had the time and means to write memoirs or to take part in international organisations such as the Women's International League.⁶⁴ By studying a wider range of women's pacifist experience through the archives of oral interviews, where the voices of women from all social backgrounds can be heard, it is possible to analyse whether there had been a change of emphasis in the motivation of pacifist women by the time of World War Two.⁶⁵ An analysis of the ideas behind women's pacifism in the 1940s will help to explain the development of feminist discourse during the twentieth century and will also reveal some significant insights into the prevailing political and religious ideas in the World War Two era.

For many women peace campaigners in the era of World War One, their pacifism had been a natural corollary of the struggle for equal political rights between the sexes, a campaign that had intensified with militant Suffragette activity in the decade leading to the outbreak of war in 1914. There had been a feeling in pre-1914 discourse that the world would be less belligerent and more peaceful if women had more influence on the politics and diplomacy of nations, first by achieving the right to vote and then by securing more female representation in the highest circles of governments.⁶⁶ Even before World War One Olive Schreiner had written in 1911 that wars would cease when women had gained 'an equal share in the control and governance of modern national life'.⁶⁷ During the World War One era, women's peace groups like the Women's International League (WIL) had turned these thoughts to the specific matter of the post-war peace settlement and the importance of women being involved in the negotiations. At the Hague Conference of the WIL in 1915 several resolutions had demanded the enfranchisement of women and the inclusion of

⁶³ Sharp & Stibbe, *Women's International Activism*; Sharp, Acsady & Vukov, *Internationalism, Pacifism, Transnationalism*; Sharp, *Moral Imperative*; Hellowell, *Antimilitarism*; Gottlieb, *Women's Movement*.

⁶⁴ For example, Eglin, *Women Pacifists*.

⁶⁵ *IWM and BL archives*.

⁶⁶ Sharp, *Moral Imperative*. (p. 639).

⁶⁷ Cited in Sharp, *Moral Imperative*. (p. 641).

women in discussions about the peace settlement.⁶⁸ These resolutions had stated that female representation in the post-war peace process was essential because women had a 'special point of view on the subject of war' and that the WIL conference itself showed that 'women of different countries can still hold out the hand of friendship to each other in spite of the hatred and bloodshed under which most international ties seem submerged'.⁶⁹ This notion of the benefits of an international sisterhood having a positive influence on male political leaders had also been emphasised by feminist and peace activist Emily Hobhouse, who had written in 1915 to urge the women of countries involved in the war to 'join hands with the women of neutral countries, and urge our rulers to stay further bloodshed'.⁷⁰ Hobhouse's letter had also been signed by other influential feminist pacifists of the World War One era, such as Mary Sheepshanks, Sylvia Pankhurst, Helena Swanwick and Maude Royden.⁷¹ Catherine Marshall, the first honorary secretary of the WIL, had expressed the view that campaigning for peace and a fair settlement at the end of World War One was 'the natural and almost inevitable development' of achieving the vote for women.⁷² These feminist pacifists had seen the achievement of greater political influence for women as an urgent need, to correct the aggressive policies of male leaders that had caused so much devastation in the past and, unless challenged by the more conciliatory approach of women, would cause further destruction in the future.

The idea of the World War One era that women's voices were essential to secure peace between nations had been based to a large extent on the unique maternal insight that women could offer. It had been argued that the emotions associated with maternal instinct made women protective of human life in a way that men could never feel. As Olive Schreiner had explained, 'the knowledge of woman, simply as woman, is superior to that of man; she knows the history of human flesh; she knows its cost; he does not'.⁷³ For this reason it was essential that women made their emotions known to statesmen because, as the Dutch pacifist Aletta Jacobs had told the 1915 WIL conference, 'too long has the mother-

⁶⁸ WILPF. *International Congress*. (pp. 11-17).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* (p. 20).

⁷⁰ Cited in Sharp. *Moral Imperative*. (p. 636).

⁷¹ Sharp. *Moral Imperative*. (p. 636).

⁷² Cited in Hellawell. *Antimilitarism*. (p. 553).

⁷³ Cited in Sharp. *Moral Imperative*. (p. 641).

heart of woman suffered in silence'.⁷⁴ In future, Hungarian activist Rosika Schwimmer had argued, 'when our sons are killed by millions let us, mothers, only try to do good by going to kings and emperors'.⁷⁵ Catherine Marshall had called war 'an outrage on motherhood' while Helena Swanwick said war was 'a silly bloody game of massacring sons of women'.⁷⁶ In the view of these women, the unique feminine emotions that arose from the maternal instincts of women, whether they were actually mothers or not, gave women a right to be heard in international diplomacy when it came to decisions about war and the construction of peace settlements. More power and influence for women would create a more peaceful world, with feminism and pacifism combining to produce a desired effect.

However, by the time World War Two broke out in 1939 there had been some significant changes in this gendered analysis by contemporaries of attitudes towards war. The change in the perceived link between pacifism and feminism can be traced through the interwar years but can actually be seen to have started as early as the time of World War One. In fact, when this conflict had begun in 1914, only a minority of British women campaigning for female suffrage in the early 1910s had become pacifists.⁷⁷ The majority abandoned their struggle for the vote in 1914 and diverted their energies into a patriotic support of the British war effort, in the belief that demonstrating good qualities of citizenship by supporting their country was the best way for women to gain respect for their contribution to public life. Feminism could therefore lead to patriotism as well as pacifism. The founders of the radical Women's Social and Political Union, Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, called for the 'complete annihilation of the German race' and wrote that pacifism was 'a very deadly disease which you will find has afflicted every dead nation of the past'.⁷⁸ When words like these were used, it was difficult to maintain the old argument from the pre-1914 era that belligerence and aggression were the sole preserve of men. Greater equality for women was not likely to lead to a more peaceful world if the new political elite were to include Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst or other women with similar ideas. Maude Royden, an influential pacifist during World War One, could see that previous assumptions about women's attitude to war had to be challenged after 1918. Probably with Emmeline

⁷⁴ Cited in Sharp. *Moral Imperative*. (p. 637).

⁷⁵ Cited in Sharp. *Moral Imperative*. (p. 637).

⁷⁶ Cited in Hellawell. *Antimilitarism*. (p. 553).

⁷⁷ Sharp et al. *Internationalism*. (p. 79).

⁷⁸ Sharp. *Moral Imperative*. (pp. 633-634).

and Christabel Pankhurst in mind, Royden wrote that her previous belief that women were naturally less warlike than men had 'been severely shaken, if not altogether destroyed' by the events of World War One.⁷⁹

Throughout the 1920s and into the early 1930s, many prominent women who had opposed World War One came to place their faith in the newly-formed League of Nations as the best way to secure international peace. There had been frustration among women that their voice had not been heard at all in the peace negotiations of 1919.⁸⁰ Through the committees of the League itself and through the formation of the League of Nations Union, many educated British women found, for the first time, spaces where they could contribute constructively to debates about the way forward for international diplomacy. Vera Brittain spoke and wrote regularly in favour of the League's policy of collective security. Helena Swanwick became the first female delegate to attend the League's assembly and also undertook speaking tours to promote the organisation's ideals. Friends Kathleen Courtney and Maude Royden both became members of the League's executive committee, with Royden founding a branch of the League of Nations Union.⁸¹ Although the League's most senior positions were dominated by men, these women felt that they could bring some unique qualities to the organisation's work. These qualities were not the maternalistic instincts discussed frequently in the years leading up to World War One, but instead were a sense of a fresh approach offered by people untainted by the previous conflicts brought about by men. As Maude Royden explained, the League should be steered by 'someone who has not trampled his rut so deep that he can't see over the top of it. Women, in short'.⁸² Similarly, Winifred Holtby, a close friend and collaborator of Vera Brittain, explained in 1934 that 'women are not handicapped by a great burden of outworn ritual; they have not learned the elaborations of prestige-hunting' and therefore would bring an injection of new thinking to diplomatic discussions.⁸³ It is interesting that interwar cartoons depicting the League of Nations would nearly always personify the organisation in the form of a woman,

⁷⁹ Cited in Hellawell. *Antimilitarism*. (p. 554).

⁸⁰ Sharp & Stibbe, *Women's International Activism*. (p. 164).

⁸¹ Gottlieb. *The Women's Movement*. (pp. 444-455); Eglin. *Women Pacifists*. (p. 152).

⁸² Cited in Gottlieb. *The Women's Movement*. (p. 455).

⁸³ Cited in Gottlieb, J. (2012). 'Broken Friendships and Vanished Loyalties': Gender, Collective (In)Security and Anti-Fascism in Britain in the 1930s. *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 13:2. (p. 206).

appearing to be increasingly worn down and exhausted as war loomed in the late 1930s.⁸⁴

The input of these prominent women into the ideas and approaches of the League retained some of the World War One notion that women were naturally more pacifist in outlook, but also moved on to a policy of collaborating with influential male politicians and officials with the aim of securing peace.

By the late 1930s all of these prominent British women pacifists had become disillusioned with the League, for different reasons. Courtney and Royden had renounced their pacifism by the early 1940s, coming to the belief that the League's authority was insufficient to stop the advance of fascism in Europe. The inability of the League to prevent the Italian conquest of Abyssinia and the German takeover of the Rhineland and Czechoslovakia revealed that resolutions and the threat of economic sanctions were insufficient to secure world peace. Instead, Courtney and Royden came round to the view that they should offer support for the British war effort as the League was now seen to be impotent.⁸⁵

By contrast, Brittain and Swanwick turned against the League because it threatened to have too much power. They retained their pacifism and believed that any military action by the League against aggressive nations would undermine the whole idea of the organisation as a force for peace. Swanwick expressed the view that 'a League war however lofty its motives would be no different from any other modern war'.⁸⁶ Similarly, as Brittain resigned from the League of Nations Union in 1938, she stated that the League's leaders had become 'sorry apologists for militarism'.⁸⁷ Despite the involvement of many prominent women in the League's organisation, it had failed to secure peace and the idea of collective security had clearly been unsuccessful. It was evident that the increased input of women into politics and diplomacy in the 1920s and 1930s, largely through the League of Nations, had not made the prospect of global conflict any less likely than it had been in the 1910s when women's influence was minimal. By the time of World War Two, the early twentieth century perception that feminist advancement was likely to produce world peace had not been supported by the reality of what had actually happened in the quarter century leading up to 1939.

⁸⁴ Gottlieb. *The Women's Movement*. (p. 443).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* (pp. 453-459).

⁸⁶ Cited in Eglin. *Women Pacifists*. (p. 155).

⁸⁷ Cited in Eglin. *Women Pacifists*. (p. 157).

The link between feminism and pacifism was challenged further and often broken by the particular circumstances of the late 1930s. As Hitler's policies towards German women became widely known, it was clear that a Europe conquered by the Nazis would only halt and reverse the progress towards gender equality. The Nazis envisaged a society where women's only roles were as wives and mothers. This convinced many feminists that only a military defeat of Nazi Germany could secure for women the gains they had made in Britain and other European countries in the early decades of the twentieth century, as well as hopefully paving the way for future progress for the rights of women. Although Dorothy M. Arnold was a prominent member of an organisation called the Peace and Disarmament Committee of Women's International Organisations, she came to the conclusion that 'the pacifists attitude seems to me hard to support for everything that we as women have so long fought and striven for would be swept away in the events of the democratic way of life being swept away'.⁸⁸ International feminist Carrie Chapman Catt had also strived to prevent war in the 1930s, but she too could see how a Nazi-controlled Europe would place severe restrictions on the freedom of women. She moved towards the view that the military struggle against the Nazis was 'a great crusade' with the aim 'to free both men and women and it is for this we women, free in our own country, must act to free other nations'.⁸⁹ At the start of the twentieth century, securing equality for women had often been seen as an aim totally compatible with the securing of peace. By the late 1930s, these two aims were now in conflict in the eyes of many prominent women activists.

By the 1930s there was much less inclination on the part of women pacifists to feminise their campaign. The arguments that motherhood gave women a distinct perspective on conflict were becoming more muted as World War Two approached. Many women came to believe that the argument about the protective nature of motherhood could undermine women's claims to equality, as it implied that they were motivated solely by an emotional response and served to reinforce typical stereotypes about women's potentially irrational contribution to public debate.⁹⁰ By the outbreak of World War Two in 1939, the most powerful pacifist women's voices were expressing their views through non-gendered organisations. A Women's Peace Campaign, set up as a female branch of the Peace Pledge

⁸⁸ Cited in Gottlieb. *The Women's Movement*. (p. 452).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* (p. 454).

⁹⁰ Hellowell. *Antimilitarism*. (p. 554).

Union, was a short-lived group that made little impact.⁹¹ Vera Brittain came to the belief by the later years of the 1930s that collaboration between male and female pacifists was the best way forward, stating that 'it will only be by men and women working together that war will be finally brought to an end'.⁹² In this spirit, she accepted an invitation to be a sponsor for the Peace Pledge Union, a group that had initially been for men only.⁹³ Brittain would go on to be a leader of influential pacifist campaigns on famine relief and restricted bombing during World War Two by working closely and equally with influential men such as Bishop George Bell of Chichester.⁹⁴ Increasingly the arguments of pacifist women became less gendered and more based on notions of common humanity, appealing to both male and female perspectives. Equality for women was still an important priority for women like Vera Brittain but it was felt that this could be demonstrated better by working alongside men of a similar persuasion, not separately from them.⁹⁵

It is interesting that the younger generation of pacifist women who emerged during World War Two were more inclined to acknowledge the strong influence of men in the formation of their beliefs, in contrast to the World War One generation who often arrived at their pacifism through feminist ideologies expounded by other women. One of these younger pacifists was Kathleen Derbyshire from Blackburn, who ended up in prison for refusing to engage with war work during World War Two. Her pacifism was influenced partially by her father who had helped conscientious objectors in World War One and 'wouldn't allow war toys in the house' and also by a male minister in the spiritualist church she attended as a child.⁹⁶ Muriel McMillan was inspired profoundly by a visiting male speaker to her Methodist church in London, talking on the theme of Christian Pacifism in 1937 when she was 17 years old. She explained how he 'aroused my interest', so that her and her friends 'formed a group who felt they were committed to Christian pacifism'. Five years later McMillan registered as a conscientious objector.⁹⁷ As a member of the Church of England in Sussex, conscientious objector Rowena Bingham had her pacifism deepened by hearing talks on pacifism by Father Rawlings of Lewes and by the ideas of Bishop Bell of Chichester, who

⁹¹ Hetherington. *Swimming*. (pp. 19-20).

⁹² Cited in Eglin. *Women Pacifists*. (p. 162).

⁹³ *Ibid.* (p. 20).

⁹⁴ Berry & Bostridge. *Vera Brittain*. (pp. 441-442).

⁹⁵ Hetherington. *Swimming*. (p. 20).

⁹⁶ IWM Archive. (1980). *Kathleen Derbyshire*. 4761.

⁹⁷ IWM Archive. (1981). *Muriel McMillan*. 4829.

went on to lead a campaign against the bombing of German civilians. Bingham said she felt 'very lucky' to have Rawlings and Bell in her part of Sussex.⁹⁸ Patricia Knowles explained that her pacifist views were influenced by a male pacifist trainee minister at her Baptist church when she was about 15 and by also by books written by Anglican Dick Sheppard and Nonconformist Leslie Weatherhead.⁹⁹ In some cases women were inspired by male role models from other countries and other religions, with conscientious objectors like Joyce Allen justifying their stance to tribunals by expressing admiration for the non-violent resistance advocated by Mahatma Gandhi.¹⁰⁰ With all these young pacifist women, it is clear that male role models were fundamental to the development of their beliefs and a more important influence than the women feminist writers from the generation above them.

Most of these examples also reveal that religion was a bigger influence than feminist discourse on the thinking of women pacifists in World War Two. Although the link between Quakerism and pacifism has been discussed extensively, historical accounts of this period have generally underestimated the importance of religious beliefs held by people from a wide range of Christian denominations. Often the war effort was generally supported by the major religious organisations in Britain, such as the Church of England and the Methodists, but many individuals within these organisations were inspired by their faith to adopt a pacifist viewpoint. The impact of religion on the actions of people in the past is widely discussed by historians of Britain in the medieval and early modern eras, as well as being noted as a factor in the work of some Victorian philanthropists. It is rare though for religion to be considered as a powerful motivating factor in twentieth century Britain, but the archival evidence suggests that these beliefs were very important for many men and women as they decided on their stance towards the war in the 1940s. In particular, the oral interviews with World War Two women conscientious objectors reveal the importance of religious motivation. The first woman to be granted conscientious objector status, Joyce Allen, objected to war on the grounds that 'from a Christian point of view, there's no excuse for it – 'Thou shalt not kill''.¹⁰¹ Methodist Muriel McMillan stated that her pacifism was

⁹⁸ IWM Archive. (1983). *Rowena Bingham*. 34014.

⁹⁹ BL Archive. *Knowles*.

¹⁰⁰ Working Class Movement Library. Conscripton Box 1. 'First Woman Before Tribunal'. *The Tribunal: Monthly Organ of the Fellowship of Conscientious Objectors*. Volume 2. No. 11. May 1942. (p. 36).

¹⁰¹ Cited in Goodall, F. (1997). *A Question of Conscience: Conscientious Objectors in the Two World Wars*. Sutton. (p. 107).

based 'entirely on Christianity', with the belief that the 'way of Christ to overcome evil with love' was 'the only way'.¹⁰² Jessie Baston was part of a religious discussion group as a student, which deepened her faith and her pacifism. She believed that 'you couldn't accept the teaching of Jesus and then go forward and slaughter your fellow human beings.'¹⁰³ Kathleen Derbyshire's moral and religious beliefs against the taking of any kind of life led to her becoming vegetarian, an increasingly popular conviction from the 1930s.¹⁰⁴ When Quaker Joan Williams was sent to Holloway Prison for refusing fire-watching duties she found that the other women conscientious objectors there consisted of '3 or 4 Jehovah's Witnesses, a Methodist, one of no denomination, and an Attender at Friends' Meetings'.¹⁰⁵ These examples were typical of the motivations of the British women who opposed war in the 1940s. Overall, an examination of the dozens of oral interviews with pacifist women from World War Two reveals that about three-quarters spoke of a pacifism based on some kind of religious belief.¹⁰⁶ It is clear that across the country and from a variety of faith perspectives, religious belief was very important to a large number of young women in the 1930s and 1940s. For them, religion was a more powerful influence than feminism.

A noticeable feature of women's pacifist outlook in the era of World War Two was a sense of toleration and respect for those who had renounced their pacifism and moved towards a position of support towards the war. This attitude was consistent with both Christian principles of forgiveness and the pacifist belief in reconciliation with opponents, whether these opponents were the German people or whether they were former pacifists who now felt differently about the desirability of war. This idea of harmony between pacifists and former pacifists provides a challenge to the view suggested in many existing accounts of this subject, where it is claimed that bitterness and contempt were shown by pacifists towards those who changed their minds and supported the war. It is true that prominent World War Two pacifist Denis Hayes claimed that former pacifists had 'bowed to the storm'.¹⁰⁷ Sybil Morrison was critical of how 'the chaff was winnowed off' and only the 'hard core, and the

¹⁰² IWM Archive. *McMillan*.

¹⁰³ BL Archive. (1997). *Jessie Baston*. C880/03.

¹⁰⁴ IWM Archive. *Derbyshire*.

¹⁰⁵ Society of Friends Library. *Experiences of a Woman Conscientious Objector, 1939-1943*. Temp MSS 620.

¹⁰⁶ *IWM and BL archives*.

¹⁰⁷ Hayes, D. (1949). *The Challenge of Conscience: The Story of the Conscientious Objectors of 1939-1949*. George Allen & Unwin. (p. 66).

indestructible grit' remained.¹⁰⁸ Even some professional historians echo this sense of contempt for those who turned away from pacifism. Richard Rempel implies that the pacifism of these people had shallow roots – they would 'abandon the cause', they 'melted away' and their beliefs were 'not of sufficient strength'.¹⁰⁹

However, the overwhelming sentiment emerging from contemporary records is one of continued respect for the pacifists who had changed their views. Early in the 1940s, the Women's International League lost two of its longstanding and most prominent members, pioneer preacher Maude Royden and lecturer and publisher Mary Sheepshanks. Both women wrote to the WIL committee to resign as, in the words of Royden, they did 'not feel sufficiently in sympathy with the general attitude' of the organisation.¹¹⁰ In her letter Sheepshanks was quite critical of the WIL's constant attempts 'to hamper the Government'.¹¹¹ Despite these criticisms, the WIL committee wrote very gracious letters in reply to Royden and Sheepshanks, thanking them warmly for all their past services and wishing them well for the future.¹¹² Similarly, the WIL sent congratulations to their former supporter Ellen Wilkinson when she was made a Privy Councillor in the New Year's Honours List of January 1945, even though she had spent the previous five years as an active member of the British war cabinet.¹¹³ Wilkinson was also sent a letter of congratulations by prominent pacifist Vera Brittain when she became Minister of Education in 1945, even though the two women had expressed very different views on the bitterly divisive issue of the bombing of German cities and many other aspects of the war.¹¹⁴ In these ways pacifists like Brittain and the leaders of the WIL were being true to their own principles of reconciliation. They urged forgiveness towards Britain's former enemies and in the same way were willing to forgive those people who had moved away from pacifism. The more bitter tone towards 'the chaff' who 'abandoned' pacifism, adopted by pacifists such as Sybil Morrison, may have been more vocal in many historical accounts but it was not typical of

¹⁰⁸ Morrison. *I Renounce War*. (p. 36).

¹⁰⁹ Rempel. *Dilemmas*. (pp. 1213-1216).

¹¹⁰ London School of Economics Library. Archive of the Women's International League. WILPF. *Executive Committee Minutes, 1941, March 5*. 1/17.

¹¹¹ LSE Library. *Executive Committee Minutes, 1942, March 4*. 1/18.

¹¹² London School of Economics Library. Archive of the Women's International League. WILPF. *Executive Committee Minutes, 1941, March 5*. 1/17; *Executive Committee Minutes, 1942, March 4*. 1/18.

¹¹³ London School of Economics Library. Archive of the Women's International League. WILPF. *Yearly Report 1944-1945*. 2/14.

¹¹⁴ Vernon, B. (1982). *Ellen Wilkinson 1891-1947*. Croom Helm. (p. 206).

the general acceptance, forgiveness and continuing feelings of respect demonstrated by the pacifist movement as a whole.

It might be expected that a women-only organisation such as the Women's Co-operative Guild would be likely to provide a feminist perspective on issues of war and pacifism.¹¹⁵ The organisation had been formed to provide a voice for women within the consumer economy and often described itself as the 'Trade Union for Mothers'. However, the WCG explained its pacifist position throughout World War Two in terms of socialist politics rather than through any instinctive opposition to violence held by women as mothers and wives. The pacifism of the WCG was deeply entrenched with a philosophy that was entirely consistent with the key principles of the Co-operative Movement. This was expressed succinctly by Margaret Llewelyn Davies, General Secretary of the WCG from 1889 to 1921. Davies stated that 'the brotherhood of nations is the religion of Co-operators, and under an Inter-national Co-operative system of trade and industry the material interests of nations are no longer in conflict'.¹¹⁶ In this way economic co-operation would lead to harmony between nations and wars would be avoided. A few months after war did break out, the WCG All-Councils Conference in February 1940 maintained this view that co-operation led to harmony while economic competition led to conflict. The conference proclaimed its opposition to the British government's prosecution of a war which, the WCG delegates claimed, was designed only to protect 'the exploitation of human beings under the aegis of the British Empire' and stated that they were 'not convinced that the present Government's war aims were anything more than making a world safe for capitalism'.¹¹⁷ For the WCG leadership, World War Two was not seen as a struggle against Fascism but was analysed purely in terms of their political and economic view of the world. In their opinion, this conflict was no different from previous wars fought by Britain to maintain its status within an exploitative capitalist system.

Another angle on pacifist thought in the World War Two era can be seen particularly in the writings of some prominent women from the literary world and might be defined as intellectual rationalism. For these pacifist women, war was always an irrational and

¹¹⁵ See Introduction for background information on the WCG.

¹¹⁶ Cited in Black, N. (1989). *Social Feminism*. Cornell University Press. (pp. 150-151).

¹¹⁷ Guild Topics. *Co-operative News*, 1940, February 3. (p.12).

emotional response to situations in the world, with a more reasoned and intelligent approach needed to secure peace. This kind of thinking was largely consistent with the ideas put forward in the 1930s by influential British philosopher Bertrand Russell. Although he moved to a position of supporting the war against Nazi Germany by the late 1930s, Russell was an active pacifist campaigner during the early and middle years of that decade.¹¹⁸ In his philosophical writings, which were read widely in intellectual circles at the time, he argued that thoughtful consideration was a sounder basis for correct moral action than relying on human instinct. One example he gave was that humans were likely to react to cruelty by demonstrating cruelty in return, but Russell argued that it was important that humans overcame this natural instinct and considered more rationally whether kindness might be more effective than punishment.¹¹⁹ Moral decisions, according to Russell, were best made 'after an appropriate amount of candid thought'.¹²⁰ Sigmund Freud was also influential in intellectual circles in the 1930s, with his ideas of psychoanalysis and the 'unconscious' parts of the mind. Freud's key writings were published in English at this time by Hogarth Press, run by well-known writer and pacifist Virginia Woolf and her husband.¹²¹ Like Russell, Freud spoke about an innate aggression within humans and how war 'let the primeval man within us into the light', which could only be tamed by reasoned, civilised behaviour.¹²²

The ideas of Russell and Freud can be seen as an influence in the arguments of many prominent women pacifist writers in the 1930s. Virginia Woolf wrote that 'somehow one had to banish anger and the unreason that is bred of anger' for wars to be avoided.¹²³ Many of her writings in the 1930s analysed the nature of war and tried to encourage political leaders and the public to respond 'soberly and rationally' to the international situation and to resist the arousal of their 'patriotic emotion'.¹²⁴ Author and peace campaigner Vera Brittain expressed similar views about the need for reason to triumph over emotion and indeed wrote in her diary that reading Russell was the decisive factor in confirming her full conversion to pacifism.¹²⁵ In her view, 'the women's movement began when ... [an]

¹¹⁸ Ayer, A.J. (1972). *Russell*. Fontana/Collins. (p. 28).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* (pp. 120-121).

¹²⁰ Cited in Ayer. *Russell*. (p. 117).

¹²¹ Overy, R. (2009). *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilisation, 1919-1939*. Allen Lane. (p. 158).

¹²² Cited in Gay, P. (1988). *Freud: A life for our time*. J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd. (p. 357).

¹²³ Cited in Eglin. *Women Pacifists*. (p. 158).

¹²⁴ Cited in Liddington. *Long Road*. (p. 169).

¹²⁵ Berry & Bostridge. *Vera Brittain*. (p. 357).

enlightened minority perceived that the operation of reason was superior to force as a factor in human affairs.' She implored people to react to moments of crisis with 'level-headedness' and 'determined sanity', as opposed to the 'emotional ferocity' she was witnessing as the prospect of war approached in the late 1930s.¹²⁶ Writer and reviewer Frances Partridge, a member of the literary Bloomsbury Circle like Woolf, expressed her 'absolute conviction that progress can never be achieved by force or violence, only by reason and persuasion. Intelligence not dynamite, words not bombs are the only means to convince people'.¹²⁷ She believed that a state of war led to a general loss of reason by the population, deploring the 'stupidity, crass suspicion and suggestibility, the lunatic sheepishness' she witnessed around her.¹²⁸

Studies of the 'history of emotions' since the 1980s have used developments in cognitive science to argue against historical analysis that provides a rigid division between reason and emotion. They state that 'emotional behaviour' is not necessarily irrational, while 'rational behaviour' does not have to be devoid of emotion.¹²⁹ However, it is important to look at the thoughts of those writing in the 1930s and 1940s on their own terms and to appreciate that they would have used a different frame of reference, in which emotional responses were often seen to be in opposition to rational ones. These ideas of a pacifism based on reason reached beyond literary circles and were read by the wider population, with Woolf and Brittain in particular enjoying very substantial sales figures in the 1930s.

This intellectual and rational basis for pacifism was a clear departure from the prevailing women's pacifism of the World War One era, where the emotional side of women's contribution to the debate had been emphasised as a positive factor in favour of peace. In the 1910s and 1920s, many women had demanded a voice in discussions about war on account of their unique feelings as wives and mothers. By the 1940s, these prominent pacifist women were suggesting strongly that an emotional reaction to international affairs, whether from men or women, was an undesirable response. Reason was now seen as a much sounder basis for pacifist thought, while emotion had come to be seen as a

¹²⁶ Cited in Badsey, P. (2005). *The Political Thought of Vera Brittain*. A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Kingston University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Kingston University. (pp. 259-260).

¹²⁷ Partridge, F. (1978). *A Pacifist's Diary*. Hogarth. (p. 156).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* (p. 48).

¹²⁹ Boddice, R. (2018). *The History of Emotions*. Manchester University Press. (pp. 95-98).

characteristic of war supporters. This trend was not just confined to the ideas of the literary intellectuals but can be seen in the ideas expressed by pacifist women from all parts of British society. Many women conscientious objectors in World War Two told tribunals that their objection to war was based on their rational reading and discussion of the teachings in the Bible, while the thousands of pacifists in the Women's Co-operative Guild believed that war was wrong because it subverted the principle of international economic co-operation. These were pacifist arguments based on reason and would apply to the thinking of men as well as women. Across the spectrum of women's pacifist thought in the 1940s, the unique emotional response of women as wives and mothers had become much less important.

This movement from emotion to reason in the World War Two era was significant at the time but, with hindsight, can be seen as more of an aberration than a turning point in the development of pacifist thought. Later anti-war campaigns by British women would revert to the idea of highlighting the emotional response. Jill Liddington describes how the women's peace movements of the 1950s had an 'emphasis on gender difference and on women's special nurturing attributes'.¹³⁰ The Greenham Common demonstrations of the 1980s began with a women's march to the site from South Wales, with a press release declaring that women's unique insight into the effects of war came from their work in the 'caring' professions and from 'bearing and nourishing children'.¹³¹ Therefore the rational pacifism promoted by women in the 1940s was a departure from the main characteristics of women's anti-war protest during the twentieth century as a whole. The Greenham women of the 1980s had more in common with the women from the era of World War One, who emphasised what they saw as the unique non-violent feelings of women. By contrast to both these groups, the World War Two pacifist women urged both women and men to react with reason and not with their emotional instincts.

Overall, a study of women's pacifism in Britain during World War Two is important because it shows that its key principles diverged from the prevailing thinking at other points during the twentieth century. Both the earlier and later part of the century saw women's pacifist arguments framed largely in the language of emotion and maternal instincts. In the 1940s, however, the anti-war arguments of women were similar to those being put forward by the

¹³⁰ Liddington. *Long Road*. (p. 174).

¹³¹ Cited in Liddington. *Long Road*. (p. 227).

male pacifists and many younger women in particular named influential men as the source of their beliefs. These arguments against war in the era of World War Two were based predominantly on firmly-held and rationally-stated religious or political beliefs, as well as on a general reasoned position that, in the opinion of the pacifists, the consequences of war were always going to be worse than any alternative situation in the international world. It is possible that the understatement of gender differences by pacifist women in the 1940s was influenced by the particular circumstances of that time. Unlike the situation in World War One, British women pacifists had to resist conscription in World War Two alongside their male counterparts. Another factor that reduced the difference between the war experiences of the genders in the 1940s was the substantial degree of conflict on the Home Front resulting from a much larger scale of aerial bombing. Here many pacifist men and women would find themselves working together to rescue and comfort the victims of air raids. In these circumstances, it is understandable that World War Two saw an apparent convergence in the outlook of male and female pacifists. Women in the 1940s placed less emphasis on their unique emotional insights, often highlighted in the anti-war rhetoric from both earlier and later in the twentieth century, basing their pacifism instead on religious or political thinking.

Chapter 3 - Applied Pacifism: Agency or Impotence?

Historians who claim that there was a failure of pacifism in World War Two, such as Richard Rempel, portray an image of a passive existence for opponents of the war throughout the years of conflict, with pacifist organisations and individuals withdrawing from society and playing very little active part in the momentous events going on around them. Rempel describes 'pacifist political impotence' and a 'record of pacifist failures during World War II'.¹³² This interpretation is challenged by historian Richard Overy, who argues that 'a more positive view can be taken of the survival of pacifist discourse and of pacifist agency'.¹³³ He maintains that individual pacifists and some peace organisations showed through both words and deeds that they had a key role to play in the developments of wartime Britain. Most of Overy's examples are male pacifists. It will be seen that a study of the activities of pacifist women during World War Two can help to reinforce further his argument for a more positive view of pacifist agency. The biographers of the prominent pacifist woman Vera Brittain, Paul Berry and Mark Bostridge, agree with Overy's view of strong pacifist discourse by asserting 'the influence of the pacifist as a perpetual evangelist for peace' during World War Two, suggesting that some pacifist campaigns had a clear impact on public opinion.¹³⁴ The historiographical debate then seems to be whether it was 'pacifist impotence' or 'pacifist agency' that predominated.

It is important not to confuse agency with activism. For pacifists, having agency over their lives within the midst of conflict did not necessarily mean that they had to be active in the community on a regular basis and bringing about practical achievements. When reading the diary of writer Frances Partridge, for example, it can be easy for historians to mock her discussion of pacifist ideas while enjoying sumptuous meals in well-stocked restaurants in the West End of London or her entertaining of well-known contemporary intellectuals in her cosy Wiltshire cottage, described by Virginia Nicholson as 'a little fortress occupied by dissenters reading the *New Statesman*'.¹³⁵ In fact Partridge had to face regular criticism from pro-war people in her literary circles, either by letter or face-to-face, and it was a

¹³² Rempel. *Dilemmas*. (p. 1228).

¹³³ Overy. *Pacifism in the Blitz*. (p. 202).

¹³⁴ Berry & Bostridge. *Vera Brittain*. (p. 389).

¹³⁵ Nicholson, V. (2011). *Millions Like Us: Women's Lives in War and Peace, 1939-1949*. Penguin. (p. 170).

constant and sometimes painful challenge for her to uphold her pacifist views.¹³⁶ Senior Peace Pledge Union official Sybil Morrison refused to engage with the kind of ‘applied pacifism’ practised by people like Vera Brittain but proclaimed her own pacifism regularly at public meetings to the extent that she was imprisoned for a ‘breach of the peace’.¹³⁷ Bearing witness to their beliefs, whether vocally or quietly, was important for Partridge, Morrison and many other pacifists to show their strength of character when most of the country was committed to total warfare.

The important thing in the minds of pacifists was to follow one’s conscience, regardless of any impact their actions may or may not have had on the wider world. Gwendy Knight, a Quaker and senior figure in the women’s Friends Ambulance Unit, quoted her father as saying that ‘it doesn’t matter whether pacifism succeeds or not, that’s not our business. It might be a failure, but if it’s right, that’s what we’ve got to follow’.¹³⁸ Another Quaker, Maude Brayshaw, asserted to the organisation’s Yearly Meeting that it was perfectly valid to express one’s faith passively, as well as actively, in relation to the war.¹³⁹ Similarly, some members of the Women’s Co-operative Guild were content that inner strength of belief was more important than having a dramatic impact on the rest of society. Mrs Parrott told a regional conference that the WCG did not have a lot of publicity but ‘she believed their influence was working silently’, while Mrs Lloyd told the same gathering that other organisations could have ‘all the praise and glory as long as they, the pacifist guildswomen, felt in their hearts they were doing the right thing’.¹⁴⁰

Indeed, within the pacifist movement there were debates throughout World War Two about the extent to which opponents of the war should become involved actively with humanitarian work or with campaigns to alleviate some of the suffering inflicted on civilians. The three largest pacifist groups - the Peace Pledge Union, the Society of Friends (Quakers) and the Women’s Co-operative Guild – all had ongoing internal debates about this dilemma. The PPU adopted on the whole a policy of opposing any activities that might mitigate the effects of the war, on the grounds that making war more humane was more likely to justify

¹³⁶ Partridge. *Diary*.

¹³⁷ Morrison. *I Renounce War*. (p. 52).

¹³⁸ IWM Archive. (1989). *Gwendy Knight*. 10929.

¹³⁹ Society of Friends Library. Bradshaw, M. *The Epistle of London Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, held in London, 25th to 31st of Fifth Month, 1944*. *The Friend*. 1940, June 9. (p. 366).

¹⁴⁰ Report on Southern Conference. *Co-operative News*, 1940, September 21. (p. 10).

future armed conflicts. The Quakers became well known for providing humanitarian aid in areas affected by war but within the organisation there were many who found it hard to come to terms with these activities. Their concern was that helping victims of enemy action, both at home and abroad, was providing support for the war effort of the British government and involved too much collaboration with the armed forces.¹⁴¹ Senior Quakers talked of a 'strain in relations in the early days' of the war between supporters and opponents of humanitarian action and of a 'wound' that took time to heal.¹⁴² Even as late as 1944, clerk Maude Brayshaw had to plead for tolerance for all approaches at the annual Society of Friends meeting, expressing concern that 'our differences tend to keep us apart, and are not always transcended at once'.¹⁴³ Within the Women's Co-operative Guild, some senior officials expressed discomfort at the involvement of members in helping the victims of air raids and assisting families who had been evacuated. In 1941 President Mrs K. Chadwick observed bitterly her belief that 'had our guilds worked as hard for our peace effort as they worked for the war effort, we might now have had a different tale to tell'.¹⁴⁴ It will be seen that, despite these misgivings about war activity, the majority of Quakers and WCG members did become involved actively in what one WCG leader called 'applied pacifism'.¹⁴⁵

The prevailing view within the Peace Pledge Union was hostile to the notion of 'applied pacifism' and the organisation upheld a general policy of disengagement with the war. Historical accounts can often focus on the PPU, as it was probably the most vocal of all the pacifist organisations and had a large literary output to promote its ideas. This focus on the PPU is evident in the recent study of World War Two pacifism by Tobias Kelly, whose argument that post-1945 pacifism was weak is exemplified mainly by the point that the PPU had to move to smaller headquarters at this time.¹⁴⁶

However, this kind of focus on the PPU provides a distortion by reinforcing the view that 'pacifist impotence' was prevalent. In fact, the PPU's management and policy-making during

¹⁴¹ Clogg, M. (2008). Quakers and Greeks in the 1940s. In Clogg, R. (Ed.). *Bearing Gifts to Greeks: Humanitarian Aid to Greece in the 1940s*. Palgrave Macmillan. (pp. 171-172).

¹⁴² IWM Archive. (1987). *Michael Cadbury*. 10051.

¹⁴³ *Epistle of London Yearly Meeting*. (p. 366).

¹⁴⁴ C.C. see New Leicester Office. *Co-operative News*, 1941, January 4. (p. 8).

¹⁴⁵ Co-operation is Pacifism in Practice, Says Mrs Ridealgh. *Co-operative News*, 1940, May 25. (p.8).

¹⁴⁶ Kelly. *Battles*. (pp. 270-271).

World War Two was questioned by people from all sides of the peace and war debate. The organisation refused to publish articles in its journal *Peace News* appealing for support for the campaign to provide famine relief in Nazi-occupied Greece, even though one of the main campaigners was Vera Brittain, a prominent member of the PPU.¹⁴⁷ The organisation may still have retained widespread respect and support if it had used *Peace News* instead to promote pacifist thoughts on issues with which the public might have some sympathy. However, the negative image of the PPU during the war was exacerbated by apparent admiration for some aspects of Nazi rule. The PPU leaders tried to convince others and themselves that a Nazi domination of Europe would be a lesser evil than war and this prompted them to look for the positives in Nazi rule and to downplay the negatives. In January 1941 *Peace News* stated that 'National Socialism relative to any other form of society is a good thing' and two months later the journal praised Hitler's success in raising the standard of living of ordinary Germans 'beyond the wildest dreams of socialists'.¹⁴⁸ The fact that these comments came at the height of the Blitz only served to reinforce the notion that the PPU leadership was insensitive to public opinion at a time of enormous anxiety. Overall, the words and deeds of the PPU during the war only served to marginalise the organisation and give a strong suggestion of impotence. It is important that historians look beyond the PPU to find a broader and more typical picture of pacifist agency in the 1940s.

A stronger degree of agency can be found by studying the activities of the Society of Friends and Women's Co-operative Guild during World War Two. The humanitarian work of the Quakers in this period, particularly those involved in the Friends Ambulance Unit, has received a certain amount of attention from historians.¹⁴⁹ However, the activities of the WCG have usually been overlooked, even though their efforts matched those of the Quakers in many areas, such as helping the victims of bombing and campaigning for famine relief abroad. This omission could be because there is a greater amount of written and oral testimony relating to the middle-class humanitarians like the Quakers, who perhaps had more time and confidence to speak and write about their work in subsequent years. However, a study of the WCG archives reveals an organisation having a similar journey to

¹⁴⁷ Berry & Bostridge. *Vera Brittain*. (p. 413).

¹⁴⁸ Cited in Gilbert, M. (1992). Pacifist attitudes to Nazi Germany, 1936-45. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27, 4. (p. 504).

¹⁴⁹ Smith, L. *Pacifists in Action*.

the Quakers during World War Two. Many editions of the Co-operative News Journal from the World War two years reveal a wide range of views about how far the organisation should participate in war relief work, both in the journal's letters pages and in its reports on conferences. Both the WCG and the Society of Friends wrestled with the dilemma of the extent to which pacifists should become entangled in activities related to war but, despite these misgivings, both groups had a large number of members who worked to alleviate some of the hardships brought about by conflict.

Both the Friends Ambulance Unit and the Women's Co-operative Guild achieved notable successes in their policies of 'applied pacifism', despite there being some doubts within their organisations about the desirability of this policy. The FAU had been established in World War One, consisting mainly of Quaker men who wanted to offer medical help rather than fight, though the organisation was not affiliated directly to the Society of Friends. Partly because World War Two brought about the need for more care for civilians on the home front, a women's unit of the FAU was set up by Quaker Tessa Rowntree (later Cadbury) and served within Britain until 1945.¹⁵⁰ In particular, the women FAU members seemed to be more relaxed about the issue of wearing uniform and more concerned in general with offering pragmatic humanitarian support rather than theorising too much about the moral dilemmas of becoming involved in the war so directly. Lilian Cadoux was pleased to leave the Friends Relief Service and join the Friends Ambulance Unit instead because of the FAU's more relaxed attitude to wearing khaki uniform. She said that she 'honestly didn't mind a scrap about wearing khaki. I just wanted to get on with the job and the red crosses on my shoulder tabs were good enough for me'.¹⁵¹ Similarly, another FAU member Angela Sinclair-Loutit had no time for 'those symbolic gestures' about whether or not to wear uniform and felt simply that 'anything that would save people from pain and destruction, I would do'.¹⁵² For both these women and for most of the other members of the FAU, both male and female, being active in the service of people affected by the war was the main priority and holding back for subtle ethical reasons was not thought to be appropriate in these circumstances. The FAU was widely respected by all sections of British society. FAU member Brenda Bailey, who helped to look after children and to sort out problems between families

¹⁵⁰ IWM Archive. (1994). Tessa Cadbury. 14205.

¹⁵¹ IWM Archive. (1989). Lilian Cadoux. 10885.

¹⁵² IWM Archive. (1987). Angela Sinclair-Loutit. 10040.

in a Wapping air raid shelter, spoke afterwards of a 'lovely fraternity' and 'warm feeling', with people greeting her enthusiastically in local streets for years afterwards.¹⁵³ When FAU member Marjorie Whittles appeared at a tribunal to assess her conscientious objection, the chair Judge Burgis praised the brave way she was willing 'to do something for humanity'.¹⁵⁴ In these ways the agency and powerful contribution of the FAU women was widely recognised.

The overall policy of the Women's Co-operative Guild to humanitarian work in the war was summarised succinctly by Central Committee member Mrs M. Ridealgh's statement that 'Co-operation is applied pacifism – pacifism in practice'.¹⁵⁵ This involved providing entertainment and comfort for wounded soldiers, helping evacuated families and providing facilities for people in air raid shelters. During July 1944, when the V1 and V2 rocket attacks were at their height, WCG volunteers catered for ten thousand people in London's shelters every night.¹⁵⁶ The WCG's work in the shelters was recognised by the award of an OBE to General Secretary Cecily Cook.¹⁵⁷ Sometimes these activities were criticised by some prominent WCG members, such as Mrs K. Chadwick, for being too supportive of the British government's war efforts.¹⁵⁸ Some historians too have made similar suggestions, such as Peter Gurney's claim that 'members engaged enthusiastically in the evacuation scheme'.¹⁵⁹ In fact, the WCG refused to play any part in the actual 'scheme' of evacuation but, having seen the misery it had brought to many families, were willing to become involved in 'a definitely practical way of helping women to overcome the strain and worry' of the many problems caused by the way evacuation had been carried out.¹⁶⁰ Most members of the WCG leadership did not feel that work to support soldiers, evacuees and the victims of bombing undermined the basic pacifist stance of the organisation. They argued that this was totally

¹⁵³ IWM Archive. (1996). *Brenda Bailey*. 16901.

¹⁵⁴ Cited in Nicholson, H. (2007). *Disputed Identity*. (p. 420).

¹⁵⁵ Co-operation is Pacifism in Practice, Says Mrs Ridealgh. *Co-operative News*, 1940, May 25. (p.8). Ridealgh's phrase may have been influenced by prominent author Aldous Huxley. Her first four words were identical to those used by Huxley in a well-known 1936 work where he praised the pacifism of the Co-operative Movement. Huxley, A. (1936). *An Encyclopaedia of Pacifism*. Chatto & Windus. (p. 41).

¹⁵⁶ Gaffin, J. & D. Thoms, D. (1983). *Caring and sharing: The centenary history of the Cooperative Women's Guild*. Co-operative Union Ltd. (p. 125).

¹⁵⁷ Salt, C., Schweitzer, P. & Wilson, M. (1983). "Of whole heart cometh hope." *Centenary memories of the Co-operative Women's Guild*. Co-operative Retail Services. (p. 41).

¹⁵⁸ C.C. see New Leicester Office. *Co-operative News*, 1941, January 4. (p. 8).

¹⁵⁹ Gurney, P. (2020). Redefining 'the woman with the basket': The Women's Co-operative Guild and the Politics of Consumption in Britain during the Second World War. *Gender & History*, 32(1). (p. 192).

¹⁶⁰ Guild Topics. *Co-operative News*, 1939, September 9. (p.8).

justified by the notion that the WCG was supporting the victims of war, not the war effort itself. Most of the 'entertainment and comforts' provided at WCG social events were for the benefit of 'wounded Tommies', not for the fit soldiers.¹⁶¹ The consistency of WCG leadership policy was explained by Mrs Ridealgh to a rally in Plymouth in 1940. She explained that it was acceptable for the WCG to be 'helping with evacuees, or even helping the men of the fighting forces' and that although the WCG had 'refused to take part in preparations for war, but they had never failed to give succour to the victims of it'.¹⁶² WCG President Isabella Thorley justified all these activities as 'a way of helping the victims of aggression'.¹⁶³ In its support for wounded soldiers and families suffering from evacuation or bombing, the WCG demonstrated agency in the consistency of its policy to help those affected by the war without assisting governmental war preparations directly.

This 'applied pacifism' of the WCG involved not just work on the ground but also political campaigning at the highest levels of government about international issues. The WCG was part of the campaign to relieve famine in Greece and some other countries occupied by the Nazis, a cause usually just associated with prominent figures such as Vera Brittain.¹⁶⁴ In March 1942 the WCG wrote a letter to Prime Minister Winston Churchill, imploring the British government to work with the Red Cross to provide food to countries affected by the allied blockade.¹⁶⁵ Another letter to Churchill was written later that year in October, in which the WCG welcomed that some improvement to food supplies had been made to Greece, but expressed concern that there was a lack of milk and baby food for young children.¹⁶⁶ This campaigning was enhanced by practical work from local guilds, with knitting and sewing clubs set up to supply clothing for the relief campaign.¹⁶⁷ The WCG also campaigned for the British government to do more to relieve the plight of Jewish people. Although many pacifists were inclined to dismiss early reports of Nazi atrocities against the Jews as allied propaganda, the WCG campaigned in 1943 for Britain to accept more Jewish refugees in the light of 'the persecution and threatened extermination' of the Jewish

¹⁶¹ Cheers for the Guild. *Co-operative News*. 1940, September 14. (p. 4).

¹⁶² Guild Must Cling to Its Pacifist Policy. *Co-operative News*. 1940, March 2. (p. 12).

¹⁶³ What a National President Learned in Office. *Co-operative News*, 1940, July 6. (p. 13).

¹⁶⁴ Bennett. *Question of Respectability*.

¹⁶⁵ Food for Greece Plea. *Co-operative News*. 1942, March 7.(p. 12).

¹⁶⁶ Starving Greece. *Co-operative News*, 1942, October 24. (p. 12).

¹⁶⁷ Women's Part in Aiding Relief Abroad. *Co-operative News*, 1944, June 3. (p. 13).

people.¹⁶⁸ In these ways the WCG, sometimes nicknamed the 'Trade Union for Mothers', demonstrated that its concerns went well beyond issues relating to household economics, with strong agitation for compassion to be shown to victims of war across the world.

The involvement of pacifist women in humanitarian work during World War Two can raise issues about feminist agency at this point in history. When attempting to analyse the impact of this kind of work on the status of women, historians can see a mixed picture. On the one hand, the status of women can be constrained by this kind of work as it can reinforce traditional stereotypes of women's suitability for the soft skills of caring, with the implication that the 'tougher' military, diplomatic and political spheres are the more natural preserve of men. The agency of women can be limited if the humanitarian work they undertake only serves to perpetuate and reinforce their traditional role of carers. However, the work of women pacifists in World War Two can also provide a very positive example of women's agency. Their work as doctors, nurses, aid workers and organisers of charities provided what some historians have called a 'legitimate space' for women to make a highly significant contribution to wartime society.¹⁶⁹

One area where this development of feminist agency could be seen was in the formation and practice of the women's section of the Friends Ambulance Unit. When the women's unit was first established in 1940, it appeared that its role would be limited and gendered. In October 1940 FAU member Peter Hume wrote to Tessa Rowntree to suggest that a women's unit should be created, on the grounds that 'it has been abundantly clear that our work in London in shelters, food and rest centres would be increased in value if we had a women's section'.¹⁷⁰ The role Hume envisaged for FAU women was clearly a caring one, looking after families and performing largely domestic duties. At this stage Tessa Rowntree, who took on the main responsibility for the new women's unit, accepted this gendered role

¹⁶⁸ Rempel. *Dilemmas*. (pp. 1227-1228); *Co-operative News*. 1943, January 30..

¹⁶⁹ Jusseaume, A. (2022). Introduction to online seminar on Humanitarian Intimacies: Gender, Care and Humanitarianism. Part of a seminar series funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Project called *New Approaches to Medical Care, Humanitarianism and Violence during the 'long' Second World War, 1931-1953*. Accessed by Zoom on 1 February 2022.

¹⁷⁰ Cited in Smith, L. *Pacifists in Action*. (p. 48).

and replied to Hume that 'women were ideally suited to shelter work – helping with the children, making sleeping conditions better'.¹⁷¹

However, Rowntree's approach changed when she set up a training camp for women joining the new unit at the remote spot of Barmoor on the North Yorkshire Moors. In this 'rugged place', as she described it, the trainee FAU women endured a tough winter during 1940-1941 with Rowntree saying that 'the idea was to toughen them up and make them as adaptable as possible'.¹⁷² Having completed this rigorous training, the FAU women went on to face the same physical conditions and dangers as the men in the bombed areas of Britain. Gwendy Knight, who assisted Tessa Rowntree with the training camp, described how women had to go into 'very vulnerable places, under the old warehouses in the docks, or under railway arches'.¹⁷³ At a tribunal to assess conscientious objectors, Judge Burgis praised the way that the FAU women 'threw up safety and comfort' in the dangerous work they did during air raids.¹⁷⁴ If it had ever been the intention that the women in the FAU would confine themselves to counselling families, making tea and plumping up pillows, then in practice this was not the case. The women's FAU unit changed the perception of the capabilities of women's humanitarian operations, showing that they would not only bring perceived 'feminine' qualities to the role but could also show the robustness and physical courage often seen as the preserve of men.

At first sight the actions of the Women's Co-operative Guild can seem like a stereotypical gendered response. The main contribution from the WCG rank-and-file was a project on an enormous scale to knit and sew clothes for the people of Germany and other European countries from 1944 onwards. Yet their assertive stance on pacifism struck a blow for female equality within the Co-operative Movement. The wider British Co-operative Movement and the Co-operative Parliamentary Party, had joined the Labour Party in supporting the war when Churchill became Prime Minister in 1940. This situation provided a significant challenge to the pacifist policy of the women's section, who continued to oppose the war despite pressure from their male counterparts. In 1941, for example, a meeting was held between the Executive of the Co-operative Party and the Central Committee of WCG

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² IWM Archive, *Cadbury, T.*

¹⁷³ IWM Archive. *Knight.*

¹⁷⁴ Cited in Nicholson, H. (2007). *Disputed Identity*. (p. 420).

‘with a view to securing guild support for the Party peace policy’ which, despite what the name suggests, was actually a policy in favour of the British war effort.¹⁷⁵ However, the WCG remained adamant that its own peace policy of opposing the war would remain. A few weeks later at the 1941 WCG Congress a motion from five local branches to adopt the pro-war policy of the wider Co-operative Movement was defeated heavily.¹⁷⁶ The women’s branch of the Co-operative Movement was also willing to condemn the Walsall Co-operative Society in 1940 for trying to dismiss and bar conscientious objectors from its workforce.¹⁷⁷ In all these ways the WCG resisted pressure to conform to the war-supporting policies of the wider Co-operative Movement, showing a large measure of working class feminist agency in upholding and asserting its pacifist stance.

At local level too, this pacifist assertiveness of the working class women in the Women’s Co-operative Guild was evident to contemporary observers. In the mid-1930s the League of Nations Union had undertaken a national ballot to canvass opinion on issues of war and peace, with its volunteers calling on houses to collect the ballot papers. One volunteer was supported in this task by local WCG members and wrote that the guildswomen’s ‘zeal for peace was coupled with an astonishing knowledge of international affairs’.¹⁷⁸ In many cases the Peace Ballot volunteers found working class households where the women were reluctant to sign the ballot papers without the permission of their husbands because, as one woman explained, ‘he doesn’t like me interfering in such things’.¹⁷⁹ By contrast the working class women who belonged to the WCG were seen to be asserting their own well-informed pacifist opinions, whether the men in their lives agreed with them or not. The discussions at local WCG branches and the literature provided for members by the national leadership all contributed to an enhanced knowledge of international issues among the working class guildswomen, leading to a growing confidence as they asserted their pacifist stance. A real sense of agency was evident in the actions and opinions of this group of women.

As well as the activities of organisations like the Society of Friends and the Women’s Co-operative Guild, a study of individual women like Vera Brittain and Edith Pye can also

¹⁷⁵ Guild Topics. *Co-operative News*, 1941, February 1. (p. 8).

¹⁷⁶ Food problems Will Be Dominant Topic at Guild Congress. *Co-operative News*, 1941, June 14. (p. 1).

¹⁷⁷ National President at Porthcawl. *Co-operative News*, 1940, May 11. (p. 13).

¹⁷⁸ Cited in McCarthy, H. (2011). *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, citizenship and internationalism, c. 1918-45*. Manchester University Press. (p. 201).

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.* (p. 202).

provide a strong example of applied pacifism. Both women campaigned for the allies to lift a blockade that was causing famine in Nazi-occupied Greece. Brittain also campaigned against the bombing of German civilians. For active pacifists, these were not easy choices. Brittain was criticised by other members of the Peace Pledge Union while Pye's activities aroused the concern of her fellow Quakers. The PPU view of the campaign for famine relief was that it was a 'diversion that would lead away from the major one of campaigning for an armistice', while the General Secretary of the Friends Relief Service Roger Cowan Wilson was concerned that Edith Pye's involvement would drag the Quakers into a propaganda battle between the two sides engaged in the war.¹⁸⁰ The campaign against the bombing of German civilians was also criticised by the PPU, whose policy was not to campaign 'against particular weapons but against war itself'.¹⁸¹ Despite these criticisms, Brittain and Pye were determined to aim to mitigate the effects of war wherever they could. Pye reflected that 'it is the old dilemma – shall we stand aside and preach righteousness, or shall we go with others as far as we can in unity?'¹⁸² Similarly, Brittain said that she 'would rather soil my hands than remain so self-righteously pure' and criticised those who 'assume that if pacifists do not succeed in preventing a war, they must throw up the sponge and acquiesce in any excesses which war-makers choose to initiate'.¹⁸³ 'Throwing up the sponge' – or 'throwing in the towel', as most might say – was certainly not the style of active pacifists like Vera Brittain and Edith Pye. Attempting to alleviate the 'excesses which war-makers choose to initiate' was a vital role that they felt compelled to undertake.

To carry out these campaigns successfully, active pacifists were often willing to compromise by working alongside non-pacifists if necessary. In both the famine relief and civilian bombing campaigns Vera Brittain was willing to form alliances with non-pacifists, such as the Famine Relief Committee and Bishop George Bell of Chichester, who criticised the bombing of Germany without opposing the war itself. She did this because she feared that a campaign by pacifists alone could be dismissed as the work of 'fanatics, soft heads and sentimental idealists'.¹⁸⁴ Edith Pye made a similar point that 'it was obvious that if Friends

¹⁸⁰ Morrison. *I Renounce War*. (p. 58); Clogg. *Quakers and Greeks*. (pp. 171-172).

¹⁸¹ Morrison. *I Renounce War*. (p. 59).

¹⁸² Cited in Clogg. *Quakers and Greeks*. (pp. 171-172).

¹⁸³ Cited in Berry & Bostridge. *Vera Brittain*. (p. 389 & p. 441).

¹⁸⁴ Cited in Black, M. *A Cause*. (p. 9).

alone took up the crusade we should not get far'.¹⁸⁵ Both Brittain and Pye recognised that, if applied pacifism was going to work effectively, then a pragmatic approach was essential and more important than the need to retain total purity in pacifist thought.

At governmental level, the pacifist campaigns against the allied blockade of occupied Europe and the bombing of civilians did have some impact, in different ways. Early in 1944 the British government was eventually persuaded by the campaign to modify the blockade and increase food supply to Greece by 1000 tons of food a month. Brittain acknowledged that this was a small but significant move, noting that 'it was not much...but the small concession enabled a number of young Greeks to survive the war'.¹⁸⁶ Dr Cawadias, a senior Red Cross official, told a conference in 1944 where Brittain and Pye spoke that 'if relief had not been sent in there would not have been one Greek alive today ... I think there can be no exaggeration in saying ... that marvellous Greek race ... would have perished'.¹⁸⁷ Brittain believed that the moral outcomes of the famine relief campaign were also significant, as 'the concern of a few bore witness to the oneness of humanity'.¹⁸⁸ Historian Aleksandra Bennett supports Brittain's claim, stating that Brittain, Pye and their colleagues 'succeeded in making a signal contribution to keeping the nineteenth century tradition of moral protest alive in wartime Britain'.¹⁸⁹

The impact of the campaign against civilian bombing on the attitudes of the public was also apparent, both during World War Two and afterwards. Vera Brittain's book on the subject in 1944, 'Seeds of Chaos', produced a heated debate on the topic and Brittain welcomed even the critical reviews. She expressed 'a satisfaction' that the book's ideas had stirred public opinion and said that the worst outcome was 'to be ignored; when people take notice, abuse you & defend themselves, you know you have got under their skin & uncovered a bad conscience!'.¹⁹⁰ Not all reaction to the book was hostile and there was unexpected support from military historian and strategist Basil Liddell Hart, who expressed his 'profound respect for your courage in upholding the claims for human decency in a time when war fever is

¹⁸⁵ Cited in Clogg. *Quakers and Greeks*. (p. 171).

¹⁸⁶ Cited in Berry & Bostridge. *Vera Brittain*. (p. 429).

¹⁸⁷ Cited in Clogg. *Quakers and Greeks*. (p. 173).

¹⁸⁸ Cited in Black, M.. *A Cause*. (p. 21).

¹⁸⁹ Bennett. *Question of Respectability*. (p. 392).

¹⁹⁰ Cited in Berry & Bostridge. *Vera Brittain*. (p. 441).

raging'.¹⁹¹ Along with Quaker pacifist Corder Catchpool and Anglican Bishop George Bell of Chichester, Vera Brittain formed the Bombing Restriction Committee, which produced and circulated several influential pamphlets and posters. A petition in favour of bombing restrictions was organised by the committee and received about 15,000 signatures.¹⁹² For several years after the war, there was widespread acceptance among the British public of the Bombing Restriction Committee's claim that as many as 300,000 people may have been killed in the allied raid on Dresden in February 1945, whereas modern estimates suggest more like 30,000, showing that Vera Brittain and her colleagues had made an impact on the general perception about the bombing raids.¹⁹³

Recent evidence has suggested that even Prime Minister Winston Churchill became sensitive to the Bombing Restriction Committee's accusation of 'terror bombing', telling Deputy Chief of the Air Staff Norman Bottomley in March 1945 that he was uncomfortable about the idea of bombing German cities 'simply for the sake of increasing the terror'.¹⁹⁴ Churchill did not mention Bomber Command in his victory speech in May 1945, nor did he mention the bombing of Dresden in his detailed history of the war written in the 1950s.¹⁹⁵ Sir Arthur Harris, Air Chief Marshal of Bomber Command, did not receive comparable honours to those in other services and as late as 1992 there were strong protests at the unveiling of a statue of Harris, who was still regarded as the main architect of the bombing raids that killed so many German civilians.¹⁹⁶ Long after 1945, the bombing of Germany remained the aspect of World War Two about which the British public felt the most unease. Vera Brittain and other campaigners did not prevent the heavy bombing of German cities during World War Two but they did have an impact on the public memory of this episode, influencing the reflections at all levels of society.

There is no doubt that the actions of women pacifists during World War Two did have some real impact. Hundreds of lives were saved in Greece during the famine while thousands of soldiers and civilians around the world were given comfort and medical help with the

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* (p. 442).

¹⁹² Overy, R. (2016). Constructing Space for Dissent in War: The Bombing Restriction Committee, 1941–1945. *English Historical Review*, 550. (pp. 606-608).

¹⁹³ McKay, S. (2020). *Dresden: The Fire and the Darkness*. Penguin Random House. (p. 294).

¹⁹⁴ Cited in *Ibid.* (p. 275).

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* (pp. 291-292).

¹⁹⁶ Berry & Bostridge. *Vera Brittain*. (p. 558).

injuries and losses they suffered as a result of the conflict. Even though campaigns like the one against civilian bombing did not affect governmental policy during the war, it had a noticeable effect on public opinion for years afterwards. Also, the moral pressure exerted on the British government had the effect of forcing the leaders to justify the legitimacy of their actions, on matters such as blockade and bombing, to ensure that the wider public retained its support for the war effort.¹⁹⁷ At certain points in the war some pacifist women may have felt some degree of frustration in their inability to control what was happening in the world but they never lost their sense of 'agency'. Often their words and deeds led to tangible results but, even if they did not, there was true agency for women pacifists through the fact that they continued to be vocal and active about the causes in which they believed. There was significant progress towards gender equality in that women's voices were heard much more frequently than they had been a generation earlier, particularly in the traditionally male-dominated spheres of international diplomacy and military strategy.¹⁹⁸ For women in the Friends Ambulance Unit and the Women's Co-operative Guild, their actions also asserted the role and authority of women in ways that went beyond conventional female spheres. The WCG remained fiercely independent of the wider Co-operative Movement in continuing to assert a pacifist stance, including challenging male Co-operative employers who discriminated against conscientious objectors. The women's unit of the FAU did not confine itself to the domestic and nurturing roles that may have been expected when the unit was founded but, to the admiration of many members of society, placed itself at the heart of the danger and devastation caused by the Blitz. In all these ways women pacifists played a highly significant and often leading role in keeping pacifist discourse and agency alive for the duration of World War Two.

¹⁹⁷ Overy, R. (2021). *Blood and Ruins: The Great Imperial War 1931-1945*. Allen Lane. P. 660; Overy, *Constructing Space*. (p. 617).

¹⁹⁸ Gottlieb. *Broken Friendships*. (pp. 218-219).

Chapter 4 - Pacifist Women and the Challenge to the Wartime Consensus

There has been a general acceptance that Britain during World War Two was largely a cohesive and united society with a significant degree of consensus in support of the war effort. Sonya Rose describes a common memory that 1940s Britain was 'a historical moment when the nation was truly united'. Robert Mackay argues that 'what the test of war above all revealed about Britain was that it was a cohesive society'.¹⁹⁹ Within this context, it has been argued that opposition to the war had very little effect on the unity of society and that pacifists could be tolerated without too much disruption. Some historians suggest that opposition to the war did become a brief irritant to the nation during the crisis of 1940-1941, when the country's existence was threatened by invasion and the rest of north-west Europe had been conquered by the Germans. After that 'critical time for the country' though, Angus Calder argues, 'national unity' could be 'extended to embrace even conscientious objectors'.²⁰⁰ This idea of opposition to the war becoming less important from 1941 is backed up by Martin Ceadel who sees a 'progressive fall' in the numbers of conscientious objectors after this point.²⁰¹ Rachel Barker's analysis of conscientious objectors in World War Two is almost entirely focused on 1939 to 1941 and she suggests that the issue of opposition to the war no longer interested the British public after 1941 and instead they 'devoted their energies to other topics'.²⁰² The conclusion reached by these historians that pacifism became less important from 1941 diminishes the significance of the women who opposed the war, as it was only from December 1941 that conscription and conscientious objection for women became an issue. However, this analysis can be questioned and many examples can be found to show that, throughout the duration of World War Two, women's pacifism did pose a serious challenge to the wartime consensus in Britain.

The presumptions made by these historians that opposition to the war was unimportant after the first two years of the conflict have been challenged in some more recent studies. Since the 1990s, historians have had access to a large number of oral testimonies from both men and women who opposed the war, through interview projects led by the Imperial War

¹⁹⁹ Mackay, R. *Test of War*. (p. 232).

²⁰⁰ Calder. *Myth of the Blitz*. (p. 77).

²⁰¹ Ceadel. *Legitimate Peace Movement*. (p. 142).

²⁰² Barker. *Conscience*. (p. 77).

Museum and the British Library.²⁰³ These interviews provide numerous examples of how many women provided a vigorous challenge to the government's programme of female conscription from 1941 onwards and of the impact these struggles had on British society. Historian Hazel Nicholson, for example, has demonstrated that 'women's conscientious objection was far more widespread than is generally appreciated'.²⁰⁴ In this context it is important not to regard conscientious objection as the same thing as pacifism.

Conscientious objection was a legal status which, for various reasons, was granted to relatively few women. They gained this status when they registered their unwillingness to be called up to support the war effort. Pacifism was an objection to World War Two and was a belief held by tens of thousands of women, regardless of whether their age or personal circumstances meant that the state called them forward for service in the war.

It is also important to define more clearly what is meant by 'consensus'. In an important recent contribution to this issue in the era of World War Two Peter Hennessy has argued that there was a noticeable degree of consensus in Britain from Churchill's accession to the office of Prime Minister in 1940 until the rise of Thatcherism in the late 1970s.²⁰⁵ In particular, he has observed that the country was particularly united in its defence and foreign policies in this period, in making decisions about how to address the threats from first Nazi Germany and later from the Soviet Union.²⁰⁶ However, Hennessy's definition of consensus is purely party political, measured in terms of how the Conservative and Labour parties agreed on nearly every aspect of the prosecution of World War Two and of dealing with the difficulties of the post-war world situation. When considering the impact of women pacifists in Britain during this period it is important to look outside the parliamentary sphere, to the spaces where pacifists contested both the war in general and many particular aspects of its prosecution by the governing classes. Women pacifists did not see the value in promoting their arguments through the main political parties and very few of them were active in either the Labour, Liberal or Conservative movements. Instead they joined existing pressure groups like the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom or they formed new ones like the Bombing Restriction Committee. The effects of the pacifists on

²⁰³ *IWM and BL Archives.*

²⁰⁴ Nicholson, H. *Disputed Identity.* (p. 427).

²⁰⁵ Hennessy, P. (2022). *A Duty of Care: Britain Before and After Covid.* Allen Lane.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.* (p. 6).

British public life are not to be found in parliamentary legislation or debates, but in the day-to-day operation of society across the country. They may have had little impact on the prevailing political consensus within Parliament but they did provide a significant challenge to the general consensus about the war among people of all social classes throughout Britain.

At first sight, the number of registered women conscientious objectors in Britain in World War Two, around 1,000 seems small in comparison to the 40,000 or so men on the register.²⁰⁷ However, further examination reveals that the number of registered women was, for a number of reasons, just a small fraction of the total number of women who opposed the war. Many women refused to be directed to 'industrial' employment by the government, but this kind of conscientious objection was not recognised by the authorities and therefore these women were not registered officially. Only those women who refused 'military' service in the women's auxiliary units of the armed forces could be granted official exemption due to their conscience. One opponent of the war not to be registered was Winifred Ibbotson. She wrote to the Ministry of Labour to ask them to recognise conscientious objection to 'industrial' conscription, explaining 'the fact that the Registration for Employment Order does not provide for conscientious objection does not alter the fact that I for one hold very strong Christian objections to work which is directly furthering the war'.²⁰⁸ The ministry refused to change their procedures and so Ibbotson and hundreds more women found that their strongly-held refusal to co-operate with the war effort was not recognised in any official statistics. Even though some of the women who refused 'industrial' service ended up in prison for their refusal, they were not counted as one of the 911 women on the register of conscientious objectors. Also excluded from these figures were the women of all ages who refused the compulsion to take part in civil defence duties such as fire-watching, with 80 women being prosecuted for this offence and several more who refused but were not prosecuted.²⁰⁹

Additionally, there were many women who may have become conscientious objectors but they were not required to join up because they were pregnant or had dependent children.

²⁰⁷ Barker. *Conscience*. (pp. 144-145).

²⁰⁸ Cited in Nicholson, H. *Disputed Identity*. (p. 413).

²⁰⁹ Nicholson, H. *Disputed Identity*. (p. 414).

Also, several were not conscripted because they were already in reserved occupations such as teaching or nursing. Erdrey Allott, Jessie Baston and Patricia Knowles were all teachers who, separately, all made a point of writing that they were conscientious objectors on their papers as they turned up for compulsory registration as a preliminary to the possibility of being allocated some kind of war service.²¹⁰ This was their method of making their views clear, knowing that they were unlikely to be forced to make an officially registered objection due to their occupation. Despite what they wrote on their papers, these opponents of the war did not count in the official figures for women conscientious objectors. Margaret Sharp's pacifism was strong enough for her to spend most of her evenings and weekends working with Peace Pledge Union leader Middleton Murray on his pioneering community farms, but she never had to register as a conscientious objector because she was in a reserved occupation as a public health worker.²¹¹ There were thousands of women who had applied to be conscientious objectors but whose names did not make it onto the official register, either because a tribunal rejected their request or the system never reached the point of processing their case. Patricia Knowles was not contacted by the authorities again after writing that she was a conscientious objector on her registration form.²¹² Lilian Cadoux spent a lot of time preparing her tribunal speech to justify her objection to the war after she received her call-up papers but then heard nothing else, for some unknown reason. She said that this was 'a pity because I would have positively welcomed a chance to declare what I stood for'.²¹³ In February 1943 Minister of Labour Ernest Bevin estimated that 2,500 women had actually applied for conscientious objection.²¹⁴ No figures are available for the year or so following Bevin's estimate to the end of female conscription in January 1944 but the chances are that at least another two thousand or so would have applied. So the official figure of 911 women conscientious objectors is a significant underestimate of the total number of women who opposed the war. As Hazel Nicholson explains, 'many more women identified themselves as conscientious objectors without the state's approval or public recognition'.²¹⁵

²¹⁰ *Ibid.* (pp. 409-410 & pp. 424-425).

²¹¹ BL Archive. (1998). *Margaret Sharp*. C880/13.

²¹² BL Archive. *Knowles*.

²¹³ IWM. *Cadoux*.

²¹⁴ Nicholson, H. *Disputed Identity*. (p. 417).

²¹⁵ *Ibid.* (p. 410).

The extent of women's pacifism in World War Two was certainly enough to cause significant tensions and divisions within British society. Many women pacifists had to face discrimination because of their views. As far as central government was concerned, there was to be less hostility towards pacifists than in World War One. Both Neville Chamberlain and Winston Churchill, Prime Ministers when conscription bills were introduced in the early years of World War Two, spoke out to protect the rights of genuine conscientious objectors.²¹⁶ This policy of toleration was reinforced in a memorandum written by Home Secretary Sir John Anderson early in the war, as he rejected calls for pacifists to be removed from public offices. The Home Secretary stated that 'the first principle to be observed is that in this country no person should be penalised for the mere holding of an opinion, however unpopular that opinion may be to the majority'.²¹⁷ Anderson added that the holding of such views 'does not of itself afford any cause of action against a public servant'.²¹⁸ In central governmental circles at least, the theory was that pacifists should not face discrimination.

It was different though at local government level, where a large majority of county and city councils dismissed both male and female employees who refused to support the war effort. For those councils for which the information is known, 38 retained their conscientious objector employees and 71 dismissed them.²¹⁹ Despite his argument for tolerance, the Home Secretary admitted that there was little that he was willing or able to do to prevent local authorities from discriminating against pacifists.²²⁰ After being released from prison for refusing to undertake compulsory fire-watching duties, teacher Margaret Porteous was summoned to meet the Director of Education for Salford. First he gave 'a tirade of what he thought of' people like Porteous and then dismissed her on the grounds that the local authority did not employ conscientious objectors, which she described as 'a hard blow'.²²¹ This was in direct contradiction to advice from senior Whitehall civil servants saying that people imprisoned for fire-watch refusal should not then be punished again by losing their

²¹⁶ Rae, J. (1970). *Conscience and Politics: The British Government and the Conscientious Objector to Military Service 1916-1919*. Oxford University Press. (p. 240).

²¹⁷ National Archives. *Memorandum by the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security for the guidance of Local Authorities in dealing with complaints made against employees in Local Government service reflecting on their fitness to remain in the public service*. 29 July 1940. ED136/29.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ Barker. *Conscience*. (pp. 140-142).

²²⁰ National Archives. *Memorandum by the Home Secretary*.

²²¹ BL Archive. (1999). *Margaret Porteous*. C880/29/01-02.

jobs.²²² Again, there was little that central government could do in practice to stop local councils behaving in this way. Rosalind Rusbridge was suspended from her teaching job in Swansea because she refused to sign a declaration that she was not a conscientious objector.²²³ Trainee teacher Dorothy Haverall Shaw struggled to find a job because of her pacifist views.²²⁴ Joyce Allen in Bristol believed that only a chronic teacher shortage in that area saved her from dismissal, after her headmaster was rattled by newspaper headlines about her such as 'Girl Conchie Teaches Boys' and 'Girl Conchie Attacks The British Constitution'.²²⁵ When Joan Williams lost her job as a librarian with Shoreditch Council, because of her conscientious objector views, she found that her situation was exacerbated by a disqualification from benefits as she was deemed to have lost her job due to 'industrial misconduct'.²²⁶

The discrimination of local authorities was also exacerbated by the attitude of His Majesty's Inspectors for Education, asking inspectors to report immediately on any pacifist teachers 'exercising an undesirable influence on the children or young people with whom they are associated', as the inspectorate was concerned about the 'propagation of pacifist doctrines among children and young people' especially 'in time of war'.²²⁷ For educated women teaching was the most common career route, so the hostility of local councils had a devastating impact on the lives and employment prospects of thousands of young women near the start of their working lives. These many examples of official discrimination provide a strong challenge to Angus Calder's claim that by the time of World War Two 'the authorities had softened in their attitudes, and were even rather proud of their pacifists'.²²⁸

On a day-to-day basis pacifist women also faced hostility from other members of the general public, with issues at all levels of society. Educated writers Vera Brittain and Ethel Mannin saw their book sales drop after the crisis of 1940-41.²²⁹ Another writer Frances Partridge was told face-to-face in her own home by friend of the family Marjorie Strachey

²²² National Archives. Fire Prevention. Conscientious Objectors. *Letter from JAC Robertson (Treasury) to W Watson (Home Office)*. 3 October 1942. Treasury Ref E42528/06. HO 186/821.

²²³ Goodall. *A Question of Conscience*. (p. 112).

²²⁴ BL Archive. (1998). *Dorothy Haverall Shaw*. C880/18.

²²⁵ Goodall, F. (1997). *A Question of Conscience: Conscientious Objectors in the Two World Wars*. Sutton. (p. 108).

²²⁶ Society of Friends Library. *Experiences of a Woman Conscientious Objector*.

²²⁷ National Archives. *Employment of Conscientious Objectors*.

²²⁸ Calder. *People's War*. (p. 494).

²²⁹ Morrison. *I Renounce War*. (p. 42).

that pacifists like Partridge and her husband Ralph should be dropped by parachute into Germany.²³⁰ Teacher Jessie Baston was evicted by her landlord for writing a letter to the Northern Echo against the bombing of civilians in Germany. Baston had to leave at 8.00 in morning and sleep in her school medical room for two nights. A colleague notified her about an available room to let but Baston was refused when she turned up because the landlady had found out about her pacifist views. As Baston explained, 'the word went round the village that I was a spy. So I was a traitor and it was most unpleasant'.²³¹ In some working class communities there was similar hostility. Blackburn conscientious objector Kathleen Derbyshire received hostile stares from a neighbour when she passed her house every day, with the neighbour throwing water on the pavement where Derbyshire had walked, as if to cleanse it. Derbyshire could laugh this off, saying 'sometimes I felt perhaps I should walk in the gutter just to save her the trouble'. However, she was understandably more concerned when the atmosphere turned ugly as she joined in political debates in a square in the centre of Blackburn, having to make a rapid departure on more than one occasion.²³² These examples challenge Rachel Barker's view that the public 'devoted their energies to other topics' and were concerned little with conscientious objectors after 1941.²³³

The case of Kathleen Derbyshire also demonstrates the significant impact of women's conscientious objection on the workings of the British governmental and judicial systems. At least five formal meetings were held to deal with her case alone, involving the time of various civil servants, judges and local community volunteers. These meetings consisted of a meeting with a senior official when she was first called to register for war service, a meeting with five people at a tribunal, a court appearance to impose a fine on her for not complying with conscription, another court appearance to sentence her to a term in prison for not paying the fine and another tribunal after her release from prison to grant her 'unconditional exemption from war work of any description'.²³⁴ So, after all these hours and resources devoted to her case, the final result was simply to accept her initial request several months earlier that she should not participate in the war effort.²³⁵ This was just the

²³⁰ Partridge. *Diary*. (pp. 142-143).

²³¹ BL Archive. *Baston*.

²³² IWM. *Derbyshire*.

²³³ Barker. *Conscience*. (p. 77).

²³⁴ IWM. *Derbyshire*.

²³⁵ *Ibid*.

time spent on one person. Multiplied by hundreds of women who went through a similar experience, the impact on the British war machine was very significant.

For over 200 women conscientious objectors, including Kathleen Derbyshire, the hostility of both the state and wider society was felt severely as they were imprisoned for refusing to comply with orders compelling them to undertake war duties and then refusing to pay the fines imposed as a penalty. In prison, these pacifist women would often face serious abuse and neglect. Campaign Officer for the Peace Pledge Union Sybil Morrison was imprisoned for a month in 1940 for a 'breach of the peace' while making an anti-war speech at Hyde Park Corner. She felt particularly aggrieved because the police officers who arrested her had changed their evidence to suggest that Morrison had spoken sympathetically about fascism, suggesting that there was antipathy towards pacifists within the police force as well. The prison governor at Holloway Prison in London singled her out for hostile treatment because she was a pacifist.²³⁶ Two years later in Strangeways Prison in Manchester Kathleen Derbyshire suffered similar treatment from the governor when imprisoned for two weeks for refusing to pay a fine imposed for her conscientious objection against compulsory hospital work. Derbyshire was told by the female governor that 'our men are fighting for sluts like you' and that, if the governor had her way, 'bloody conchies' would 'certainly be hanging from the end of a rope'.²³⁷ Clearly the attitudes of the prison authorities had changed very little since World War One, when a governor at Wandsworth Prison had actually been removed after weeks of constant verbal abuse towards what he termed 'those stinking COs'.²³⁸ The extreme hostility received by women pacifists such as Morrison and Derbyshire demonstrates how threatened many people seemed to be by the notion of pacifism. These examples challenge the view of historians like Tobias Kelly that the authorities and public did not perceive women's objection to the war as 'disruptive'.²³⁹

As well as verbal abuse, prison during wartime also provided extreme physical dangers to both Morrison and Derbyshire, along with hundreds of other male and female incarcerated pacifists. On most occasions, the prison authorities did not release the prisoners from their

²³⁶ Morrison. *I Renounce War*. (p. 52).

²³⁷ IWM. *Derbyshire*.

²³⁸ Working Class Movement Library. No Conscriptio Fellowship Box 2. Thomas Ellison Scrapbook. (p. 61). Cutting of 'Conscience Men in Prison'. *Daily News*. (1919, March 7).

²³⁹ Kelly. *Battles*. (p. 145).

cells during air raids, which was a terrifying experience for them. Derbyshire could hear her fellow prisoners shouting and screaming during air raids and the lack of any kind of reaction from the warders suggested that they were sheltering and leaving the prisoners exposed. For Derbyshire, this was 'sheer mental torture'.²⁴⁰ Morrison, imprisoned in Holloway at the height of the London Blitz in September 1940, said that, during air raids, 'I knew a chill of helplessness and fear that I hope not to experience again'.²⁴¹ In May 1941, two male conscientious objectors had been killed when a bomb hit Walton Prison in Liverpool.²⁴² For both men and women, imprisonment for their opposition to the war could be a highly distressing and terrifying experience.

The issue of fire-watching, where civilians would keep an eye on key buildings overnight to extinguish fires caused by air raids before they spread too far, became a bitter and contentious battleground, especially when made compulsory for women in September 1942. On the one hand the issue aroused strong feelings against the women who refused to fire-watch, as this appeared to be a refusal to help save the lives of people in the locality at a time of great danger. The point that often enraged people even more was that the women who refused to fire-watch did so because they objected to the idea of compulsion by the government rather than to the idea of fire-watching itself. Nora Page from east London said 'we were directed to register for fire-watching... I wrote and told them I had not registered because I did not believe in conscription'.²⁴³ Yet she had been fire-watching on a voluntary basis for several months, taking her turn to stay up through the night. Prominent physicist Kathleen Lonsdale, later made a Dame of the British Empire, had the same idea as Page, refusing to register for fire-watching as she objected to the power of the state to infringe her civil liberties. Both Lonsdale and Page spent time in prison for their refusal. They found little sympathy with many members of the public who could not understand why fire-watching refusers would be willing to follow 'compulsory' orders to pay taxes or turn out lights in a blackout but not to carry out the potentially life-saving duty of fire-watching, especially when they had been doing this on a voluntary basis before. Even the Central

²⁴⁰ IWM. *Derbyshire*.

²⁴¹ Morrison. *I Renounce War*. (p. 53).

²⁴² Gardiner, *Wartime Britain*. (pp. 128-129).

²⁴³ IWM Archive. (1980). *Nora Page*. 4659.

Board for Conscientious Objectors was lukewarm in its support for women who refused to fire-watch.²⁴⁴

In some parts of the country, though, strong feelings were aroused in support of women being compelled to undertake fire-watching duties. Shortly after the passing of the law to make fire-watch duties compulsory for women in September 1942, government ministers Herbert Morrison and Ellen Wilkinson received a hostile reception from the local politicians and people of Liverpool when they visited the city. The main complaint seemed to be that women were being asked to keep watch overnight in warehouses by the river where the air raid attacks were most concentrated, creating the probability of 'needless and heavy casualties'.²⁴⁵ A range of other issues about the compulsory fire-watching were also shouted by crowds in Liverpool heckling Ellen Wilkinson as she tried to reason with them. They wanted all men to do their duty before women were asked and for business owners to take their turn to guard the premises rather than retreat at night to 'safer places' and leave 'the typist and shop girl' in danger in the city.²⁴⁶ Local politicians were aggrieved that this policy had been imposed on Liverpool by central government. Alderman Luke Hogan, also a trade union official, complained about 'the cynical disregard that Whitehall apparently has for this great port'.²⁴⁷ He berated the 'tinpot Hitlers' like Herbert Morrison and other Labour politicians who had joined the wartime coalition government and were now imposing these regulations 'without consulting those who had practical knowledge' in the local area.²⁴⁸ The bitterness of the fire-watching dispute in Liverpool exposed and widened some of the deep divisions in wartime Britain in several ways: men against women, workers against bosses, loyal citizens against conscientious objectors, rank-and-file Labour against the Labour leadership, Whitehall against the provinces and north against south. A contemporary journal noted the high degree of significance of what it called an 'open rebellion in Liverpool', stating that 'the conscription of women for fire-watching has roused far more

²⁴⁴ Barker. *Conscience*. (pp. 109-110).

²⁴⁵ Guardian Reporter. Miss Wilkinson in Liverpool: Fire-Guard Dispute: To Report to Mr Morrison. *Manchester Guardian*, 1942, October 6. (p. 5).

²⁴⁶ Guardian Reporter. Women Fire-Watch. Liverpool's Doubts. Miss Wilkinson Heckled. *Manchester Guardian*, 1942, October 7. (p. 8).

²⁴⁷ Guardian Reporter. (1942, September 30). Women Fire-Guards: Liverpool's Opposition. *Manchester Guardian*, 1942, September 30. (p. 5).

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

hostility than any other aspect of conscription since the war began'.²⁴⁹ This episode showed clearly that the issue of women's compulsory involvement in the war effort could provide a serious challenge to the wartime consensus in Britain.

The struggles over the conscription of women between 1941 and 1945 are important because they reveal that British society could often be bitterly divided and warn against an over-simplistic assumption that the people and politicians of Britain pulled together harmoniously when faced with the Nazi threat. The issue of conscientious objection was still vibrant after 1941, challenging Rachel Barker's view that the British public 'devoted their energies to other topics' from the time of the Battle of Britain onwards.²⁵⁰ Barker also suggests that the treatment of conscientious objectors in Britain 'showed a relaxed and secure society in which the state could acknowledge that some of its individuals could not, in all conscience, obey all of its laws'.²⁵¹ However, there were numerous examples of hostility and discrimination from all social classes towards the many women who defied the conscription laws, revealing instead a society in a state of constant friction and tension over the contentious issue of women who opposed the war.

²⁴⁹ Women Fire Watchers. *Co-operative News*, 1942, October 10. (p. 6).

²⁵⁰ Barker. *Conscience*. (p. 77).

²⁵¹ *Ibid.* (p. 122).

Chapter 5 - The Contribution of Pacifists to Post-War Reconciliation

As well as underestimating the influence of pacifists during World War Two, most major studies of pacifism have also argued that they had virtually no impact on the reconstruction of a new world in the years after 1945. Richard Rempel claims that ‘pacifist political impotence ensured that their influence on postwar policy was minimal’.²⁵² Martin Ceadel agrees with this verdict of failure, saying that ‘at the end of the war ... pacifism had lost much of its political optimism and had failed to create the nucleus of a new society’.²⁵³ There has been no comprehensive study of the pacifists’ policies and practices in the post-war years to challenge this view of impotence in this period. The only significant historical research into this area has consisted of small-scale studies into the work of groups such as the Friends Relief Service, demonstrating their key role in helping to bring about reconstruction and reconciliation in post-war Europe.²⁵⁴ It is true that these studies have given space to the work of women in the FRS, as well as the men, but historians also need to give more recognition to the contribution of the tens of thousands of British women in the Women’s Co-operative Guild, a pacifist organisation that made a significant contribution to efforts to build bridges between Britain and Germany after 1945. In general, a more detailed survey of pacifist post-war reconciliation work is needed, aiming to cover a wider range of individuals and organisations, analysing what they were trying to achieve and assessing their impact on both the physical and moral recovery of Europe in the late 1940s. This will provide a strong challenge to those historians like Rempel and Ceadel who have dismissed the post-war efforts of pacifists in terms of ‘minimal’ influence, ‘impotence’ and failure.

There is strong evidence that the humanitarian efforts of pacifists in post-war Europe had a significant impact on the provision of basic necessities such as food, clothes and shelter, which helped to save thousands of lives. From 1945 until 1948, voluntary groups with pacifist convictions such as the Friends Relief Service, about half of whom were women, made an important practical contribution to the relief of famine in areas of Europe

²⁵² Rempel. *Dilemmas*. (p. 1228).

²⁵³ Ceadel. *Pacifism*. (p. 310).

²⁵⁴ Wilson. *Quaker Relief*; Von Borries. *Quiet Helpers*; Carson, J. (2009). ‘The Quaker Internationalist Tradition in Displaced Persons Camps, 1945-48’. In Gatrell, P. & Baron, N. (eds.) *Warlands: Population Resettlement and State Reconstruction in the Soviet-East European Borderlands, 1945-50*. Palgrave MacMillan. (pp. 67-86); Reid, F. and Gemie, S. (2013). The Friends Relief Service and Displaced Persons in Europe after the Second World War, 1945-48. *Quaker Studies* 17/2. (pp. 223-243).

devastated by the war, especially for the German people against whom Britain had been fighting just months before. Ultimately, the main contribution to the economic recovery of western Europe was the Marshall Plan, where the United States of America provided \$15 billion in aid, including a generous contribution to West Germany. However, Marshall Aid only began in April 1948, so there were nearly three years after the end of the war in Europe in May 1945 when relief and reconstruction had to rely on aid organisations such as UNRRA, the Red Cross and the Friends Relief Service. Lilian Cadoux worked with the FRS in Bochum, a town that had been bombed heavily due to the location of the Krupps armament factory there. When the FRS unit arrived in Bochum in February 1946 they found widespread poverty with many people living in basements. The FRS used their ambulances to take soup to schools to feed the children.²⁵⁵ Joyce Parkinson worked with both the FRS and Red Cross in Germany from 1946 to 1948 in Recklinghausen in the Ruhr region. One of big issues there was accommodating refugees from eastern Germany, displaced by the expansion of Poland to the west. Whenever she was back in Britain during this time, Parkinson worked hard to persuade family and friends to donate food parcels and material for clothes. She also established a successful link between a boys' home in Penarth in South Wales with a children's home in Recklinghausen, involving the boys in Wales making toys for the German children, even though they had few toys themselves.²⁵⁶ Lilian Cadoux and Joyce Parkinson were just two of the 1,200 or so volunteers who formed the Friends Relief Service, inspired by their pacifist principles to provide basic necessities and life-saving relief for Britain's former enemies in the difficult years before Marshall Aid arrived. Their work and its impact challenge those historians who see only a 'minimal' influence and a loss of 'optimism' for pacifists in the years after 1945.

The Women's Co-operative Guild was also involved heavily in the provision of humanitarian aid to post-war Germany. Although most of the rank-and-file members were working-class housewives 'bound by home ties and responsibilities' and were therefore unable to visit Germany in person, they were active in supporting efforts at reconstruction and reconciliation in other ways.²⁵⁷ The main contribution from the WCG rank-and-file was a project on an enormous scale to knit and sew clothes for the people of Germany and other

²⁵⁵ IWM Archive. (1989). *Lilian Cadoux*. 10885

²⁵⁶ IWM Archive. (n.d.). *Joyce Parkinson*. 15615.

²⁵⁷ Stricken Peoples in Europe Still Want Food – and Friends. *Co-operative News*, 1943, October 30. (p.13).

European countries from 1944 onwards. Throughout 1944, 1945 and 1946, the Co-operative News journal reported every week on success stories from around the country with the overseas clothing project. In December 1945 the WCG's efforts were praised by the Director General of Equipment and Stores for the Ministry of Supply, reporting that over a million garments had been produced by the organisation at this stage.²⁵⁸ There is clear evidence too that the WCG's clothing programme had a real impact in Germany itself. Around Christmas 1946, Mrs Theo Naftel, secretary of the International Women's Co-operative Guild, had seen 'tears of joy and gratitude' in the eyes of German women who had received food parcels from the British WCG, as they asked Naftel 'to send their thanks and warm Christmas greetings to British guildswomen'.²⁵⁹ At about the same time an Australian nurse working in Germany wrote to the WCG to say that German mothers were 'more than grateful' for the baby shawls they had received from the British women.²⁶⁰

The extensive WCG knitting programme has been interpreted inaccurately by some historians as a patriotic effort to support 'our boys', with Jill Liddington saying of the WCG members that 'their sons would now be called up, so they agreed to help with knitting and providing comforts for the soldiers'.²⁶¹ Peter Gurney describes how the WCG 'knitted clothes for troops', without mentioning that most of the knitted garments went to civilians in Europe.²⁶² This analysis underestimates the significant humanitarian and internationalist motivation behind the knitting programme, certainly from 1944 onwards, when the primary concern was to clothe the people who had suffered in Germany and other European countries. The many expressions of gratitude to the WCG from the German people underline this point. In this aspect of their work, the prevailing principles for the WCG were not patriotic but pacifist. The scale of the WCG clothing programme also challenges the view of Gillian Scott that there was a division between the leadership and rank-and-file on issues relating to the war.²⁶³ The principles of pacifism and reconciliation were not confined to a small inner circle of WCG leaders but instead these principles permeated the wider

²⁵⁸ Branch Activities. *Co-operative News*, 1945, December 15. (p. 13).

²⁵⁹ Food Parcels Can Be Sent to Germany and Austria. *Co-operative News*, 1947, January 11. (p. 12).

²⁶⁰ U.N.R.R.A. Worker Says 'Thank You for Baby Shawls'. *Co-operative News*, 1946, December 14. (p. 13).

²⁶¹ Liddington. *Long Road*. (p. 171).

²⁶² Gurney, P. (2020). Redefining 'the woman with the basket': The Women's Co-operative Guild and the Politics of Consumption in Britain during the Second World War. *Gender & History*, 32(1). (p. 192).

²⁶³ Scott. *Feminism*. (p. 203).

membership on a large scale, with tens of thousands of women contributing their time and resources to producing clothes for Britain's former enemies.

For most pacifists, both male and female, providing physical aid to the German people was only part of their aims and objectives after 1945. Promoting reconciliation with the German people was even more important than providing food and shelter for them. As the Quaker *Friend* journal said, 'it is so much easier to give a bowl of soup and an aspirin tablet than it is to straighten out a crooked mind and cleanse an impure heart'.²⁶⁴ On an occasion when the Friends Relief Service workers in Solingen in December 1946 felt anxious that they did not have enough food supplies to support the local population, they noted in a report that 'the spirit in which our work is done is in the long run more important than the material relief we have to offer'.²⁶⁵ Working with the minds and hearts of Britain's former enemies was the crucial part of relief work. Professional relief organisations like UNRRA were generally accepting of the British Army's insistence on non-fraternisation with the local population. The army admitted that this policy of avoiding social contact with the German people was deliberate, explaining that 'the initial rigid ban on fraternisation was an essential corollary of our declared conviction that all Germans shared the blame for the infamy of the Nazi Party'.²⁶⁶ For the fighting forces, reconciliation was therefore a much lower priority than piling guilt onto the German people, in a sentiment reminiscent of the 'make Germany pay' policy adopted at the end of World War One. However, the volunteer Friends Relief Service pushed the army hard to be allowed to mix with and speak to local Germans, to the extent that the army came round to accepting fraternisation by the FRS in practice. As FRS member Lilian Cadoux said, the attempt at reconciliation was the 'big object in going' to Germany in the first place.²⁶⁷ Another FRS worker, justifying the need for fraternisation with the German people, mused that 'perhaps Nazis need our message more than anti-Nazis'.²⁶⁸

This approach to reconciliation with the former enemies of Britain set the pacifist relief workers apart from other individuals and organisations working in Europe at the time. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) was set up in 1943 to help

²⁶⁴ Cited in Reid & Gemie. *Friends Relief Service*. (p. 235).

²⁶⁵ Cited in Wilson. *Quaker Relief*. (p. 252).

²⁶⁶ National Archives. Germany File No. 3086. *British Army of the Rhine Fortnightly Intelligence Summary. For fortnight ending 22 September 1945. BAOR/INT/1206. FO 371/46935.*

²⁶⁷ IWM. *Cadoux*.

²⁶⁸ Cited in Reid & Gemie. *Friends Relief Service*. (p. 231).

victims of the war in Europe. At that time 'United Nations' was a term used to describe the alliance fighting against Hitler and Mussolini and this was reflected in a policy where only 'displaced people' from allied countries would be helped in the camps they created. In July 1945, Yugoslavs, Germans and Hungarians were expelled by UNRRA from Föhrenwald Camp in Germany even though they were in a desperate condition. Quaker Francesca Wilson was working for UNRRA at the time and felt very uneasy about this, knowing that organisations run by her fellow Quakers would have had a different policy, where needy people from both allied and enemy countries would be treated alike.²⁶⁹ Another Quaker Joyce Parkinson was disappointed to find that some Red Cross workers were reluctant to co-operate with 'conchies' like her and one Red Cross employee in post-war Germany was happy to enjoy regular hot baths during a local water and power shortage. When Parkinson challenged her about this, the Red Cross worker said she did not care if this had adverse effects on the local German population 'after everything they had done to us'.²⁷⁰ By contrast, the pacifist convictions of Quaker organisations and individuals made no distinction between friend and foe when it came to helping people in need. This desire to help the former enemies of Britain even extended to Quakers working to improve conditions in an internment camp where 50,000 'suspected Nazi leaders' were being held.²⁷¹ The Nobel Peace Prize Committee noted that 'the Quakers are active everywhere ... among countrymen and friends as well as among former enemies'.²⁷² Conciliatory principles such as these were highly evident among pacifist relief workers in post-war Europe.

The Quakers were not the only pacifist group who felt so strongly about the importance of reconciliation. The Women's Co-operative Guild also promoted the idea of positive relations between Britons and Germans, on a consistent basis both during and after World War Two. At the height of the German bombing campaign of Britain in early 1941 Cecily Cook, General Secretary of the WCG, deplored the view that 'the Germans must be crushed out of existence' and proclaimed that 'it was only without bitterness that a real peace could be achieved'.²⁷³ These principles of reconciliation still prevailed powerfully six years later when Cook, along with the WCG's National President and its Scottish President, went to visit

²⁶⁹ Reid & Gemie. *Friends Relief Service*. (p. 223).

²⁷⁰ IWM. *Parkinson*.

²⁷¹ Carson. *Quaker Internationalist Tradition*. (p. 68).

²⁷² Haberman, F. (ed.). (1972). *Nobel Lectures: Peace 1926-1950, Volume 2*. Elsevier. (p. 378).

²⁷³ Planning for the Future. *Co-operative News*, 1941, February 15. (p. 8).

Germany in May 1947.²⁷⁴ This visit was to assess conditions for the German people and to 'wish our German sisters success' by giving support to women's co-operative movements that had been re-founded in Germany.²⁷⁵ An exchange scheme was also organised by the WCG from 1946 onwards, for parties of housewives across different countries 'to promote international understanding and safeguard world peace'.²⁷⁶ Whereas the reconciliatory principles of the Quakers in the Society of Friends were based on the religious notion of Christian forgiveness, those of the WCG were based on the political idea of 'the practice of co-operative principles', where working together on economic and social matters would produce greater harmony between nations.²⁷⁷

The Women's International League (WIL) was another organisation for which the restoration of positive relationships between Britons and Germans was a central priority. In April 1942 the WIL wrote to the British government to state that co-operation with the German people after the war would be essential 'as the imperative basis of a lasting peace'.²⁷⁸ As the war drew to a close in April 1945, the British Section of the WILPF called for the victorious allies to act 'not only in justice but also in mercy ... not in terms of triumph over a defeated nation but as the beginning of a new era of peace, an era which we believe must be founded on understanding and friendship between the nations'.²⁷⁹ The aims of these pacifist organisations like the Society of Friends, the WCG and the WIL, went well beyond the provision of physical aid undertaken by the professional relief workers of the Red Cross and UNRRA. For the pacifists supporting German reconstruction after the war, the mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of this recovery operation were central to their motivation.

Assessing the impact of these attempts at reconciliation is a difficult process. Success with reconciliation is almost impossible to quantify, as it involves feelings and emotions rather than more concrete products such as reconstructed houses and numbers of food parcels delivered. Indeed, many of the British relief workers who went to Germany after the war

²⁷⁴ Conditions in Germany. *Co-operative News*, 1947, May 24. (p. 12).

²⁷⁵ English Guild Message to Women of Germany. *Co-operative News*, 1946, December 14. (p.13).

²⁷⁶ World Peace Depends on Tolerance and Equality. *Co-operative News*, 1946, November 2. (p. 13).

²⁷⁷ English Guild Message to Women of Germany. *Co-operative News*, 1946, December 14. (p.13).

²⁷⁸ Cited in Overy. *Pacifism and the Blitz*. (p. 233).

²⁷⁹ London School of Economics Library. Archive of the Women's International League. WILPF. *Yearly Report 1944-1945*. 2/14. (p. 19).

would not have assessed their own actions in terms of their impact. For the Quaker volunteers in particular, the service they gave was motivated by the desire that 'we give expression to our love for God himself'.²⁸⁰ Many Quakers disliked the label 'humanitarian' as it implied that their motivation was simply to help other human beings and diminished the spiritual importance of their work in the development of their own souls.²⁸¹ Their actions and how they carried them out were more important than the consequences.

Despite the difficulty of assessing and measuring the possible impact of reconciliation programmes in post-war Germany, there is clear documented evidence that they had clear and lasting consequences. Over thirty years after the war, Jennifer Morel was 'still great friends' with the German family she had 'adopted' by providing vital food supplies and Joyce Parkinson was still in touch with the German family where she had spent Christmas in 1946.²⁸² At the time of the relief efforts in the late 1940s there was clear evidence of lasting gratitude from the German population. Lilian Cadoux was moved immensely by German schoolchildren who gave thanks to British relief workers by singing to them as soup was delivered each day. Cadoux had been concerned when she first arrived in Germany that the local people seemed to have been 'taught' to hate the British by Nazi propaganda during the war years. However, she felt that initial suspicion towards British civilians soon gave way to acceptance and warmer relationships because the Friends Relief Service 'were offering help and counselling' alongside practical help.²⁸³ The fact that British relief workers like Cadoux and her husband Harold made the effort to learn German also made a big difference to their success at fraternisation. Cadoux and other FRS members accepted several invitations to evening events such as concerts and civic receptions offered by local German dignitaries. Although sometimes the concerts in particular could be 'incredibly boring' and sleep-inducing after a long hard day of relief work, Cadoux maintained that 'you had to do it because there they were (the Germans), holding out the hand of friendship to the Quakers'. The presence of the Britons was much appreciated by the locals.²⁸⁴

²⁸⁰ Cited in Carson. *Quaker Internationalist Tradition*. (p. 72).

²⁸¹ Gill, R. (2013). *Calculating compassion: Humanity and relief in war, Britain 1870–1914*. Manchester University Press. (p. 5).

²⁸² IWM Archive. (1980). *Jennifer Morel*. 4692; IWM, *Parkinson*.

²⁸³ IWM, *Cadoux*.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

As well as promoting reconciliation between the British and Germans, the relief workers in central Europe after the war had to deal with complex and challenging tensions between a wide range of nationalities, in the Displaced Persons camps set up to accommodate refugees who had mainly fled from eastern European countries into Germany to escape the advance of the Soviet army. There were concerns about 'nationalist' tensions in these camps, where understandably refugees stuck together due to common language and cultural outlook. A report talked of 'virtually closed communities' where 'their hatreds become stronger'.²⁸⁵ Quaker relief worker Margaret McNeill said that 'unending vigilance must be maintained against competitive nationalism'.²⁸⁶ McNeill went on to play a vital role in breaking down these differences, through her organisation of cultural events such as dances featuring styles from different countries, where groups could learn about and appreciate each other's heritage. Another notable success was a nativity play performed at McNeill's camp in December 1946, written by two women from the Friends Relief Service group. Here Germans, British and Eastern Europeans collaborated effectively, with McNeill observing that the 'nationalities were practically forgotten in the exigencies of production'.²⁸⁷ The play was seen by a British colonel who called it 'a shining light in the midst of great darkness'.²⁸⁸

The observation that Quaker reconciliation efforts had been successful did not just come from the British perspective. German commentators too made positive reflections in writing on the improvement in relations. A German social worker from Solingen thanked British relief workers in a letter as their work came to an end in 1948. He wrote that their work of reconciliation had transformed his thinking completely. The German writer said that the British had come to Germany in 1946 as 'messengers of peace and reconciliation, something one had scarcely dared hope for ... And now our friends have left us. But in spite of that we no longer feel lonely because they have helped us to find something which we had thought lost for ever'.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁵ Cited in Carson. *Quaker Internationalist Tradition* (p. 75).

²⁸⁶ Cited in Wilson. *Quaker Relief*. (p. 326).

²⁸⁷ Society of Friends Library. Margaret McNeill Papers. Scrapbook (F). McNeill, M. *Nativity Play*. MSS 981 (L). (p. 55).

²⁸⁸ Society of Friends Library. Margaret McNeill Papers. Scrapbook (F). *Letter from Colonel Fawns to Margaret McNeill, 9 April 1947*. MSS 981 (L). (p. 54).

²⁸⁹ Cited in Von Borries. *Quiet Helpers*. (p. 43).

The impact of the reconciliation work of the Friends Relief Service in particular was acknowledged by a highly-esteemed independent body when the organisation was awarded the Nobel Peace prize in 1947. The presentation speech accompanying the award praised the success of the FRS teams in post-war Europe in 'bringing people back to life and work' and 'restoring their self-respect and their faith and confidence in the future'.²⁹⁰ In these ways, they had been 'laying foundations for peace among nations'.²⁹¹ According to the Nobel Prize Committee, the Peace Prize for 1947 was thoroughly deserved by the FRS for their 'rich expression of the sympathy between all men, regardless of nationality or race'.²⁹² These words may have been idealistic but they provide recognition from a greatly-respected international body that the work of the FRS was having a significant impact on reconciliation.

The Women's Co-operative Guild's policy of reconciliation has received much less attention from historians than the efforts of the Quakers in the Friends Relief Service. However, the WCG's policy was applied just as consistently throughout World War Two, had equally important practical outcomes and also had a significant impact on restoring positive relations between the peoples of Germany and Britain in the post-war years. As well as appreciating the practical support provided by the British WCG in the form of food and clothing, many German people valued the thoughtfulness and care shown by the WCG from a distance. Louise Shroeder, Lord Mayor of Berlin, told the British WCG in a letter that she valued the 'moral help' as much as the 'material help', adding that 'it is so important to the German people, who have to regain the esteem of the world, to have signs of friendship in other countries'.²⁹³ The WCG leaders also noticed this appreciation for their 'moral help' when they visited Germany in 1947, observing that German women were pleased to be 'assured that at least one section of women outside their land was anxious for and interested in their welfare'.²⁹⁴

The WCG's policy of reconciliation had a clear impact in Britain as well as in Germany, even in parts of the British Isles that had suffered most from German actions during the war. The

²⁹⁰ Haberman. *Nobel Lectures*. (p. 378).

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² *Ibid.* (p. 379).

²⁹³ Appreciation from Austria. *Co-operative News*, 1947, March 8. (p. 13).

²⁹⁴ *Conditions in Germany*. *Co-operative News*, 1947, May 24. (p. 12).

town of Hastings was singled out for praise by an UNRRA representative for the contribution of its WCG branch to the clothing project. The location of Hastings on the south coast of England meant that it had been hit badly by flying bombs and rockets but 'trying times have not made these women forgetful of the even greater suffering abroad, and the official tribute to their knitting effort is indeed deserved'.²⁹⁵ The island of Jersey had been occupied by the Germans from 1940 to 1945 but 'though all remembered their own experiences of hunger and privation under German occupation under the war' the WCG members on the island still showed 'sympathy and pity' for the plight of their former enemy in 1947.²⁹⁶ This strong spirit of reconciliation within the WCG rank-and-file was also shown by the warm reception given at public meetings in the post-war years to German visitors to WCG conferences, especially at the national Congress in Blackpool in 1947 as 'delegates gave a special round of applause' when Frau Schweer of Hamburg was introduced.²⁹⁷ These examples of a practical application of a policy of reconciliation within WCG branches across the country provide a different narrative from Scott's description of thousands of women leaving the movement supposedly because they rejected its pacifist principles.²⁹⁸

It is probably accurate to state that British pacifists in World War Two may have 'failed to create the nucleus of a new society', as Martin Ceadel claims that they should have done, somewhat unrealistically.²⁹⁹ Yet there is little doubt that the work done by the women of the Women's Co-operative Guild and the women and men in the Friends Relief Service did help to set a tone for the years after 1945 that was very different from the more vengeful and retaliatory mood of 1919. Writing in the early years of World War Two, Vera Brittain said that the end of the war needed to witness a 'forgiving, tolerant spirit', in contrast to 'the post-war humiliation of the conquered by the conqueror' seen after 1918.³⁰⁰ Brittain and other pacifists did their best to help this new spirit prevail and there is lots of evidence that the relief efforts of the FRS and WCG did help to foster positive relations between former enemies. Some historians have recognised this, though their study has tended to concentrate on the reconciliation projects undertaken by Quakers and the Women's

²⁹⁵ U.N.R.R.A. Official's Tribute. *Co-operative News*, 1945, May 12. (p. 12).

²⁹⁶ Jersey Guild Branches are Increasing. *Co-operative News*, 1947, July 19. (p. 13).

²⁹⁷ Many Visitors at Opening Session. *Co-operative News*, 1947, June 2. (p. 13).

²⁹⁸ Scott. *Feminism*. (p. 203).

²⁹⁹ Ceadel. *Pacifism*. (p. 310).

³⁰⁰ Brittain, V. (1941). *England's Hour*. Continuum. (p. 220 & p. 74).

International League. This can give the distorted impression that reconciliation was the sole interest of volunteers from privileged or at least comfortable backgrounds. An examination of the large-scale relief programme undertaken by the WCG provides a different interpretation, by demonstrating that efforts at reconciliation went much wider and deeper than previous studies have suggested. Many thousands of working class women put lots of time and energy into the WCG clothing programme, aiming to provide both physical and emotional warmth towards the devastated population of Germany. Far from displaying 'impotence', the post-war pacifist reconciliation programmes were evidence that pacifists were having real agency and impact on the tone of the reconstruction of Europe after 1945.

Conclusion

By providing a detailed analysis of the nature, significance and impact of women's pacifism, this thesis has made an important contribution to the historiography of Britain in World War Two. In particular, it has been suggested here that pacifism should be defined more broadly to encompass all opponents of the war, not just those who insisted on an 'absolute renunciation' of force. It has been seen that opposition to the war went deeper into British society than has usually been acknowledged in existing studies, with the discovery of a widespread and consistent adherence to pacifism among tens of thousands of working class women. These findings and approaches have offered a significant challenge to the conventional historical views, present in both the scholarship and popular memory, of a wartime Britain characterised by almost total unity and consensus as the nation struggled against Nazi Germany. Women pacifists played an important role in providing alternative ideas about the desirability of the war and the way in which some key military strategies were implemented. The result of these alternative points of view was a much broader range of opinion within British wartime society than has often been admitted and a continuous sense of tension between pacifists and non-pacifists that was never far from the surface. Britain in World War Two was not necessarily 'a relaxed and secure society', as other historians have suggested.³⁰¹

Historians have not explored the nature of women's pacifism in the 1940s in the same level of detail with which they have analysed the links between feminism and pacifism in the era of World War One. This thesis has suggested that the women's pacifism of World War Two was different in style from that of the previous generation. The unique maternal insight of women was emphasised less in the 1940s, with more emphasis instead on a pacifism based on calm, rational discussion to counter the perceived dominance of emotions that would lead to an aggressive response. The pacifist approach in the 1940s also involved strong co-operation between male and female opponents of the war, as both men and women found themselves facing conscription by the state for the first time in Britain. This analysis of the distinctive flavour of World War Two women's pacifism contributes to an understanding of the varied path taken by feminist ideas across the whole of the twentieth century.

³⁰¹ Barker. *Conscience*. (p. 77).

Above all, this thesis refutes the dismissive attitude of other historians towards World War Two pacifism and their suggestion that its adherents were total failures who achieved nothing worthwhile through their stance.³⁰² Women who campaigned to relieve famine in Greece did achieve several concessions from the British government, saving thousands of lives. The pressure put on the government to restrict the bombing of German civilians may not have changed the strategy at the time but it did clearly affect the thinking of contemporary politicians and had an impact on the public memory of these events. On the Home Front, the activities of groups like the Friends Ambulance Unit and Women's Co-operative Guild showed a large degree of agency in the many ways they helped those who suffered during the war, while still retaining their basic pacifist beliefs. Both as individuals and as members of organisations, many female pacifists asserted themselves during World War Two, through both words and deeds, in ways that went beyond the traditional domesticated and subservient expectations of women. Without actively supporting the war, many women pacifists could claim with justification that 'they had never failed to give succour to the victims of it'.³⁰³

Another area where pacifists had success in influencing policy and practice was in the matter of post-war reconstruction and reconciliation. Here a comprehensive analysis has been made of the attempts to create more harmonious relations between Britons and Germans after 1945. This includes the important but often overlooked work done by the Women's Co-operative Guild as well as the better-documented work of the Quakers in the Friends Relief Service. As well as providing a wider picture of post-war reconciliation, the analysis in this thesis of the impact of the FRS and the WCG programmes also provides a significant challenge to those historians who have only seen 'impotence' in the pacifist movements after 1945.³⁰⁴ Many examples of positive impact on relations between Britain and Germany have been documented here, showing that these pacifist reconciliation programmes achieved far more than just good intentions.

As well as challenging some of the conclusions drawn by other historians, this thesis has also suggested a reconsideration of their methodology and categories of analysis. Using a wider

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ Guild Must Cling to Its Pacifist Policy. *Co-operative News*. 1940, March 2. (p. 12).

³⁰⁴ Rempel. *Dilemmas*. (p. 1228).

range of sources can provide valuable insights into both the impact and importance of women's pacifism in World War Two Britain. If historians confine themselves to the official governmental papers on this subject, they will gain an impression of toleration for pacifists as these records describe the situation merely at the level of policy. However, the extensive use of oral interviews, as shown in this thesis, demonstrates that in practice many sections of society were discriminatory and hostile towards pacifist women, challenging the conventional view of consensus and unity within wartime Britain. Also, the over-reliance by historians on the memoirs of women intellectuals such as Vera Brittain, Virginia Woolf and Frances Partridge can reinforce an impression that women's pacifism was a niche pursuit confined to a handful of privileged people. Instead, a detailed study of the records of working class organisations such as the Women's Co-operative Guild provides a more comprehensive view of how far and deep these ideas were embedded across British society. Both the oral archives and those of the WCG give the historian a more complete insight into the thoughts and practices of the general public, which has been an important feature of this thesis.

The achievements of women pacifists in World War Two were summarised by Vera Brittain's belief that they 'bore witness to the oneness of humanity' and by Isabella Thorley's explanation that they found 'a way of helping the victims of aggression'.³⁰⁵ Although united by their opposition to World War Two and by their ability to articulate the essence of their pacifism, these two women inhabited very different worlds. Brittain was a well-known author whose interactions were largely with fellow intellectuals from privileged social backgrounds; Thorley was President of the Women's Co-operative Guild, an organisation representing tens of thousands of working class women. This thesis has brought these different worlds together. By using an appropriately wide range of historical sources, it has shown how women's pacifism penetrated all levels of British society during the era of World War Two and how it had a highly significant impact on the story of Britain in this crucial phase of the country's history.

³⁰⁵ Cited in Black, M.. *A Cause*. (p. 21); What a National President Learned in Office. *Co-operative News*, 1940, July 6. (p. 13).

References

Archives

British Library Sound Archive 1997-1998 (London and Boston Spa).

Jessie Baston. (1997). C880/03.

Patricia Knowles. (1997-1998). C880/24.

Margaret Porteous. (1999). C880/29/01-02.

Margaret Sharp. (1998). C880/13.

Dorothy Haverall Shaw. (1998).C880/18.

Co-operative Heritage Trust Archive (Manchester)

Co-operative News journals, 1939-1947

Women's Co-operative Guild Branch Minute Books. *Failsworth.* LCWG/1/8/1/1

London School of Economics Women's Library: Archive of the Women's International League (London)

WILPF. *Executive Committee Minutes, 1941, March 5.* 1/17;

WILPF. *Executive Committee Minutes, 1942, March 4.* 1/18.

WILPF. *Yearly Report 1944-1945.* 2/14.

National Archives (London)

Memorandum by the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security for the guidance of Local Authorities in dealing with complaints made against employees in Local Government service reflecting on their fitness to remain in the public service. 29 July 1940. ED136/29.

Fire Prevention. Conscientious Objectors. *Letter from JAC Robertson (Treasury) to W Watson (Home Office).* 3 October 1942. Treasury Ref E42528/06. HO 186/821.

Inspectors' Memos. Board of Education. *Employment of Conscientious Objectors. Memo to Inspectors.* N.S. No. 186 Gen. 26 November 1943. ED135/3.

Germany File No. 3086. *British Army of the Rhine Fortnightly Intelligence Summary. For fortnight ending 22 September 1945.* BAOR/INT/1206. FO 371/46935.

Society of Friends Library (London)

Experiences of a Woman Conscientious Objector, 1939-1943. Temp MSS 620.

Bradshaw, M. The Epistle of London Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, held in London, 25th to 31st of Fifth Month, 1944. *The Friend.* 1940, June 9.

Margaret McNeill Papers. Scrapbook (F). McNeill, M. *Nativity Play.* MSS 981 (L).

Margaret McNeill Papers. Scrapbook (F). *Letter from Colonel Fawns to Margaret McNeill, 9 April 1947.* MSS 981 (L).

Working Class Movement Library (Salford)

No Conscription Fellowship Box 2. *Thomas Ellison Scrapbook.*

Conscription Box 1. *The Tribunal: Monthly Organ of the Fellowship of Conscientious Objectors.* Volume 2. No. 11. May 1942.

Online Sources

Imperial War Museum Sound Archive, 1980-1989

Kathleen Derbyshire. (1980). 4761.

Jennifer Morel. (1980). 4692

Nora Page. (1980). 4659.

Muriel McMillan. (1981). 4829.

Rowena Bingham. (1983). 34014.

Angela Sinclair-Loutit. (1987). 10040

Michael Cadbury. (1987). 10051.

Lilian Cadoux. (1989). 10885.

Gwendy Knight. (1989). 10929.

Lilian Cadoux. (1989). 10885.

Tessa Cadbury. (1994). 14205.

Brenda Bailey. (1996). 16901.

Joyce Parkinson. (n.d.). 15615.

Other Online Sources

WILPF. *Report of the International Congress of Women, The Hague – the Netherlands. April 28th to May 1st 1915*. No place of publication. P. 20:

<https://archive.org/details/internatcongrewom00interich/page/n1>.

Primary Source Books

Brittain, V. (1941). *England's Hour*. Continuum.

Huxley, A. (1936). *An Encyclopaedia of Pacifism*. Chatto & Windus.

Partridge, F. (1978). *A Pacifist's Diary*. Hogarth.

Newspapers

Guardian Reporter. (1942, September 30). Women Fire-Guards: Liverpool's Opposition. *Manchester Guardian*.

Guardian Reporter. (1942, October 6). Miss Wilkinson in Liverpool: Fire-Guard Dispute: To Report to Mr Morrison. *Manchester Guardian*.

Guardian Reporter. (1942, October 7). Women Fire-Watch. Liverpool's Doubts. Miss Wilkinson Heckled. *Manchester Guardian*.

Secondary Source Books and Articles

Addison, P. (1994). *The Road to 1945: British Politics and the Second World War*. Pimlico.

Ayer, A.J. (1972). *Russell*. Fontana/Collins.

Badsey, P. (2005). *The Political Thought of Vera Brittain. A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Kingston University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy*. Kingston University.

- Barker, R. (1982). *Conscience, Government and War: Conscientious Objection in Great Britain, 1939-1945*. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Bartley, P. (2014). *Ellen Wilkinson: From Red Suffragist to Government Minister*. Pluto.
- Bennett, A. (1996). A Question of Respectability and Tactics: Vera Brittain and Food Relief for Occupied Europe, 1941-1944. In H. Dyck, (Ed.). *The Pacifist Impulse in Historical Perspective*. (pp. 384-396). University of Toronto Press.
- Beers, L. (2017). *Red Ellen: the life of Ellen Wilkinson socialist, feminist, internationalist*. Harvard University Press.
- Berry, P. & Bostridge, M. (2008). *Vera Brittain: A Life*. Virago.
- Black, M. (1992). *A Cause for our Times: Oxfam, the first 50 years*. Oxford University Press.
- Black, N. (1989). *Social Feminism*. Cornell University Press.
- Boddice, R. (2018). *The History of Emotions*. Manchester University Press.
- Bondfield, M. (1948). *A Life's Work*. Hutchinson & Co.
- Braybon, G. & Summerfield, P. (2012). *Out of the Cage : Women's Experiences in Two World Wars*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Bruley, S. (1999). *Women in Britain Since 1900*. Palgrave.
- Caine, B. (1997). *English Feminism, 1780-1980*. Oxford University Press.
- Calder, A. (1969). *The People's War: Britain 1939-45*. Pimlico.
- Calder, A. (1991). *The Myth of the Blitz*. Jonathan Cape.
- Carson, J. (2009). The Quaker Internationalist Tradition in Displaced Persons Camps, 1945-48. In P. Gatrell & N. Baron (Eds.). *Warlands: Population Resettlement and State Reconstruction in the Soviet-East European Borderlands, 1945-50*. (pp. 67 – 86). Palgrave MacMillan.
- Ceadel, M. (1980). *Pacifism in Britain, 1914–1945: The defining of a faith*. Clarendon Press.
- Ceadel, M. (1999). A Legitimate Peace Movement: The Case of Britain, 1918-1945. In *Challenge to Mars: Pacifism from 1918 to 1945*. (pp. 134-148). University of Toronto Press.
- Clogg, M. (2008). Quakers and Greeks in the 1940s. In Clogg, R. (Ed.). *Bearing Gifts to Greeks: Humanitarian Aid to Greece in the 1940s*. (pp. 169-188). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dunstan, P. (2018). *Campaigning for Life: A Biography of Dorothy Frances Buxton*. Lutterworth Press.

- Eglin, J. (1999). Women Pacifists in Interwar Britain. In *Challenge to Mars: Pacifism from 1918 to 1945*. (pp. 149-168). University of Toronto Press.
- Fell, A. (2007). Gendering the War Story. *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 1(1), 53-58.
- Fletcher, S. (1989). *Maude Royden: A Life*. Basil Blackwell
- Fulbrook, K. (2012). Murry, John Middleton (1889-1957). In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.
- Gaffin, J. & D. Thoms, D. (1983). *Caring and sharing: The centenary history of the Cooperative Women's Guild*. Co-operative Union Ltd.
- Gardiner, J. (2004). *Wartime Britain 1939-1945*. Headline Book Publishing.
- Gay, P. (1988). *Freud: A life for our time*. J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd.
- Gilbert, M. (1992). Pacifist attitudes to Nazi Germany, 1936-45. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27, 493-511.
- Gill, R. (2013). *Calculating compassion: Humanity and relief in war, Britain 1870-1914*. Manchester University Press.
- Goodall, F. (1997). *A Question of Conscience: Conscientious Objectors in the Two World Wars*. Sutton.
- Gottlieb, J. (2012). 'Broken Friendships and Vanished Loyalties': Gender, Collective (In)Security and Anti-Fascism in Britain in the 1930s. *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 13:2, 197-219.
- Gottlieb, J. (2014). Introduction: 'flour power' and feminism between the waves. *Women's History Review*, 23:3, 325-329.
- Gottlieb, J. (2014). 'The Women's Movement Took the Wrong Turning': British feminists, pacifism and the politics of appeasement. *Women's History Review*, 23:3, 441-462.
- Gurney, P. (2020). Redefining 'the woman with the basket': The Women's Co-operative Guild and the Politics of Consumption in Britain during the Second World War. *Gender & History*, 32(1), 189-207.
- Haberman, F. (Ed.). (1972). *Nobel Lectures: Peace 1926-1950*. Volume 2. Elsevier.
- Hamilton, M. (1944). *Remembering My Good Friends*. Jonathan Cape.
- Hamilton, M. (1953). *Up-hill All The Way: A Third Cheer for Democracy*. Jonathan Cape.
- Hayes, D. (1949). *The Challenge of Conscience: The Story of the Conscientious Objectors of 1939-1949*. George Allen & Unwin.

- Hellawell, S. (2018). Antimilitarism, Citizenship and Motherhood: the formation and early years of the Women's International League (WIL), 1915–1919. *Women's History Review*, 27(4), 551-564.
- Hellawell, S. (2020). 'A Strong International Spirit': The Influence of Internationalism on the Women's Co-operative Guild. *Twentieth Century British History*, 18(4), 1-26.
- Hennessy, P. (2022). *A Duty of Care: Britain Before and After Covid*. Allen Lane.
- Hetherington, W. (2014). *Swimming Against the Tide: The Peace Pledge Union Story, 1934–2014*. Peace Pledge Union.
- Jameson, S. (1969). *Journey from the North: Autobiography of Storm Jameson*, Vols 1 & 2. Collins and Harvill.
- Kelly, T. (2022). *Battles of Conscience: British Pacifists and the Second World War*. Penguin Random House.
- Kennedy, P. (1975). Idealists and Realists: British Views on Germany, 1864-1939. *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 25, 137-156.
- Lewis, J. (1984). *Women in England, 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and Social Change*. Wheatsheaf Books Ltd.
- Liddington, J. (1989). *The Long Road to Greenham: Feminism and Anti-Militarism in Britain since 1820*. Virago.
- Luckhurst, T. (2016). 'The Vapourings of Empty Young Men': Legacies of their hostility between 1916 and 1918 in British newspaper treatment of conscientious objectors during the German blitzkrieg of 1940. *Journalism Studies*, 17(4).
- Mackay, R. (1999). *The Test of War: Inside Britain 1939-45*. UCL Press.
- McCarthy, H. (2011). *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, citizenship and internationalism, c. 1918-45*. Manchester University Press.
- McKay, S. (2020). *Dresden: The Fire and the Darkness*. Penguin Random House.
- Moorehead, C. (1987). *Troublesome People: Enemies of War, 1916-1986*. Hamish Hamilton.
- Morrison, S. (1962). *I renounce war: The Story of the Peace Pledge Union*. Sheppard Press.
- Noakes, L. (1998). *War and the British: Gender and National Identity, 1939-1991*. I.B. Tauris.
- Nicholson, H. (2007), A Disputed Identity: Women Conscientious Objectors in Second World War Britain. *Twentieth Century British History*, 18(4), 409-428.

- Nicholson, V. (2011). *Millions Like Us: Women's Lives in War and Peace, 1939-1949*. Penguin.
- Overy, R. (2009). *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilisation, 1919-1939*. Allen Lane.
- Overy, R. (2013). Pacifism and the Blitz. *Past and Present*, 219, 201-236.
- Overy, R. (2016). Constructing Space for Dissent in War: The Bombing Restriction Committee, 1941–1945. *English Historical Review*, 550, 596-622.
- Overy, R. (2021). *Blood and Ruins: The Great Imperial War 1931-1945*. Allen Lane.
- Perry, M. (2014). *'Red Ellen' Wilkinson; her ideas, movements and world*. Manchester University Press.
- Proctor, T. M. (2020). Repairing the spirit: The Society of Friends, Total War, and the Limits of Reconciliation. *Peace and Change*, 45(2), 198-224.
- Rae, J. (1970). *Conscience and Politics: The British Government and the Conscientious Objector to Military Service 1916-1919*. Oxford University Press.
- Reid, F. & Gemie, S. (2013). The Friends Relief Service and Displaced Persons in Europe after the Second World War, 1945-48. *Quaker Studies* 17(2), 223-243.
- Rempel, R. (1978). The Dilemmas of British Pacifists During World War II. *The Journal of Modern History*, 50(4), 1213–1229.
- Rigby, A. (1999). The Peace Pledge Union: From Peace to War, 1936-1945. In *Challenge to Mars: Pacifism from 1918 to 1945*. (pp. 168-185). University of Toronto Press.
- Robb, L. (2015). 'The Front Line': Firefighting in British Culture, 1939–1945. *Contemporary British History*, 29(2), 179-198.
- Rose, S. (2003). *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945*. Oxford University Press.
- Royden, M. (1947). *A Threefold Cord*. Victor Gollancz.
- Salt, C., Schweitzer, P. & Wilson, M. (1983). "Of whole heart cometh hope." *Centenary memories of the Co-operative Women's Guild*. Co-operative Retail Services.
- Scott, G. (1998). *Feminism, Femininity and the Politics of Working Women: The Women's Co-Operative Guild, 1880s to the Second World War*. UCL Press.
- Scott, J. (2012). Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis. In E. Weed (Ed.) *Coming to Terms (RLE Feminist Theory): Feminism, Theory, Politics*. (pp. 81-100). Taylor and Francis Group.

Sharp, I. & Stibbe, M. (2017). Women's International Activism during the Inter-War Period, 1919–1939. *Women's History Review*, 26(2), 163-172.

Sharp, I., Acsady, J. & Vukov, N. (2017). Internationalism, Pacifism, Transnationalism: Women's Movements and the Building of a Sustainable Peace in the Post-War World. In Sharp, I. & Stibbe, M. (Eds.). *Women Activists Between War and Peace: Europe, 1918-1923*, Chapter 2, (pp. 77-122). Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Sharp, I. (2020). Love as Moral Imperative and Gendered Anti-war Strategy in the International Women's Movement 1914-1919. *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 31(4), 630-647.

Smith, H. (1984). The Womanpower Problem in Britain during the Second World War. *The Historical Journal*, 27(4), 925-945.

Smith, L. (1998). *Pacifists in Action: The experience of the Friends Ambulance Unit in the Second World War*. The Ebor Press.

Smith, L. (1999). Quakers in Uniform: The Friends Ambulance Unit. In *Challenge to Mars: Pacifism from 1918 to 1945*. (pp. 243-255). University of Toronto Press.

Starkey, P. (1989). *Companions in Caring: The work of the Liverpool and District Pacifist Service Unit during the Second World War*. Arthur H. Stockwell Ltd.

Vernon, B. (1982). *Ellen Wilkinson 1891-1947*. Croom Helm.

Von Borries, A. (2000). *Quiet Helpers: Quaker Service in Postwar Germany*. Quaker Home Service & American Friends Service Committee.

Wilson, R. (1952). *Quaker Relief: an Account of the Relief Work of the Society of Friends, 1940-1948*. Allen & Unwin

Wood, A. (2014). Facing 'Life as We Have Known It': Virginia Woolf and the Women's Co-operative Guild. *Literature and History*, Volume 23, Number 2, 18-34.

Online Secondary Sources

Jusseume, A. (2022). Introduction to online seminar on Humanitarian Intimacies: Gender, Care and Humanitarianism. Part of a seminar series funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Project called *New Approaches to Medical Care, Humanitarianism and Violence during the 'long' Second World War, 1931-1953*. Accessed by Zoom on 1 February 2022.

Periyan, N. (2020). Online talk on 'A good democrat? Vera Brittain and meritocracy', given to the Working Class Movement Library on 2 December, 2020. Can be accessed at <https://www.wcml.org.uk/whats-on/events/online-talks-by-clara-jones-and-natash-periyan-on-labour-women>.