

EMA for A329: The Making of Welsh History

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'A world turned upside down' To what extent were women the scapegoats for moral decline in wartime Wales 1939-45?

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Abbreviations:

WAAF – Women’s Auxiliary Air Force

ATS – Auxiliary Territorial Service

WRNS – Women’s Royal Naval Service

DORA – Defence of the Realm Act

Introduction

This dissertation will consider the popular perceptions of women in Wartime Wales. It will address the extent to which they were singled out as the instigators of immorality and how these indiscriminate perceptions of female behaviour measure up against the tangible and diverse experiences of the women themselves. This will be examined across the turbulent period of 1939 to 1945, when allegations against women reached their zenith.

During the Second World War, the conventionally accepted view of the female domestic sphere was severely tested when the British government introduced the National Service Act (No.2). By the close of 1941 millions of single women aged between twenty and thirty were conscripted as part of the war effort and channelled into the armed services, civil defence forces, industrial employment and the Land Army. This legislation was later extended to include married women without parental responsibilities¹. The mass-mobilisation of the female workforce gave rise to fears that by entering the masculine realms of the uniformed services or by undertaking manual labour, women were jeopardising their femininity.

Moreover, there were concerns that increased opportunities to fraternise with members of the opposite sex would encourage unrestrained and immoral behaviour. Penny Summerfield argued that 'charges of immorality were flung at women... as another way of saying... [they] should not be doing 'unfeminine' things'.² Whilst many of these accusations were the product of 'rumour and innuendo',³ tales of moral laxity became increasingly evident in the press, with articles voicing concerns surrounding female drinking, divorce, illegitimate children and rising levels of venereal disease. This presents an interesting dichotomy when compared with the Ministry of Information's morale boosting recruitment campaigns, which urged the

¹ Mari A. Williams, 'In the Wars: Wales 1914-1945' in *The People of Wales*, G.E Jones and D. Smith eds. (Landysul, 1999), p.14; The National Archives, Women in World War II – Introduction (n.d.) Available at <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/womeninuniform>, Accessed 06 March 2021.

² Penny Summerfield, 'Love, Sex and Marriage' in *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars*, G. Braybon and P. Summerfield (London, 2013 [1987]), p.218.

³ Penny Summerfield and Nicole Crockett, 'You weren't taught that with the welding: lessons in sexuality in the second world war', in *Women's History Review*, 1:3 (1992), p. 435.

women of Britain to 'Come Into The Factories'⁴ or reassured them that 'a woman's place is in the W.A.A.F'.⁵ Historians tend to agree that the chaos of war and mobilisation of the workforce led 'to the adoption of new social mores'.⁶ However, with the British government keen to preserve the morale of their servicemen⁷, it was largely women who shouldered the burden for any perceived moral decline⁸.

The first chapter of this dissertation will consider how the historical constructs of femininity impinged on the mobilisation of women for the war effort. It will demonstrate how received wisdom was instrumental in shaping public attitudes during the Second World War and will examine how the government's recruitment campaigns were designed to modify these established perceptions. Chapter two will focus on the nature of the public criticisms levelled at women, it will consider the source of the allegations and examine to what degree women were the victims of prejudiced rumour. The final chapter will assess whether the chaotic wartime conditions encouraged less restrained sexual behaviour and how far the experiences of Welsh women substantiate or undermine the accusations of moral laxity.

Whilst the experiences of Welsh women broadly fit with the wider British understanding of female sexual liberation during World War Two, the majority of academic studies have a distinctly British focus. Consequently, the evidence is drawn from English newspapers and typically highlights the experiences of English women. In 1981 Deirdre Beddoe published an article decrying the absence of Welsh women's experiences from history, declaring there was 'a great chasm to be filled'⁹. Subsequently, Beddoe and Leigh Verrill-Rhys published

⁴ Anon., 'Women of Britain Come into the Factories', Bridgeman Art Library, C. 1940, Britannica Image Quest, Available at https://quest-eb-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/search/munitions-propaganda/1/108_272794/Women-of-Britain-Come-into-the-Factories-propaganda-poste, Accessed 08 March 2021.

⁵ Anon., 'On reflection join the WAAF', *Western Mail* (24 July 1941), p. 1. Available at www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk, Accessed 22 February 2021.

⁶ Williams, 'In the Wars: Wales 1914-1945', p. 18.

⁷ Sally Sokoloff, 'How are they at home? community, state and servicemen's wives in England, 1939-45', in *Women's History Review*, (1999), p. 32.

⁸ Summerfield, 'Love, Sex and Marriage', p. 214.

⁹ Deirdre Beddoe, 'Towards a Welsh women's history', in *Llafur the journal of the Society for the Study of Welsh Labour History*, Vol. 3, no. 2 (1981), p. 37.

Parachutes and Petticoats (1991), an edited collection of Welsh women's diaries and essays, detailing their experiences during the Second World War. This book makes an important contribution to recovering the tangible experiences of the women in Wales, although the authors acknowledge the accounts were largely written by women from an educated background.¹⁰ Beddoe's later book, *Out of the Shadows* (2000), is a more comprehensive study of Welsh women's history during the twentieth century. In 2003 Andy Croll praised this work as a 'major contribution to the historiography of modern Wales', yet he criticised Beddoe's reliance on the separate gender spheres, questioning whether it was an outmoded tool of analysis.¹¹ Whilst Croll rightly highlights that prescriptive ideals were contested, he fails to acknowledge their symbolic potential; women were vital to the wartime economy, yet they were often held aloft as the symbolic representation of the home and the transmitters of the nation's values, thus female behaviour and dress were subject to 'ferocious nationalist judgement'.¹² The ideology of the separate spheres provided a framework for such criticisms. Moreover, Beddoe argued that the British government's assault on the morality of Welsh women in the 1847 *Report into the State of Education in Wales*, led the Welsh nation 'to adopt the doctrine of separate spheres with an outstanding fervour'¹³. Geraint Jenkins suggested this 'seminal event...shaped the political and cultural life in Wales for several generations'.¹⁴ This dissertation will briefly consider if the legacy of the Treachery of the Blue Books uniquely informed the nature of Welsh discourse surrounding female immorality.

Whilst Beddoe has foregrounded Welsh women's experiences, it is important to acknowledge that women's status is 'located within wider gender contexts'.¹⁵ Since the

¹⁰ Leigh Verrill-Rhys and Deirdre Beddoe, 'Introduction', in *Parachutes And Petticoats: Welsh women writing on the Second World War*, eds. (Dinas Powys, 1992), p. 2.

¹¹ Andy Croll, 'Holding on to History: modern Welsh historians and the challenge of postmodernism', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38 (2), (2003), p. 326

¹² Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman, *Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (London, 2002), p.51.

¹³ Deirdre Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth Century Wales* (Cardiff, 2000), p. 179.

¹⁴ Geraint H. Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 213.

¹⁵ Penelope J. Corfield, 'From women's history to gender history: A reply to 'playing the gender history game'', in *Rethinking History* 3:3 (1999), p. 340.

1990s there has been a tentative shift towards more integrated gender studies. Brian Roberts has written extensively about workers in the Welsh mining villages of Blaina & Nantyglo, these accounts evaluate male anxieties alongside the experiences of female munitions-workers. 'A Mining Town in Wartime' (1990) and 'The Budgie Train' (1992), both highlight the disruption of traditional social relations, in communities dominated by heavy industry, where formerly there had been little prospect for female employment.¹⁶ This multi-gendered, labour history perspective serves to 'broaden rather than...undermine women's history'.¹⁷

Beddoe and Roberts provide an overview of the more distinctly Welsh facets of women's lives during this period, however there are substantially more British focused studies that specifically address the question of women's wartime behaviour. This research is important, not only due to cultural commonalities, but also for revealing how far Wales fits with the wider British experience. One of the most comprehensive works is Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield's *Out of the Cage: Women's experiences in Two World Wars* (2012). Using oral testimony the book demonstrates how women's sense of wartime freedom was merely a temporary hiatus before relapsing to stricter pre-war conditions. Whilst the wider emancipation of women is outside of the scope of this dissertation, Braybon and Summerfield usefully underline that any sense of female freedom has to be viewed in tandem with the prejudiced attitudes women encountered in their newly acquired roles.¹⁸ Summerfield has written extensively about British women's experiences during the Second World War. An article co-authored by Nicole Crockett, 'You Weren't Taught That with the Welding: Lessons in Sexuality in the Second World War' (1992) and 'Gender and War in the Twentieth Century' (1997), both address how female sexuality was problematised¹⁹ during

¹⁶ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 180.

¹⁷ Corfield, 'From women's history to gender history', p.341.

¹⁸ Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, 'Introduction' in *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars*, (London, 2013 [1987]), pp.1-2.

¹⁹ Summerfield and Crockett, 'You weren't taught that with the welding': lessons in sexuality in the Second World War', p. 436.

wartime and how the chaotic conditions threatened to undermine traditional gender constructions.²⁰

Two articles by the American sociologist Sonya O. Rose, specifically address the issue of sexuality; 'Girls and GIs: Race, Sex, and Diplomacy in Second World War Britain' (1997) considers how the discourse surrounding women's sexual behaviour was further heightened by the arrival of American troops. Whilst 'Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation' (1998) posits that female purity became an idealised aspect of national identity.²¹ Rose usefully highlights the media 'furore' that surrounded the wartime conduct of young women,²² however this inclines her focus towards evidence drawn from newspapers and magazines, as a consequence her studies lack the voice of the women themselves. This approach produces a rather sensationalised view of female behaviour, with little to counterbalance the often lurid and unproven media claims. Additionally, Beddoe and Rose have linked the censorious mentality that saw women's activities restricted by the oppressive DORA regulations during World War One, as a precursor to the suspicious attitudes that re-emerged during the Second World War.²³ This serves to emphasise how attitudes towards women were often shaped by earlier events.

Given the small number of Welsh studies addressing women's wartime behaviour, this dissertation will aim to shed further light on the experiences of Welsh women, whilst also analysing any uniquely Welsh aspects of the wartime morality debate. This approach will incorporate primary evidence from Welsh newspapers, government reports and propaganda, as well as advertisements and articles featured in the national press. To counterbalance the more sensationalised material, the study will integrate the experiences of Welsh women from

²⁰ Penny Summerfield, 'Gender and War in the Twentieth Century', in *The international History Review*, Vol. 19 (1997), p. 14.

²¹ Sonya O. Rose, 'Sex, Citizenship and the Nation in World War Two Britain', in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 103, No. 4 (1998), p. 1148.

²² Sonya O. Rose, 'Girls and GIs: Race, Sex and Diplomacy in Second World War Britain', in *The International History Review*, 19:1 (1997), p. 160.

²³ Rose, 'Girls and GIs: Race, Sex and Diplomacy in Second World War Britain', p. 160; Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 130.

their memoirs and diaries, as well as directive responses and diaries from the Mass-Observation survey. It will also utilise oral testimony from the 'Voices from the Factory Floor' project, run by the Women's Archive of Wales, this material in particular provides an important working-class perspective on the turbulent wartime events.

Chapter 1

A Woman's Place? How did the historical constructs of femininity impinge on the mobilisation of Welsh women for the war effort?

In order to better understand how female behaviour was portrayed during the Second World War, it is necessary to assess how attitudes towards the gender roles were shaped during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The rise of the middle-class, idealised paradigm of femininity known as the Angel in the House, coincided with the rapid industrialisation of Britain. This model supposedly restricted women to the realms of domesticity whilst assigning men to the economic sphere.²⁴ In Wales the more familiar stereotype was the working-class Welsh Mam, a robust, hard-working wife and mother who was the 'moral custodian of the home'.²⁵ Historians have contested the authenticity of these models, highlighting how many women were not in an economic position to shun the world of work.²⁶ However, Beddoe has persuasively argued that Welsh attitudes towards female conduct and duties continued to be shaped by the ideology of the separate spheres.²⁷ One justification for this rationale rests with the Welsh response to the 1847 *Report on the State of Education in Wales*, specifically towards 'the alleged want of chastity in women'.²⁸ The humiliation of this erroneous accusation spurred non-conformist ministers into reconstructing Welsh womanhood as an 'angel of the hearth', a symbol of...purity... godliness, sobriety and thrift'²⁹. This strongly enforced ideal tied women to the home and the chapel and encumbered them with upholding the values of the Welsh nation³⁰. Geraint Jenkins

²⁴ Amanda Vickery, 'Golden age to separate spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history', in *The Historical Journal*, 36 (2) (1993), pp. 383-84.

²⁵ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 13.

²⁶ Beddoe, 'Towards a Welsh women's history', p. 33.

²⁷ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 13.

²⁸ Sian Rhiannon Williams, 'The True 'Cymraes': Images of Women in Women's Nineteenth-Century Welsh Periodicals' in *Our Mothers' Land, Chapters in Welsh Women's History, 1830-1939*, Angela V. John ed. (Cardiff, 1991 [2011]), p.74.

²⁹ Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales*, p. 219.

³⁰ Sian Rhiannon Williams, 'The True 'Cymraes': Images of Women in Women's Nineteenth-Century Welsh Periodicals', pp. 90-91.

suggested the repercussions of 1847 resounded well into the next century³¹ and this notion of female respectability is a recurrent theme in much of the wartime morality discourse.

The most significant factor that continued to shape attitudes towards the role of women in Wales was the domination of heavy industry, which had increasingly marginalised women from the waged workforce.³² Female employment statistics for the 1930s and 40s demonstrate markedly lower rates of economically active Welsh women in comparison to England.³³ Findings indicate that Lancashire's textile mills and London's domestic service sector were creating wider opportunities for female employment. In these areas female activity rates were in excess of 50%, whereas the rural regions experienced closer to 20% activity rates. Most significantly, it was in mining communities like Gwent, where male earnings had traditionally been high enough to sustain a family unaided, that a mere 12% of women were economically active.³⁴ In these mining regions, attitudes regarding a woman's place were more likely to be tied to notions concerning male breadwinner's pride.³⁵

The post-World War One period and ensuing economic depression had a significant bearing on attitudes towards women. The high-levels of male unemployment resulted in a back-lash against female workers and saw the introduction of restrictive policies, such as marriage bars, which compelled women to relinquish their work.³⁶ Additionally, the implementation of the DORA regulations in 1914 restricted female drinking and imposed curfews on their social activities.³⁷ These patriarchal policies seem to underline the belief that ultimately a woman's

³¹ Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales*, p. 213.

³² Jane Aaron, 'A Review of the Contribution of Women to Welsh Life and Prospects for the Future' in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of the Cymmrodorion*, vol. 8, (2001) p. 200.

³³ (See Appendix, Fig. 1.); A Vision of Britain through Time, Wales Dep through time 'Historical statistics on Work and Poverty for the Country / Female Activity Rate', University of Portsmouth, n.d. Available at http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10001055/rate/CENSUS_FEM-ACTIVE, Accessed 05 April 2021.

³⁴ A Vision of Britain through Time, Wales Dep through time, 'Historical Statistics on Work and Poverty for the Country / Female Activity Rate'.

³⁵ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 180

³⁶ Deirdre Beddoe, 'Munitionettes, Maids and Mams: Women in Wales, 1913-1939' in *Our Mothers' Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History 1830-1939*, Angela V. John ed. (Cardiff, 2011 [1991]), pp. 187-89.

³⁷ Lisa Snook, 'Out of the Cage – Women and the First World War in Pontypridd' in *Llafur the journal of the society for the study of Welsh Labour*, vol 8, no. 2. (2001), p. 85.

place was in the home. Yet, they also need to be viewed in context of the greater emancipation of women in the early twentieth century, which saw them achieve equal voting rights with men in 1928.³⁸ However, as chapter two will discuss, the Second World War public discourse was permeated with the enduring suspicion that female activities required regulation. It is also evident that women were pushed in and out of the labour market at the convenience of the authorities,³⁹ these seemingly capricious actions left the question of a woman's role in a perpetually indeterminate state.

Significantly, the economic depression was particularly severe in Wales, unemployment blighted the extraction industries and encouraged the exodus of the nation's young workforce. The levels of hardship are evident in the large numbers of young Welsh women who took up employment in London as domestic servants, essentially to provide for their impoverished families back home.⁴⁰ The adverse consequences of this displacement of young people was acknowledged in 1942 by the Mass-Observation investigator Mollie Tarrant, who was documenting the wartime experiences of the community in the South Wales mining villages of Blaina and Nantyglo. Tarrant observed 'that young people have... tended to leave the district, [and this] may well have meant the predominance of the ideas of the older people'. She offered this as a potential explanation for the perceived 'sudden emancipation of women and for the repercussions which it...aroused'.⁴¹ It seems the locals were alarmed by the rapid, large-scale employment of women in the munitions factories and their misgivings were further fuelled by the fact that women's work was more typically associated with domestic service sector rather than the factory production line.⁴² Tarrant therefore sheds useful light on an aging population, unsettled by wartime societal shifts and unaccustomed to the more progressive attitudes associated with youth culture. The Mass-

³⁸ Beddoe, 'Munitionettes, Maids and Mams: Women in Wales, 1914-1939' p. 187.

³⁹ Beddoe, 'Towards a Welsh women's history', p. 38.

⁴⁰ Williams, 'In the Wars: Wales 1914-1945', pp. 7-8; Mari Williams, 'The New London Welsh: Domestic Servants 1918-1939', in *Transactions of the Honourable Society of the Cymmrodorion*, vol. 9, (2002), p. 136.

⁴¹ Brian Roberts, 'The Budgie Train: Women and Wartime Munitions Work in a Mining Valley', in *Llafur the Journal of the Society for the study of Welsh Labour History*, vol. 7, nos. 3-4 (1998-1999), p. 146.

⁴² Beddoe, 'Munitionettes, Maids and Mams: Women in Wales, 1913-1939', pp. 192-93.

Observation project aimed to motivate social change by liberating the views of ordinary people,⁴³ and it seems likely that Tarrant's line of enquiry followed this exposé style remit. However, similar culture shocks were echoed in other regions of Wales. The March 1941 edition of the Denbighshire newspaper, the *North Wales Weekly News*, recounted the events at a meeting of the Aberconway Guild, where Mr Ellis Jones speculated that a 'woman's place was in the home...[and] contended that normally women were best fitted for, and should be restricted to, home duties'. He added that 'in ordinary circumstances a man could have been found who would have done the job better'.⁴⁴ This anxiety regarding female employment appears to be framed by traditional gender constructions that pigeon-holed the necessary qualities of both sexes⁴⁵, it is also possible that Jones's view reflected the more parochial attitudes of the smaller rural regions. Yet, this view was not readily accepted by everyone; in April 1941 the more conservative Welsh national newspaper, the *Western Mail*, featured an article entitled, W.A.A.F Heroines of Cardiff, in which two servicewomen were praised for assisting fire fighters during a fire-blitz. A member of the auxiliary fire service paid 'special tribute to the gallant little corporal of the W.A.A.F, who regardless of all danger, first hauled hose with me'.⁴⁶ These conflicting opinions demonstrate how the mobilisation of the female workforce was not only putting gender stereotypes under duress, it was also placing many women in the onerous position of being legally bound to contribute to the war effort, whilst simultaneously being criticised for doing so.⁴⁷

In nationalistic terms, historians have suggested that the female role is imbued with deeper significance and has been subject to greater scrutiny during times of war. Whilst the

⁴³ Penny Summerfield, 'Mass-Observation: Social Research or Social movement?', in *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 20, no. 3 (1985), p. 440.

⁴⁴ Anon, 'Conway', *North Wales Weekly News* (13 March 1941), p. 5. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0003119/19410313/072/0005?browse=False>, Accessed 24 February 2021.

⁴⁵ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 117.

⁴⁶ Anon., 'W.A.A.F Heroines of Cardiff', *Western Mail* (01 April 1941), p. 2. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000104/19410401/015/0002?browse=False>, Accessed 06 March 2021.

⁴⁷ Antonia Lant, 'Prologue: mobile femininity' in *Nationalising Femininity, Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War*, Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson eds. (Manchester, 1996), p. 15.

government were recruiting women for the war effort and asking them to fill the essential roles vacated by men, they continued to portray them as a 'symbol of the family community and nation'.⁴⁸ Political and social scientists, Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman have highlighted how 'constructions of national identity have had major implications for women'. At various times they have been held aloft as the 'biological reproducers of the nation', the 'transmitters of its culture' and the symbolic representation of the 'sanctity of the home'.⁴⁹ These nationalistic expressions are heightened during wartime when a nation's values are perceived to be under threat. Hence, any unconventional female behaviour is singled out as 'the sort of thing we don't do'.⁵⁰ The wartime government gave emphasis to the idea that women personified 'the dream of returning to the domestic hearth' and were therefore an important resource for maintaining the morale of the troops.⁵¹ Sally Sokoloff has highlighted how the government strategically prioritised the role of the serviceman's wife, and how she was only directed into war work within convenient reach of her home. The wisdom behind this policy was to avoid damaging the husband's morale by disrupting his family and home.⁵² It was against this backdrop that the government's Ministry of Information were tasked with persuading women that their contribution to the war effort was vital. Consequently, a raft of recruitment posters emerged, informing women 'YOU ARE WANTED TOO', or appealing to their patriotism by encouraging them to 'free a man for the fleet'.⁵³ Philip Zec's eye-catching poster features an unusually empowering image of a woman, arms held aloft, almost commanding the assembled tanks and aircraft silhouetted behind her. The slogan below her

⁴⁸Penny Summerfield, 'The girl that makes the thing that drills the hole that holds the spring...': discourses of women and work in the Second World War' in *Nationalising Femininity, Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War*, Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson eds. (Manchester, 1996), pp. 35-36.

⁴⁹ Spencer and Wollman, *Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, pp. 51-52.

⁵⁰ Rose, 'Sex, Citizenship and the Nation in World War II Britain', p. 1148.

⁵¹ Carol Smart, 'Good wives and moral lives: marriage and divorce 1937-51' *Nationalising Femininity, Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War*, Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson eds. (Manchester, 1996), p. 95.

⁵² Sokoloff, 'How are they at home? community, state and servicemen's wives in England, 1939-45', p. 32.

⁵³ Imperial War Museum, 'You are wanted too! Join the ATS', (n.d.) Available at <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/29132>, Accessed 08 March 2021; Imperial War Museum, 'Join the Wrens and free a man for the fleet', (London, n.d.) Available at <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/29092>, Accessed 08 March 2021.

reads 'WOMEN OF BRITAIN COME INTO THE FACTORIES'.⁵⁴ In July 1941, a more romanticised advertisement appeared on the front page of the *Western Mail*. In this campaign a young woman in a floral dress looks wistfully into a mirror, the reflection staring back wears the uniform of the WAAF, with the girl pensively proclaiming 'yes its really me... yet somebody else in a way'. The message below her subverts the maxim that a woman's place is in the home, by unequivocally stating that a 'woman's place is in the WAAF'.⁵⁵ These campaigns were created to meet the increasing demands of the war, they knowingly contradicted many of the established notions of womanhood and demonstrate how the authorities were attempting to modify public attitudes by strategically reconfiguring the female role.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ (See Appendix Fig. 2.) Anon., 'Women of Britain Come into the Factories'; V&A., 'Women of Britain Come into the Factories' Collections.vam Online (n.d.) Available at <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O75918/women-of-britain-come-into-poster-zec-philip/>, Accessed 08 March 2021.

⁵⁵ (See Appendix Fig. 3); Anon., 'On reflection join the WAAF', *Western Mail* (24 July 1941), p. 1. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000104/19410724/015/0001?browse=False>, Accessed 24 February 2021.

⁵⁶ John Costello, *Love, Sex and War 1939-1945* (London, 1986), pp. 204-5; Summerfield, 'The girl that makes the thing that drills the hole that holds the spring...': discourses of women and work in the Second World War', p. 35.

Chapter 2

“Virtue has no gossip value”: What was the nature of the public criticism of women and who were the detractors?

The wartime public discourse concerning female behaviour tended to revolve around attitudes towards their appearance, sexual activity and aspects of their working and social life. This seems to underline how public anxieties correlated with the received wisdom regarding women’s respectability, purity and domestic duties, and how these established ideals were felt to be under threat.

With large numbers of women being directed into the uniformed services, land army and other formerly male dominated occupations, the issue of female appearance and dress motivated a wealth of discourse. In June 1942, the *South Wales Gazette* featured an article concerning the employment of women on the pit-brow; the anonymous author bewailed the ‘sickening sight...[of] girls and women clad in men’s attire’...losing [their] womanly... characteristics...[and] sink(ing) into the deepest depths of moral degradation’.¹ Significantly, this opinion was voiced in a south Wales regional newspaper and the animosity specifically targeted women working in the coalfield. This hostile reaction substantiates Beddoe’s view that attitudes in mining regions were more typically entrenched with female domestic ideology and that women working in conventionally male occupations were seen as a threat to Welsh manhood and a disruption to a traditional way of life.² However, these attitudes were not confined to the patriarchal coalfield regions; it is evident from articles in contemporary magazines that the supposed masculinisation of women had seeped into popular consciousness.³ In November 1941 the widely read⁴ *Picture Post* ran an article titled

¹ Anon., ‘*Employment of Women and Girls*’, *South Wales Gazette* (19 June 1942), p.7. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002852/19420619/055/0007>, Accessed 14 March 2021.

² Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p.110.

³ Summerfield and Crockett, ‘“You weren’t taught that with the welding’: lessons in sexuality in the Second World War’, p. 437.

⁴ (In 1940 the *Picture Post* was selling 1.5 million copies at only 1d. a week) A. Hopkinson ‘*Picture Post*’, Oxford Reference (1970) Available at <https://www-oxfordreference->

'Should women wear trousers? The story was authored by the women's editor Anne Scott-James and essentially took a light-hearted approach to the subject, reflecting the more liberated attitudes of London's urban elite.⁵ Yet, even James commented that trousers were 'fine on the job...but they certainly don't improve the look of the town'⁶. Mischievously, one of the accompanying photographs reveals a couple arm in arm, the man wearing a kilt and the woman wearing trousers, the insinuation being that the conventional gender boundaries had been 'turned upside down'.⁷

A troubling aspect of the female appearance debate is the contradictory message that was conveyed. Pat Kirkham has highlighted how the government encouraged female beautifying as a patriotic responsibility, thus the slogan 'beauty on duty'⁸ became a mainstay of several prominent advertisement campaigns. Despite making an important contribution to the war effort, women continued to be seen as a reward and a morale boost for the servicemen⁹. Moreover, whilst it was deemed patriotic to be feminine, some in society believed it was immoral to be overly glamorous. In 1939 the Mass-Observation Survey prompted its volunteers to respond to the question 'What is your attitude towards make-up?'¹⁰ To which a forty-eight year old married teacher from Chepstow replied, 'in a small country town, an

com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780198662716.001.0001/acref-9780198662716-e-1229, Accessed 01 May 2021.

⁵ Katherine Whitehorn, 'James, Anne Eleanor Scott-, Lady Lancaster (1913-2009), journalist and author', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2013) Available at <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-101855>, Accessed 20 March 2021.

⁶ Anne Scott-James, 'Should Women Wear Trousers?', *Picture Post* (01 November 1941), p.22. Available at <https://link-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/apps/doc/EL1800018251/PIPO?u=tou&sid=PIPO&xid=d59ae0e9>, Accessed 20 March 2021.

⁷ (See Appendix Fig. 4.) Anne Scott James., 'Should Women Wear Trousers?', p. 20; Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 117.

⁸ (See Appendix Fig. 5.) Anon., 'Tangee Lipstick', *Picture Post* (28 October 1939), p. 6. Available at <https://go-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk>, Accessed 20 March 2021.

⁹ Pat Kirkham, 'Fashioning the feminine: dress, appearance and femininity in wartime Britain' in *Nationalising Femininity, Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War*, Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson eds. (Manchester, 1996), p. 154.

¹⁰ File Report A21, 'Personal Appearance', July 1939, University of Sussex, Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Mass Observation Online, p.1. Available at <https://www-massobservation-amdigital-co-uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/>, Accessed 16 March 2021.

excessively made up girl looks like an orchid in a field of daisies'.¹¹ The Mass-Observation directives typically reflected the views of the educated middle-classes and tended to 'probe particular issues' in order to gauge public opinion.¹² Yet, this disquiet concerning women's appearance was similarly echoed in the 1941 '*Land Girl*' manual, which recommended that a volunteer should 'be prepared to "tone down" her lips, complexions and nails...so as not to look conspicuous'¹³. The manual was written by the horticulturalist W.E Shewell-Cooper, but his influential collaborators, Lady Denman and Dame Meriel Talbot were both born in the 19th century,¹⁴ thus the manual's subtext seems to epitomise the inherent concerns of an older generation. This type of discourse that constantly questioned the female appearance, ultimately resulted in a vicious circle where women were chastised for being masculine, encouraged to be attractive, and reproached for being unrespectable.¹⁵

The most injurious allegations against women concerned to their sexual morality. These attacks often came from social welfare groups, religious figures or law enforcement officials¹⁶ and frequently advocated tighter control of female behaviour. In July 1942, the *North Wales Weekly News* featured a plea from the National Council of Women, where their president complained that 'young girls, more stupid than criminal, should have the guidance of uniformed women police'.¹⁷ Whilst the government refrained from imposing any legislative

¹¹ Directive Respondent 1079, reply to April-July 1939 Directive, University of Sussex, Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Mass Observation Online, pp. 1-2. Available at <https://www-massobservation-amdigital-co-uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk>, Accessed 16 March 2021.

¹² James Hinton, 'Mass-Observation' Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2008) Available at <https://www-oxforddnb-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb>, Accessed 14 May 2021.

¹³ W.E Shewell-Cooper, *Land Girl: A Manual for Volunteers in the Women's Land Army 1941* (Gloucestershire, 2011 [1941]), p. 96.

¹⁴ J. Martin, 'Talbot, Dame Meriel Lucy (1866–1956), women's welfare worker' Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2004) Available at <https://www.oxforddnb.com>, Accessed 01 May 2021; T. Stone, 'Gertrude Mary, Lady Denman (1884–1954), public servant' Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2011) Available at <https://www.oxforddnb.com>, Accessed 01 May 2021.

¹⁵ Penny Summerfield, 'Call Up', in *Out of the Cage: Women's Experiences in Two World Wars*, G. Braybon and P. Summerfield (London, 2013 [1987]), p. 166.

¹⁶ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p.130, Jenkins; Rose, 'Sex, Citizenship and the Nation in World War Two Britain', pp. 1149-50.

¹⁷ Anon., 'Women Police' *North Wales Weekly News* (30 July 1942), p.5. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0003119/19420730/056/0005?browse=False>, Accessed 23 February 2021.

restrictions on women during World War Two, there was evidently public concern that women were incapable of handling the greater freedoms of wartime. In this respect the pleas for tighter control echo World War One's DORA regulations, which restricted women's activities on the basis that they might lead to acts of immorality.¹⁸ A great deal of the press coverage surrounding women's behaviour was highly discriminatory and often unsubstantiated. The front page of the 27 May 1942 edition of the *Western Mail* related allegations made at a meeting of the Monmouthshire Baptist Association, where the Reverend Richard Rees accused young female munitions workers of 'promiscuity and immorality' and of squandering their earnings in 'government... established "wet" canteens'. Rees claimed the information was obtained from a man who had witnessed four teenage girls drinking "'double" whiskeys', he commented that 'the girls were earning the money, but were going to the devil with it'.¹⁹ This type of 'media attention... contributed to public anxiety about girls and young women',²⁰ yet, there is no indication as to why Rees's source was so trustworthy. Interestingly, two days later these accusations were staunchly rebutted in the reader's views column, where one male reader suggested the allegation 'does not appear to be founded on fact...[the women] are clean and sober, and I have never heard an uncouth word spoken by them'.²¹ The negative rumour mill continued to be a thorn in the side of the government's female recruitment drive, particularly as the women's services became the subject of crude gibes; the Women's Land Army were said to have their backs to the land, the ATS was branded the groundsheet of the army and the Women's Naval Service was tarnished by the saying, up with the lark and to bed with a Wren²². These insinuations were given further credence by the rising illegitimacy rates in England and Wales; Welsh data

¹⁸ Lisa Snook 'Out of the Cage – Women and the First World War in Pontypridd' in *Llafur the journal of the society for the study of Welsh Labour*, vol 8, no. 2 (2001), p. 85.

¹⁹ Anon., 'Immorality and Drinking Alleged in War Factories', *Western Mail* (27 May 1942), p.1. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000104/19420527/005/0001?browse=False>, Accessed 23 February 2021.

²⁰ Rose, 'Sex, Citizenship and the Nation in World War II Britain', p. 1150.

²¹ Evan Jones, 'Girl War Workers Defended', *Western Mail*, 29 May 1942, p. 3.

²² Summerfield and Crockett, "'You weren't taught that with the welding': lessons in sexuality in the Second World War", pp. 436-7.

indicates that whilst illegitimate births remained low, there was a steady increase across the wartime period, reaching a highpoint in 1945 before declining.²³ However, historians have cautioned that Illegitimacy rates can be misleading; for instance children conceived during extra-marital affairs could sometimes be passed off as the progeny of the husband. Furthermore, illegitimate conceptions in the pre-war period were often rectified through marriage, whereas the wartime conditions potentially prevented this, if the prospective father was suddenly posted away for duty.²⁴ This evidence suggests that Illegitimacy received an unnecessary amount of attention and perhaps had more continuities with the pre-war period than was willingly acknowledged.²⁵ Revealingly, in 1942 the government appointed a committee, which included five female members, to investigate the welfare conditions in the women's services. One section of their report specifically addressed the issue of service life and morals. The first line shrewdly states that 'Virtue has no gossip value' and the report suggests that women in uniform may have roused 'a special sense of hostility...among certain people'. Their statistical findings indicated that the numbers of illegitimate pregnancies were 'trifling' and they could 'find no justification for the...sweeping charges of immorality which have disturbed public opinion'.²⁶ Given the importance of the government's wartime recruitment programme, it is perhaps unsurprising that the committee largely found the servicewomen to be the unfair targets of public prejudice. However, their findings were widely reported in the press and on September 3rd 1942 the *Western Mail* showed patriotic

²³ (See Figs. 6 & 7) A Vision of Britain through Time, 'Wales Dep through time, 'Life and Death Statistics / Births by legitimacy', University of Portsmouth, n.d. Available at http://visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10001055/cube/BIRTH_LEGIT, Accessed 28 March 2021.

²⁴ Sokoloff, "'How are they at home?'" community, state and servicemen's wives in England, 1939-45', p. 34, Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p.131.

²⁵ Rose, 'Girls and GI's, Race, Sex and Diplomacy in Second World War Britain', p. 147.

²⁶ Markham, Violet *et al.*, 'Report of the Committee on Amenities and Welfare conditions in the three women's services' (05 August 1942), pp. 49-52, Available at: <https://archives.parliament.uk/online-resources/parliamentary-papers>, Accessed 26 February 2021.

fervour by prominently featuring an article titled, 'Malicious Tales of Women in the Services', in which the committee's most significant repudiations were highlighted in bold print.²⁷

Despite this highly publicised exoneration, women continued to be exposed to criticism. Conspicuously, some of this negativity was promulgated by the government's venereal disease awareness campaign. 'By 1941 rates of syphilis had increased 13 per cent among males and 63 per cent among females'.²⁸ The Ministry of Information's, 'Boyfriend Coming My Way' poster unhelpfully decided to portray the threat of venereal disease in the guise of a menacing female skull, wearing an orchid trimmed pink hat. The accompanying text claims, 'The 'easy' girl-friend spreads syphilis and gonorrhoea'.²⁹ Whilst this slogan differentiates between a promiscuous and a respectable woman, it nonetheless implies that women are responsible for the spread of the disease. Summerfield and Rose have both highlighted how a prevailing 'double standard of sexual morality' was routinely used to portray women as the guilty-party.³⁰ Rose's study of the American troops in Britain has also illuminated how the government was complicit in shielding the errant behaviour of the GI's, on the basis that it might jeopardise diplomatic relations.³¹ On the 17 February 1945, the front page of the south Wales weekly newspaper, the *Pontypridd Observer*, reported that young girls had been jailed for associating with 'coloured' American soldiers on billeted premises. A police officer labelled the girls as 'sex-maniacs...[and] a danger to any troops stationed in the area'.³² A supplementary article in the same issue claimed 'the girls...[were] far more to blame than the

²⁷ Anon., 'Malicious Tales of Women in the Services', *Western Mail* (03 September 1942), p.3. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000104/19420903/049/0003?browse=False>, Accessed 23 February 2021.

²⁸ Rose, 'Sex, Citizenship and the Nation in World War Two Britain', p. 1150.

²⁹ (See Fig. 8.), Anon., 'Venereal Disease Poster', The Granger Collection, C. 1943, Britannica Image Quest, Available at https://quest-eb-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/search/venereal-disease-poster/1/140_1648533/VENEREAL-DISEASE-POSTER---Anti-Venereal-Disease-poster, Accessed 08 March 2021; Lant, 'Prologue: mobile femininity', p. 20.

³⁰ Summerfield, 'Gender and War in the Twentieth Century', p. 14.

³¹ Sonya O. Rose, 'Girls and GI's: Race, Sex and Diplomacy in Second World War Britain', pp. 149-50.

³² Anon., 'Disgrace To Our Country', *Pontypridd Observer* (14 February 1945), p.1. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0002891/19450217/135/0001?browse=true>, Accessed 01 March 2021.

men'.³³ The report provides explicit details of the women's alleged wayward pasts, but entirely disregards the conduct and accountability of the men. The sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis suggested that female respectability is often a cultural projection of a nation's ideals, therefore women's sexual transgressions with outsiders have been subject to greater condemnation than men's³⁴. This is evident in the article's headline which brands the women as a 'disgrace to our country'³⁵. As a result the women were both singled out for their aberrant behaviour and vilified for their failure to uphold the moral values of the nation.³⁶

However, it must be acknowledged that the research for this dissertation has unearthed a relatively small number of these highly sensationalised accounts of female immorality in Wales, most of which are confined to the regional press, as opposed to the more widely circulated newspapers such as the *Western Mail*. This indicates that the national press were more inclined to conform to the government's spirit of maintaining morale. Yet, there is perhaps a uniquely Welsh dimension to this, which potentially has its origins in the Treachery of the Blue Books; for example there are a greater number of moral decline narratives in the national Welsh press that examine the behaviour of both sexes, and given the anger and humiliation caused by English assault on the chastity of Welsh women in 1847,³⁷ it seems plausible there was at least some Welsh resistance towards publically defaming their womenfolk. In January 1943, a *Western Mail* article entitled 'Moral Menace to Youth,' reported how the heads of the Welsh Catholic Church attributed moral decline to the wartime conditions and how they 'sympathised with the young people...torn from the protection of their homes'. Furthermore, they intimated that the 'advent of many [people] from other parts...[was] a major contributory cause of...[the] prevailing laxity in moral

³³ Anon., 'A Grave Problem', *Pontypridd Observer* (14 February 1945), p.5. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0002891/19450217/073/0005?browse=False>, Accessed 01 March 2021.

³⁴ Spencer and Wollman, *Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, p. 52.

³⁵ Anon., 'Disgrace To Our Country', p.1.

³⁶ Rose, 'Sex, Citizenship and the Nation in World War Two Britain', pp. 1162-3.

³⁷ Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales*, pp. 213-4.

conduct'.³⁸ Historians have highlighted how attendance at the Welsh church and chapel declined rapidly during the interwar period;³⁹ hence the declarations of these even-handed churchmen could be seen as an attempt to increase their relevance in the lives of young people. Nevertheless, there was a pervasive attitude that female evacuees were a corrupting influence on Welsh women and this tended to draw on the idea that women arriving from urban areas were alien to the Welsh values of godliness and sobriety.⁴⁰ In February 1942 an article in the *South Wales Gazette* reported a local magistrate's concerns regarding the increasing numbers of women drinkers, he suggested 'it was due in some measure to the habits of some women evacuees'.⁴¹ This type of rhetoric could be seen as a long awaited reversal of fortunes, where the wartime conditions had given the Welsh nation an opportunity to wag their finger at the immoral behaviour of English women. These potential Welsh nuances require a more detailed investigation to evaluate their significance, but it seems clear that Welsh women's behaviour was subject to a great deal of scrutiny. The criticisms of their appearance and conduct frequently came from authority figures, religious leaders and traditionalists and their accounts were often permeated with inconsistency and rumour. These factors make it difficult to ascertain to what degree women were actually culpable for the transgressions levelled against them.

³⁸Anon., 'Moral Menace to Youth', *Western Mail* (18 January 1943), p.2. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000104/19430118/028/0002?browse=False>, Accessed 01 March 2021.

³⁹ Philip Jenkins, *A History of Modern Wales 1536–1990*, (London, 1992), pp. 369-70; Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales*, pp. 272-4.

⁴⁰ Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales*, p. 256.

⁴¹ Anon., 'Increase in Women who Drink', *South Wales Gazette* (06 February 1942), p.1. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0002852/19420206/005/0001>, Accessed 01 March 2021.

Chapter 3

‘A World turned upside down’: How far did the wartime conditions disrupt the constructions of womanhood and to what extent do the experiences of Welsh women substantiate or undermine the accusations levelled against them?

The chaos of war inevitably had a disruptive effect on Welsh society, in *The People of Wales*, Mari Williams highlighted one contemporary commentator’s observation that the war had ‘upset every single institution and practically every habit’¹. The deployment of the military services saw large numbers of troops stationed across Wales and the mobilisation of the female workforce meant many women were now working and socialising beyond the protective gaze of their husbands or families.² Between 1940 and 1943 the towns of Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Wrexham were all subjected to aerial bombardment, bringing the horrors of war directly into the heart of Wales.³ The consequences of this uprooting and destabilisation meant behavioural changes were not uncommon and men and women frequently acted with ‘far less restraint’.⁴

The notion that love and desire is foregrounded in times of adversity is apparent in the diaries and recollections of Welsh women.⁵ In her short memoir, Stella Morgan recalled her boyfriend presenting her with a special marriage licence and how in the ‘tumult and turmoil of recent weeks’ she had not only been anxious about their lives, but for the fate of ‘the whole world’.⁶ Similarly, in 1940 Marian Henry Jones was working as a university lecturer in Swansea, she reminisced how her marriage was hastened by the government’s decision to raise the reserved occupation age, and claimed that ‘the prospect of a long separation...[and the] heavy bombing of Swansea...[had] heightened [their] determination to belong fully to

¹ Williams, ‘In The Wars: Wales 1914-1945’, p. 15

² Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, pp. 130-131.

³ Russell Davies, *People, Places and Passions: ‘Pain and Pleasure’: A Social History of Wales and the Welsh*, (Cardiff, 2015), pp. 328-31.

⁴ Summerfield and Crockett, ‘“You weren’t taught that with the welding’: lessons in sexuality in the Second World War’, p. 436.

⁵ Verrill-Rhys, Beddoe, ‘Introduction’, in *Parachutes And Petticoats*, p. 11.

⁶ Stella Morgan, ‘All leave cancelled’ in *Parachutes and Petticoats: Welsh women writing on the Second World War*, L. Verrill-Rhys and D. Beddoe eds. (Dinas Powys, 1992), p. 138.

each other⁷. Whilst these memoirs notably have a degree of literary flourish, they nonetheless emphasise the importance of love and romance in an uncertain world. Jones's account in particular indicates there was a moral incentive to her marriage, which seems at odds with the one-sided media narratives regarding female promiscuity. The disruptive effects of the war are also a facet of the oral accounts given by the factory workers interviewed for the Voices from the Factory Floor project. Although, nineteen year old Mattie Ruddock's rather hasty marriage was not romantically motivated, but was a pragmatically made decision to avoid being conscripted into the land army or munitions factory. Ruddock was aware that as a single woman she was considered mobile and may well have been posted far away from her Rhondda home.⁸ In hindsight, she reflected that it was a 'silly thing' and she felt she had married quicker than she would've liked.⁹ These accounts reveal that relationships were accelerated due to the wartime conditions, yet this did not necessarily herald the decline of female virtue, in these cases the established feminine moral values seemingly remained intact.¹⁰ Significantly, the post-war period was conspicuous for its spiralling divorce rates and whilst the legislation introduced in 1937 had made divorces easier to obtain, it seems likely that marriages made during the chaos of war were contributing to those numbers.¹¹ In this respect divorce was not so much a marker of moral decline, but rather an indication of the 'disruption of life caused by war'.¹²

The war affected women's behaviour in a variety of ways, whilst some women continued to conform to the established models of womanhood, in other cases there is evidence that female values were shifting away from these earlier ideals.¹³ In 1942, twenty-four year old

⁷ Marian Henry Jones, 'Keep calm and carry on' in *Parachutes and Petticoats: Welsh women writing on the Second World War*, L. Verrill-Rhys and D. Beddoe eds. (Dinas Powys, 1992), p. 65.

⁸ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 116.

⁹ VSE004, Mattie Ruddock interviewed by Catrin Edwards, 13 November 2013 for Women's Archive of Wales, Available at <http://factorywomensvoices.wales/>, Accessed 28 March 2021.

¹⁰ Summerfield, 'Love, Sex and Marriage', p. 205.

¹¹ Summerfield, 'Love, Sex and Marriage', p. 214.

¹² Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p.131

¹³ Summerfield and Crockett, "You weren't taught that with the welding': lessons in sexuality in the Second World War", pp. 450-1.

Winifred Martin was a writer and voluntary worker in Swansea, her Mass-Observation diary highlights how her free time was filled with drinking, smoking, dancing and parties, which included a high degree of interaction with the locally stationed soldiers of the pioneer corps. After one beach party Martin confessed 'we talked & ate & played...& made whoopee'.¹⁴ She revealing states that 'I find myself doing a lot of things I wouldn't do in peacetime'.¹⁵ This perhaps indicates how the wartime situation had given Martin a greater sense of independence and freedom. Beddoe suggested that young women came to expect a 'more enjoyable life than their mothers before them...and they sought wider horizons than the four walls of their homes'.¹⁶ However, as a Mass-Observation diarist, Martin was undoubtedly aware that her thoughts could be published, and as a young writer with creative aspirations she may have deliberately chosen to highlight the more enlightened aspects of her personality. Whilst it is difficult to gauge how representative Martin's experiences were, there are other diaries that similarly emphasise the recreational opportunities afforded by the war. A striking aspect of Enid Lewis's personal diaries is her vivacious social life which included numerous visits to various dances, public houses and cinemas around Neath. As with Martin, Lewis's wartime diaries were written when she was in her early twenties, however they make an interesting contrast with Martin's; the entries are brief and factual and were written for private use as opposed to public scrutiny, yet she too reveals a high number of, seemingly chaste, wartime flirtations.¹⁷ These testimonies demonstrate a particular aspect of women's wartime behaviour, which is not necessarily representative of the collective experience. Yet, it was women that exhibited this, so called 'provocative spirit of

¹⁴ Diarist 5369, diary for June 1942, University of Sussex, Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Mass Observation, p. 4 Available at: <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/Documents/Details/Diarist-5369>, Accessed 19 February 2021.

¹⁵ Diarist 5369, diary for June 1942, University of Sussex, Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Mass Observation Online, p. 3.

¹⁶ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 133.

¹⁷ Enid Lewis, *Wartime Diaries 1939-1948*, People's Collection Wales, Available at www.peoplescollection.wales/items/1640426, Accessed 20 February 2021.

independence'¹⁸ that were central to the alarmist stories that repeatedly appeared in the press. The feminist Labour MP Edith Summerskill (1901-1980)¹⁹ stated there were always people 'ready to suspect the morals of women who indulge in activities outside the home'²⁰. Significantly, Summerskill was a member of the committee that investigated the condition of the women's services in 1942, and they concluded that the more liberated behaviour of women was the result of societal shifts. The report states that 'Standards of sexual behaviour have changed greatly in the last generation and some people conduct their lives on principles remote from those termed Victorian'.²¹ This acknowledges that sexual behaviour had been changing since at least the post-World War One period, yet the attitudes of these broad-minded young people still had to coexist with the prudish beliefs of an older generation. Moreover, the country's non-existent sex education policy conspired to make many naïve and inexperienced women²² the victims of public condemnation. In her Mass-Observation diary for January 1942, Mrs Collins, a teacher from Chepstow, recorded how there was 'a widespread demand on the part of young people for sex instruction'. She mentioned that three girls in her local grocery were 'all engaged to be married and [were] eager for the right kind of knowledge'.²³ This lack of sex education is reiterated in Eileen Gillmore's ATS memoir. Gillmore recalled that whilst stationed in Anglesey in 1943, one girl gave birth on the floor of the ablutions block. She claimed they were 'shocked...beyond belief...Most of us were young, unmarried and in most senses of the word inexperienced'.

¹⁸ Anon., 'More Women Drinking, But It Helps The Treasury', *Western Mail* (06 February 1943), p.4. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000104/19430206/103/0004?browse=False>, Accessed 01 March 2021.

¹⁹ J. Stewart, 'Summerskill, Edith Clara, Baroness Summerskill (1901–1980), medical practitioner and politician', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2011) Available at: <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-31734>, Accessed 14 May 2021.

²⁰ Summerfield and Crockett, "You weren't taught that with the welding': lessons in sexuality in the Second World War", p. 438.

²¹ Violet Markham *et al.*, 'Report of the Committee on Amenities and Welfare conditions in the three women's services', p. 50.

²² Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 130.

²³ Diarist 5282, diary for January 1942, University of Sussex, Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Mass Observation Online, p.870. Available at <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/Documents/Details/Diarist-5282>, Accessed 16 March 2021.

Interestingly, Gillmore claimed the girl was unaware that she was pregnant and that 'She neither smoked... nor drank'... [and] On her locker stood a photograph of a young airman...[who] had been posted to Canada'.²⁴ This memoir not only reveals the innocence of the girls, but also how the child was seemingly conceived within the bounds of a genuine relationship, which under normal circumstances could have been legitimised through marriage.²⁵ Whilst the government's report established that illegitimate pregnancy was extremely low in the women's services, the 'ribald remarks'²⁶ arising from such incidents undoubtedly fed the negative media stories that widely denigrated female morality.

The dislocating effects of the war on family life often materialise in the belief that young women conscripted away from the family home were more likely to succumb to immorality. Thus, family members often engineered their female relatives into occupations closer to home as a means of controlling their activities and behaviour.²⁷ In 1942, seventeen year old Sylvia Poppy Griffiths was working at Milford Haven's Flax Factory, in an interview in 2014 she recalled how she wasn't usually allowed to socialise with the girls outside of work, as they tended to go to dances where the soldiers went. Griffiths remembered that her aunt was rather strict because she felt responsible for her.²⁸ Similarly, whilst working at Poliakoff's clothing factory in Treorchy, Mattie Ruddock recalled how her strictly religious father would only allow her to attend church dances, although she admitted to occasionally circumventing his rules by going to other dances 'on the sly'.²⁹ Whilst these reminiscences are dependent on memory and shaped by the interests of the interviewer, they nonetheless provide rare eyewitness testimony of the female wartime experience. These two accounts expose a

²⁴ Eileen Gillmore, 'Women at war in Wales' in *Parachutes and Petticoats: Welsh women writing on the Second World War*, L. Verrill-Rhys and D. Beddoe eds. (Dinas Powys, 1992), pp. 106-7.

²⁵ Summerfield, 'Love, Sex and Marriage', p. 215.

²⁶ Eileen Gillmore, 'Women at war in Wales' in *Parachutes and Petticoats: Welsh women writing on the Second World War*, L. Verrill-Rhys and D. Beddoe eds. (Dinas Powys, 1992), p. 108.

²⁷ Summerfield and Crockett, 'You weren't taught that with the welding: lessons in sexuality in the Second World War', pp. 442-43.

²⁸ VSW039, Sylvia Poppy Griffiths interviewed by Susan Roberts, 07 March 2014 for Women's Archive of Wales, Available at <http://factorywomensvoices.wales/>, Accessed 18 March 2021.

²⁹ VSE004, Mattie Ruddock interviewed by Catrin Edwards, 13 November 2013 for Women's Archive of Wales, Available at <http://factorywomensvoices.wales/>, Accessed 28 March 2021.

prevailing view amongst the older generation that female respectability was an esteemed quality that needed safeguarding and in Ruddock's case she was notably contesting the restrictions that had been imposed upon her.³⁰

Whilst the social mixing in the dance halls and public houses received an inordinate amount of public attention, a great deal of female testimony points to the fatigue and anxiety generated by the wartime conditions. Griffiths recalled that at the end of a long shift in the factory she was often too filthy and tired to go out. Furthermore she intimates how during the winter months the blackout was rather off-putting.³¹ The apprehension caused by the blackout is similarly echoed in the Mass-Observation diaries; in November 1939 a Swansea voluntary worker enclosed a newspaper extract with her diary entry, the article concerned a police investigation into an attack on a woman during the black-out, the pithy comment below the clipping states 'I'm am not at all surprised'.³² The vulnerability of women seems lost in the media stories that tended to accentuate female transgressive behaviour, whilst overlooking the predatory nature of some men. Summerfield highlighted an incident involving two Welsh land girls who opted to speak in Welsh as a means of discouraging the amorous attentions of two Polish servicemen.³³ Whilst Dora Lemin's memoir of her experiences working as a mechanic reveals that receiving a filthy handprint on the seat of one's trousers was an acknowledgment of acceptance.³⁴ The wartime circumstances forcibly placed many women in unnerving and unfamiliar territory. Feminist readings of these events have suggested that male authority conspired to keep women in the domestic sphere; if women were harassed in the streets, it was because they should be at home and if they were

³⁰ Summerfield and Crockett, 'You weren't taught that with the welding: lessons in sexuality in the Second World War', pp. 449-51.

³¹ VSW039, Sylvia Poppy Griffiths interviewed by Susan Roberts, 07 March 2014 for Women's Archive of Wales, Available at <http://factorywomensvoices.wales/>, Accessed 18 March 2021.

³² Diarist 5242, diary for November 1939, University of Sussex, Adam Matthew, Marlborough, Mass Observation Online, p.7. Available at: <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/Documents/Details/Diarist-5242> Accessed 27 March 2021.

³³ Summerfield, 'Love, Sex and Marriage', p. 206; Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 129.

³⁴ Dora Lemin, 'Give us the tools' in *Parachutes and Petticoats: Welsh women writing on the Second World War*, L. Verrill-Rhys and D. Beddoe eds. (Dinas Powys, 1992), p. 71.

disconcerted by the sexual horseplay in the workplace, it was because they had encroached on a male domain.³⁵ In point of fact this interpretation is too one-sided and does not account for the numerous ways that women contested the prevailing ideals of respectable womanhood. However, Geraint Jenkins rather casual assertion that 'women [threw] caution to the winds'³⁶ is certainly not substantiated by the varied experiences of the women in Wales.

³⁵ Summerfield and Crockett, 'You weren't taught that with the welding: lessons in sexuality in the Second World War', pp. 440-41.

³⁶ Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales*, p. 256.

Conclusion

This dissertation has demonstrated that Welsh women's behaviour during the Second World War was subject to far greater scrutiny than men's and this led to women being disproportionately denounced as the transmitters of moral decline. Whilst historians have contested the usefulness of the ideology of the separate spheres, Beddoe's assessment that it had more traction in Wales is certainly reinforced by the hostile narratives regarding female workers, particularly in the patriarchal mining regions. The explanations for this can be found in the nineteenth-century construction of respectable Welsh womanhood, as well as in the masculine economic climate that further entrenched Welsh women in the realms of domesticity. The picture that emerges is a society accustomed to the idea that a woman's place was in the home, hence they were naturally suspicious to find their womenfolk on the factory floor, in the military services and drinking in the public houses. Martin Johnes suggested that 'old prejudices about what females could and should do were cast aside in the name of patriotism'.³⁷ This assertion is somewhat undermined by the alarmist and prejudiced stories, frequently peddled in the regional Welsh press, which routinely conflated women's war work with acts of immorality.

It could be argued that media coverage magnified the opinions of a narrow band of traditionalists, authority figures and an increasingly irrelevant clergy, which did not necessarily reflect wider public opinion. However, the fact that the government were forced to conduct an enquiry into the state of the women's services is testament to the prevalence of these prejudiced attitudes. Significantly, the government enquiry identified societal change as a source of conflict and the driver behind some of the malign notions of female behaviour.

³⁷ Martin Johnes 'Women in wartime', BBC Wales history (n.d.) Available at https://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/history/sites/themes/periods/ww2_women.shtml ,Accessed 30 April 2021.

It seems this uneasy social transition was construed as moral decline and as it was women who were seen to be breaking with convention, it was their behaviour that was singled-out as the root-cause.

The diaries, memoirs and oral testimony used in this dissertation reveal the diverse experiences of Welsh women from a variety of backgrounds. Yet, their stories share many common themes; the chaos of war disrupted their lives in a number of ways, but it also afforded them greater freedom. Whilst wartime recreations were an important aspect of their lives, simply participating in them did not automatically signify the abandonment of propriety and self-control. On the contrary, several of these accounts reveal women who were highly conventional in terms of their sexual behaviour. Summerfield fittingly argued that 'what women were actually experiencing has to be disentangled from what they were said to be experiencing'.³⁸

This dissertation has also theorised that the events of 1847 may have made the mainstream Welsh media less likely to launch an indiscriminate attack on the sexual morality of Welsh women, this is a potential avenue for further research and a comparison between the style of reporting in the English and Welsh press may prove to be a useful starting point. This is not to suggest that women were not singled-out in the Welsh national press, rather there was more restraint when it came to the issue of their sexual behaviour. However, what is more certain is the way that the Welsh media took great delight in citing English female evacuees as a corrupting influence on respectable Welsh women.

Women were disproportionately the focus of public attention during the Second World War, they were the victims of rumour, their behaviour was portrayed as transgressive and the media gave a platform to influential figures that made sweeping generalisations concerning female immorality. In addition, the British government not only prioritised the feelings of the servicemen they also shielded their unruliness, leaving women shouldering the burden of

³⁸ Summerfield, 'Love, Sex and Marriage', p. 218.

public scrutiny. Given the existence of this double-standard, it seems evident that women were made the scapegoats for moral decline in wartime wales.

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Appendix

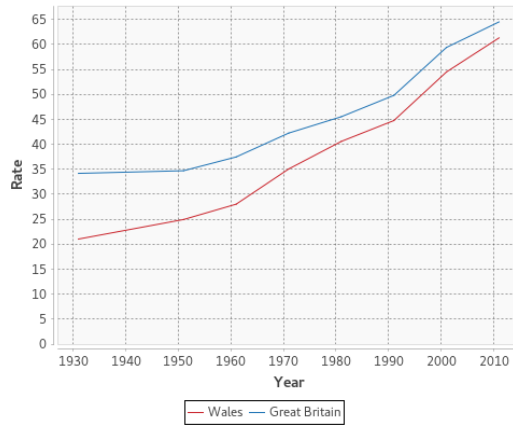


Fig.1. A Vision of Britain through Time, Wales Dep through time 'Historical statistics on Work and Poverty for the Country / Female Activity Rate', University of Portsmouth, n.d. Available at http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10001055/rate/CENSUS_FEM-ACTIVE, Accessed 05 April 2021.



Fig.2. Anon., 'Women of Britain Come into the Factories', Bridgeman Art Library, C. 1940, Britannica Image Quest, Available at https://quest-eb-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/search/munitions-propaganda/1/108_272794/Women-of-Britain-Come-into-the-Factories-propaganda-poste, Accessed 08 March 2021.

IMAGE REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS

Fig. 3. Anon., 'On reflection join the WAAF', *Western Mail* (24 July 1941), pp. 1-4. Available at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0000104/19410724/015/0001?browse=False>, Accessed 24 February 2021.



Fig. 4. Anne Scott-James, 'Should Women Wear Trousers?', *Picture Post* (01 November 1941), p.22. Available at <https://link-galecom.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/apps/doc/EL1800018251/PIPO?u=tou&sid=PIPO&xid=d59ae0e9>, Accessed 20 March 2021.



Fig. 5. Anon., 'Tangee Lipstick', *Picture Post* (28 October 1939), p. 6. Available at <https://go-gale-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk>, Accessed 20 March 2021.

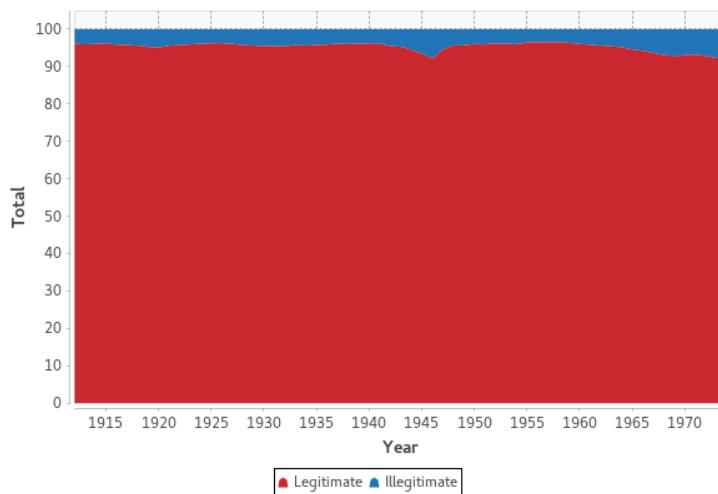


Fig. 6. A Vision of Britain through Time, 'Wales Dep through time, 'Life and Death Statistics / Births by legitimacy', University of Portsmouth, n.d. Available at http://visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10001055/cube/BIRTH_LEGIT, Accessed 28 March 2021.

Year	Legitimate Births	Illegitimate Births	Total Births	% Illegitimate
1939	36,000	1,402	37,402	3.75%
1940	37,812	1,507	39,319	3.83%
1941	38,100	1,786	39,886	4.48%
1942	41,096	2,034	43,130	4.72%
1943	40,917	2,353	43,270	5.44%
1944	43,717	3,013	46,730	6.45%
1945	38,254	3,261	41,515	7.85%
1946	44,920	2,646	47,566	5.56%

Fig. 7. A Vision of Britain through Time, 'Wales Dep through time, 'Life and Death Statistics / Births by legitimacy', University of Portsmouth, n.d. Available at http://visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10001055/cube/BIRTH_LEGIT, Accessed 28 March 20.



Fig. 8. Anon., 'Venereal Disease Poster', The Granger Collection (C. 1943), Britannica Image Quest, Available at https://quest-eb-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/search/venereal-disease-poster/1/140_1648533/VENEREAL-DISEASE-POSTER.---Anti-Venereal-Disease-poster, Accessed 08 March 2021.

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