

Women's Work in Industry and Agriculture in Wales during the First World War

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Summary

During the First World War, thousands of Welsh women became involved in the production of munitions and food for the war effort. This thesis examines attitudes towards and experiences of women workers employed in munitions and agricultural production in Wales during the war. It explores the organisation and recruitment of women in these areas, the employment of women in both fields, the organisation of welfare and leisure within and outside the workplace, and women's experiences of demobilisation. Throughout, it considers women's motivations for undertaking war work, as well as their experiences, including their involvement in strike action and in sporting activities, and how these were affected by class, age, and locality. The thesis argues that while the war lasted, women gained greater self-confidence and started to forge a collective identity as workers, but their contribution to the labour market was always viewed as temporary and valued less than men's work. After the Armistice, women were forced back to the home or to traditional 'feminine' occupations. This thesis therefore contributes to long-standing historiographical arguments about the extent to which the war brought about lasting social change for women. It makes a significant contribution to the under-researched field of Welsh women's experiences in the First World War.

DECLARATION

This work has not been submitted in substance for any other degree or award at this or any other university or place of learning, nor is being submitted concurrently in candidature for any degree or other award.

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STATEMENT 1

This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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This thesis is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references. The views expressed are my own.

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List of Abbreviations

ASE – Amalgamated Society of Engineers

AWB – Agricultural Wages Board

GFS - Girls Friendly Society

NCBRF – National Cartridge and Box Repair Factory

NFWW - National Federation of Women Workers

NSF – National Shell Factory

WLA - Women’s Land Army

WSPU – Women’s Social and Political Union

WWAC – Women’s War Agricultural Committee

WIL – Women’s Industrial League

YWCA – Young Women’s Christian Association

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The counties of Wales (to 1973)¹

¹ Taken from Kenneth O. Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation: A History of Modern Wales* (Oxford: University Press, 1981), xii. Some towns and villages have been added as they are referred to in the thesis.

Note on Spelling of Place Names

Throughout the thesis I will be using the English spellings of counties, towns and villages. However, in some case the source material directly refers to them in their old anglicised form. Where I have used direct quotations that use the anglicised form I have not changed them. The same can be said for some of references in footnotes, where the old anglicised spellings of ‘Llanelly’ and ‘Carnarvon’ have been not been altered. In addition, ‘Llanelly’ refers to Llanelli in Carmarthenshire not Llanelly, Monmouthshire.

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Introduction

In 2000, Deirdre Beddoe stated that ‘to write on the impact of the Great War on the lives of women in Wales, is to write on a clean slate’.¹ Although Beddoe’s lament was published fifteen years ago, there is still little historical scholarship on Welsh women’s experiences of the First World War. This thesis, which explores Welsh women’s experiences of paid employment in agriculture and the munitions industry between 1914 and 1918, as well as their attempts to negotiate the labour market in the immediate post-war period, is a contribution towards filling this gap in the literature. In examining women’s experiences in two sectors, it significantly extends previous scholarship, which has focused mainly on the munitions industry. Although thousands of women were employed in diverse capacities, including as railway porters, clerks, and in other trades, the organisation of female labour in agriculture and industry was perhaps the most widespread and publicly visible shift in women’s work during the war years. The focus of this thesis on these distinct areas of female employment allows for a greater understanding of both women’s experiences of wartime work and differing agricultural and industrial conditions in rural and urban areas of Wales. This thesis therefore contributes to historical understandings of the wartime labour market in Wales, women’s experiences of war, and major historiographical debates on war and social change.

¹ Deirdre Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth-century Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 47.

Historical approaches: women, war and social change

Welsh women of all classes and backgrounds made an important contribution to the war effort between 1914 and 1919. Whether that was in a voluntary capacity by organising fundraising events or making socks and garments, or by undertaking paid work on the land or in a munitions factory, the Welsh war effort depended on the hard work and ability of thousands of women. However, the existing historiography has not fully acknowledged the centrality of women's contributions to the pursuit of war. Indeed, Welsh experiences of the First World War remain a relatively under-researched area. The broader political, social and cultural consequences of the conflict for both nation and locality have been briefly discussed, but much of the existing literature focuses on military recruitment, especially in relation to national identity and attitudes towards pacifism.² There has also been some research examining reactions towards the outbreak of war, which reveals the social and economic effects of the conflict on ordinary people.³ Likewise, research on the establishment of memorials has demonstrated both the war's impact on the physical landscape of Wales, and how groups and communities dealt with its long-

² Chris Williams, 'Taffs in the Trenches: Welsh national identity and military service 1914-1918' in *Wales and War: Society, Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, eds by Matthew Cragoe and Chris Williams, *Wales and War: Society, Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), pp. 126-164; Cyril Parry, 'Gwynedd and the Great War, 1914-1918', *Welsh History Review*, 14:1 (1988), pp. 78-117. Studies have also examined nonconformity and pacifism: See for example, Deian Hopkin, 'Patriots and pacifists in Wales, 1914-1918: the case of Capt. Lionel Lindsay and the Rev. T.E. Nicholas', *Llafur*, 1:3 (1974), pp. 132-46 and Kenneth O. Morgan, 'Peace movements in Wales 1899-1945', *Welsh History Review*, 10:3 (1981), pp. 398-430.

³ Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

term consequences.⁴ However, much work remains to be done in establishing greater understanding of the impact of the war upon ordinary men and women.

This thesis therefore contributes to a burgeoning historical literature on Welsh experiences of the First World War. It also contributes to debates on women, war and social change in both Wales and Britain. Arthur Marwick's research on women and the First World War remains an important touchstone in this field. Marwick's *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, first published in 1965, attempted to understand how the war affected the lives of British women. Marwick argued that the conflict marked a 'watershed' of social change for women of all backgrounds, which shaped their experiences during the inter-war period.⁵ This view continues to be reiterated in public and cultural constructions of women's role during the war, and has been supported by inter-war accounts by middle-class women.⁶ In a recent historiographical review, Laura Doan argues that historians have continued to measure the war's impact on women in relation to what achievements or failures the conflict brought about. According to Doan, they have led with lines of inquiry such as 'did women make long-lasting inroads into forms of employment previously the preserve of men and did the war temporarily dislocate gender roles'? She suggests that whilst responses have been varied, judging whether the war was good or bad for women has been the overall consequence of such an approach.⁷

These kinds of questions have shaped some of the most influential historical accounts of women's wartime work. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, feminist

⁴ Angela Gaffney, *Aftermath: Remembering the Great War in Wales* (Cardiff: Cardiff University Press, 2007).

⁵ Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, 2nd edition. (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1991), p. 134.

⁶ Chris Brader, *Timbertown Girls: Gretna Female Munitions Workers in World War I* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2001), p. 4.

⁷ Laura Doan, 'A Challenge to Change? New Perspectives on Women and the Great War', *Women's History Review*, 15:2 (2006), p. 338.

historians built on Marwick's argument that the war was an instrument of social change through research on the expansion of working-class women's employment opportunities and changing perceptions of 'women's work' itself. The most important scholar working in this tradition was Gail Braybon, whose pioneering volume on *Women Workers in the First World War* was first published in 1981. Adopting a socialist-feminist approach, Braybon examined women's wartime industrial work within the context of state regulation. She argued that negative male attitudes towards the use of female labour, which shaped women's experiences of wartime work, were influenced by the dominance of patriarchy and the nature of the capitalist system.⁸ Subsequent historians have followed Braybon's lead in showing how gender difference affected women's opportunities in many industrial jobs, focusing especially on attempts by employers and trade unions to restrict women to unskilled repetitive work, and therefore justify their lower wages.⁹

A major focus of the work of Braybon and subsequent scholars was the significance of processes of dilution and substitution in understanding the attitudes of government, employers and trade unions to women's work. Dilution was a system through which the job of one skilled man was divided between groups of women. This led to each individual female worker carrying out a smaller, lighter task. It was decided that women would not be able to do a skilled man's job completely, but that they could effectively perform part of it. Later substitution was extensively introduced, whereby a woman would replace an unskilled or semi-skilled male

⁸ Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War: The British Experience* (London: Croom Helm, 1981).

⁹ Laura Lee Downs, *Manufacturing Inequality: Gender Division in the French and British Metalworking Industries, 1914-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Marion Kozak, *Women Munition Workers during the First World War', with special reference to Engineering* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hull, 1976).

worker.¹⁰ This system was implemented most extensively in the engineering, metals and chemicals trade, where very few women had previously been employed. Substitution was particularly common in shell factories, where production was reorganised according to a detailed division of labour.¹¹ The widespread use of dilution and substitution in British factories has been seen as evidence that women's work was undervalued and exploited during the war, and therefore as a sign that there was more continuity in negative attitudes to women's work than historians such as Marwick acknowledged.

More recently historians have attempted to extend or even move beyond the 'war and social change' paradigm by emphasising women's own understandings of their wartime experiences, and by examining the significance of gendered constructions of work and identity. Historians who have explored women's own understandings of their wartime experiences have placed great emphasis on oral testimonies. Angela Woollacott has examined women's lives away from the workplace, and has shown that for many female munitions workers, participating in various forms of leisure, socialising and working alongside others gave them greater confidence in openly challenging established notions of femininity and social behaviour.¹² Woollacott deliberately focused on the war years, rather than women's post-war experiences of public hostility and unemployment. She claims that this approach shifts the debate away from the extent to which the war changed women's lives to the question, 'what was of significance to women munition workers during the war?' In her view, it is essential to view women's wartime lives from their own

¹⁰ Gareth Griffiths, *Women's Factory Work in World War I* (Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1991) p. 18.

¹¹ Lee-Downs, *Manufacturing Inequality*, p. 45.

¹² Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

perspective, as opposed to ‘those of the government, the employers, and the male trade unions’.¹³ In a similar vein, Deborah Thom has expressed scepticism about the value of accounts given in government documentation and newspapers. However, her conclusions on women employed at the Woolwich Arsenal in London are more pessimistic than Woollacott about the nature of their wartime experiences, arguing that ultimately attempts to expand production placed less value on women’s status in the workplace.¹⁴

The other main challenge to the ‘war and social change’ model has come from historians who focus instead on wartime constructions of gender.¹⁵ An important scholar in this tradition is Janet K. Watson, who examined the influence of gendered expectations on men and women’s wartime experiences. Watson was particularly concerned with how the work and workers were talked about (by women workers and others), and how women compared and contrasted their experiences with other active participants. Watson argues that women’s experiences of wartime work were mediated by social class as well as gender, with working-class women likely to view their wartime paid employment as ‘work’, and middle-class volunteers likely to view their voluntary work as a form of ‘service’, analogous to the military service undertaken by their brothers, fathers and sons.¹⁶

As this discussion suggests, there is much justification for Adrian Gregory’s recent conclusion that within British history, there is a ‘thriving literature on

¹³ Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 15.

¹⁴ Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War I* (London: IB Tauris, 2000); Deborah Thom, ‘Women at the Woolwich Arsenal 1915-1919’, *Oral History*, 6:2 (1978), pp. 58-73.

¹⁵ Janet S.K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Nicoletta Gullace “*The Blood of Our Sons*”: *Men, Women and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship During the Great War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

¹⁶ Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, p. 12.

women's history and the issue of change (or lack of change) in gender roles'.¹⁷ However, there is far less literature on Welsh women's experiences of paid employment during the war. Deirdre Beddoe, who has been at the forefront of historical assessments of the significance of the First World War for Welsh women since her *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars 1918-1939* was first published in 1989, remains the most influential figure in this field. In her *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth-century Wales* (2000), Beddoe outlines the various jobs women undertook during the war, and the reaction of different sections of society to women's replacement of men in the workplace.¹⁸ However, even Beddoe was forced to rely on some of Braybon's conclusions about the effects of the war on women, acknowledging that 'far more research is necessary than I have been able to undertake into every area of Welsh women's lives in wartime'.¹⁹

Historical research on Welsh women's experiences of wartime work therefore remains limited and fragmented. Lisa Snook and Anthony Mór-O'Brien have focused on attitudes towards the employment of female labour amongst employers and male trade unions in urban, industrial towns of the former South Wales Coalfield. They demonstrate that wartime social and economic conditions dictated the demand for female labour. Both scholars reach tentative suggestions about the wider impact of the war on women's lives, emphasising briefly the importance of domesticity, marital status and class in relation to shaping women's own experiences and perceptions of their wartime roles.²⁰ In addition to this research, there have been

¹⁷ Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 6.

¹⁸ Deirdre Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth-century Wales* (Cardiff: University Press, 2000), pp. 47-73.

¹⁹ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 59.

²⁰ Lisa J. Snook, *Women in Rhondda Society, c. 1870-1939* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Swansea, 2002); Lisa J. Snook, 'Out of the Cage? Women and the First World War in Pontypridd',

some recent studies of women's participation in professions such as nursing.²¹ In general, scholarship on Welsh women's wartime work has focused on industrial employment in south Wales, and has corresponded with approaches taken by British historians since the 1970s in questioning the extent to which women were "liberated" by the war.

Women and work in Wales before 1914

One of the main aims of this thesis is to determine the effects of the war on the employment opportunities open to women in Wales, and whether the expansion of women's work in wartime had lasting effects on gendered conceptions of women's social roles. The thesis focuses on women's paid work, which usually incorporated regular wages and work under clearly established conditions. However, women's work also included unpaid jobs, with no formal conditions or representation. For example, throughout the war farmers' daughters and wives undertook agricultural tasks as part of the established family economy, and therefore these women did not necessarily appear on wartime employment registers. In the main however, this thesis discusses different kinds of paid work, bringing into sharp focus debates surrounding women's wages, the continued status of men in the labour market and women's motivations for entering the workplace.

Although Welsh women's wartime experiences of work have been neglected by historians, there exist well-established historical narratives on the longer history

Llafur, 8:2 (2001), pp. 74-88; Anthony Mór-O'Brien, *A Community in Wartime: Aberdare and the First World War* (Unpublished PhD thesis, The University of Wales Swansea, 1986).

²¹ Sara Brady, *Nursing in Cardiff during the First World War: a study of the interaction between women, war and medicine in a provincial city* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2004).

of women's work during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Wales. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Welsh society was underpinned by the clearly defined ideology of separate spheres which viewed that men took part in the public worlds of work and politics, and women resided in the home or "feminine" occupations such as domestic service. Views of women as belonging in the home were reinforced by the overwhelming exclusion of women from paid labour in the dominant industries located in areas with a large population.²² Likewise, the strength of patriarchal nonconformist ideals strengthened the association of women with domesticity and motherhood.²³ As a result of this combination of factors, there were low levels of employment amongst women across the formal economy.

Those studies providing an overview of women's work in Wales during this period have primarily focused on the census and its use as an historical source in measuring the extent of female employment. Although there are some drawbacks in using this kind of data to assess the extent of women's formal and informal employment, especially in relation to the diverse kinds of work undertaken by both married and single women in various districts, it provides the most reliable indicator of the extent of women's formal paid work for this period.²⁴ The census returns suggest that there were fewer openings available to women in Wales for formal paid work compared with their counterparts in England. However, there were also regional differences within Wales in terms of the level of participation amongst women, with proportionally more women in rural areas in formal paid employment

²² Ellen Jordan, 'The Exclusion of Women from Industry in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31:2 (1989), p. 289.

²³ Angela V. John, 'Introduction to the 1991 Edition' in *Our Mothers Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History*, 2nd edition, ed. by Angela V. John (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 14.

²⁴ D. Jones, 'Serfdom and Slavery: Women's Work in Wales, 1890-1930' in *Class, Community and the Labour Movement: Wales and Canada 1850-1930*, eds by Deian R. Hopkin and Gregory S. Kealey (St John's Nfld: Committee on Canadian Labour History, 1989), pp. 86-100.

than those in industrial districts.²⁵ The later chapters of the thesis will compare the extent to which the war temporarily or permanently altered these patterns of women's work in rural and urban areas.

As regards women's experiences of industrial work before 1914, small numbers of working-class women were scattered in the tinsplate and coal mining industries in Wales by the beginning of the century. Historians have focused on the social and economic factors which determined women's employment in these industries.²⁶ A complex relationship existed between ideas of femininity and class, which became linked to the importance of domesticity in women's lives. Angela V. John in her work on these workers throughout Britain during the nineteenth century first placed working-class women within the historical narrative and examined the social implications of their work.²⁷ Although some research has been conducted on women employed in the tinsplate industry, mainly, in south Wales, there has not yet been an in-depth examination of attitudes towards these women during this period.²⁸ In Welsh agriculture, studies by Dot Jones and Deirdre Beddoe suggest that women played an important part in the rural economy, both as wives and daughters of farmers, and as part-time or seasonal workers.²⁹ However, this work tended to be seen as supplementary to male agricultural labour. In a range of areas then, before the war women's work was defined according to established standards of "feminine" roles and behaviour, and was consistently undervalued in relation to men's work.

²⁵ Jones, 'Serfdom and Slavery', pp. 88-89.

²⁶ Val Lloyd, 'Attitudes towards women at north Wales coalmines, 1840-1901', *Llafur*, 5:2 (1989), pp. 5-16.

²⁷ Angela V. John, *By the Sweat of Their Brow: Women Workers at Victorian Coal Mines* (London: Croom Helm, 1980).

²⁸ Sheila Owen-Jones, 'Women in the Tinsplate Industry: Llanelli, 1930-1950', *Oral History Journal*, 15:1 (1987), pp. 42-49; Bill Jones and Ronald L. Lewis, 'Gender and Transnationality among Welsh Tinsplate Workers in Pittsburgh: The Hattie Williams Affair, 1895', *Labour History*, 48:2 (2007), pp. 175-194; Paul Jenkins, *"Twenty by Fourteen": A History of the South Wales Tinsplate Industry 1700-1961* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1995).

²⁹ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 36.

Women's work in wartime Wales: aims, methods and sources

This thesis will examine the extent to which the war changed the nature of expectations and experiences of women's industrial and agricultural work. It will ascertain how far attitudes towards gender roles were challenged by the growing number of women entering both the industrial and agricultural workforce during the war, and the effects of this major social and economic shift on conceptions of class, gender, and women's work. Another important area which will be addressed is the differing experiences of women according to age and marital status. Even for young, single women, employment opportunities before the war were usually confined to "feminine" tasks such as domestic service, dressmaking and laundry work.³⁰ Before the war, it was especially difficult for married women to gain formal employment outside of the home. For example, Dot Jones has demonstrated that the role of the miner's wife in south Wales was defined in direct relation to their husband's occupation.³¹ Finally, the thesis will explore women's lives beyond the factory or farm by examining participation in a range of leisure activities and the implications of the introduction of welfare programmes in munitions factories. Attempting to uncover the voices of workers from different localities, their varied experiences of the workplace and attitudes towards their employment will help to build a Welsh narrative which includes women.

A major aim of this thesis is therefore to reconstruct the neglected history of women's experiences of wartime employment in Wales. The term 'experience' has different meanings for groups of women and was often complex. In this study, I use

³⁰ Lloyd, 'Attitudes to women', pp. 5-16.

³¹ Dot Jones, 'Counting the Cost of Coal: Women's Lives in the Rhondda, 1881-1911' in *Our Mothers Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History, 1830-1989, 2nd edition*, ed. by Angela V. John (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 115.

the definition of experience given by Angela Woollacott in her history of female labour in munitions factories throughout Britain. She states that ‘experience as a category of historical analysis is that people’s responses to changes and events in their own lives and circumstances reconstitute their self-identities and their understanding of their position in relation to others’. In particular, she argues that it is important to emphasise the diversity of experience, but it is also important to understand degrees of uniformity in shaping ideas about women as a group of workers.³² This included the ways in which women responded to gender and class norms being disrupted by the demands of total war. In a similar vein, this study also shows how Welsh women in both munitions and agriculture responded to events or actions they experienced during their employment. It will consider the extent to which these workers shared a common experience as part of its contribution to understanding the shaping of women’s self-identity and collective identity as workers in wartime Wales.

The scattered and often fragmentary nature of sources on Welsh women’s wartime work means this is no easy task. Some of the most basic facts about women’s work are unknown, and impossible to reconstruct. For example, it is not possible to establish an accurate figure for the number of women employed in munitions and agriculture in Wales during the war, or to accurately chart fluctuations in these figures in both fields. The government figures for female labour employed in various industries usually bracketed England and Wales together. This means that the only way of establishing even rough figures of total numbers of women employed in Wales is to use a variety of different sources which nevertheless do not cover the whole country or the entire period. In farm work, the village registrar or local district

³² Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, pp. 11-12.

committee for each district often published reports in the press about those who had registered. However, it has been shown that figures for other parts of Britain were sometimes inaccurately recorded at a local level, and so these numbers should perhaps be considered as estimates. I have located figures for the number of women workers in government-controlled factories in Wales at the beginning of 1917; however little has been found for the other years of the war to determine any fluctuations in their employment. For munitions, newspaper reports and personal testimony from women workers regarding the general ebb and flow of demand for labour has been helpful. However, the fact remains that it is not possible to establish a comprehensive set of figures for the number of women workers employed in different areas during the war.

Moreover, in order to construct even a basic narrative of women's wartime work, it has been necessary to consult varied sources including photographs, newspaper reports, memoranda from the Ministry of Munitions and other government bodies, and correspondence from groups involved in the recruitment and organisation of female wartime labour within Wales. The most widely used source is national and local newspapers, mainly because of both accessibility and content. I have used daily and weekly titles including the *Western Mail*, *The South Wales Daily News* and *The North Wales Guardian*, which provide plenty of details as to events on 'the home front' in their respective regions. Using the Welsh Newspapers Online database has helped to pinpoint stories related to women's war work in papers that perhaps did not have such an extensive readership during the war. This has helped to establish a more comprehensive narrative about women's wartime work throughout Wales.

There are limitations to this material. Gail Braybon, who used the press quite extensively in her own work, made the point that during the war newspapers were encouraged by the government to run stories intended to boost morale in support of the war effort. Under the influence of the government and with the majority of the local and national press in support of the war, editors were intent on making sure their readerships consumed certain events. Women's wartime work was of interest due to its supposed novelty, and was largely portrayed as a spectacle. Therefore, only positive aspects of women's wartime work were generally reported.³³ The glorification of women's war work detracted from the horrendous and challenging realities of their daily lives, but also means that it has been more difficult to find information about "negative" experience or "disruptive" actions, such incidences of industrial unrest amongst women workers. Nevertheless, newspaper reports and articles contained a significant amount of relevant information on the organisation of women's war work, as well as key debates on dilution, substitution and the question of wages. Moreover, key themes including notions of patriotism and attitudes towards gender roles and class can be gleaned from their pages.

Women's own accounts of their actions are included in some newspaper reports, allowing for a better understanding of their interactions and experiences. This has proved an invaluable resource as relatively few oral testimonies of Welsh women war workers exist. Although the Imperial War Museum conducted a large-scale oral history project on women workers of the First World War in the 1970s, it seems that the women interviewed were mainly employed in London or other major English cities. During the course of this project I have only come across the recollections of munitions worker Florence Nield and farm worker Agnes Greatorex.

³³ Braybon, *Women Workers*, pp. 154-161.

Florence was living in Swansea, before going to work at the explosives factory at Pembrey in Carmarthenshire. Agnes on the other hand lived and worked in Cardiff, finding employment during the war on a farm in the west of the city in Ely. Both gave recorded interviews for a television and radio programme during the 1990s.³⁴ As there are almost no surviving records of working-class women themselves, different segments of information from a broad range of sources have been consulted.

The thesis also draws on a wide range of archival material, much of it previously unused in studies of Welsh women's wartime work. Much of the information related to the use of female labour at munitions factories in Wales was uncovered in the files of the Ministry of Munitions held at the National Archives, London. Although Deborah Thom rightly states that central government documentation should be considered with caution, especially in terms of how it portrayed women workers during the war, the papers related to factories in Wales were an important resource in the absence of other forms of information. Thom also notes that the Imperial War Museum documents were collected to record the achievements of women during the First World War, thus emphasising the apparent novelty of their employment.³⁵ Reports and other such documentation from the Ministry of Munitions, which were consulted during the course of this project, are held at the National Archives, London and the Imperial War Museum, London (IWM). Ministry of Munitions files, copied over to the Women and Work collection

³⁴ Florence Nield was originally interviewed by Richard Timothy on 11 October 1993 for the television programme *All of Our Lives "Tears and Telegrams"*, 1994. Sections of that interview are available at the National History Museum Sound Archive, St Fagans. Agnes Greatorex was also seemingly interviewed for the same programme, however during the course of my own research a transcribed version of her interview, held at BBC Wales, was given to me by Mr Geoff Ballinger a producer for BBC Radio Wales.

³⁵ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, pp. 36-37.

held at the Imperial War Museum, provide detailed accounts of conditions inside factories and allow for a greater understanding of social attitudes towards wartime women workers.

Government controlled factories at Pembrey and at Queensferry, which employed the largest numbers of female labour engaged upon munitions in Wales, were the most frequently commented upon by government officials. However, unlike other factories in Britain, such as the munitions works at Gretna, where a comprehensive observation was carried out by officials representing the Ministry of Munitions, it appears that no factory in Wales was chosen for such an extensive survey. Nor did central government committees established to assess women's employment in industry during the war directly refer to Wales. It appears that industrial towns in England and Scotland were investigated, while the role of female labour in corresponding areas of Wales was not. This might be because male-dominated industries including coal and steel predominated in Wales, with perhaps a comparatively smaller number of women working in munitions production in industrial localities.

A number of scholarly studies have recently focused on women's wartime work in particular regions or large factories in Scotland and England. The availability of the relevant source material and other documentation has prevented me from undertaking a more 'regional' approach, for example using the South Wales Coalfield as a case study. However, adopting a more 'national' perspective allows for a closer examination of both rural and urban localities, towns and villages, and the role of female labour. To fulfil this aim, a number of local archives were consulted. These included the Flintshire Records Office where some of the information related to the factory at Queensferry in north Wales was deposited. In

terms of the organisation and recruitment of female labour on farms, the papers of Mary Silyn Roberts held at the Special Collections and Archives at Bangor University were essential in determining the response towards their employment in rural localities. The thesis also draws on several collections held at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth, including the records of the Welsh Army Corps, alongside single pieces of correspondence and memoranda scattered in various papers. In the latter stages of research, I was also fortunate to benefit from the digitisation of archival material from various depositories throughout Wales as part of the ‘Cymru 1914: The Welsh Experience of the Great War’ project. The sources include reports from local labour exchanges as to the introduction of female labour and information related to the training of women in domestic courses. In all, quite apart from its analytic conclusions, one of the major contributions of this thesis for future scholarship on women’s work in wartime Wales is the identification of this vast amount of previously unknown and untapped material.

Conclusion

This thesis extends previous research on women’s wartime work in Wales by comparing women’s agricultural and industrial employment, and therefore provides the first full-length study of Welsh women in the First World War which examines both rural and urban experiences. It explores how the local press, middle-class observers and the government discussed the introduction and employment of female labour in both agriculture and the munitions industry. It is influenced by studies of attitudes towards women munitions workers in south Wales during the Second World

War, which have demonstrated the importance of two trends in women's wartime industrial employment: the coexistence of continuity in contemporary notions of gender roles with tension between employers and trade unions over the issue of female labour.³⁶ It concludes that both these trends were in evidence in Wales during the First World War. The thesis therefore provides an important contribution to existing debates on whether the war disrupted established gender roles and identities in Wales.

The thesis first examines organisation and recruitment, with particular reference to the production of munitions and the role of patriotism and service in shaping ideas about women's war work (Chapter 1). Chapter 2 takes a more in-depth look at the organisation of female labour primarily in farm work, and the various factors which dictated its success. The following chapter explores the introduction of the system of welfare in Wales both inside and outside the workplace. The role of welfare supervisors, the actions of religious voluntary organisations and the provision of sport and recreation reflected wartime anxieties surrounding the behaviour of young working-class women. As was the case throughout Britain, female participation in sports such as football and hockey reveal the thirst amongst some women to enhance their own lives. The final chapter deals with the question of demobilisation and the public treatment of women workers during the immediate post-war period. The experience of demobilisation reaffirmed women's place in the domestic sphere and continued their exclusion from skilled jobs in industry. As other historians have concluded, attitudes towards gender roles and women's capabilities in the industrial workforce were not dramatically altered by the war. Nevertheless, it

³⁶ Mari Williams, *A Forgotten Army: Female Munitions Workers of South Wales, 1939-1945* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002); Brian Roberts, 'The 'Budgie Train': Women and Wartime Munitions Work in a Mining Valley', *Llafur*, 7.3-4 (1998/1999), pp. 143-152.

is also possible to argue that the experiences of ordinary workers, and in particular their growing involvement in trade union activity, visibly challenged the gender order during the span of the war itself.

Chapter One

‘Girls of Wales – Your country is calling for your service’: the organisation and recruitment of female labour in Wales during the First World War

The need to replace male labour in varying sectors of the economy during the First World War gave women the opportunity to not only find work, but also move into jobs which had until then not been open to them. According to Deirdre Beddoe, the provision of war work allowed many working-class girls to enter occupations which had been solely male preserves and to leave traditionally female roles in domestic service and other similar jobs.¹ In order to understand how such a trend occurred, it is necessary to examine approaches towards the recruitment and organisation of female labour in Wales, within the context of contemporary narratives around female labour. Furthermore, it is important to determine the extent to which Welsh discourses around recruitment challenge or confirm the main issues and themes outlined in the existing historiography of recruitment to women’s war work in Britain.

This historiography has largely focused on the purpose behind the various recruitment campaigns in relation to both paid and voluntary work and on how the organisation of female labour shaped ideas about women’s wartime role in terms of gender, class and patriotism. Janet K. Watson and others have argued that in the press, government propaganda, and amongst other wartime commentators, female munitions workers were often equated with male soldiers. In many popular representations the work they did and their motivations for doing it were portrayed entirely in relation to

¹Deirdre Beddoe, ‘Munitionettes, maids and mams: women in Wales, 1914-1939’ in *Our Mothers’ Land: Chapters in Welsh Women’s History, 1830-1939*, 2nd edition, ed. by Angela V. John (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), pp. 187-189.

the war effort.² In particular, middle-class munitions workers clearly identified their role in terms of service alongside soldiers and assumed that patriotism alone would override any interest in wages and working conditions.³ Marie Baillie's work on the industrial region of the Clydeside in Scotland has also shown how at a local level the authorities and the press established a link between patriotism and munitions production. Alongside the developing public interest and imagery surrounding munitions work itself, recruiters and organisers in Glasgow sought to build an extensive workforce reflecting contemporary notions of femininity and class.⁴

In his study of female munitions workers at the explosives factory in Gretna, Chris Brader has also shown how the recruitment process and appeals for women workers were carried out. He explores the purpose and content of lectures and public meetings which encouraged women to apply for industrial work.⁵ Whilst this discourse adopted the language of service, Brader has found that for many working-class women there were a variety of factors that informed their decision to work at a munitions factory. This included the promise of higher wages, a patriotic impulse to help the war effort alongside the opportunity to leave home and gain a greater feeling of independence.⁶ Furthermore, this is also supported by scholarship focused on other primarily urban industrial localities with a strong working-class population.⁷ Whilst the

²Janet S.K Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Janet S.K. Watson 'Khaki Girls, VADs and Tommy's Sisters: Gender and Class in First World War Britain', *The International History Review*, 19:1 (1997), pp. 32-51; Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

³Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, pp. 127-128.

⁴ Myra Baillie, *The Women of Red Clydeside: Women Munitions Workers in the West of Scotland during the First World War* (Unpublished PhD thesis, McMaster University Ontario, 2002), pp. 17-65.

⁵Chris Brader, *Timbertown Girls: Gretna Female Munitions Workers in World War I* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 2001), pp. 28-33.

⁶ Brader, *Timbertown Girls*, pp. 30-31.

⁷ Maureen Callcott, 'Arms and the Women: Women and the War Industries on Tyneside 1914-1918', *North East History*, 41(2010), p. 109.

focus of this chapter will be on the recruitment of women into war work more generally, the vast majority of the evidence refers directly to the munitions industry.

This chapter uses press commentary and correspondence between individuals and local committees to analyse ideas of patriotism and service in discussions and public representations of the recruitment and organisation of women's war work in Wales. It explores the relationship between demands for female labour, changing opportunities for women in the workplace, and public debate about the war effort in different localities. In doing so, this chapter builds upon existing historical narratives around patriotism and the differentiated experiences of war work. Therefore, within the wartime social and economic context of Wales, the intention here is also to develop a greater understanding of the meanings behind women's war work beyond patriotism.

Female unemployment and wartime charity

In the early months of the war, before the large scale organisation and recruitment of female labour to replace male workers who had joined the armed forces, there was much concern about female unemployment. A sense of dislocation and uncertainty characterised the weeks following Britain's declaration of war on the 4 August 1914.⁸ Trades such as millinery and dressmaking, which traditionally employed a large number of female workers, saw a decline in orders resulting in large numbers of women being laid off. At the same time, many wealthy households began to dismiss servants due to what Gail Braybon describes as an 'economy measure' and cut their

⁸ Catriona Pennell, 'Believing the Unbelievable: The Myth of the Russians with 'Snow of their Boots' in the United Kingdom, 1914', *Cultural and Social History*, 11:1 (2014), p. 70.

outgoings.⁹ In Wales, women who remained in formal employment now needed to find additional income to support their families as growing numbers of their male relatives joined the army.

According to a report submitted by the County Borough of Swansea Executive Committee to the local branch of the Prince of Wales' National Relief Fund, by the beginning of December 1914, 195 women and 103 girls had registered as unemployed at local labour exchanges. This comprised women from a variety of traditional female trades including 'Indoor Domestic Servants, Daily Domestic Servants, Charwomen, Laundry Workers, Clerks, Seamstresses, Waitresses, Barmaids and Shop Assistants'.¹⁰ Women who had relied upon male lodgers for a regular income also began to register.¹¹ This was especially the case in industrial districts where miners' wives often let out rooms to workers employed at the local collieries and factories. With lodgers volunteering for the army, this valuable form of income was lost, and increasingly women had to find work outside the home.¹² In Barry too, increasing numbers of women registered for work, while in Cardiff it was reported that fourteen businesses had been forced to reduce the working hours of female employees.¹³ In contrast to the high levels of female unemployment in the early months of the war, the importance of mining and agriculture to the war effort meant that male unemployment remained low in Wales. Indeed, this remained the case throughout the war, with the exception of higher levels of unemployment among quarrymen in the slate districts of Merioneth and

⁹ Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War: The British Experience* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p. 44.

¹⁰ Richard Burton Archives, Swansea University (hereafter RBA), Henry Leyshon collection, LAC 64/1, Report from the County Borough of Swansea Executive Committee to the Local Representative Committee, Prince of Wales' National Relief Fund, 17 December 1914.

¹¹ *South Wales Weekly Post*, 17 October 1914, p. 8.

¹² Dot Jones, 'Serfdom and Slavery: Women's Work in Wales, 1890-1930' in *Class, Community and the Labour Movement: Wales and Canada, 1850-1930*, eds by Deian R. Hopkin and Gregory S. Kealey (Aberystwyth, 1989), p. 88.

¹³ *Barry Dock News*, 6 November 1914, p. 7; *Western Mail*, 26 September 1914, p. 7.

Caernarfon.¹⁴ By the beginning of 1915, a growing number of local committees and charitable groups had been established in Wales to provide clothing for soldiers and practical relief for those affected by the outbreak of war.

Many women who found themselves out of work were faced with the options of depending on charity or moving to other parts of the country to find work in order to avoid recourse to the poor law. The Prince of Wales National Relief Fund, administered locally by a committee of the county council, provided temporary help to many through weekly payments of between 2 and 3s. a week.¹⁵ Part of this fund was used to provide work for women who had registered at their local labour exchange. In Swansea, in conjunction with the Swansea Education Authority, the Fund established a number of workrooms in the district. For example, the War Garment Fund opened a workroom and provided additional materials for women to make such items at home. Workrooms were established by different organisations throughout Wales in order to produce socks, shirts and other items of clothing for soldiers and for those at home in need of help. Former charwomen and seamstresses also now worked for local wartime charities.¹⁶ The *South Wales Weekly Post* noted in connection with the scheme established by the Mayoress in Swansea that 'about 25 women were engaged in making garments, and latterly between 60 and 70 have been regularly employed'.¹⁷

These workplace schemes were usually organised by middle-class women, who also established various fundraising schemes and made donations to various wartime initiatives. Whilst both middle and working-class women took a great deal of pride in

¹⁴ John Davies, *A History of Wales*, revised edn (London: Penguin Books, 2007), p. 504.

¹⁵ Cyril Parry, 'Gwynedd and the Great War, 1914-1918', *Welsh History Review*, 14:1 (1988), p. 103.

¹⁶ RBA, LAC 64/2, Henry Leyshon collection, Report from the County Borough of Swansea Executive Committee to the Local Representative Committee, Prince of Wales' National Relief Fund, 21 January 1915.

¹⁷ *South Wales Weekly Post*, 22 May 1915, p. 5.

supporting troops and families, the organisation of such initiatives was underpinned by class-specific Edwardian ideas of social philanthropy. Catriona Pennell has argued that people throughout Britain undertook this kind of relief work to express their loyalty to the nation, to make the only sacrifices within their means, and to show that they were 'doing their bit'.¹⁸ Upper and middle-class women who were members of local societies and subsequently sat on charitable committees believed it was their responsibility to help those perceivably unable to help themselves.¹⁹ The work of these charity organisers for the war effort was highly praised and given extensive coverage in the press, emphasising how gratefully the items had been received by soldiers and sailors abroad.

Their efforts also fed into wartime discourse which portrayed unemployment as a social evil which could threaten the war effort. An article in the *South Wales Weekly Post* asked 'what is the policy that is to meet the crisis arising but once in a generation? Remember, that you and we are in the home fighting force. Our enemy is unemployment, distress, discontent and unrest'.²⁰ The need to maintain the social order was also driven by the fear that unemployed women and those not under a degree of control would be susceptible to the 'temptation of prostitution and promiscuity', especially those living in towns and villages near military bases.²¹ As well as schemes which provided work for women made unemployed by the economic dislocation of the war, there were many voluntary schemes to provide clothes and other garments for serving soldiers.

¹⁸ Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 76.

¹⁹ Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, p. 107.

²⁰ *South Wales Weekly Post*, 24 October 1914, p. 3.

²¹ Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War I* (London: I.B Tauris, 2000), p. 29. This belief persisted throughout the war as female police officers were later recruited to control the behaviour of large groups of women workers both inside and outside munitions factories.

These voluntary schemes involved the efforts of many women who either remained in their former employment, or who did not need to work for a living in the first place; primarily middle-class women. At Dyserth in Denbigh in north Wales, members of the local sewing and knitting guild made large numbers of khaki shirts and socks for soldiers during 1915. The local press printed grateful letters from soldiers and sailors, reinforcing that the organisation of such schemes was purely in support of the war effort.²² Anthony Mór-O'Brien argues that, although the National Relief Fund was received unfavourably in south Wales because the money was often not used locally, it nevertheless 'achieved the direct involvement of the entire nation in a voluntary practical patriotism'.²³ Many organisers gave up their time and donated vast sums of money towards building support for schemes to provide clothing for soldiers, and to provide employment for distressed women in making these garments. However, very little is known about the women who actually made these items of clothing. It is unlikely that their conditions of work were very good, or that the war provided positive opportunities for them unless they went on to work at a munitions factory.

Like other female trades, including dressmaking, wages were low, closely resembling the sweated rate.²⁴ Deborah Thom argues that the high levels of unemployment reinforced the understanding that women were more likely to accept poor conditions of work at low wages through a combination of ignorance, docility and patriotism.²⁵ In south Wales, the Cardiff and District Women's Suffrage Society worked alongside the Queen Mary's Women's Workhouse Committee to provide work

²² *The Rhyl Journal*, 29 January 1916, p. 2.

²³ Anthony Mór-O'Brien, *A Community in Wartime: Aberdare and the First World War* (Unpublished PhD thesis, The University of Wales Swansea, 1986), pp. 178-180.

²⁴ Braybon, *Women Workers*, p. 44.

²⁵ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 29.

for women.²⁶ The wives of soldiers and sailors were provided with work by the Women's Workrooms Committee, which according to the society's annual report for 1914-1915 was 'of considerable value in brightening the lives of the workers'.²⁷ Those who had registered as unemployed at their local labour exchange were subsequently chosen for the work by a selected sub-committee on the basis of their character and suitability. The work offered also continued the pre-war trend of getting more women and girls trained in domestic service, as did some of the training courses for girls and women set up in the early months of the war.

During the winter of 1914 and throughout 1915, local authorities and wartime charities began to establish training courses for those out of work. With the cooperation of the Women's Employment section of the Prince of Wales' National Relief Fund, the Swansea Education Authority proposed the establishment of a series of courses for 'Local Women and Girls'. A 'special domestic training' course was set up at Danygraig Girls' Council School in late November 1914.²⁸ Employers often used the term "girl" to define any female worker up to the age of twenty-five, and it could also refer to those not receiving an adult wage.²⁹ In relation to the course in Swansea, those over sixteen were paid more of a weekly allowance than those under that age. The organisation of this course demonstrates that, even with women losing their jobs in domestic service as a result of the outbreak of war, the emphasis was still on making younger women proficient in traditional female jobs.

²⁶ Ryland Wallace, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Wales, 1866-1928* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), pp. 230-231. This society also provided aid for Belgian refugees.

²⁷ National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth (hereafter NLW), XHQ 1221.C 27, National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, Cardiff and District Society, Annual Report 1914-1915, 13 April 1915 p. 7.

²⁸ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 153.

²⁹ Brader, *Timbertown Girls*, pp. 8-9.

This scheme was funded by charitable donations to the Queen Mary's Work for Women Fund, which was created to find work for newly unemployed female workers. The scheme in Swansea was designed to ensure that 'young people could be beneficially employed until work was available for them'.³⁰ A training centre was set up at a local school where girls and women were given both practical and theoretical tuition in tasks related to maintaining the home, including housewifery and cooking. In February 1915, the *Cambria Daily Leader* suggested that such courses should be extended to schools throughout Swansea and the district so that girls could enter domestic service.³¹ Similar classes had been run throughout Wales during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, intended to make working-class women better wives and to prepare them for a life in service.³² By this time a growing number of women were transferring from their old occupations into newly established government-controlled munitions factories.

Women's war work and recruitment

By the spring of 1915 there was much more demand for female workers across a range of industries and sectors. In March 1915, the government created a National Register of Women for War Service, with the intention of ensuring a centralised list from which it could draw women, especially for industrial and agricultural work, if required. Women between sixteen and sixty-five were also encouraged to register at their local labour exchanges for war work, and many did sign up on the ordinary

³⁰RBA, LAC 64/1, Report from the County Borough of Swansea Executive Committee to the Local Representative Committee, Prince of Wales' National Relief Fund, 17 December 1914.

³¹*The Cambria Daily Leader*, 12 February 1915, p. 6.

³²Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 25.

register at the Labour Exchanges of the Board of Trade.³³ However, this was causing an increasing shortage of female labour in some trades which had traditionally employed them on specific jobs. Although Ben Evans, the department store in Swansea, was awarded a government contract to provide 15,000 blankets and thousands of shirts, pants, vests and service-caps in September 1914, by the beginning of 1915 it was struggling to recruit and seemingly keep hold of female labour.³⁴ At a meeting of employers in Swansea during April 1915 to discuss the possibility of releasing male workers for the army by employing additional female labour, the representative for Ben Evans was adamant that there was a scarcity of suitable women to do the job. He insisted that the firm 'had been long advertising for experienced hands, and had tried the Labour Exchanges but could not get them'.³⁵ However, for some other trades which had traditionally relied on female labour, after the initial economic downturn at the outbreak of war there began a revival. During October 1914, the Welsh flannel industry, which employed hundreds of women in mid-Wales, gained a government order to make 150,000 shirts. Centred on Newtown and Llanidloes, the industry provided employment for women throughout the war.³⁶ The introduction of women into new positions was intended to free more men for the army, as the rate of male volunteers had steadily fallen since December 1914.

In light of the high number of British casualties sustained after the battle of Neuve Chappelle in March 1915, recruiters needed to persuade local employers and businesses that women could be used as an alternative source of labour. During a meeting in Swansea during April 1915, Major Anderson the Chief Recruiting Officer

³³ Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 24.

³⁴ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, pp. 57.

³⁵ *The Cambria Daily Leader*, 14 April 1915, p. 7.

³⁶ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, pp. 57-58.

for the town ‘appealed to all employers to consider the question seriously of substituting female labour with the object of setting free for enlistment young men’.³⁷ As a result, women began to replace men in a number of civilian jobs, including shop and postal work, driving taxis and delivery vans, and clerical work. Many women entered office work in municipal and government departments, which had previously been male dominated.³⁸ With an increasing volume of paper work in nearly all areas of administration because of the war, there was an enormous demand for more labour, including women.³⁹ During the year, women were also hired as tramcar drivers and conductors, road sweepers, and ticket inspectors and carriage cleaners on the railway network throughout Wales.⁴⁰

However, by far the biggest demand for female labour in Wales was in the production of munitions. In March 1915, the press reported that in Swansea large numbers of women had signed up for jobs ‘in factories and elsewhere’ under the new government scheme.⁴¹ In the districts of Swansea and Llanelli, which encompassed the Western division of the South Wales Board of Management, munitions production began to expand. Messrs Taylor and Sons owners of the Briton Ferry Engineering Works were the first to begin production of shells in south Wales. Shortly afterwards, Baldwin’s Limited reconverted a section of their site at Landore in Swansea into a shell factory in June 1915. The company’s steel plant at Landore also made billets, frequently

³⁷ West Glamorgan Archives, Swansea (hereafter WGA), TC 26 Series: Records relating to the Swansea Battalion Committee, TC 26/26 Meeting of Employers re: replacing with female labour men of recruitable age. Correspondence, papers and press cuttings. 14 April 1915.

³⁸ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 58.

³⁹ Deborah Thom, ‘Women and Work in Wartime Britain’ in *The Upheaval of War: family, work and welfare in Europe, 1914-1918*, eds by Richard Wall and Jay Winter (Cambridge: University Press, 1988), pp. 301-302.

⁴⁰ Lisa Snook, ‘Out of the Cage? Women and the First World War in Pontypridd,’ *Llafur*, 8:2 (2001), p. 79.

⁴¹ *The Cambria Daily Leader*, 19 March 1915, p. 1.

supplying firms throughout Britain during the war.⁴² In July 1915, in response to a shortage of ammunition, the government established the Department for the Ministry of Munitions. In response, the Munitions of War Act was introduced, which granted the government control and regulation over a large proportion of factories, including those which had been employed in the manufacture of munitions since the outbreak of war. In this phase of the war, local industries throughout Britain were converted to enable the production of armaments and chemicals, and new factories and workshops were set up for the same purpose.⁴³ Factories under government control became known as ‘controlled establishments’, where new legislation governing wages and conditions of employment was strictly enforced. As well as metals, chemicals and ammunition, the munitions industry also came to include equipment required by the armed forces including food and clothing.⁴⁴ During the war, coal mines also came under the control of the Ministry of Munitions following a series of strikes as steam coal was of essential importance to powering the Royal Navy.⁴⁵ With growing labour unrest amongst miners, the government sought to implement an effective propaganda campaign in order to increase the production of munitions.

Among women, traditional perceptions of the female role continued to affect attitudes towards suitable work. Domesticity and the importance of motherhood were represented throughout the war as an essential component of the war effort. Early in the war, public discourse on female patriotism emphasised women’s primary responsibilities in the domestic sphere and in persuading male relatives to join the forces. Mothering essentially became a form of military service, whereby women’s

⁴² Ivor Nicholson and Trevor Lloyd-Williams, *Wales: Its Part in the War* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919), pp. 82-84.

⁴³ Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, pp. 28-29.

⁴⁴ Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 25.

⁴⁵ Chris Williams, *Community and Conflict: The South Wales Coalfield 1898-1947* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p. 20.

sacrifice of their sons endowed them with authority and status.⁴⁶ Advertisements in the local newspapers focused on the contemporary understanding of motherhood with titles including ‘The Mother in Wartime’ serving to illustrate their equality with soldiers in terms of their contribution to the war effort.⁴⁷ This reinforced the centrality of motherhood amongst the wider population, as a way in which women could help support the war effort. However, this conflicted with the need to draw on women to supplement the depleted labour force.

The romanticised and stereotypical image of the “Welsh Mam” was also reinforced by such an emphasis. Created during the period of rapid industrialisation in Wales during the nineteenth century, the image of the “Welsh Mam” placed women’s power firmly within the private sphere.⁴⁸ Public constructions of Welsh female identity prior to the First World War were characterised by notions of domesticity and piety. Sian Rhiannon Williams argues that the ideal of Welsh womanhood exemplified in the pages of the periodical *Y Gymraes (The Welshwoman)* during the nineteenth and early twentieth century advocated religious morality and women’s role as wives and mothers.⁴⁹ However, women’s work outside of the home was not included in such an image of the ideal Welsh woman. Very little mention was made of working-class women’s work and their dual responsibility of employment and looking after the home, as it was not compatible with ideas of female purity and womanhood.⁵⁰ It is arguable that wartime representations of female workers as patriots, rather than people engaged

⁴⁶ Nicoletta Gullace, “*The blood of our sons*”: men, women and the renegotiation of British citizenship during the Great War (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 53-55.

⁴⁷ *The North Wales Guardian*, 17 September 1915, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Deirdre Beddoe, ‘Images of Welsh Women’ in *Wales: the imagined nation: essays in cultural and national identity*, ed. by Tony Curtis (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1986), pp. 227-238 (p. 232).

⁴⁹ 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*, ed. by Angela V. John (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), pp. 73-94.

⁵⁰ Williams, ‘The True ‘Cymraes’, pp. 79-87.

in necessary labour, continued such nineteenth-century trends in the cultural depiction of women.

One cultural figure through which Welsh patriotism was represented during the First World War was that of “Dame Wales”. Created by the cartoonist J. M. Staniforth, whose work was printed in several newspapers including the *Western Mail*, during the late nineteenth century, she was often dressed in traditional Welsh national costume. During the war she was extensively used by the press to mobilise support amongst the population for the war effort and as part of attempts to increase recruitment for the military. In response to miners in south Wales not returning to early work during the August bank holiday, she was portrayed as the ‘voice of reason’ in an ‘appeal to the patriotic virtues’ of the workers.⁵¹ She also became part of the discourse surrounding the need to produce munitions and how Wales was making its contribution to the war effort. In another cartoon printed in the *Western Mail*, Dame Wales was portrayed as ‘The Willing Worker’, eager and determined to make munitions (see image below).⁵²

⁵¹ Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, p. 85.

⁵² ‘A Willing Worker’, *Cartooning the First World War* <http://www.cartoonww1.org/image.htm?id=261> (Date accessed: 09/03/2015).



Figure 1: J.M. Staniforth, *A Willing Worker*, May 1915

The cartoon itself however does reinforce the idea that making munitions was an entirely patriotic act in order to ‘smash them old wicked Germans!’ and coincides with appeals in the press towards Welsh patriotism as a means of recruiting men for the military. The representation of Welsh wartime patriotism was often expressed with references to past military triumphs. Both the Conservative and Liberal press believed that drawing on ideas of Welsh patriotism in this manner was an effective way of encouraging men to enlist.⁵³ Commentators approached the war as a ‘heroic’ struggle against Germany with military service portrayed as a ‘privileged duty’ for the king and

⁵³ Neil Evans, ‘Loyalties: state, nation, community and military recruiting in Wales’ in *Wales and War: Society, Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, eds by Matthew Cragoe and Chris Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 50.

state.⁵⁴ Newspaper depictions of women workers fed into these narratives. Depictions of war work printed in the traditionally conservative *Western Mail* conveyed the role of British women. Under a cartoon, produced again by Staniforth, with the headline ‘For King and Country’, the caption from ‘our leader’ proclaimed that ‘The British woman-worker at home who fills the shells, Helps to destroy the Turkish forts on the Dardanelles’ (see image below).⁵⁵



Figure 2: J.M Staniforth, ‘For King and Country’, March 1915

⁵⁴ Parry, ‘Gwynedd and the Great War’, p. 82.

⁵⁵ ‘For King and Country’, *Cartooning the First World War*
<http://www.cartoonww1.org/image.htm?id=206> (Date accessed: 09/03/2015).

Such images were part of a broader web of wartime representations of Wales as a defender of the liberties and freedoms of small nations.⁵⁶ Prominent suffragettes also adopted this rhetoric in their on-going attempts to further discredit any anti-suffrage sentiment. During an address in Aberdare during October 1915, *The Merthyr Express* reported a speech by Emmeline Pankhurst in which she referred to the Welsh as ‘a race of men and women who had fought for liberty, and as such she earnestly appealed to them to do their utmost in the present crisis to ensure that the liberty they had inherited was not taken away by a ruthless enemy’.⁵⁷ This was part of what June Purvis has described as an attempt by Emmeline Pankhurst to project a ‘patriotic feminism’ in her support for the war effort. Along with other prominent members of the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), she toured the length and breadth of the country during the war arguing against trade union opposition to women’s wartime work, encouraging men to volunteer for the army and to dissuade workers from taking industrial action.⁵⁸

Along with fellow activists “General” Flora Drummond and Norah Darce Fox, Pankhurst visited the South Wales Coalfield on a number of occasions, especially during 1915. Although attempts had been made to control the activities of the WSPU prior to the war, such speeches were supported by the government and in particular David Lloyd George who was particularly keen to exploit the public profile of the group.⁵⁹ In the wake of recent strike action alongside growing opposition towards governmental control over distribution and labour practices in south Wales, an effective response to appease the population was essential. However, the WSPU also used the

⁵⁶ Evans, ‘Loyalties: state, nation’, p. 50.

⁵⁷ *The Merthyr Express*, 16th October 1915, p. 11.

⁵⁸ June Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst: a biography* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 271.

⁵⁹ Brock Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (London: F Cass, 2000), p. 119.

speeches for its own ends which focused on gaining long-term political, economic and social equality for women.⁶⁰

In countering the opposition towards women's war work from male trade unionists, the speeches emphasised the important role women could play in the workplace. During October 1915, Norah Darce Fox at a rally in Tredegar, near Merthyr Tydfil 'made an appeal to the men of eligible age and fitness to come forward in response to the call of their country, and to women to step forward to work in munitions factories and thus *unitedly* to finish the war successfully.'⁶¹ Both Fox and another WSPU activist Flora Drummond directed their claims that women could very easily replace men in certain jobs, including shop and postal work, to employers as well as male labourers.⁶² Rachel Barrett, the former Chief WSPU Organiser for Wales, also echoed Fox's sentiments. In response to a plea for women in Wales not to volunteer for wartime work and to advocate peace, she stated, 'let women do their part, not by sentimentally prating of peace, and so playing into the hands of Germany, but by making shells or other-wise doing their share of the nation's work, so that men may be set free to fight the foe without whose downfall all talk of peace is vain'.⁶³

The WSPU leadership was motivated by extreme patriotism, but also used the war as a platform to further the suffrage cause. They used the press and public addresses to undermine the "physical force" argument inherent within anti-suffragist movement and claim women's right to citizenship. This very public construction of female patriotism embodied in the war worker served to weaken the position of the

⁶⁰ Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst*, p. 271.

⁶¹ *The Merthyr Express*, 9 October 1915, p. 3. My italics.

⁶² *The Merthyr Express*, 9 October 1915, p. 3.

⁶³ Rachel Barrett, 'An Appeal to the Women of Wales', *The Welsh Outlook*, 2 (October 1915), pp. 371-408 (p. 408).

enfranchised man who had chosen not to enlist.⁶⁴ Such sentiments were reinforced by the ‘Right to Serve’ march held during July 1915. Organised principally by Emmeline Pankhurst publicising the National Register of Women for War Service, thirty thousand women participated by marching down London’s Embankment. Apart from demonstrating the willingness of many women to undertake war work, the march also established the WSPU as the main representatives of female munitions workers and in turn organisers of ‘patriotic British womanhood’.⁶⁵ In government propaganda and in the accounts of journalists, the march was used to reinforce the centrality of service by all women.⁶⁶ Whilst this message of service was clearly conveyed in the local press and government discourse throughout the war, recruiters faced practical challenges in terms of labour supply and in particular getting women into the factories.

The need for both male and female labour in the munitions industry fluctuated throughout the war, but increased after military conscription was directly implemented in March 1916. Before this, production had initially been delayed at some factories by a shortage of machinery and skilled labour. During the spring of 1915, there was a shortage of skilled male labour for new government shell factories throughout both north and south Wales. In the south especially, there was a shortage of skilled male engineers, due in part to the small engineering industry in the region.⁶⁷ According to John Moxon, secretary of the shell factory in Newport, there was a shortage of male labour in the surrounding area when production began in October 1915.⁶⁸ This was probably due to the combination of high rates of recruitment to the army with the

⁶⁴ Gullace, “*The blood of our sons*”, pp. 119-129.

⁶⁵ Gullace, “*The blood of our sons*”, pp. 128.

⁶⁶ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 32.

⁶⁷ Nicholson and Lloyd-Williams, *Wales: Its Part in the War*, p. 94.

⁶⁸ Newport Central Library, Newport (hereafter NCL), 10425, Record of the Newport National Shell Factory established by the Ministry of Munitions at Newport, Monmouthshire, Correspondence from John Moxon to the Curator of the Library and Museum, Newport (August 1919), p. 9.

retention of the existing labour forces in the collieries and metallurgical works in Gwent for war production.⁶⁹ Machinery including lathes was in limited supply and caused delays to production, with some factories having to borrow equipment from existing firms.⁷⁰ These problems were sufficiently serious for the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE) to propose to the South Wales Munitions Committee that semi-skilled male labour and female labour might supplement this shortage, or skilled labour might be hired from further afield.⁷¹ As shortages in male labour increased, and the necessity of increasing war production became more urgent, plans were put in place to organise the recruitment of female labour throughout Wales.

This planning took several forms. Council members and civic leaders formed committees to ascertain the availability of women to undertake war work. Throughout Wales, public meetings were held to discuss how women could be organised and utilised most effectively in the workplace. Lisa Snook has found that in Pontypridd in south Wales, various labour organisations visited the town to recruit women to replace men in various jobs.⁷² Throughout Wales, military representatives often met with local council members to discuss the possibility of getting more men to volunteer by using female labour.⁷³ The “question” of the recruitment and organisation of female labour was often discussed in the local press. During June 1915, a meeting of local dignitaries assembled in the public library in Wrexham to discuss ‘Women’s work during the War – and after’. The Mayoress, Mrs Sydney Jarman, was adamant that the women of Wrexham had so far applied themselves diligently, with great ‘loyalty and energy [...]

⁶⁹ Peter Strong, ‘The First World War’, in *The Gwent County History Volume Five: Twentieth Century*, eds by Chris Williams and Andy Croll (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), p. 6.

⁷⁰ The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), Ministry of Munitions, MUN 5/150, 1121.25/2, Notes on the Meeting of the South Wales Munitions Committee, 11th June 1915, p. 2.

⁷¹ TNA, MUN 5/150, 1121.25/4, Early History of the Organisation of the output of munitions in South Wales, pp. 2-6.

⁷² Snook, ‘Out of the Cage?’, p. 79.

⁷³ *The Llangollen Advertiser and North Wales Journal*, 14 May 1915, p. 8.

not to be found in any town of its size in Great Britain'.⁷⁴ These comments suggest that civic dignitaries and local recruiters were keen to reinforce the perception that female war workers were making a vital contribution to serving both their country and locality.

After describing how the organisation and recruitment of female labour was developing in Wrexham and the interest shown amongst workers and employers, Mr A. Seymour at the public library meeting suggested that there were many ways 'in which women could assist in releasing men'. He argued that there would be many male casualties in the war and that 'for a generation at least women would, to a certain extent, be the breadwinners'. The war was therefore 'a splendid opportunity for women to fit themselves up for occupations after the war'.⁷⁵ Seymour suggested the recruitment of women workers could combat the potential shortfall of male workers in the post-war labour market, and proposed the establishment of a committee to take a census of the numbers of women in the district who could be available for work, which could be advertised by posters, leaflets and flyers.⁷⁶ In this instance, Seymour did not consider women's participation in the workplace as temporary, or dwell on the potential impact of the war on family life and gender roles. His account was most likely influenced by continued reports of heavy British casualties, and the appearance of injured soldiers in many British towns, which caused increasing anxiety about the long-term consequences of the war for ordinary people.⁷⁷

These concerns propelled the production of propaganda which encouraged women to undertake war work. J. M. Winter has suggested that propaganda during the First World War helped to mobilise minds, as well as men, munitions and labour. It

⁷⁴ *The North Wales Guardian*, 25 June 1915, p. 7.

⁷⁵ *The North Wales Guardian*, 25 June 1915, p. 7.

⁷⁶ *The North Wales Guardian*, 25 June 1915, p. 7.

⁷⁷ Pennell, *A Kingdom United*, p. 123.

sought to transform those societies involved onto a war footing.⁷⁸ Perhaps the most recognisable recruitment poster aimed at encouraging women to take up munitions work was the image of a female worker putting on her overalls, whilst in the background a soldier departs for the front. The statement underneath reads ‘These Women Are Doing Their Bit – Learn To Make Munitions’.⁷⁹ In Wales, advertisements, leaflets and posters for military recruitment initially appeared in English, but began to be printed in Welsh too at the beginning of 1915.⁸⁰ The Caernarfon Labour Exchange printed a recruitment poster aimed directly at encouraging Welsh-speaking women to ‘make tools for war’ by announcing ‘Merched Cymru – Eich Gwlad Yn Galw Am Eich Gwasanaeth. Deuwch! Ymrestrwch! Cannoedd o Ferched yn eisiau’ [*Girls of Wales – Your country is calling for your service. Come on Register. Hundreds of Girls needed*].⁸¹ This coincided with the distribution of Welsh-language posters and leaflets aimed at encouraging men to volunteer for the army.⁸²

Among rural Welsh-speaking communities, attitudes to the war were ambivalent and at times hostile, especially in the north of the country. This Welsh-language propaganda can be seen as an attempt by recruiters to appease the local population and encourage women to register. Cyril Parry has argued that in cultural and linguistic terms, many people in such communities could not identify with the government’s wartime policies and in particular the military, perceiving the conflict to be England’s

⁷⁸ J.M. Winter, ‘Propaganda and the Mobilisation of Consent’ in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War*, ed. by Hew Strachan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 218.

⁷⁹ Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 112.

⁸⁰ Parry, ‘Gwynedd and the Great War’, p. 81.

⁸¹ Bangor University Special Archives and Collections, Bangor University [hereafter BU], BMSS/27011, Recruitment poster World War I for women munition workers, 1914-1918. Translated by Mr Peter Phillips.

⁸² Robin Barlow, ‘Did Wales go willingly to the First World War?’, in *A New History of Wales: Myths and Realities in Welsh History*, ed. by H.V Bowen (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 2011), p. 155.

war.⁸³ The ‘Merched Cymru’ poster’s emphasis on militarism and the notion of “service” suggests that recruiters may have misjudged the levels of ambivalence towards the war effort in some communities. However, the production of such posters shows that demand for female labour had reached every corner of the country.

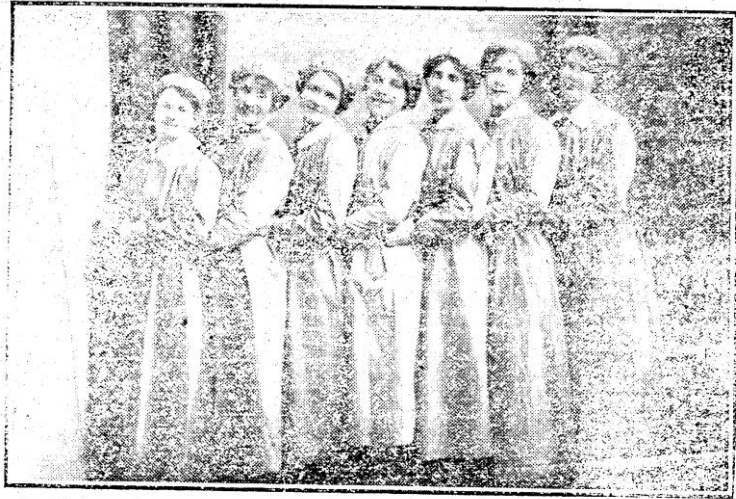
The ‘Merched Cymru’ poster provides an important insight into how women’s wartime work was perceived during the war. Throughout the conflict, the demand for female labour was often defined in terms of service rather than work. The term “work” implied a necessary form of labour, which was performed in order for women to survive. However, an emphasis on the economic necessity of work for women was out of line with pre-war perceptions of the female role. It was feared that women’s financial independence might destabilise the labour market and social structures.⁸⁴ Women’s “work” was therefore presented as “service” throughout the conflict. For example, female munitions workers were publicly represented as patriots serving the nation in partnership with soldiers in the trenches.⁸⁵ In wartime postcards and the press, visual images of newly recruited women workers also emphasised this notion of service. Underneath one newspaper image of a group of seemingly happy and contented workers at an unnamed shell factory in Llanelli, it was asserted that the women were ‘not appearing at the theatre but are doing splendid service for King and Country at a munitions factory not a thousand miles from the “Star” Office. They are quite enthusiastic [...] and are proud to be part of the personnel of one of the best equipped factories in the country’ (see image below).⁸⁶

⁸³ Parry, ‘Gwynedd and the Great War’, p. 83.

⁸⁴ Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, p. 106.

⁸⁵ Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 112.

⁸⁶ *The Llanelli Star*, 11 March 1916, p. 4.



A BEVY OF MUNITION WORKERS.

Figure 3: 'A Bevy Of Munition Workers'

Such photographs appeared throughout the local press and were a visual reminder to its readership of the role played by women in support of the war effort. Another photograph, printed in the *South Wales Daily News* under the headline 'Women of Wales Winning the War', showed a group of Welsh women employed at a factory in the Midlands. All of the women in the photograph were named individually, with their hometown printed alongside. The caption underneath read 'they are proud of being able to do their bit to help towards victory. Each of the women in the picture has a brother on active service' (see image below).⁸⁷

⁸⁷ *South Wales Daily News*, 5 July 1917, p. 6.



Figure 4: ‘Women Of Wales Winning The War’

Such descriptions made it socially acceptable for women to appear in traditionally masculine roles. In addition, to reduce the threat posed by women stepping outside the normal boundaries imposed by their class and sex, the local press emphasised that women’s work was for the duration of the war only.⁸⁸ The idea that female employment was temporary was subtly reinforced by wartime advertising printed in both the local and national press. The producers of Sunlight Soap, the Lever Brothers, highlighted the replacement of male by female workers in one advertisement printed in the *Western Mail*, which presented a soldier and female worker shaking hands.⁸⁹ The reproduction of such images was one way in which newspapers acted as unofficial recruiting agents. In south Wales, labour exchanges were put under enormous pressure to develop and strengthen recruitment campaigns to get more female labour

⁸⁸ Snook, ‘Out of the Cage?’, p. 80.

⁸⁹ *Western Mail*, 1 November 1916, p. 3.

into factories, but nevertheless, the labour exchanges were never fully utilised by the government. Instead, the authorities relied upon the press to garner support and encourage women to look for jobs.⁹⁰

As the war went on, the civilian population in Britain was required to direct all its energy to the war effort and to increase output of food, ammunition and other wartime necessities in an attempt to help break the stalemate on the Western Front. In January 1917, the *South Wales Argus* printed an ‘Appeal to the Women of South Wales’ which urged ‘mothers, wives and sweethearts’ to help their brothers, sons and husbands in the trenches by undertaking some kind of war work.⁹¹ Speeches given by local councillors, many of whom had initially opposed the introduction of women workers, reflected the growing urgency for additional labour. At City Hall in Cardiff, Councillor G. F. Fordsdike argued that the call for female labour at home was just as important as male military service abroad.⁹² This came on the back of growing criticism from some commentators that recruiters had not yet managed to get sufficient women from south Wales into munitions factories. In the first two years of the war, misgivings had been expressed about the level of organisation. Reverend John Williams claimed in a letter to the Secretary of the Welsh Army Corps Mr. Owen William Owen that ‘there is a demand for thousands and thousands and yet nothing practical is being done so far as Wales is concerned for dealing with the question. I have been making enquires as where information is to be obtained regarding this matter, and I have been informed that the

⁹⁰ Braybon, *Women Workers*, p. 56.

⁹¹ *South Wales Argus*, 16 January 1917, p. 2.

⁹² *Cardiff Times and South Wales Weekly News*, 21 July 1917, p. 3.

Labour Exchanges have the matter in hand. Is this true? ⁹³ In 1917, questions were still being asked about the strategy involved in the recruitment campaign.

In January 1917, Owen William Owen, who it appears had now become the Divisional Officer of the Welsh Labour Exchanges for the Ministry of Labour, wrote a letter in response to an article in the *South Wales Daily News* which argued that the number of women munitions workers coming forward in south Wales was ‘miserably below average’. Owen asserted that ‘the women of Wales, like the men, have already responded nobly to their country’s call’.⁹⁴ Furthermore, he suggested that the figures being referred to in the article did not take into account those Welsh women working who had gone to work at factories in England.⁹⁵ Although there are no overall figures for the number of women from throughout Wales who went to work in factories in England and Scotland, other evidence does suggest that by November 1917 a significant number had been sent away to such factories. In light of the renewed appeal made in January 1917 for more munitions workers to come forward, amongst those who had registered with the Cardiff Labour Exchange between February and August 1917, exactly 310 women had either been sent to the Shell Filling Factory on the outskirts of Hereford or to factories in Coventry.⁹⁶ This shows that perhaps there was a plentiful supply of labour in the Cardiff area, especially as large numbers of both male and female tinsplate workers from mills in west Wales had been transferred to factories in the

⁹³ NLW, Records of the Welsh Army Corps (1914-1925), A: General Correspondence, accounts and tenders for clothing necessities: AL/3 Labour Exchange File October 1914-June 1916: Correspondence from Rev. John Williams to Mr O. W. Owen Esq., no date given.

⁹⁴ *South Wales Daily News*, 30 January 1917, p. 4.

⁹⁵ *South Wales Daily News*, 30 January 1917, p. 4.

⁹⁶ NLW, Series: Ministry of Labour Employment Department File: C114/22, Typescript ‘Report to the Local Advisory Committee upon the work of the Cardiff Labour Exchange, twelve months ended 9th November 1917’.

East Moors district of the city during the same year.⁹⁷ This reinforces the point that women often moved between trades during the war, often numerous times, and that moving to different localities was an important part of the experience of employment during the war. This leads to the question of why did women want to work in the munitions industry, and to what extent were they motivated by feelings of patriotism?

Patriotism and women workers

As elsewhere across Britain during 1915, there was seemingly a great deal of interest amongst women in Wales for work in munitions factories. In December, the Reverend John Williams of Brynsiencyn on Anglesey noted that ‘I am being worried incessantly by women asking for work with the Munitions. There is a host of them in Wales extremely anxious to do their share, and these belong to the respectable middle-class as well as the working-class. It would be a very easy matter for me to secure the services of at least a thousand of them’.⁹⁸ It is likely that most of the female industrial workforce in Wales was working class. According to a report submitted to the Ministry of Munitions, in 1916 the female workforce at the explosives factory at Queensferry, which at one time employed over seven thousand men and women, largely comprised of domestic servants, dressmakers, governesses, clerks, tailors ‘and daughters of miners from the mining district’.⁹⁹ In mining districts, young women had usually helped their

⁹⁷ TNA, MUN 2/28, Ministry of Munitions: Labour – Offprints of Weekly Reports, Vol. II Jan 6th 1917 to December 29th 1917, Section XII – Report No. 80, Week ending Feb 17th 1917, p. 7.

⁹⁸ NLW, A: General Correspondence, accounts and tenders for clothing necessities: AL/3 Labour Exchange File October 1914-June 1916: Correspondence from Rev. John Williams to Mr O. W. Owen Esq., no date given.

⁹⁹ TNA, MUN 5/158/1122.7/2, H. M. Explosives Factory, Queensferry Chester, Report of a visit by Mr George H. Duckworth, 8 December 1916, p. 3. In Durham, where collieries also dominated the social and

mother in the home, or, depending on the size of the family income, moved in and out of casual or part-time work, primarily domestic service.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, before the war, the absence of a large scale manufacturing industry meant that most women workers in Wales had been employed in domestic service, apart from a relatively small group of women employed in the flannel and tobacco trades.

As working-class women very rarely kept diaries at this time, and there is very little oral testimony directly from Welsh women workers employed at munitions factories, it is impossible to know for certain why such women undertook war work. However, scholarly research covering women's work throughout Britain from the late nineteenth century to the war, combined with evidence from the Welsh local press and government reports, allows for some tentative conclusions to be drawn. Although the press often implied that women were working for patriotism, self-sacrifice or because of personal loss, it seems that women were motivated to work for many different reasons.¹⁰¹ These ranged from the strength of familial ties, feelings of patriotism and the prospect of earning higher wages. Working at a munitions factory allowed some women to feel that they were helping their male relatives. In August 1915, the East Denbighshire Parliamentary Recruiting Committee received an urgent plea from a mother requesting a position in a munitions factory. She wrote to the Chairman asking him to find her a job 'on munitions or ammunition, as I have two sons in France fighting for their King and Country and I want to go and help them'. She ends by claiming that 'I have my husband's permission'.¹⁰² Possibly her husband's permission

economic lives of inhabitants, daughters of miners also went to find work in munitions factories. Brader, *Timbertown Girls*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁰ Sue Bruley, "'Little Mothers': Adolescent Girls and Young Women in the South Wales Valleys between the Wars', *Llafur*, 10:3 (2010), p. 133.

¹⁰¹ Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, pp. 127-128.

¹⁰² NLW, East Denbighshire Recruiting Committee minutes, 1915, Report of the Executive of the East Denbighshire Parliamentary Recruiting committee, August 1915.

stems from this role being perceived as something temporary only in support of the war effort. Nevertheless, this does show that married women were leaving their traditional sphere of the home and going out to find formal employment.

Familial ties or patriotism were less important for others, or might co-exist with other motives. Florence Nield, a sixteen year old girl from Swansea, ended up working at the explosives factory in Pembrey because a military representative had come to her house and asked ‘Why aren’t you on munitions?’ She described her war work as down to ‘luck’ rather than ‘judgment’.¹⁰³ Although Florence was aware of the existence of the factory as her sister was employed there, there is no indication that she herself had considered it as an option. After beginning work at the factory, she realised the part she and her fellow workers were playing, and later described making munitions as ‘vitaly important to supporting [...] fathers, brothers and sons in the trenches [...] we had relations out there and we were glad to make munitions.’¹⁰⁴ However, despite her willingness to support the troops, she frequently recalled how troubled she was by her new role in the killing machine. She recalled that ‘we also had to think about the ones that were going to be on the end of it, they were youngsters just coming up in life like I was, sixteen or seventeen. That made me feel sad sometimes’.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, such testimony contradicts the militaristic tone of government recruitment posters.

Of course, some women were simply keen to leave unattractive forms of employment for others which offered more benefits. In her research on attitudes towards women workers in north Wales during the late nineteenth century, Val Lloyd argues that many girls seized the opportunity to leave domestic service when new kinds of

¹⁰³ St Fagans National History Museum, Cardiff (hereafter NHM), Sound Archives, 8390/1 Florence Nield.

¹⁰⁴ NHM, Sound Archives, 8390/1 Florence Nield.

¹⁰⁵ NHM, Sound Archives, 8390/1 Florence Nield.

employment came around. This included going to the local pit bank which was far more lucrative in terms of wages, which were sometimes double what women were earning in service.¹⁰⁶ It seems that this trend continued during the war, with the munitions factory replacing the local pit as the place where women could earn higher wages and escape the long hours, strict discipline, and lack of privacy of domestic service. The plea of one unnamed domestic servant was printed in the *Cardiff Times* in January 1916. She explained that ‘I should be very pleased if you would kindly help me to get a situation in the munitions works’.¹⁰⁷ Deborah Thom has argued that such women, concerned about low pay and the physical conditions of work, found munitions work attractive.¹⁰⁸ Further evidence suggests that there was a real interest amongst women in Wales for work in munitions factories throughout the duration of the war. A report on the work of the Cardiff Labour Exchange during 1917 claimed that ‘the majority of the [female] applicants have sought munitions work of some description’.¹⁰⁹ In Llanelli and the surrounding district, it was found that significant numbers of women were also waiting to be absorbed into the munitions and tinsplate factories.¹¹⁰

Employment at a munitions factory also appealed to some women because there were few opportunities for work in their immediate localities. Efforts were made by labour exchanges to place women in factories and other kinds of work, but they had to overcome several obstacles, including traditional employment patterns and negative attitudes towards women’s work in some areas. In a set of recruiting returns compiled by the labour exchanges of various coalmining districts including Aberdare, Bargoed,

¹⁰⁶ Val Lloyd, ‘Attitudes towards women at north Wales coalmines, 1840-1901’, *Llafur*, 5:2 (1989), p. 12.

¹⁰⁷ *Cardiff Times and South Wales Weekly News*, 1 January 1916, p. 5.

¹⁰⁸ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁹ NLW, C114/22, Ministry of Labour Employment Department, Typescript ‘Report to the Local Advisory Committee upon the work of the Cardiff Labour Exchange, twelve months ended 9th November 1917’.

¹¹⁰ *The Carmarthen Journal*, 31 March 1916, p. 3.

Mountain Ash, Maesteg, Tonypany and Abertillery between 1913 and 1915, it was found that there remained few job opportunities for women. Although the beginning of the war had seen an increasing number of women registering at labour exchanges in these areas, very few had been given work or placed in munitions factories' elsewhere.¹¹¹

The structure of the local economy and attitudes towards women's employment in such districts explains why women did not want to take up such work. In his unpublished doctoral thesis examining the wartime experiences of people in Aberdare, Anthony Mór-O'Brien has suggested that there remained few employment opportunities for women in the town due to the rigidly gendered structure of coalfield society. Opposition towards the employment of female labour in distributive trades including clerical and commercial occupations, or at the local collieries, remained strong amongst employers and local council members in the town, who insisted that older men above conscription age should be employed instead. Attitudes towards women's work were slow to change, partly because there were no munitions factories in the immediate locality.¹¹² Economic dependency on the coal and iron industry informed the social structure of many towns in the South Wales Coalfield. Male workers had social prestige and status within the community, whilst women were strongly identified with the home. It was usual for wives to work long hours in the home, and to take on additional casual work only to supplement the family income.¹¹³

¹¹¹ NLW, C114/15: Report to the General Manager from the Acting Divisional Officer of the Labour Exchanges and Unemployment Insurance, Cardiff, 7/3/1916, p. 4.

¹¹² Mór-O'Brien, *A Community in Wartime*, pp. 216-218.

¹¹³ Dot Jones, 'Counting the Cost of Coal: Women's Lives in the Rhondda, 1881-1911' in *Our Mothers' Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History, 1830-1939*, 2nd edition, ed. by Angela V. John (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), p. 115.

The same patterns of female employment as were found in Aberdare can be seen in other parts of wartime Britain. In engineering areas of outer London, Birmingham, Leeds and Clydeside, there were a high number of men in reserved occupations as skilled engineers or shipbuilders. Therefore, a higher household income kept their wives out of the labour market, whereas for daughters, domestic service was replaced with a job at a local factory.¹¹⁴ O'Brien has found that in Aberdare only a very small group of mainly young, single women from the town left to work in factories, whereas wives and mothers remained in the home to support their families.¹¹⁵ This of course reflected a pre-war trend in Wales with women and girls responding to advertisements in the local press for domestic service positions in London and the north-west of England.¹¹⁶ The demand for coal and control of the mining industry by the Ministry of Munitions, as well as opposition to female employment from mine-owners, ensured that opportunities for women in the South Wales Coalfield remained limited during the war. Incentives including the prospect of higher wages and greater freedom and independence, alongside the continued opposition to their employment, meant that larger numbers of young and single women from industrial districts travelled further afield to find work. As the demand for munitions workers began to steadily decline during 1917, the public focus surrounding women's wartime work began to shift towards the recently established women's section of the National Service Department.

¹¹⁴ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 35.

¹¹⁵ Mór-O'Brien, *A Community in Wartime*, pp. 216-218.

¹¹⁶ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 32.

National Service and Lady Mackworth



Figure 5: Margaret Haig Mackworth (on left) parading in the streets of Newport in 1913.¹¹⁷

In February 1917, Margaret Haig Mackworth became commissioner for Wales and Monmouthshire in the Women's Department of the Ministry of National Service. Although the department faced initial difficulties and opposition from the Ministry of Labour, especially in relation to the commissioners' responsibilities, Mackworth

¹¹⁷ National Library of Wales – Cardiff Times and South Wales Daily News, Media Wales Ltd in Angela V. John, *Turning the tide: the life of Lady Rhondda* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2013).

became a prominent part of the National Service for Women campaign in Wales.¹¹⁸ This campaign did not include the recruitment of women for ordinary industrial employment, but targeted appeals for state labour during certain periods. This included recruiting volunteers for the Women's Land Army (WLA) in Wales and organising Selection Boards for the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, which employed women for non-combatant roles in France including clerical work. The commissioner's main function was to make public appeals for female labour and to go through application forms.¹¹⁹ By November 1917, requests to labour exchanges from factories for workers began to drop off as the first waves of women munitions workers were forced out, coming after Russian armament contracts were cancelled.¹²⁰ Public meetings and recruitment events echoed this trend by encouraging women who had previously worked at a munitions factory to take up a new wartime job. In Llanelli, a town and surrounding district which included a number of factories that had been engaged in the manufacture of munitions, a recruitment event held in the spring of 1918 appealed to 'Women likely to leave Munition and other Works'.¹²¹ However, in the press, greater emphasis was now given to the National Service scheme and those behind its organisation.

Mackworth encouraged and promoted women's war work through speeches and public campaigns throughout Wales which emphasised the need for female labour in certain jobs. In a public address during July 1917 she urged women to leave jobs that were not essential to the 'carrying on of the State' or providing materials or services for the war effort.¹²² These included jobs in traditional female trades such as domestic

¹¹⁸ John, *Turning the tide*, pp. 142-144.

¹¹⁹ John, *Turning the tide*, p. 145.

¹²⁰ Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 105.

¹²¹ *The Llanelly Star*, 23 February 1918, p. 1.

¹²² *South Wales Daily News*, 7 July 1917, p. 4.

service, which in fact had experienced shortages in labour throughout the war.¹²³ During the opening of the Women's War Service Exhibition in Cardiff the following year, it was reported that Mackworth 'thought that women should be ashamed if they stick to "cushy" jobs when they might be doing something useful for the country'.¹²⁴ Although the address was framed in the language of patriotism, Angela John has noted that Mackworth felt that it was important to stress to potential recruits that the state itself was appealing to them in the same vein as for men to join the army.¹²⁵ Writing in the *Welsh Outlook* during July 1917, Mackworth appealed directly to women in Wales to take the opportunity of the 'State's public recognition of the necessity for women's work'.¹²⁶ Although she mentioned the thousands of women who entered munitions factories or other civilian roles, she also suggested that previously women had not been publicly or officially recruited on such a large scale.¹²⁷ In addition, with her prior connections to the WSPU and the cause for women's political enfranchisement, it is likely that Mackworth considered this call for women as a further validation of claims for female suffrage.¹²⁸ This can be seen as a continuation of the intentions of Emmeline Pankhurst and other WSPU leaders during their speeches in south Wales during 1915. Throughout the pages of the Welsh press, Mackworth's campaign was given a great deal of coverage linked together with a continuing nationalistic discourse surrounding Wales' participation in the war.

The recruitment campaign for the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps gathered apace during the course of 1917 and 1918 and became increasingly widespread across

¹²³ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 34.

¹²⁴ *The Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 26 April 1918, p. 5.

¹²⁵ John, *Turning the tide*, p. 149.

¹²⁶ Margaret Haig Mackworth, 'National Service for the Women of Wales', *The Welsh Outlook*, 4 (July 1917), 233-262 (p. 256).

¹²⁷ Mackworth, 'National Service', p. 256.

¹²⁸ Gullace, "The blood of our sons", pp. 158-164.

Wales. Mackworth and her colleagues contacted local authorities and women's organisations, asking chapels to display posters. In north Wales, meetings were held with editors of the local press, representatives of labour exchanges and other dignitaries to ascertain local demand for female labour.¹²⁹ A Women's War Service Exhibition was held in Cardiff during April 1918 and a poster was displayed in the *South Wales Daily News* to accompany and promote the event.¹³⁰ Previous exhibitions had been held in Cardiff during the war. In March 1917, a display of photographs was shown at City Hall showing women undertaking a range of jobs in munitions and aeroplane production.¹³¹ While the purpose of this event was primarily to encourage local employers to introduce dilution into their factories and workshops by taking on female labour, the War Service Exhibition intended to directly recruit women to work on the land or for service abroad. During her opening address at the exhibition, Mackworth announced that so far, 'the women of Wales had responded splendidly, having recruited better than those of any other part of the country'. A resolution was then made on behalf of the women of south Wales that they would help to set a man free for the front line by volunteering.¹³²

This resolution was used by David Lloyd George to reaffirm the continued unbridled patriotism of the Welsh people as defenders of liberty and freedom, and to maintain Britain's commitment to victory. During a meeting of war workers in Paris in August 1918, a message from Lloyd George was read out. In it he said 'my recent experience in south Wales confirmed me in the conviction that the women there understand perfectly what is at stake in this war [...] to them this war is a crusade for righteousness and gentleness, and they do not mean to make peace until the Allies have

¹²⁹ John, *Turning the tide*, p. 154.

¹³⁰ *South Wales Daily News*, 20 April 1918, p. 3.

¹³¹ TNA, MUN 2/28, Ministry of Munitions: Labour – Offprints of Weekly Reports, Vol. II Jan 6th 1917 to December 29th 1917, Section XII – Report No. 82, Week ending March 3rd 1917, p. 8.

¹³² *Cambrian News and Merionethshire Standard*, 26 April 1918, p. 5.

made it impossible for another carnival of violence to befall mankind. I am certain that this resolution of the women of south Wales is but typical of the spirit of the women in the rest of Great Britain'.¹³³ As demonstrated earlier in the chapter in examining the link between national sentiment and women's wartime work in Wales, this patriotic narrative was an integral part of perceptions of women's wartime work. Such discourse suggested that patriotism alone drove women to find work during the war, whereas this chapter has shown that women's decisions were influenced by a variety of factors.

Conclusion

Representations of the recruitment and organisation of women's wartime work in Wales, especially in the munitions industry, corresponded with the narratives established elsewhere throughout Britain. Notions of patriotism and service were an integral part of efforts to encourage women to contribute to the war effort. For middle-class women who helped to organise and operate workshops to provide clothing for soldiers, war work was seen as both a form of social philanthropy and as part of their contribution to the war effort. The emphasis upon traditional female tasks showed how organisers could use the experiences of women and girls to produce clothing to support the war effort. Although the work itself was low paid and laborious, for working-class women such groups provided an important source of income during a turbulent period during the opening few months of the war.

In Wales, efforts towards recruitment took many forms and involved many different individuals and groups. Local committees were established to ascertain the

¹³³ *Herald of Wales*, 24 August 1918, p. 1.

availability of women to work, and to organise their labour. Members of the WSPU promoted women's wartime work in south Wales, and used patriotic rhetoric to further the campaign for female suffrage. In the press and in public life, posters, photography and cartoons established links between nationalist sentiment and women's work, and also subtly reinforced the temporary nature of their roles by emphasising their service with male soldiers. Throughout the war, women's assumed patriotism was used as part of attempts to publicly advocate Wales' own participation in the war for "liberty and freedom". However, as in other parts of the country, it seems there were a variety of reasons why women and girls entered war work. This diversity in wartime experience demonstrates that women's actions were influenced by both a familial responsibility alongside individual aspirations and needs, not least for better wages and conditions in the workplace.

Chapter 2

‘It was quite as important to produce food, as it was to produce munitions’:

Female Agricultural Workers in Wales during the First World War

To date, historians have not explored the recruitment and organisation of female agricultural labour in wartime Wales. This leaves a large gap in our understanding of the role of class, gender and notions of patriotism in shaping the demand for female labour and the importance of local labour structures and practices in wartime Britain. Different groups of women from various social and economic backgrounds undertook a range of agricultural work, often dictated by the combination of wartime conditions and traditional working practices in local areas. Many women employed in agriculture during the First World War were engaged in general farm work, including hoeing and tending to animals; others were trained in market gardening or loading bales of hay, undertaking timber cutting and felling trees. Between 1915 and December 1916, demand for additional female labour on farms was often intermittent and localised. With the increasing emphasis on food production at the beginning of 1917, there was a growing demand for female labour trained in jobs previously only undertaken by men.

Existing research on the wartime agricultural labour force has tended to view the female workforce in terms of a patriotic response to the war effort, and has focused on how the WLA came to embody a particular patriotic construct. Arguably, this narrow conception restricts our understanding of the different experiences of female agricultural workers. Most historians agree that notions of patriotism and service were an integral part of efforts to encourage women to work on the land. Agricultural work became idealised against the backdrop of the rural idyll creating a public image of the educated,

primarily middle-class “land girl” who wished to serve her country with vigour and enthusiasm.¹ However, as Bonnie White has suggested, using this image as a framework to examine the WLA overlooks the problems which many Women’s War Agricultural Committees (WWAC) initially encountered whilst attempting to organise and gain support from local communities to get more women working on the land. Research focused on particular counties has emphasised the importance of variations in terms of farming methods and traditional labour practices in the demand for female labour. In addition, women’s behaviour and their varied experiences of work suggest that the patriotic land girl was far from an accurate depiction.²

This chapter builds on the existing historiography by exploring recruitment and training amongst women undertaking agricultural work throughout Wales. This includes examining the efforts of local agricultural committees, the varying factors which dictated the demand for additional female labour amongst farmers, and the degree of enthusiasm amongst women for such work. The main focus is on those women and girls who worked on a part-time or full-time basis for a wage, including village women and those recruited for the WLA, although the role of farmers’ daughters and wives is also considered. This differentiation of female agricultural labourers helps to draw out how different backgrounds and circumstances, including age, social and economic status, shaped experiences and attitudes towards wartime work.³ It also underscores the

¹ For the overall British experience see Gill Clarke, *The Women’s Land Army: a portrait* (Bristol: Samson and Company, 2008); Pamela Horn, *Rural Life in England* (Dublin, 1984); Carol Twinch, *Women on the Land: their story during two world wars* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1990). See also Susan R. Grayzel, ‘Nostalgia, Gender and the Countryside: Placing the ‘Land Girl’ in First World War Britain’, *Rural History*, 10:2 (1991), pp. 155-170.

² W. A. Armstrong ‘Kentish Rural Society During the First World War’ in *Land, Labour and Agriculture, 1700-1920: Essays for Gordon Mingay*, eds by B.A. Holderness and M. Turner (London: The Hambledon Press, 1991), pp. 109-131; Bonnie J. White, ‘Sowing the seeds of patriotism? The Women’s Land Army in Devon, 1916-1918’, *The Local Historian*, 41:1 (2011), pp. 13-27.

³ Government reports and private correspondence often used terms including ‘women workers’ or ‘land girls’, when referring to their employment on the land. To avoid such ambiguity, this chapter will make

existence of obstacles in recruiting and employing female agricultural labour, which were especially prevalent during this period in Wales and persisted throughout the war. Apathy amongst women, unfavourable local labour conditions and rigid conceptions of gender, femininity, and suitable employment all contributed to such circumstances. Through focusing on particular localities, this chapter furthers our understanding of the regionally-specific experiences of female agricultural workers, and the recruitment and organisation of this labour force. Local conditions are crucial to understanding women's experiences on the land. The chapter demonstrates that although ideas of patriotism and service were readily exhorted by recruiters and the press, shortages of accommodation, attitudes towards women engaged in certain kinds of agricultural work, and the attraction of other kinds of wartime work ultimately limited attempts to build a substantial wartime female agricultural workforce in Wales.

Family labour and women's work on Welsh farms

Women's work was integral to the function and operation of farms throughout Wales. As in other areas of Britain, a significant number of Welsh women had been engaged in some kinds of farm work prior to 1914. The overwhelming majority of these were the wives and daughters of farmers, alongside female domestic servants and casual part-time labour employed primarily during the harvest period. Their responsibilities generally included tending to poultry and cattle, cleaning out the stables, planting and digging potatoes, hoeing, and dairy work. Their work was vital to the very survival of each farm, due in part to the small size of the individual farm units and the sparsely

direct reference to different groups of workers including those categorised as 'village women' and who were enrolled in wartime organisations.

populated nature of rural communities in Wales.⁴ In a report printed in October 1918, Silyn Roberts, Administrative Inspector for the Women's Branch of the Food Production Department, emphasised the importance of women's work to the operation of many farms in Wales. She found that

at the outbreak of War, it is likely that on average there were as many, if not more, women doing agricultural work in Wales as in any part of the Kingdom. The reason for this is that Wales is a land of small holdings [...] Owing to the fact that there is little co-operation in buying and selling, the farmer has to spend a considerable time away from his farm attending markets and fairs. This he can do without much loss to his farm, the women folk taking entire charge of milking and dairy work, and the feeding of young stock.⁵

Although traditionally farming was largely a male activity, many of the smaller hill farms were run entirely by women as their husbands were employed in other local industries including quarrying and mining. According to the 1911 census, which included all thirteen Welsh counties, on average 9.4% of occupied women in Wales were employed in agriculture. In some rural counties of west Wales, the number of occupied women in agriculture was significantly higher than the overall average, with 25.9% in Cardiganshire and 21.5% in both Carmarthenshire and Montgomeryshire.⁶ Traditionally, during the hay and corn harvests, larger farms could also draw on an uncounted supply of casual female labour from cottages and small-holdings. According to Dot Jones, this kind of largely unrecorded work was an important part of women's role in many rural communities.⁷ According to a report on Cardiganshire by the Agricultural Wages Board published in 1919, in addition to their household duties,

⁴ Deirdre Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth-century Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 35.

⁵ M. S. Roberts, 'The Women of Wales and Agriculture', *The Journal of the Board of Agriculture*, 25 (October 1918), 781-872, p. 817.

⁶ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 35.

⁷ Dot Jones, 'Serfdom and Slavery: Women's Work in Wales, 1890-1930' in *Class, Community and the Labour Movement: Wales and Canada, 1850-1930*, eds by Deian R. Hopkin and Gregory S. Kealey (Aberystwyth, 1989), pp. 90-91.

many tasks such as tending cattle, cleaning out stalls, loading carts, planting and digging potatoes, hoeing, and driving the harrow were ‘still largely entrusted to women’ and ‘they also help when required in the field, and always assist in haymaking corn harvesting’.⁸ Therefore, many farmers’ wives, daughters and domestic servants in the county continued to carry out these jobs throughout the duration of the war. Local village women were also employed on a part-time or seasonal basis. This trend also continued throughout the war especially during the harvest periods, with village women becoming involved in the production of food by joining locally organised gangs.⁹ Existing patterns of work in agricultural communities were an important factor which dictated the level of demand for additional female labour in many counties throughout Wales.

Understanding these patterns of work was integral to the government’s attempts to intervene in the organisation of agricultural labour, which began at an early stage in the war. By the autumn of 1915, a War Agricultural Committee was formed in each county across Britain and the following February, the Board of Agriculture was encouraging all such committees to establish a Women’s Farm Labour Committee. These later became known as WWACs and they worked with a host of existing groups including branches of the Women’s Institute to organise recruitment in a range of different jobs.¹⁰ Their effectiveness relied for the most part on local initiative and most importantly generating interest amongst farmers.¹¹ District committees alongside local

⁸ *Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, Wages and conditions of employment in agriculture, Volume II. Reports of Investigators* [Cmd. 25], 1919, ix, pp, 413-414.

⁹ Ivor Nicolson and Trevor Lloyd-Williams, *Wales: Its Part in the War* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919), p. 223.

¹⁰ Horn, *Rural Life in England*, p. 120.

¹¹ Peter E. Dewey, *British agriculture in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 52.

labour representatives began to negotiate with farmers to determine which farms and districts required labour.¹²

In south Wales, shortages of male agricultural labourers in some districts began to be reported in the press during the spring and summer of 1915. In June, the *Daily Chronicle* claimed that ‘in South Wales, where there is a very serious shortage of agricultural labour due to the splendid patriotic response made by the men of Glamorgan and Monmouth, the Women’s College in Cardiff for the daughters of small farmers may perhaps be the means of saving the situation for Welsh farmers’.¹³ Whilst there are no accurate figures available for the overall reduction of the labour force in Wales, during 1915 the local press began to report that an increasing number of agricultural labourers in south Wales were enlisting for the army.¹⁴ However, research has found that in many rural areas of north and west Wales between August 1914 and the beginning of 1916 low numbers of men were volunteering.¹⁵ In addition, as Peter Dewey and others have argued, the methods used to compile Board of Trade figures for the availability of agricultural labour were flawed. These figures did not include farmers or their relatives, and largely comprised of labour employed on larger farms and estates.¹⁶ Therefore, the report from the *Daily Chronicle* could have been referring to the loss of labour on large estates owned by prominent local landowners. Some farms and small-holdings in the county did not employ general farm labour, as the size of the

¹² Dewey, *British Agriculture*, p. 120.

¹³ *Daily Chronicle*, 1 June 1915, p. 3.

¹⁴ David A. Pretty, *The Rural Revolt that Failed: Farm Workers’ Trade Unions in Wales 1889-1950* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1989), p. 64.

¹⁵ Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.82. For a more in-depth focus on Wales see also Chris Williams, ‘Taffs in the Trenches: Welsh national identity and military service 1914-1918’ in *Wales and War: Society, Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, eds by Matthew Cragoe and Chris Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), pp. 126-164 and Neil Evans, ‘Loyalties: state, nation, community and military recruiting in Wales, 1840-1914’ in *Wales and War: Society, Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, eds by Matthew Cragoe and Chris Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), pp. 38-62.

¹⁶ Dewey, *British Agriculture*, pp. 40-44; Alun Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside Since 1900* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 18.

plot itself could be covered by family members. It therefore remains difficult to distinguish how many agricultural male workers volunteered for the army and whether they were relatives or hired outside labour.

Whatever the initial level of enlistment in rural communities, shortages of male labour did not immediately cause a crisis in most areas. According to a report published in 1916 examining the state of agricultural labour in Wales, particularly in the Llandaff and South East Glamorgan District, it was found that 'most of the farms are very small so most can be run without additional labour'.¹⁷ As a result of increasing mechanisation and the pastoral nature of agriculture in Wales, historically there had been little demand for general labourers or additional workers in certain districts.¹⁸ Nearly 70% of holdings were less than 50 acres, therefore only on large estates or bigger farms was hired male labour required to any significant extent.¹⁹ This was also the case in regards to the demand for female labour during the war, as generally smaller farms did not require the same level of replacement labour as bigger estates and plots. Nevertheless, as the *Daily Chronicle* article illustrates, the loss of men to the army did cause an increasing need for replacement labour as the government steadily sought to expand food production throughout Britain. However, the response from farmers and women in many areas was not encouraging.

¹⁷ National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth (hereafter NLW), Records of the Welsh Army Corps (1914-1925), File No C114/15, C: Administration, Report on Agricultural Work in the Counties of Glamorgan, Monmouthshire, Brecon and Radnorshire with Additional Notes on the Work in Caernarfon, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Cardiganshire, 13 May 1916, p. 2.

¹⁸ Pretty, *The Rural Revolt*, p. 64.

¹⁹ E. H. Whetham, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Vol. 8 1914-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 64.

Opposition from farmers

For many reasons, several farmers were initially reluctant to employ female labour from outside their own family. Of particular importance were attitudes towards women's capabilities on the farm and established notions of rural labour practices. By the summer of 1916, very few women had been placed to work on farms and small-holdings throughout Wales. Silyn Roberts, by now acting as Women's Agricultural Organising Officer for Wales, reported that 'those [farms] able to employ a number of labourers are comparatively few, and the number of women employed other than members of the family are fewer still'.²⁰ For 'lighter tasks' including dairying and feeding animals, farmers felt the employment of additional female labour was unnecessary when they already had wives and daughters able to undertake such work.²¹ Mrs Powell, Village Registrar for Trapp in Carmarthenshire, found that 'the farmers do not care about the idea of women working on the farm unless it is members of their families'.²² At a farm in Merionethshire, a farmer's son reportedly asked, 'Why should such a fuss be made of the Land Army girls? My sister has always done the work they do'.²³ As this suggests, in some areas, there was a degree of hostility amongst farmers towards hiring female labour from outside their immediate family.

Farmers placed a great deal of importance on the work performed by female relatives, and relied on their experience and knowledge to help maintain production.

²⁰ Bangor University Special Archives and Collections, Bangor University [hereafter BU], Papers of Mary Silyn Roberts, BMSS MSIL, 14877 Women's Land Army: Reports, Letters, Newspaper Cuttings, etc., File: Detailing the activities of the Women's Land Army in Wales during the 1914-18 War Item: M. Silyn Roberts, Agricultural War Service for Women, July 1916, ff. 5-6.

²¹ 'Report on the Wages and Conditions of Employment in Agriculture', *Journal of the Board of Agriculture*, 26 (April 1919), pp. 1-120, p. 13.

²² BU, 14877 Women's Land Army: Reports, Letters, Newspaper Cuttings, etc., M. Silyn Roberts, Agricultural War Service for Women, July 1916, ff. 7-13.

²³ Roberts, 'The Women of Wales', p. 819.

During 1916, recruiters recognised the important role farmers' daughters could play in using their experience and knowledge to provide training for new workers. The crucial wartime role of farmers' female relatives was recognised by the Chairwoman of the north Wales branch of the Women's Institute, Mrs Drage, during a meeting of the Caernarfonshire WWAC in 1918. She emphasised the wartime contribution of farmers and daughters in the county 'who quietly carry on in their homes'.²⁴ However, from some quarters there was also criticism directed towards farmers for their apparent unwillingness to introduce and accept the value of such training schemes. Some believed that the lack of interest in the organisation of women's work was reflective of Welsh rural society and its attempt to maintain traditional employment practices. According to one district representative of the Carmarthenshire WWAC there was a certain level of distrust for new labour methods. She recalled 'I fear very few will take any interest in it here [...] they [the Welsh] suspect all new methods. I had a class this afternoon and told them [women in attendance] of the offer about training [in farming and gardening], but no one rose. I think the "work for women" has been well discussed and is quite understood but many farmers don't want them'.²⁵

These criticisms were occasionally countered by farmers. At a public meeting in Carmarthen during May 1916, one farmer suggested that the organisers themselves had not coordinated the scheme effectively. He claimed that 'people in the outlying districts did not understand the situation, nor the aims of the campaign', and proposed 'that a letter clearly and simply written in both Welsh and English be sent to every place of worship throughout the County'.²⁶ However, in the vast majority of small-holdings, the

²⁴ *The Merioneth News and Herald and Barmouth Record*, 26 April 1918, p. 3.

²⁵ BU, 14877 Women's Land Army: Reports, Letters, Newspaper Cuttings, etc., M. Silyn Roberts, Agricultural War Service for Women, July 1916, ff. 7-13.

²⁶ BU, 14877 Women's Land Army: Reports, Letters, Newspaper Cuttings, etc., M. Silyn Roberts, Agricultural War Service for Women, May 1916, ff. 28-32. This suggests that in wartime Wales, chapels

potential loss of just one male relative could be financially disastrous. Therefore, large numbers of men decided to continue to work on farms and not enlist.²⁷ After conscription was introduced in 1916, some agricultural workers, depending on their job and their importance to the farm, were exempt from military service. Military Tribunals were established throughout the country to hear requests for exemption, with farmers often appealing to their local committee in an attempt to stop relatives from being conscripted.²⁸ In this context, attempts to replace male labour with inexperienced female agricultural workers understandably met with much opposition.

A mixture of animosity and scepticism from farmers and employers towards the employment of women on a full-time basis persisted throughout the war in Wales. Farmers were initially concerned that if they employed women they might lose their few remaining experienced, skilled male workers. The press attempted to quell perceived fears amongst farmers that their sons and male relatives would be replaced once the war had ended. In an article from the *Western Mail* during August 1918 the assertion was made that ‘there need be no fear that women in time to come might take the place of men in agricultural work’.²⁹ Farmers also worried that replacement female workers would not be able to effectively carry out the necessary labour. Although most rural women from the working class had participated in some kind of farm work at some point during their lives, those of a higher social status were considered by farmers and members of the gentry to be unfit for such work.³⁰ Farmers believed that middle-class

and churches continued to be seen as important focal points and sources of local news and information. As some ministers were seemingly supportive of women entering other wartime services including munitions production, there is a possibility that the local chapel would have allowed local recruiters to spread the message of the need for female labour on surrounding farms.

²⁷ Peter E. Dewey, ‘Agricultural Labour Supply in England and Wales during the First World War’, *The Economic History Review*, 28:1 (1975), pp. 100-112 (pp. 102-103).

²⁸ Pretty, *The Rural Revolt*, p. 69.

²⁹ *Western Mail*, 8 August, 1917, p. 2.

³⁰ White, ‘Sowing the Seeds’, p. 17.

women especially would not have the stamina to be able to undertake such difficult work on the land in all weathers and conditions. They also felt that they could not ask ‘ladies’ to undertake such rough work.³¹ In Glamorgan, the local Women’s Farm Labour Committee, detailed to organise the recruitment of female labour onto the land in the county, found that ‘many farms, especially scattered farms in the mining valleys, include a considerable proportion of mountain land, where the work and conditions are quite unsuitable for women’.³² Even in areas where the presence of female labour on farms had been especially prevalent, there were some jobs which were considered inappropriate for women.

In other areas, there was no such tradition of female agricultural labour. In many areas of west Wales which had a strong farming tradition, the vast majority of women had not done any kind of field work. This was especially the case in regards to ploughing with horses, which had been considered ‘highly improper, if not physically impossible, for women’.³³ One employer in Pembrokeshire argued in 1916 that the land in the county was not appropriate for women to plough. At a meeting of the War Agricultural Committee in the county, Mr W. T. Davies stated that ‘there were a very large number of arable farms and the work would be very heavy for women and girls’. Women would be better utilised in harvesting corn with the use of sheaves.³⁴ It appears that farmers in Pembrokeshire were motivated to express such opinions based upon ‘dictates of tradition’ and gendered assumptions regarding women’s physical capability. This echoes Bonnie White’s findings in her study of the WLA in Devon.³⁵ Many

³¹ Clarke, *The Women’s Land Army*, p. 15.

³² NLW, C114/15, C: Administration, Report on Agricultural Work in the Counties of Glamorgan, Monmouthshire, Brecon and Radnorshire with Additional Notes on the Work in Carnarvon, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Cardiganshire, 13 May 1916, p. 2.

³³ Roberts, ‘The Women of Wales and Agriculture’, p. 818.

³⁴ *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 12 May 1916, p. 2.

³⁵ White, ‘Sowing the Seeds’, p. 17.

farmers remained sceptical about how much practical support these new middle-class recruits could actually provide.

WWACs were initially encouraged to recruit young, strong, healthy and educated women with a good moral character. An “educated” middle-class woman (which seems to have meant a woman who had received some level of formal education) was believed to be the model land worker. This was partly due to the assumption that being well-read and therefore ‘imaginative’ made workers more competent and self-reliant. It was also assumed that such women would work for patriotic motives alone and therefore would not be too concerned by the combination of physically demanding work, long hours and low pay.³⁶ Most of the initial recruits were middle-class daughters of professional men from urban areas, and recruiters hoped they would serve as a positive example to village women who ultimately continued to do the overwhelming majority of the farm work throughout the war.³⁷ Recruits were therefore represented as happy, healthy and patriotic. This helped to maintain established notions of femininity and gender roles, despite the move into physically demanding work. However, although women’s patriotism was emphasised by recruiters, public meetings organised by farmers throughout Wales continued to voice misgivings about whether they would be able to replace skilled male labourers after only a few months training.

For these reasons, farmers preferred to use male labour from local industries, German prisoners of war and soldiers on leave from the army. A report compiled by Miss Pritchard, the Organising Secretary of the County Committee for Anglesey found that farmers were using male labour from the local quarries, along with existing

³⁶ Grayzel, ‘Nostalgia’, p. 158.

³⁷ G. Clarke, *The Women’s Land Army*, p. 17.

agricultural workers and soldiers.³⁸ Throughout north Wales, large numbers of quarrymen found their employment disrupted by the war as little building was taking place. In many districts that had relied on the quarries, there were high levels of unemployment but only a relatively small number had volunteered for the army by the beginning of 1915.³⁹ With mechanisation still relatively young throughout Wales and in other parts of Britain with similar types of farming, the physical strength of men made them a more efficient alternative for the heavier jobs on the farms. Similar conditions were apparent in the colliery district of Mynyddcerrig in Carmarthenshire. Mr Hugh Morgan reported in July 1916 that ‘it would appear that no scarcity of labour exists in this immediate neighbourhood as colliers after their days [sic] work and those working night shifts together with the usual women’s assistance is sufficient to meet the requirements of the farmers around and most of the young girls not required at home are helping in shops’.⁴⁰ Furthermore, it was also found many women did not want to work on farms. The increasing availability of alternative forms of employment persuaded many working-class women to either leave farms, or choose not to work on the land at all.

Shortage of female labour

As this suggests, the prospect of working on farms was unappealing for many women. Many women already in part or full-time employment in agriculture did not register with their local wartime agricultural committee. As noted in a report compiled

³⁸ BU, 14877 Women’s Land Army: Reports, Letters, Newspaper Cuttings, etc., M. Silyn Roberts, Agricultural War Service for Women, July 1916, ff. 7-13.

³⁹ Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p. 82.

⁴⁰ BU, 14877 Women’s Land Army: Reports, Letters, Newspaper Cuttings, etc., M. Silyn Roberts, Agricultural War Service for Women, July 1916, ff. 7-13.

by the Board of Trade, this was particularly common in Pembrokeshire where ‘there is a real prejudice against registering’ as a ‘great number of women are already at work all over the county’.⁴¹ Village Registrars and WWACs worked together to try and place women onto different farms, with the former compiling the names of volunteers alongside keeping track of where they had been sent. During 1916, growing numbers of recruits enlisted as part-time workers instead, allowing a greater degree of flexibility and autonomy over their own working lives. In the districts of Hay and Talgarth, Breconshire, some women who had applied to work on the local farms were either doing other wartime jobs or already held positions in professional roles. Miss Annie Williams was also employed as a postwoman; whilst Mrs Annie Lewis, a married woman from the same village, was a school teacher and could therefore only work during the holidays.⁴² Throughout the war, many female teachers were involved in undertaking this kind of additional work, which also included becoming involved with local sewing guilds.⁴³ After the establishment of a village gang at Chepstow in Monmouthshire, only sixteen volunteers out of fifty-four who had initially registered could work with a gang on a regular basis. The wages provided were not truly an extra incentive either, with three pence per hour the best women could expect to receive.⁴⁴ As this suggests, agricultural work was not necessarily the most attractive option for women, and they often tried to combine it with other work, or avoided it entirely.

⁴¹ National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), MF 59/1 (2), Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Women’s County Committees: Organisation of Women’s Labour, File I: Reports on Women’s Employment 4th October 1916, ‘Summary of the Work of the Women’s War Agricultural Committees, For the Year Ending August 1916’, Sub-section: Wales Division, pp. 31-33.

⁴² BU, 14877 Women’s Land Army: Reports, Letters, Newspaper Cuttings, etc., Women’s Farm Labour Committee: Hay and Talgarth District, ff. 53-56.

⁴³ Anthony Mór-O’Brien, *A Community in Wartime: Aberdare and the First World War* (Unpublished PhD thesis, The University of Wales Swansea, 1986), pp. 220-221.

⁴⁴ TNA, MF 59/1 (2), Women’s County Committees: Organisation of Women’s Labour, File I: Reports on Women’s Employment 4th October 1916, ‘Summary of the Work of the Women’s War Agricultural Committees, For the Year Ending August 1916’, Sub-section: ‘Special Schemes’ V. Thorne, Work of Gangs in Villages, Chepstow, June 23rd 1916, p. 42.

For women with little or no experience of working on a farm, the working conditions of the land army were often perceived as far too restrictive. Even after the WLA was established in January 1917, the terms of work stipulated that after a period of mandatory training, women had to spend at least six months on the land, and could not leave their post until it had been cleared by the Village Registrar or the local WWAC.⁴⁵ Many women in Wales considered these conditions of employment to involve an ‘unnecessary fuss’ and feared that by putting their names forward they risked being moved away from their local area.⁴⁶ In a colliery district to the north of Carmarthenshire, the local agricultural committee found that nobody was prepared to undertake farm work away from their homes. Some preferred to stay in their local area and help on the neighbouring farms of friends and relatives, particularly during the harvest period.⁴⁷

As with the establishment of village gangs, this kind of seasonal labour had been a common feature of rural life in many parts of Wales during the previous century. Women were an integral part of what Dot Jones has described as a ‘Higher Network of Mutual Aid’, which primarily involved the transfer of labour between cottages and larger farms. In Cardiganshire, farmers would allow local families living in cottages with no land attached to plant rows of potatoes on their farms. In exchange, women from the cottage would work at the corn harvest a day for each row of potatoes that had been set.⁴⁸ It is also possible that many young women and girls in both rural and more urban districts were not able to work because of the need to support their families by carrying out additional responsibilities in the home. Where fathers or brothers were

⁴⁵ White, ‘Sowing the Seeds’, p. 16.

⁴⁶ TNA, MF 59/1 (2), ‘Summary of the Work of the Women’s War Agricultural Committees, Sub-section: Wales Division, pp. 31-33.

⁴⁷ BU, 14877 Women’s Land Army: Reports, Letters, Newspaper Cuttings, etc., M. Silyn Roberts, Agricultural War Service for Women, May 1916, ff. 28-32.

⁴⁸ Jones, ‘Serfdom and Slavery’, pp. 90-91.

employed at the local coal mines or in other industries which were at maximum output as a result of the war effort, this put further pressure on women to fulfil traditional domestic roles. Local, familial, and communal ties influenced the choices made by women during the war.

As well as difficulties in getting women to take up agricultural work, or to fit it in with domestic duties, women and girls previously engaged in farm work also sometimes preferred alternative forms of wartime employment. As men began to volunteer for the front, some predominantly young, unmarried women from rural areas began to replace them in a variety of jobs including shop and factory work. During 1915, compared with pre-war levels, there was a clear fall in the number of females permanently employed in agriculture throughout Wales.⁴⁹ During 1916, it was found that on the western side of Denbighshire, growing numbers of women had left the farms to find work in the seaside resorts of Colwyn Bay, Rhyl and Llandudno.⁵⁰ On Anglesey, the Organising Secretary of the County Committee argued that women chose not to undertake farm work because they could potentially earn higher wages elsewhere. Miss Pritchard found that in a number of places on the island ‘there was no one who would volunteer for farm work, for every woman and girl in the place was needed to cater for the needs of visitors, and of course the holiday time is the harvest time on the farms, and they demand such big wages in these seaside places’.⁵¹ This kind of seasonal employment had provided a valuable source of additional income for women before the war, and they were reluctant to give it up for agricultural work in wartime.

⁴⁹ London School of Economics, London (hereafter LSE), Beveridge Papers, 6/124-154, No. 129: Report on the state of employment in all occupations in the United Kingdom in April 1918, pp. 1-47. Information based on Table XV: Employment Exchange Areas the State of Employment among Workpeople permanently employed in Agriculture, pp. 33-34.

⁵⁰ *The Holyhead Mail and Anglesey Herald*, 5 January 1917, p. 2.

⁵¹ BU, 14877 Women’s Land Army: Reports, Letters, Newspaper Cuttings, etc., M. Silyn Roberts, Agricultural War Service for Women, July 1916, ff. 7-13.

A more pronounced wartime trend, which extended late nineteenth-century patterns of female labour migration, was movement from rural areas to the South Wales Coalfield.⁵² In wartime, rural women often moved in order to work in the higher-paid munitions industries. Gabrielle West, a member of the Women's Police Service stationed at Nobel's Explosives Factory in Pembrey, noted that some of the workers were from 'lonely little sheep farms in the mountains, [they] speak only Welsh, or a very little broken English [but] are very good workers'.⁵³ At the Powysland Ordnance Works in Welshpool, the majority of the 500 workers were former agricultural labourers. Amongst the female workforce, a large number were the daughters of local farmers.⁵⁴ In March 1916, during a meeting of the Carmarthenshire War Agricultural Committee, it was suggested that the presence of munitions factories and tinsplate works in the south-west at Pembrey, Llanelli and Swansea was draining potential labour, especially younger women and girls, away from farm work.⁵⁵ The reason for this was made clear by one respondent to a survey examining the interest in agricultural work in Carmarthenshire. They stated that 'why go away to a farm for 30/- a month, when you can get 30/- a week in Llanelly'.⁵⁶

Around the same time in Flintshire, north Wales, the large explosives factory at Queensferry was also thought to be hiring most of the women able to work on the farms.⁵⁷ This was also the case in other parts of the country including Warwickshire, where a number of munitions factories had taken the vast majority of younger women

⁵² Kathryn J. Cooper, *Exodus from Cardiganshire: Rural Urban Migration in Victorian Britain* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), p. 105.

⁵³ IWM, Department of Documents: 77/156/1, Diary of Miss G.M West, 1917.

⁵⁴ Nicolson and Lloyd-Williams, *Wales: Its Part in the War*, p. 113.

⁵⁵ *The Carmarthen Journal*, 31 March 1916, p. 3.

⁵⁶ BU, 14877 Women's Land Army: Reports, Letters, Newspaper Cuttings, etc., M. Silyn Roberts, Agricultural War Service for Women, May 1916, ff. 28-33.

⁵⁷ *The North Wales Guardian*, 10 March 1916, p. 3.

who would have been able to work on the land.⁵⁸ One of the reasons for the difficulty in recruiting women to agricultural labour, then, was the steady expansion of the munitions industry in various localities in both north and south Wales, and the greater remuneration such work afforded.

There were other reasons why farm work seemed less attractive to young women. Recruiters believed that women saw farm work as somehow less necessary to the war effort as munitions work. The Carmarthenshire War Agricultural Committee claimed that ‘there was at present a large number of women in Llanelly district waiting to be taken into the Muniton Works, but they would not undertake farm work. It was essential to enlist the sympathy of the women, and to point out to them that it was quite as important to produce food, as it was to produce munitions’.⁵⁹ Farmers claimed that women were not interested in doing jobs which they had traditionally done, including field work and ‘the feeding of calves and pigs and the milking of cows’.⁶⁰ According to Edgar Leyshon Chappell, a local government official investigating labour conditions in south Wales during the war, this was due to ‘the proximity of Carmarthenshire to the industrial districts’ on the western tip of the South Wales Coalfield. In his report to the AWB in April 1918, Chappell concluded that ‘the tendency for present-day women to refuse any work associated with agriculture was undeniable’.⁶¹ This reveals not only attitudes towards the changing habits of working-class women but also their increasing confidence in wanting to improve their working lives.

It also shows that agricultural labour was perceived as unappealing on its own terms. The supply of women available for farm work and domestic service in the county

⁵⁸ Horn, *Rural Life in England*, p.114.

⁵⁹ *The Carmarthen Journal*, 31 March 1916, p. 3.

⁶⁰ *Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, Wages and conditions of employment in agriculture, Volume II. Reports of Investigators* [Cmd. 25], 1919, ix, p. 424.

⁶¹ *Volume II. Reports of Investigators* [Cmd. 25], 1919, ix, p. 424.

had been on the decline since the end of the nineteenth century. Farm servants might be expected to work both inside and out, often obtaining employment through local hiring fairs. They would assist the mistress with the milking and butter-making, alongside doing their household chores and also helping during the harvest period.⁶² The average working day lasted from 5am until 10pm: this was tough, arduous work. In Carmarthenshire, the long hours and physically demanding nature of farm work was said to be one of the main reasons for the shortage of women willing to apply for domestic service roles. Some of the mistresses interviewed as part of the report on agricultural labour in the county during the war claimed that ‘the statements as to the excessive hours and arduousness of domestic labour are greatly exaggerated’. Instead, they attributed ‘the scarcity of servant girls to the changes in the outlook and habits of the people, consequent on “too much education”’. They claimed that girls now wanted to be “genteel” and aspired to shop work or dressmaking instead of domestic service.⁶³ The Chairman of the War Agricultural Committee for Carmarthenshire put forward a similar analysis, and suggested that in order to solve the shortage of agricultural labour, it was necessary to make farm work seem more ‘fashionable’.⁶⁴ As this shows, preconceived notions of feminine characteristics and behaviour informed middle-class beliefs about working-class women’s employment choices. The greater economic benefits and increased social freedom of other forms of work were not considered by these commentators.

There was also a stigma attached to farming which seemingly deterred some from undertaking the work. Compared with the level of participation amongst women in

⁶² Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 36.

⁶³ *Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, Wages and conditions of employment in agriculture, Volume II. Reports of Investigators* [Cmd. 25], 1919, ix, p. 425.

⁶⁴ *The Carmarthen Journal*, 17 March 1916, p. 4.

the counties of west Wales, on the eastern side of the country in Breconshire female labour was used sparingly, especially in field work. According to the AWB report in June 1918 'a great scarcity of female farm servants is reported in all parts of the county, and there is general complaint that girls employed in domestic service on farms are becoming more reluctant to perform various outdoor tasks which were formerly always undertaken by women'. Furthermore, in many 'country districts' women would not undertake field work because it was considered to be 'degrading'.⁶⁵ Even in counties where traditionally large numbers of women had worked on farms, such as Pembrokeshire, there was the belief amongst some that it was for the 'less intelligent' and that 'brighter' children should be encouraged do another job.⁶⁶

Some recruiters attempted to counter negative perceptions of farm work and agricultural labourers by singling out factory work for criticism. Groups such as the Women's Farm Labour Committee in Carmarthenshire consistently emphasised the negative aspects of working in a munitions factory. According to a newspaper report, the Chairman of the Committee 'maintained that work on the land is of a far more noble character than work in factories, which is so monotonous and uninteresting'.⁶⁷ However, these problems were never satisfactorily resolved. In April 1918, a local north Wales newspaper covered a public meeting of the South Caernarfonshire WWAC. The reporter noted that 'he was afraid that the village girls [living in localities surrounding the farm] of the district were thinking that it was an insult for them to work on the land. He had no doubt that the country girls [those living on farms] were working very hard

⁶⁵ *Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, Wages and conditions of employment in agriculture, Volume II. Reports of Investigators* [Cmd. 25], 1919, ix, pp. 402-403.

⁶⁶ BU, 14877 Women's Land Army: Reports, Letters, Newspaper Cuttings, etc., M. Silyn Roberts, *Agricultural War Service for Women*, April 1916, ff. 14-27.

⁶⁷ *The Carmarthen Journal*, 7 April 1916, p. 6.

on the land, but the committee ought to induce the village girls to do their share.⁶⁸ The remainder of this chapter will consider some of the ways in which women did become involved in agricultural labour, but the prevalent trend towards rejection of farm work forms the necessary backdrop to this consideration of the organisation of a female agricultural labour force.

The Increasing Involvement of Women in Agriculture

The table below shows the deficit in the number of women permanently employed on the land between 1915 and 1918 compared to the level found in July 1914.

Table 1: Percentage Excess (+) or Deficit (-) in numbers of females permanently employed in agriculture in Wales as compared with July 1914*

*Numbers employed in July 1914 = 100

Date	April 1914	April 1915	April 1916	April 1917	April 1918
Percentage excess or deficit	-5.9	-5.5	-3.8	+ 4.2	-2.5

Source: LSE Beveridge Papers, 6/124-154, No. 129 Report on the state of employment in all occupations in the United Kingdom in April 1918, pp. 1-47. Information based on Table XV: Employment Exchange Areas the State of Employment among Workpeople permanently employed in Agriculture, pp. 33-34.

This deficit was maintained by the establishment of munitions factories and the increasing availability of other jobs open to women as a result of the war. However, these statistics only show those who had registered with labour exchanges and may not represent the entire Welsh female agricultural workforce, especially those who worked

⁶⁸ *The Merioneth News and Herald and Barmouth Record*, 26 April 1918, p. 3.

on a part-time or casual basis. Attempts to compile accurate figures for the number of women actually placed on a farm in each locality during the war were beset by problems. One of the main problems is that monthly returns compiled by the Village Registrar and District Representatives for each county were often 'poor and confused' and it was 'therefore difficult to secure any accurate figures'.⁶⁹ Despite these problems, we do have some rough figures for female agricultural labourers employed in different areas in the later stages of the war.

In 1918, the AWB found that Cardiganshire, Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire had the highest numbers of women working on the land in Wales, with the majority being farmers' daughters, wives and farm servants.⁷⁰ According to the Women's Branch of the Food Production Department by August 1918, just fewer than 37,000 village women in Wales were registered as engaged in farm work.⁷¹ According to one contemporary source written directly after the war, the vast majority of WLA recruits were found to be employed in eastern areas of Wales.⁷² Despite deficiencies in the collection of statistics, this evidence does suggest that in areas where traditionally large numbers of women had always worked on farms, there were fewer WLA recruits. Nevertheless, as the war went on, both experienced and new female agricultural labourers became involved in different branches of agricultural work throughout Wales.

One response to the need for increased agricultural labour was the organisation of village 'gangs'. During the harvest period of 1916, the need for this kind of casual labour grew in many small villages and districts throughout Wales. The image below

⁶⁹ NLW, C114/15, Report on Agricultural Work in the Counties of Glamorgan, Monmouthshire, Brecon and Radnorshire with Additional Notes on the Work in Caernarfon, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Cardiganshire, 13 May 1916, p. 5.

⁷⁰ Dewey, *British Agriculture*, p. 130.

⁷¹ Dewey, *British Agriculture*, p. 130.

⁷² Nicolson and Lloyd-Williams, *Wales: Its Part in the War*, p. 225.

shows a group of non-conscripted men and boys alongside women working as part of a ‘village gang’ somewhere in Montgomeryshire during 1917.⁷³



Figure 6: ‘Women’s Land Army, Montgomeryshire, c. 1917’

Members of the local WWAC, primarily middle and upper-class women, were at the forefront of attempts to organise and recruit gangs or squads of female workers to help out on local farms. Trained women workers who formed part of the Women’s National Land Service Corps were put in direct charge of leading these groups. Forewomen arranged work for their groups with local farmers, issued wages and updated time and pay sheets.⁷⁴ But in many cases there were not enough suitably trained and experienced women available to organise and lead the groups. Silyn Roberts noted that in many districts, ‘it has been impossible so far to secure a sufficiently skilled and

⁷³ BU, Reference No. 14877 ‘Women’s Land Army, Montgomeryshire, c. 1917’.

⁷⁴ Clarke, *The Women’s Land Army*, p. 16.

educated leader to make gangs of this type a success. It is not that there are no skilled workers in the district, but that all the skilled workers are themselves employed on their farms and are therefore quite unable to spare time from their own work to organise gangs'.⁷⁵ To make up for the unavailability of local labour, Silyn Roberts wrote to the Secretary of the Belgian Refugee Committee at Harlech in north Wales to ask whether Belgian women could support and provide instruction to these groups. She emphasised the experience and 'example' Belgian women could provide for new recruits who 'though anxious to help their Country, have not yet the necessary knowledge'.⁷⁶ Whilst assuming a patriotic motive on behalf of the new recruits, using Belgian women was also intended to be a cheap and affordable way of training such groups of female labour.

During 1916, groups of women were organised into village 'gangs' to help on different farms in Chepstow. Their role and responsibilities were recorded by Miss V. Thorne, who was particularly active in the recruitment of female labour in Monmouthshire. She organised and instructed these groups of women and was also in charge of a training scheme introduced for WLA members at Tredegar Home Farm in April 1916. In order to recruit members for such 'squads', Thorne targeted local newspapers and village shops to display notices giving information about what kind of work which was required and the whereabouts of the farm. She then noted that 'one is posted in the town in the window of the Editor of the "Argus" and one in the village shop window near here, where I get some very good helpers from'.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ BU, 14877 Women's Land Army: Reports, Letters, Newspaper Cuttings, etc., File: Detailing the activities of the Women's Land Army in Wales during the 1914-18 War Item: M. Silyn Roberts, Agricultural War Service for Women, July 1916, ff. 5-6.

⁷⁶ NLW, W. D. Roberts Manuscripts, MS 9982E, Circulars, correspondence, accounts, and other papers relating to Belgian refugees, farm produce for the armed forces, and other matters in Llanfair-juxta-Harlech, 1914-1918, Item: Correspondence from Mary Silyn Roberts to Secretary of the Belgian Refugee Committee, 5 April 1916, f. 132.

⁷⁷ TNA, MF 59/1 (2), Women's County Committees: Organisation of Women's Labour, File I: Reports on Women's Employment 4th October 1916, 'Summary of the Work of the Women's War Agricultural

By the time of writing her report, fifty-six women had offered their services. By the summer of 1916, these groups had undertaken a range of tasks including ‘weeding, thistles and dooks [batches?] out of wheat’. The report also implies that there was an increasing demand for such groups from local farmers. Thorne noted that there had been requests from farmers for the women’s services ‘for the next two weeks at least’.⁷⁸ This report was submitted at the request of the Board of Trade, which prior to 1916 had been responsible for assessing the condition of female agricultural employment and for compiling data on the numbers of women working on the land.⁷⁹ Thorne’s intention was primarily to impress the Board with her own achievements, and this means her positive account should not necessarily be taken at face value. Moreover, she provided little indication as to whether the women enjoyed their work and how they may have reacted to the ‘military-style discipline’ which was seemingly harshly imposed. There was also little discussion as to whether any of these women had any prior experience of farm work, although it is likely on the basis of evidence from other localities that some may have done.

It was not just groups of women from local villages who formed part of such ‘gangs’. In Cardiganshire, the University College of Wales (UCW) organised groups of female university students to undertake hoeing during their summer vacation. They primarily worked in the root fields adjoining the house of Sir George Stapledon and his wife Doris at Glanymor, Clarach in Aberystwyth. By the summer of 1916, 18 farmers had requested the assistance of Stapledon’s gang with field work and hay making.⁸⁰

Committees, For the Year Ending August 1916’, Sub-section: ‘Special Schemes’ V. Thorne, *Work of Gangs in Villages*, Chepstow, June 23rd 1916, pp. 41-42, p. 42.

⁷⁸ Sub-section: ‘Special Schemes’ V. Thorne, *Work of Gangs in Villages*, Chepstow, June 23rd 1916, p. 42.

⁷⁹ Twinch, *Women on the Land*, p. 10.

⁸⁰ D. Stapledon ‘Women in the Root Fields in Cardiganshire’, *Journal of the Board of Agriculture*, 23 (August 1916), 417-492 (p. 463).

Farmers and local representatives began to see the benefit of such schemes, especially with the increased shortage of both casual and permanent labour in the county.⁸¹ In some rural areas of Cardiganshire the labour shortage was particularly severe. Mrs Abel Jones, also from the Cardiganshire WWAC, noted how the Stapledon gang was needed by one farmer because he had lost six sons to the army.⁸² However, a more comprehensive and centrally coordinated programme for female labour was required to fill the increasing shortage of workers available for work on the land by the beginning of 1917.

The Women's Land Army (WLA)

During 1917, agricultural production was intensified with food production becoming the top priority. Food control measures were implemented, including restrictions on flour extraction. A full rationing system was introduced at the beginning of the following year.⁸³ With the establishment of the Food Production Department, the cultivation of agricultural land was steadily intensified with farmers told to plough open grasslands and sow cereals or potatoes.⁸⁴ Although groups of skilled agricultural labourers were protected from military conscription, there was an increasing demand for female labour to supplement the depleted workforce. Around 10,000 extra workers were needed, and a series of emergency measures were introduced to increase food production.

⁸¹ Nicolson and Lloyd-Williams, *Wales: Its Part in the War*, p. 225.

⁸² BU, 14877 Women's Land Army: Reports, Letters, Newspaper Cuttings, etc., M. Silyn Roberts, Agricultural War Service for Women, April 1916, ff. 14-27.

⁸³ Dewey, *British Agriculture*, pp. 225-226.

⁸⁴ Dewey, *British Agriculture*, pp. 241-242.

In January 1917, Miss Meriel Talbot was appointed as the director of the newly created Women's Branch of the Board of Agriculture. Shortly following this a national appeal for recruits for the WLA was made. This centralised group comprised of three sections: agriculture, forage, and timber cutting. Whereas the land service corps had targeted primarily educated middle-class women, the WLA accepted that they needed to recruit from a wider pool of workers.⁸⁵ Those who applied were questioned about their health and physical capability with their character and temperament also judged. According to Claire Twinch, recruiters believed that such measures were needed to convince farmers to employ WLA members.⁸⁶ Margaret Haig Mackworth, recently appointed commissioner for Wales and Monmouthshire in the Women's Department of the Ministry of National Service (as discussed in the previous chapter), organised recruitment events and tried to generate interest in the WLA throughout Wales.

Demand for female labour often varied from month to month but became especially pressing in spring of 1917 as soldiers on leave who had been working on the land were being recalled back to the army.⁸⁷ In light of this, with the help of local speakers and district representatives, Lady Mackworth arranged meetings in Cowbridge and Bridgend where farmers sought 'more information and new offers were made for training'.⁸⁸ To begin with, priority was given to applicants with prior experience in agricultural work and those not already in any form of employment deemed essential to the war effort. In correspondence with Miss Violet Markham of the National Service Department, Mackworth noted that 'they [farmers] are again getting very short of girls for the land, especially the more educated ones, whom they are particularly anxious to

⁸⁵ Horn, *Rural Life in England*, p. 125.

⁸⁶ Twinch, *Women on the Land*, pp. 31-32.

⁸⁷ Twinch, *Women on the Land*, p. 32.

⁸⁸ Angela V. John, *Turning the tide: the life of Lady Rhondda* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2013), p. 146.

secure'.⁸⁹ This suggested there was growing demand amongst some farmers for trained women.

As the vast majority of farms and small-holdings in Wales were primarily pastoral, involved in the production of dairy, the change to a predominantly arable method of farming resulted in a great deal of disruption and reorganisation. Large areas of previously uncultivated land were now to be harvested for crops.⁹⁰ Therefore, when the government asked for more male labour from farms in Wales to join the army there was plenty of opposition. In 1917, many farmers felt increasingly short of experienced labour. In a letter from the Denbighshire War Agricultural Committee to the Board of Agriculture, there was condemnation of Wales' exclusion from a recently agreed government directive 'to the effect that no more men whole time engaged in agriculture are to be called up from farms'. The Committee considered 'that any further depletion of men engaged in agriculture in the principality will entail a great hardship upon farmers'.⁹¹ Therefore, the employment of women along with other forms of supplementary labour was essential to maintaining food production in Wales.

During 1917, an increasing number of posters were being printed in the local press in an attempt to encourage women to work on the land. WWACs were now beginning to understand that they could not rely on patriotism, a love for animals or the outdoors to fully persuade women to join.⁹² This was reflected in a recruitment poster printed in *The Pembrokeshire and Herald and General Advertiser* during the spring of

⁸⁹ TNA, Ministry of National Service, Nats 1/1279 Correspondence between Lady Mackworth and Miss V. Markham, 25 June 1917.

⁹⁰ *The North Wales Guardian*, 11 May 1917, p. 3.

⁹¹ NLW, E. T. John Papers, ET 1729, Denbighshire War Agricultural Executive Committee, Correspondence from Hon. Secretary to E. T. John, 23 June 1917.

⁹² White, 'Sowing the Seeds', p. 19.

1917.⁹³ The promise of ‘inspected and approved’ accommodation, higher wages and the opportunity for advancement were strongly advocated. Travelling expenses were also now covered by the Board of Agriculture. During 1916, Silyn Roberts had found the cost of travel combined with their low wages deterred women with farming experience from moving away to areas where the shortage of agricultural labour was more acute.⁹⁴ Throughout Wales, an increasing number of public rallies, parades and demonstrations were held in an attempt to encourage women to undertake work on the land, but also to convince farmers to employ them.

Although the National Service Department did offer additional incentives to women, the language of patriotism and service remained prevalent in much of the public discourse surrounding the WLA. As with much of the discourse surrounding the need for female labour in other occupations during the war, an explicit link was made between their role and the soldiers fighting abroad. During a rally held in Newtown during April 1918, the Welsh novelist Miss Hilda Vaughan, who had served in a Red Cross hospital before becoming recruiting officer for the Breconshire and Radnorshire WWAC, claimed that working on the land was the best way for women to display their patriotism and allegiance to the men in the trenches.⁹⁵

⁹³ *The Pembrokeshire Herald and General Advertiser*, 20 April 1917, p. 1.

⁹⁴ BU, 14877 Women’s Land Army: Reports, Letters, Newspaper Cuttings, etc., File: Detailing the activities of the Women’s Land Army in Wales during the 1914-18 War Item: M. Silyn Roberts, Agricultural War Service for Women, July 1916, ff. 5-6.

⁹⁵ Lucy Thomas, *Fiction of Hilda Vaughan (1892-1985): negotiating the boundaries of Welsh identity* (Unpublished PhD thesis, Cardiff University, 2008), p. 96.



Figure 7: Painting of Hilda Vaughan.⁹⁶

She directly associated the drudgery of women's farm work with the sacrifices made by men at the front. 'I am putting before you the disadvantages of the life. Long Hours! Hard work! Poor pay! After you get your board and lodging, a shilling a day perhaps [...] but girls the Royal Welch Fusiliers and the Welch Regiment [sic] are offering their lives for that. Will you not offer your services for that – for them?'⁹⁷ Her explicit reference to Welsh regiments reinforced the responsibility women had to help their own friends and family serving in those regiments.

⁹⁶ Christopher W. Newman, *Writers of Wales: Hilda Vaughan* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1981), no page number given.

⁹⁷ Berta Ruck, *The story teller tells the truth: reminiscences and notes* (London: Hutchinson and Co, 1935), p. 132.

This link between the conditions men were facing in the trenches and women's work on the farms became a prominent theme of local recruitment drives. The Organising Secretary for the Monmouthshire WWAC Lady Mather-Jackson urged women to sign up and not to grumble about their working conditions as 'they should put up with them for the sake of the men in the trenches'.⁹⁸ Mather-Jackson was probably completely unaware of how physically tiring and exhausting farming was, and she perceived women's work on the land entirely in patriotic terms. Vaughan displayed similar reasoning about the nature of women's war work. During a recruitment rally in Brecon in May 1918 and in line with the views of other female novelists and middle-class commentators, Vaughan made it clear that war work for young women 'would make them a better daughter and wife in the future'.⁹⁹ Again their position in the workplace was seen as temporary, whilst their role and responsibilities inside the home were to be maintained. According to established norms of gender in wartime, men were fighting at the front to protect women and children. Therefore, war work for women was presented as an opportunity for them to acknowledge and repay the soldiers for this protection.¹⁰⁰

However, before women could be employed they had to undergo a period of intensive training. The vast majority of applicants to the WLA had little or no experience of farm work. Therefore, the WLA began to organise the instruction of these women within a number of avenues. Training centres were established throughout the country alongside the increasing availability of practice farms where recruits would learn directly from the farmer. Financial assistance was also provided in the form of a

⁹⁸ *South Wales Weekly Argus*, 26 January 1918, p. 5.

⁹⁹ *The Brecon and Radnor Express*, 2 May 1918, p. 5.

¹⁰⁰ Nicoletta Gullace, *"The blood of our sons": men, women and the renegotiation of British citizenship during the Great War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 43.

bursary, primarily for the recruit to pay for living expenses as the land army covered the costs of housing accommodation.¹⁰¹ Alongside there was specialist instruction in market gardening and horticulture provided by Agricultural Colleges, training was often organised from larger farms and estates owned by landowners in Wales. These large estates had lost much of their male workforce to the army, and needed to find an alternative source of labour. At a training camp established at Glanusk Park, Crickhowell, situated on the land of Lord Glanusk, sixty-eight women received board and lodgings at the camp and were then sent to adjoining farms for training.¹⁰² The courses were mainly funded entirely by the landowners, but they remained in dialogue with the Board of Agriculture.¹⁰³ Lord Treowen, who owned lands throughout the county of Monmouthshire, recruited female staff at Pwlllyrhwyaid Farm. Working under the guidance of a foreman, they were instructed in ploughing, carting and forestry. Many of the women that were trained at the farm came from urban areas and industrial districts.¹⁰⁴ These jobs had been considered as unsuitable for women, but many were now successfully carrying out these jobs with no previous experience and openly challenging established gender roles.

As demonstrated above many women from towns and urban areas avoided farm work, but this was not to suggest that all were deterred by the idea of working on the land. According to one employer in north Wales his recruits had been ‘shop attendants, dressmakers, teachers or domestic servants from the towns’.¹⁰⁵ Agnes Greatorex, who had been employed as a domestic servant in Ely, Cardiff, found working on the land gave her a greater sense of freedom. She later recalled that she ‘had a pound a week, I

¹⁰¹ Clarke, *The Women's Land Army*, p. 32.

¹⁰² ‘Jean and Jan’ *The Landswoman*, 10:1 October 1918, p. 227.

¹⁰³ Horn, *Rural Life in England*, p. 27.

¹⁰⁴ Roberts, ‘The Women of Wales’, p. 820.

¹⁰⁵ Roberts, ‘The Women of Wales’, p. 825.

was independent nobody bossing me what time to get up, what fire to light, what coal to put on the fire, running beck and call for the cook. None of that, I was my own boss really'.¹⁰⁶ As this suggests, many women undoubtedly found working on the land fulfilling and enjoyable, but others had very different experiences.

Very often the location of training provided an idyllic smokescreen to the physical and psychological demands of agricultural work in more remote areas. After the initial period of training in relatively large groups, girls were often separated and employed individually at different farms. Pamela Horn has suggested that this caused a great deal of misery amongst some land army girls, especially if there was any degree of opposition from local people to their employment.¹⁰⁷ Local and national campaigns suggested that women who came to work in the countryside would feel revitalised for leaving the 'city life' behind them.¹⁰⁸ However, according to Doris Stapledon, who had acted as women's recruitment officer for Breconshire and Radnorshire before Hilda Vaughan replaced her; this was far from reality for a group of women from the urban districts of south Wales working in the predominantly rural and mountainous areas of Brecon and Radnor. She noted that 'it began to dawn on me that there could be little demand for land girls on these small farms, and that the living conditions were not fit for them, nor could these girls, who mainly came from the towns and mining villages of south Wales, stand the loneliness of the life on remote farms'.¹⁰⁹ As Bonnie White has suggested such distress and unhappiness was in stark contrast to the image of the happy and healthy land girl depicted in official government propaganda.¹¹⁰ Furthermore,

¹⁰⁶ BBC Radio Wales, tx 21/1/1994, All of Our Lives, "Tears and Telegrams", Interview conducted with Agnes Greateorex, 1993.

¹⁰⁷ Horn, *Rural Life in England*, p. 128.

¹⁰⁸ Grayzel, 'Nostalgia', p. 168.

¹⁰⁹ Doris Stapledon, 'Recollections of the Land Army', *Home and Country* (London: National Federation of Women's Institutes (July 1939), p. 249.

¹¹⁰ White, 'Sowing the Seeds', p. 21.

concern surrounding the kind of training being offered meant that new recruits, especially from urban areas, sometimes still did not have enough practical experience of farm work and in some cases would need to be retrained.

The shortcomings of WLA recruits were demonstrated during an efficiency test at Rhuddlan in north Wales. Organised by the Flintshire WWAC, a crowd of around two thousand people, including farmers were in attendance at the event. They also provided the organising secretaries of female labour with the opportunity to allocate women to particular farms which suited their particular level of skills.¹¹¹ However, the main purpose of such events was to convince farmers that women could replace men on the farm and undertake a variety of tasks which required knowledge and skill.¹¹² According to some estimates, around 150 women participated in the event, with Wrexham, Flintshire, Caernarfonshire, Denbighshire, Anglesey and Merionethshire all sending along competitors. A small number of women from neighbouring farms in England also took part in the test.¹¹³ Tasks included milking, thatching, ploughing by horse and by tractor and hedge trimming. Only a small number of WLA members participated in the event, with the vast majority being local village women. The local press provided coverage of the event which saw those with a greater experience of farm work or the 'farming class' winning many of the prizes, which included war saving certificates. Not only did the event reinforce the greater skills of women with knowledge and experience of working on the land in rural communities in north Wales, it also demonstrated why farmers remained unconvinced about employing WLA recruits.

¹¹¹ Clarke, *The Women's Land Army*, p. 36.

¹¹² Twinch, *Women on the Land*, p. 8.

¹¹³ *The Rhyl Journal*, 16 February 1918, p. 2.

These village women may have been spurred on to even greater achievements by underlying mistrust of the intentions behind the introduction of WLA recruits in rural areas. Pamela Horn has suggested that village women were often suspicious of the motives of land girls and as a result the former performed more efficiently at events such as Rhuddlan.¹¹⁴ According to a report by the Food Production Department who also covered the test, the ordinary farm workers were 'brought out by the appearance as competitors of the Land Army girls'.¹¹⁵ From the evidence available, it appears that this animosity was partly directed at their uniform. Such attitudes appear to have persisted both during and immediately after the war. Mrs Edith Lyttleton, the Deputy Director of the Women's Branch of the Ministry of Agriculture, in an address at a formal presentation of service ribbons in Caernarfon in 1919, suggested that 'on the Welsh hills there still lingered a prejudice against women on the land wearing uniforms'.¹¹⁶ With the uniform being a sign of the women's inexperience, the village women were intent on demonstrating that they had the superior knowledge of farm work.

These kinds of reactions to the WLA indicate continuing local hostility to inexperienced interlopers. But it is also the case that many trained women could not be placed on suitable farms, despite considerable demand. By the spring of 1918, the German military offensive had further stretched the manpower of the British army. Whilst attempts were initially made by the government to reduce the numbers exempt from conscription, there was strong opposition from WACs throughout the country. By June, the government had relented and sought no further conscripts from the agricultural

¹¹⁴ Horn, *Rural Life in England*, p. 130.

¹¹⁵ TNA, The Cabinet Papers, CAB 24/42, Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, Food Production Department, Week Ending 13th February 1918, p. 10.

¹¹⁶ *North Wales Chronicle*, 17 January 1919, p. 2.

workforce in England and Wales.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, official recruitment events for the WLA continued throughout 1918, even if there appeared to be more attractive options for women.

During the spring and summer of 1918, recruitment for the WLA appeared to stagnate. Following the end of an exhibition promoting ‘Women’s War Work Week at Cardiff’ in April, it was found that only 50 attendees at the event, mainly from the south Wales valleys, registered, with the WLA. Competition from other women’s services at the exhibition including the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps had in all probability affected the numbers.¹¹⁸ Although more training was being made available as a result of the establishment of the WLA, recruits had not been incorporated into the workforce by the summer of 1918. In June 1918, during a parliamentary debate concerning the potential consequences for rural areas of losing male workers as a result of the latest quota of men required for National Service, the position of women’s labour in Wales was raised. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of National Service, Mr Beck, stated that ‘as regards Wales, I dare say the conditions are difficult in regard to small farms, but Wales has made extraordinarily small use so far of the trained women. Wales herself trained a number of agricultural women and could not absorb them, and those women who were trained in Wales for Welsh agriculture have actually had to be sent into England in order that their services may be utilised’.¹¹⁹ Mr Walter Roch, the Member of Parliament for Pembrokeshire, argued that this was due to a lack of suitable accommodation for women in Wales.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Howkins, *The Death of Rural England*, pp. 35-36.

¹¹⁸ *South Wales Daily News*, 27 April 1918, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ Hansard, HC (series 3) vol. 106, cols. 2494 (13 June 1918).

¹²⁰ Hansard, HC (series 3) vol. 106, cols. 2494 (13 June 1918).

As industrial districts struggled to cope with the additional influx of workers who came to work in factories and workshops, many farms faced a similar obstacle. Traditionally ‘live-in’ farm workers lodged in outbuildings.¹²¹ The introduction of land value duty in 1910 and five years later rent control had led to a sharp decline in the number of houses built in rural areas of England and Wales.¹²² Those that remained were deemed largely uninhabitable. Although WLA recruits had been promised good accommodation at the farms to which they would be sent, it seems the reality was different. Edgar Leyshon Chappell noted many of the cottages and outlying buildings could not be used because of the potential health risks.¹²³ Some accommodation was provided for land girls by philanthropic groups including the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) and the Girls Friendly Society (GFS). Only in areas where the local labour shortage was at its most critical, relying on workers from outside the county, was there some level of housing provision. In Cardiganshire, a YWCA depot and hostel were established in Aberystwyth during June 1918.¹²⁴ In the same year, the Glamorgan WWAC attempted to counter the shortage of housing by establishing a hostel in Cadoxton near Cardiff for new female recruits to be trained on neighbouring farms.¹²⁵ However, in all, it seems that even once large numbers of women had been trained to work on the land, inadequate provision of housing prevented their skills being put to good use on Welsh farms.

¹²¹ Pretty, *The Rural Revolt*, p. 64.

¹²² Richard. J Moore-Colyer, ‘Homes fit for heroes and after: Housing in rural Wales in the early twentieth century’, *Welsh History Review*, 24:3 (2009), p. 86.

¹²³ NLW, Papers of Edgar Leyshon Chappell, 1896-1945, Class D: Agricultural Wages Board Enquiry and Research, 1918-40, D2/1-11 Notebooks, Item: D2/1 Investigators Diary I, IV Cottage Accommodation, p. 3-5.

¹²⁴ NLW, Minor Deposits 375-403B, Records relating to the Y.W.C.A (Welsh Division) 1909-1942, 395B Aberystwyth Branch Minute Book, 1913-1924, Correspondence between Institute Secretary Miss Kitts and Hon. General Secretary Miss Grace Williams, April 12th, 1918.

¹²⁵ *Western Mail*, 16 September 1918, p. 2.

For those WLA members who had found a place to work on farms, the Armistice did not necessarily signal the end of their employment. Prior to the disbandment of the Land army in October 1919, eighty-five WLA members were still working in Caernarfonshire, with twenty-three employed on Anglesey.¹²⁶ Around 988 members of the WLA continued to work in the dairying districts of Wales by April 1919. As well as dairy, many were also undertaking general field work.¹²⁷ As Peter Dewey has argued this was not the original intention behind the establishment of the WLA, which was meant to be an organisation of skilled workers undertaking jobs including tractor driving and tending animals leaving the less skilled work to village residents.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, some of these women also intended to remain in agriculture and were offered the opportunity by the government to go overseas or remain in rural areas.¹²⁹ Although there are no examples to hand of WLA women in Wales taking up these opportunities, some almost certainly would have done so.

However, as the example in Caernarfon demonstrates, there was still some degree of prejudice in some areas towards these women. Old attitudes towards women engaged in certain kinds of work as a preference for male labour remained in many parts of Britain during the following decade.¹³⁰ In fact, there continued to be a shortage of agricultural labour in some parts of Wales by the end of 1919, possibly due to the number of men and women choosing not to head back to agricultural work after the war.¹³¹ Although there is no direct evidence suggesting what may have happened to village women after the war, it can be assumed that as in other localities they returned to domestic duties after their male relatives came back from the front or wartime

¹²⁶ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 68.

¹²⁷ Dewey, *British Agriculture*, p. 135.

¹²⁸ Dewey, *British Agriculture*, p. 135.

¹²⁹ Horn, *Rural Life in England*, p. 135.

¹³⁰ Horn, *Rural Life in England*, p. 136.

¹³¹ *North Wales Chronicle*, 5 December 1919, p.11.

occupations. Throughout the 1920s, there was a growing decline in the numbers of female labour engaged in agricultural work especially in areas that had traditionally relied on women in many farming operations such as in west Wales.¹³² Therefore, the end of the war marked the beginning of a decline in the numbers of women involved in agricultural work in Wales and the reassertion of traditional kinds of men's and women's work.

Conclusion

Women were an integral part of the wartime agricultural labour force in Wales, providing valuable assistance in a variety of jobs. Many factors influenced the extent of employment for women in different areas of Wales. Demand tended to be localised, with farmers and employers questioning women's physicality but also the practicality of employing them on certain farms. In rural areas, family members were an important source of labour for farmers. Attempts to recruit and organise female labour in particular areas demonstrated that both practical considerations and gendered conceptions of women's work were essential characteristics of local employment patterns. Factors including social background and the increasing availability of alternative employment options show how women themselves perceived certain kinds of work. Movement between rural and urban areas was partly a continuation of pre-war trends in patterns of employment, but also demonstrated the attractiveness of alternative forms of wartime work available to women. Even where women wanted to work on the land, accommodation shortages severely curtailed the placement of trained female

¹³² Deian Hopkin, 'Social Reactions to Economic Change' in *Wales between the Wars*, eds by Trevor Herbert & Gareth Elwyn Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1988), p. 54.

workers and demonstrated the economic deprivation clearly apparent in many rural areas of Wales at this time. Moreover, there were simply not enough skilled women to begin with in order to organise and train gangs of village workers in some areas.

With the establishment of the WLA at the beginning of 1917 came a renewed focus on encouraging women to join the agricultural labour force. This largely centred on the idea of “parallel service” with soldiers on the front line, as local recruiters emphasised the importance of their contribution to the war effort. Farmers did begin to accept the need for female labour, but believed that only trained women could help to maintain productivity. Women also faced differing experiences of working on the land in Wales during the war. For some, it enabled them to leave behind domestic service giving them a greater feeling of independence. However, for others working on farms often in isolated areas was a difficult and traumatic experience which definitely did not fit with the idealised vision of rural life often promoted in much of the recruitment discourse.

Chapter Three

Dilution, trade unionism and women's experiences of munitions factories in Wales

This chapter examines the nature of women's work in the wartime munitions industry in Wales, the effects of women's mass entry into the industrial labour force, and attitudes towards the employment of female labour in the munitions industry. It primarily focuses on the reaction of employers and trade unions to the introduction of female labour, including opposition to female employment, and the extent to which wartime employment altered preconceptions of women's capabilities in the workplace. Wartime discourse on women's work often revealed traditional conceptions of class and gendered identities which ignored continuities in women's wartime work. Some women who came into the munitions industry had experience of factory work and used their knowledge and skills to good effect. Others were trained on modified machinery in the production of shell casings or as process workers in chemical factories. The persistence of these traditional attitudes demonstrates that despite significant changes in the nature of women's wartime employment, the experience of war did not fundamentally alter beliefs about female "nature".

In examining how female labour was introduced at factories, steel works and other employers engaged in the production of munitions during the First World War, scholars have examined the processes of dilution and substitution (discussed in the introduction). This has shown how the government and trade unions responded to the need for female labour without compromising the primacy of men's position in the workplace and stability of the labour market. Deborah Thom has argued that the work done by women in factories and workshops was constructed and discussed within the

context of its impact upon social norms and the interests of skilled male labour.¹ The sexual division of labour was maintained by restricting women to primarily repetitive jobs, especially on adapted machinery in engineering processes.² Framing her discussion within the context of a patriarchal and capitalist economic system, Gail Braybon has shown the impact of male prejudice upon working-class women workers during the war. The lower wages paid to women, and the emphasis on the primacy of their domestic role, reflected assumptions about class and gender which determined their conditions of employment within industry.³ Scholarship on debates over equal pay, which has highlighted the negative reactions of government, male trade unionists, and other social commentators to demands for equal pay for women, has shown that women's opportunities in the wartime workplace were limited.⁴

Yet some women did fight for their rights within the workplace. This chapter will also consider the extent to which trade unionism informed the workplace experiences of women, alongside relations between fellow workers and employers. Women's activities and behaviour in the workplace also demonstrate the role of class in defining attitudes towards groups of workers and their varied experiences of wartime employment. This chapter's focus on attitudes and experiences builds upon a recent emphasis within the historiography towards understanding the various meanings behind women's wartime work. The actions of ordinary women, in their pursuit for equal pay, greater recognition, and status in the workplace contrasted with public discourse and

¹ Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War I* (London: I.B Tauris, 2000).

² Laura Lee Downs, *Manufacturing Inequality: Gender Division in the French and British Metalworking Industries, 1914-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 1-3.

³ Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War: The British Experience* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), pp. 11-13.

⁴ Janet S. K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

propaganda which emphasised their docility, deference and unbridled patriotism. This research supports the findings of other recent studies of wartime female labour in particular industrial localities. Myra Baillie, in her study of the munitions industry in Clydeside, shows that in the face of dismissals and management opposition towards female unionisation at one factory, women workers pressed ahead with wage rate demands.⁵ Other historians have also considered the growing participation of women workers within the trade union movement. This scholarship has emphasised the organisational responsibility of the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW) at both a local and national level and its relationship with male trade unionists.⁶ Although the federation's attempts to increase women's wages and to provide better conditions for women workers were not ultimately successful, participation in the trade union movement provided some women with experience of collective action and heightened their sense of identity as workers.

This chapter builds on previous scholarship to determine the impact of war work on attitudes towards female labour in Wales. It first examines the kind of jobs women did at government controlled factories and in other industries that fell under the control of the Ministry of Munitions, including the attitudes of employers towards the proposed introduction of women workers, provisions for training, and contemporary reactions to the female workforce. The second part of the chapter explores women's actions and behaviour inside the workplace in order to draw out their experiences and perceptions of wartime work. This will broaden our understanding of the role of gender and class in

⁵ Myra Baillie, *The Women of Red Clydeside: Women Munitions Workers in the West of Scotland during the First World War* (Unpublished PhD thesis, McMaster University Ontario, 2002), pp. 111-172.

⁶ Deborah Thom, 'The Bundle of Sticks: Women, Trade Unionists and Collective Organisation before 1918 in *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800-1918*, ed. by Angela V. John (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 261-289; Cathy Hunt, 'Tea and Sympathy: A Study of Diversity among Women Activists in the National Federation of Women Workers in Coventry, England, 1907-1914', *International Labour and Working Class-History*, 72:1 (2007), pp. 173-191; Cathy Hunt, *The National Federation of Women Workers, 1906-1921* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

determining perceptions and experiences of women's wartime work, and allows an assessment of the extent to which women from different age groups and social backgrounds shared a common experience of employment during the war.

Training

Throughout the munitions industry in Wales, women undertook a variety of different jobs from making shells to becoming crane drivers. Work in the munitions industry was categorised into two main areas: men's work and women's work. According to the Ministry of Munitions, this distinction depended on the degree of skill needed for a particular task.⁷ Women formed the majority of the workforce in the production of fuses and cartridges, which had been women's work before the war, but remained dependent on male tool-setters in work on shells. They even had to transfer a portion of their wages to the skilled male engineer.⁸ In shell factories, female machine operators, under the supervision of a skilled male engineer, worked on automatic and semi-automatic machines. Viewers measured the size of each shell with gauges, whilst young women and girls were often used as general labourers.⁹ Production at such government-controlled shell factories was often reorganised according to a detailed division of labour, whereby women undertook largely unskilled work defined as 'women's processes'.¹⁰ This was so as to avoid paying women the same wages as men and to protect the status of skilled male workers. Ideas of women's capabilities and wages in the workplace were considered by many employers including the government

⁷ Official History of the Ministry of Munitions (hereafter HMSO), *Volume V: Wages and Welfare, Part II: The Control of Women's Wages* (London: 1921), pp. 6-7.

⁸ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 42.

⁹ Baillie, *The Women of Red Clydeside*, p. 45.

¹⁰ Lee Downs, *Manufacturing Inequality*, p. 45.

within the context of their perceived social role.¹¹ For the relatively small number of women who were given the opportunity to undertake formal training before entering the factory, they were at least given the opportunity to acquire some level of expertise in some engineering processes at selected training centres in Wales.

In order to train large numbers of unskilled labourers in a variety of processes, the Ministry of Munitions combined with local authorities to fund the establishment of workshops across the country. To begin with, these courses were intended for both men and women. However, as the war progressed, greater numbers of women were encouraged to sign up for these workshops.¹² In 1915, training courses for men and women were established at technical institutes in Cardiff and Newport. At the Cardiff Technical School, female students appear to have been trained as machine tool workers throughout the war, with demand for their labour amongst the city's factories reaching its height by the end of 1917.¹³ Gradually as more men volunteered for or were conscripted into the army, larger numbers of men and women were needed for semi-skilled and skilled work. The shortage of skilled male labour in engineering throughout many parts of south Wales led to even greater emphasis on training. For example, at the beginning of 1916, the Ministry of Munitions encouraged the technical college at Newport to focus on producing semi-skilled male and female workers.¹⁴

In south Wales, a range of courses were established at local technical training colleges. With the combined efforts of local educational authorities and the Ministry of Munitions, students from a variety of backgrounds were encouraged to apply. This

¹¹ Braybon, *Women Workers*, p. 86.

¹² Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 92.

¹³ The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), MUN 2/28, Ministry of Munitions: Labour, Offprints of Weekly Reports, Vol. II Jan 6th 1917 to December 29th 1917, Section XVI, Report No. 116, Week Ending 3 November, 1917, p. 9.

¹⁴ *Western Mail*, 4 January 1916, p. 3.

corresponded with the establishment of training courses in different modes of agricultural work at various educational institutions across Wales. Branches of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in Wales also organised courses in munitions production, at which employers were encouraged to participate and choose the most efficient workers.¹⁵ This was an attempt to encourage employers to use female labour by demonstrating women's capabilities at undertaking particular tasks and using various kinds of machinery.

Courses could last anywhere between six weeks to six months, depending on the level of training involved and the competency of the trainees.¹⁶ Students were also given support in finding accommodation in the local area and not required to pay for the courses, as the training section of the Ministry of Munitions often covered the expense.¹⁷ Women's payment for training varied. In Cardiff, women beginning the course were paid a maintenance allowance between 15s and 25s a week. However, the allowances were not as much as many working-class women could earn if they headed straight into a factory. Combined with the uncertainty as to whether they would be able to apply these skills in the long-term, large numbers of women chose not to be trained.¹⁸

Women also moved into entirely new industries, for which training had to be provided. At the beginning of the war, the aeroplane construction industry was still in its infancy employing a small workforce of skilled male mechanics. However, as the war progressed, demand for aeroplanes had increased dramatically and production was intensified at both government and privately operated firms. During 1917, the school in Cardiff established a course for women to be trained in making parts for aeroplanes. In

¹⁵ Downs, *Manufacturing Inequality*, p. 89.

¹⁶ *Ministry of Reconstruction. Report of the Women's Employment Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction* [Cd. 9239], 1918, xiv, p. 48.

¹⁷ *Western Mail*, 21 October 1916, p. 3.

¹⁸ Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 93.

August 1917 the aircraft industry needed around 100,000 new recruits, including 50,000 women. After completing a two week placement at the Cardiff Gas Light and Coke Company in Grangetown, women were sent to the Instructional College in Birmingham to complete their training. A workshop was already located on the premises of Gas and Light Coke Company since 1915, employing over three hundred men and women in making shell casings.¹⁹ Under the new training scheme, seventy female trainees were sent to Birmingham between August and October 1917 after which they were placed in specialist aeroplane factories across the country. According to a report by the Cardiff Labour Exchange, the scheme at the school in Cardiff was to be extended, providing women with training in elementary engineering.²⁰ By 1917, the Cardiff Technical School had been approved by the Ministry of Munitions as the centre for aeroplane production in south Wales and Monmouthshire. As a result of this, local factories were converted into aviation works. The White Wilson's mattress factory, also in Grangetown, began making aeroplane parts, with women being employed in the cutting and sewing of linen fabric for the fuselage and wings. However, in comparison to the women who were sent for further training in Birmingham, this was comparatively low skilled work, associated more with traditional female trades.²¹

Whilst they were enrolled on such courses, female trainees were observed frequently with a great deal of interest taken in their ability to operate machinery and undertake particular tasks. Therefore, work undertaken by women was assessed closely,

¹⁹ TNA, MUN 5/150, Ministry of Munitions: Area Organisation for South Wales, 1121.25/6 Scheme of Cardiff National Shell Factory.

²⁰ The National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth (hereafter NLW), Records of the Welsh Army Corps, 1914-1925, Ministry of Labour Employment Department, C114/22 Typescript 'Report to the Local Advisory Committee upon the work of the Cardiff Labour Exchange, twelve months ended 9th November 1917', p. 19.

²¹ Gareth Griffiths, *Women's Factory Work in World War I* (Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1991), p. 75.

thus implicitly reinforcing the sexual division of labour.²² Experiences were varied. In some new industries, such as aeroplane construction, women were able to train in semi-skilled and skilled work as there was no established tradition of male domination, and so they met with far less prejudice and opposition.²³ Some women therefore developed skills and proved their competency in some engineering processes. This challenged the subordinate position of women in the industrial labour force. However, for other women, although they moved into new kinds of work, they remained engaged on jobs described as unskilled processes. As this suggests, although wartime commentators often focussed on whether women were “successful” in industry or not, existing gender prejudices both determined women’s experiences of work and shaped much of this discussion.²⁴ Some commentators praised women for their ability to adapt and operate certain kinds of machinery. Mr C. Coles, Superintendent of Technical Instruction at the Cardiff Technical School, suggested that women were far more efficient at operating some machines than the average unskilled workman.²⁵ Newspapers often used stories about the successful implementation of women workers at factories, with reports from employers and managers often stating their astonishment at women’s adaptability.²⁶ At aircraft factories and workshops throughout Britain, contemporary comment noted that women were successfully doing jobs which were deemed semi-skilled and skilled work, including welding and fitting.²⁷

²² Sallie Heller Hogg, *The employment of women in Great Britain, 1891-1921* (Unpublished D.phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1967), p. 525.

²³ Marion Kozak, *Women Munition Workers during the First World War’, with special reference to Engineering* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hull, 1976), p. 98.

²⁴ Braybon, *Women Workers*, p. 65.

²⁵ *Cardiff Times and South Wales Weekly News*, 27 November 1915, p. 9.

²⁶ Braybon, *Women Workers*, pp. 154-161.

²⁷ Kozak, *Women Munition Workers*, p. 98.

Women's industrial work

A significant proportion of unskilled women workers were employed at explosives and chemical factories in Wales. They were engaged primarily in what was known as “process work” which often carried hidden health risks and could be particularly dangerous. At factories in Pembrey, Queensferry and Penrhyndeudraeth, by October 1918 3,448 women were classified as process workers. Only a comparatively small number of men were engaged on such tasks at each of the factories.²⁸ In an account published in 1948 outlining the role of the explosives factory at Queensferry during the First World War, one observer explained why he believed women were better suited to certain kinds of work than men:

there are undoubtedly certain classes of work for which women, in general, are more suited than men. This is especially true for all routine work, especially when it is of a “repetition” type, involving the constant repetition of a simple task, such as weighing and packing a bag or box, shaking a liner, feeding the machines of the Box Factory, dipping in a Nitration pan or making routine tests. Such work, when it demands quickness of movement rather than physical exertion, is admirably suited for woman labour. Speaking generally women find routine work less tedious than do the men, and are often more reliable in consequence, on work of this nature, especially when close attention is demanded. For this class of work, women are fully equal to men as far as output is concerned.²⁹

Apart from ignoring both the physical dangers and psychological pressures that came with undertaking these particular jobs, such observations suggest a continuation of beliefs about women's work related to particular “feminine” characteristics and behaviour. Before the war, J. R. Freeman and Son in Cardiff, which employed hundreds of mainly young, single women in grading, stripping or rolling tobacco, believed that

²⁸ Imperial War Museum, London (hereafter IWM), Women, War and Society, 1914-1918 Database, *Report on Labour in Controlled Establishments*, Table XXII, High Explosives and Propellants, p.18.

²⁹ Flintshire Records Office (hereafter FRO), P. Box 7. FL1/11, Ian Hay, *H.M. Factory Queen's Ferry: Its history and Development from May 1915 to November 1918* (Queensferry: Factory Printing Press, 1948).

they were the most appropriate for these roles because of their ‘nimble fingers’.³⁰ Similar emphases were found in descriptions of women learning to operate machinery used for making shell casings. In October 1916, a report from the *South Wales Argus* described how women were taught at the Cardiff Technical Institute how to “shape” and “mill” in exact fashion. This commentator suggested that ‘upon accuracy and judgement, keenness of sight and delicacy of touch, rather than upon physical strength, depends the part women take in the production of munitions’.³¹ These assumptions about “feminine” characteristics determined the types of work women were enabled to perform at munitions and other factories. For example, female machine operators, under the supervision of a skilled male engineer, worked on automatic and semi-automatic machines. These had often been modified in order to accommodate for these repetitive techniques.³² However, while the deskilling of certain jobs was represented as a response to the needs of a female workplace, such processes actually operated to reduce the threat posed to gender roles and men’s primary position in the workplace by women’s mass entry into the industrial labour force. The redefinition and redistribution of industrial tasks was also based on the false premise that women had never previously undertaken industrial work.

As the war went on, the shortage of male workers meant there was an increasing drive to recruit female labour, despite concerns regarding the physical nature of industrial work. Alongside the establishment of public exhibitions showing the jobs women were doing, dilution officers travelled throughout the local areas to promote the benefits of employing women in the workplace and to allay fears regarding productivity

³⁰ Robert Griffiths, ‘Cardiff Cigar Workers and the ‘Feminine Strike’ of 1911’, *Llafur*, 10:3 (2010), p. 108.

³¹ *South Wales Argus*, 23 October 1916, p. 4.

³² Baillie, *The Women of Red Clydeside*, p. 45.

and the impact upon workplace practices.³³ During 1917, forty firms in Cardiff were approached by the local dilution section for south Wales as to the possibility of employing female labour. Only two companies had previously employed female labour, but almost all now gave women a trial, with a number of vacancies being filled by the end of the year.³⁴ The majority of these factories were located in the East Moors and Docks District of the city, including a steel works, a number of foundries, shipbuilding yards, wagon repair shops, paint and varnish factories, and colliery supply works.

It appears that employers were becoming more open to the idea of taking on female labour, although this may have been driven by necessity rather than openness to the value of female labour. In Chepstow, Monmouthshire, shipyards owned by Edward Finch and Company and the Standard Shipping Company, used by the British Admiralty, began to employ small numbers of female labour during 1917.³⁵ Messrs. John Williams and Sons, sash makers in Cardiff, experimented by introducing three disabled soldiers and four women into their workforce. It was reported that whilst the four soldiers found the work physically too demanding, the women remained in employment.³⁶ However, the fact that assumptions about women's capabilities did not fundamentally alter over the course of the war is perhaps demonstrated by the fact that in industries where there was virtually no repetition work, there were comparatively few opportunities for women.

Women did continue working in factories which had traditionally employed high numbers of female workers before the war, and which were then converted into

³³ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 71.

³⁴ NLW, C114/22 Typescript 'Report to the Local Advisory Committee upon the work of the Cardiff Labour Exchange, twelve months ended 9th November 1917', pp. 24-25.

³⁵ Anne Rainsbury, *Chepstow and the River Wye in Old Photographs: from the Severn to Tintern: from the collections of Chepstow Museum* (Gloucester: Sutton, 1989), pp. 40-44.

³⁶ TNA, MUN 2/28, Ministry of Munitions: Labour, Offprints of Weekly Reports, Vol. II Jan 6th 1917 to December 29th 1917, Section XII, Report No 77, Week ending January 27 1917, p. 8.

factories producing munitions or related materials. At Guest Keen and Nettleford's in Cwmbran, female labour was used to produce nuts and bolts for shell casings. Before the war, many of the same workers had made screws.³⁷ At Lovell & Co in Newport, women who had been previously employed on specialised semi-skilled work including box-nailing, banding and making boxes for packing sweetmeats when the factory had produced confectionary, were later transferred on to building eighteen-pounder ammunition boxes, whilst also repairing and converting over 300,000 other sizes. With a highly stratified division of labour already in place and a vertically integrated production policy, Lovell was able to use the skills of his female workforce and introduce them to the production of boxes for the storage of ammunition. Over 700 women were transferred from the production of confectionary to producing munitions.³⁸

Before 1914, women had also been employed to unload bricks and in various other capacities at brickworks mainly throughout south Wales.³⁹ This continued throughout the war, and additional women were employed, as Frederick George Kellaway, Secretary of the Ministry of Munitions noted in a meeting during 1917. He stated that 'in South Wales one works employs 67 women on such work as unloading and wheeling of bricks, breaking limestone, handling billets on the breaking machine, and the men thus released have gone to make up a second shift in the steelworks and so doubled the output. Others are loading and unloading material from truck and barges, excavating railway cuttings'.⁴⁰ In a report compiled by the Ministry of Munitions in May 1917 into the 'Substitution of Women for Men' in industry, it was noted that a

³⁷ E. Jones, *A history of GKN: Innovation and Enterprise, Volume 1* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Publishing, 1987), p. 396.

³⁸ Ian Michael Pincombe, *Out of Rexville: G. F. Lovell and the South Wales Confectionary Industry, c. 1830-c. 1940* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wales, 1999), p. 63.

³⁹ Deirdre Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth-century Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 59.

⁴⁰ *Llais Llafur*, 31 March 1917, p. 1.

recently built silica brick works in north Wales had hired increasing numbers of women for ‘mixing, moulding, and conveying to the kilns’. Employers and male workers at other brick works in the locality had believed that women would not be able to undertake such jobs due to the physicality of the work.⁴¹ These attitudes were in evidence elsewhere, as sometimes work was deemed to be too tough for women and mechanical devices were introduced instead of female labour. However, although there are no definitive figures available for the number of women employed at brickworks in Wales during the war, it still seems there was an overall increase throughout Britain. Employers increasingly drew upon female labour as there was a growing demand for fire-bricks from local munitions factories, which were often in isolated areas, and the shortage of male labourers meant there was no alternative.

As was the case amongst farmers in Wales, there was in fact a great deal of opposition and scepticism towards the employment of women amongst employers in different trades. Although by 1917 many businesses in south Wales had been persuaded to employ female workers, most of these employers were initially strongly against this move.⁴² A report compiled by the Cardiff Labour Exchange in 1917, which contained a list of businesses and employers who had been contacted regarding hiring female labour, found that ‘many of the managers were prejudiced against employing women for various reasons, such as expense of accommodation, difficulty of supervision, unsuitability of the heavier branches of work’.⁴³ It was also believed that women had a

⁴¹ HSE Library, Bootle, Ministry of Munitions, *Substitution of Women for Men: Summary of Reports from H.M Inspector of Factories*, May, 1917, p. 13. Photocopy of report given to me by Dr Gethin Matthews who visited the Library on the 19 April 2011.

⁴² TNA, MUN 2/28, Ministry of Munitions: Labour, *Offprints of Weekly Reports*, Vol. II Jan 6th 1917 to December 29th 1917, Section XII, Report No. 91, week ending 12 May, 1917, p. 8.

⁴³ NLW, C114/22 Typescript ‘Report to the Local Advisory Committee upon the work of the Cardiff Labour Exchange, twelve months ended 9th November 1917’, p. 24.

lack of commitment and stamina to undertake industrial work.⁴⁴ Negative perceptions of female labour were more ingrained in industries which had strong traditions of male trade unionism, and where the local social and economic structure traditionally denied women greater opportunities in the workplace.

Perhaps the most vocal opposition to the employment of female labour came from the coal industry, especially in south Wales. Women were employed in clerical roles at colliery offices in the south Wales coalfield during the war. However they were replaced by disabled soldiers in 1919.⁴⁵ Whilst women had been allowed to replace men in clerical roles at collieries, employers appeared to be against the recruitment of women as a direct replacement for male labour involved in the production of coal. In the recent past, women had been pushed out of employment at collieries by male unionists and reformers. Throughout the nineteenth century, groups of women known as ‘tip girls’ had been employed at the surface of collieries in south Wales, but their numbers had shrunk dramatically in the decades immediately before the First World War. Arguments against women’s work in the coal industry were based on physical, economic and moral grounds, and included concerns over health and safety, the potential impact of women’s low wages on the labour market, and the impact of their employment upon home life.⁴⁶ These themes underpinned the hostility towards the reintroduction of women onto the surface at many collieries throughout south Wales during the First World War.

⁴⁴ Braybon, *Women Workers*, p. 86.

⁴⁵ Gale Cengage Learning, Women, War and Society 1914-1918 Database, Imperial War Museum (hereafter IWM), Employment: Ministry of Labour; 18 Oct. 1919 – 17 Jan 1920; EMP 80/40 Departmental Weekly Report (week ending 25th October 1919), p. 11.

⁴⁶ Angela V. John, *By the Seat of Their Brow: Women Workers at Victorian Coal Mines* (London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1980), p. 166.

In 1916, proposals were put forward by the Coal Organisation Committee to replace conscripted male surface workers with female labour at collieries in south Wales. There was strong opposition from owners and male workers. During a conference hosted by the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, it was argued that when 'the question [of employing women] was put to practically every colliery manager appearing before the Monmouthshire Tribunal [...] in no single instance was the answer given in favour of the employment of women without the qualification that it was very undesirable'.⁴⁷ Acting on behalf of a worker who had appealed against his conscription, the manager at Lancaster's Colliery in Cwmtillery suggested that 'you would not suggest that women should be employed? It would be very awkward for women to get about among the trucks in petticoats'.⁴⁸

This question fed into wider wartime anxieties about the defeminising effects of "masculine" work on women, which often involved dress. Clothing was a signifier of gendered behaviour and uniforms worn by female munitions workers, which included trousers and puttees, were believed by some to make them more masculine.⁴⁹ A more serious concern raised by employers was the perceived amount of time it would take to instruct women. Asked during a colliery tribunal in Cardiff if women could do the job of weighing coal, Mr Evans of the Albion Colliery in Cilfynydd near Pontypridd argued that it would take a long time for them to learn.⁵⁰ This helps to explain why women from coalfield communities perhaps sought work in other occupations as tram conductresses, on the land or further afield at a munitions factory away from their local community.

⁴⁷ *Western Mail*, 16 May 1916, p. 4.

⁴⁸ *South Wales Gazette*, 10 March 1916, p. 7.

⁴⁹ Angela Woollacott, 'Dressed to Kill: Clothes, Cultural Meaning and First World War Munitions Workers,' in *Representations of Gender from Prehistory to the Present*, eds by Moira Donald and Linda Hurcombe (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 199-200.

⁵⁰ *South Wales Echo*, 16 March 1916, p. 3.

Before concluding this section, it is important to note that these debates do not tell us what women themselves thought about their work, the dangers they faced on an almost daily basis, or their other experiences in the workplace. As a sixteen year old, Florence Nield was employed in the cordite section of the Gun Cotton Department at the explosives factory in Pembrey. The factory, originally owned by the Nobel Explosive Company Ltd. of Glasgow, came under government control in January 1917. The image below, possibly taken during the 1950s, shows the scale of the factory and how it would have employed thousands of people during the First World War.⁵¹



Figure 8: Royal Ordnance Factory at Pembrey, Carmarthenshire, c. 1950

In fact, the number of women working at the factory fluctuated during the conflict. According to a government report in 1919, 2,211 women were employed in

⁵¹ Photograph courtesy of Mr. David S. Hughes, a Ranger at the Pembrey Country Park.

maintenance and production at the factory in October 1918.⁵² This figure had been 2,800 during the first months of 1917.⁵³ A staggering 58.2 per cent of the 5,361-strong workforce was female, with a large number being under the age of eighteen.⁵⁴ In part this was to keep down labour costs and because of the suspected gynaecological risks to married women of working with chemicals and dangerous substances.⁵⁵

Younger workers were often exposed to the most dangerous conditions and during her time at Pembrey, Florence became well aware of the explosive capability of cordite.⁵⁶ Munitions work was often fraught with danger and hundreds of women were killed and injured in factories throughout Britain during the First World War. Accidents and explosions were a common occurrence, in spite of the preventative measures introduced at many factories.⁵⁷ At the explosives factory in Queensferry between 1917 and 1918, 3,813 acid burns were treated, together with 2,128 eye injuries, 763 cases of Industrial Dermatitis, and 12,778 other accidents.⁵⁸ Gabrielle West noted in her diary that the ether used in some processes gave the workers ‘headaches, hysteria and sometimes makes them unconscious. 15-20 get epileptic fits’.⁵⁹

However, in oral testimony, women tended to focus on the spirit of camaraderie and togetherness which existed amongst the workers, rather than the work itself. Florence recalled how ‘everyone was so jolly’ because of the level of interaction

⁵² *Women in Industry. Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry* [Cmd. 135, 167], 1919, xxxi, Appendices, p. 71.

⁵³ IWM, Women, War and Society 1914-1918, MUN V/32, *Report on Labour in Controlled Establishments*, Table XXII, High Explosives and Propellants, March 1917, p. 18.

⁵⁴ TNA, MUN 5/100/360/42, Ministry of Munitions Report on Labour in Government Establishments, December 1917 in Chris Brader, *Timbertown Girls: Gretna Female Munitions workers in World War I* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2001), p. 21.

⁵⁵ Brader, *Timbertown Girls*, p. 48; Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 36.

⁵⁶ St Fagans National History Museum (hereafter NHM), Cardiff, Sound Archives, 8390/1 Florence Nield.

⁵⁷ Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 84.

⁵⁸ FRO, Hay, H.M. Factory Queen’s Ferry.

⁵⁹ Imperial War Museum, (hereafter IWM), Department of Documents, 77/156/1 Diary of Miss G. M. West, 1917.

amongst the workforce.⁶⁰ This collective bond of friendship was expressed particularly clearly in times of hardship and mourning. An inquest into one explosion at the explosives factory in Pembrey, which resulted in the deaths of six workers on the 31 July 1917, was reported in the *South Wales Daily Post*. Two women were killed, Mildred Owen and Mary Watson, aged eighteen and nineteen respectively. On August Bank Holiday their funeral cortege passed through the streets of Swansea with their fellow workers acting as pall-bearers.⁶¹ In the face of obvious grief and sorrow having lost not just friends but fellow workers, there was an outpouring of emotion on the day (see image below).⁶²



Figure 7: Female munitions workers attending the funeral in Swansea of a colleague killed in an explosion at an unknown factory, August 1917.

⁶⁰ NHM, Sound Archives, 8390/1 Florence Nield.

⁶¹ *South Wales Daily Post*, 4 August 1917.

⁶² IWM, Women at Work during the First World War, Q108452

<http://www.iwm.org.uk/history/podcasts/voices-of-the-first-world-war/podcast-16-munitions> (Date accessed: 09/03/2015)

Women were particularly afraid of explosions occurring and were acutely aware of the dangers they faced. Nevertheless, such incidents also appeared to strengthen the resolve of some workers. As the fires were being extinguished after an explosion at the factory in Pembrey in 1917, Miss G. M. West recalled how the workers began to sing the popular wartime song ‘Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag’ as they made their way back into the factory.⁶³ Such reports testify to the strategies women workers employed to cope with dangers and hardship.

Trade unions and women workers’ activism

Some women workers, of course, responded to the demands of wartime work in a more organised fashion. This section examines the relationship between female labour and the trade union movement in Wales during the war and especially debates over women’s wages and working conditions. Throughout the war, male trade unions were left in a quandary over women’s pay. Trade unions did accept that if a woman replaced a skilled man in his job, in theory she should be paid the same, but opposition towards women’s employment continued throughout the war.⁶⁴ Trade unions only accepted dilution in exchange for a commitment to restore the pre-war situation immediately after the conflict ended. Mr H. Hiles, President of the Cardiff Trades and Labour Council, suggested during 1915 that ‘there would be considerable opposition to the proposal’ of replacing men with female labour.⁶⁵ Many members of this council argued that women were a form of ‘cheap labour’ which could be brought in to undercut skilled male wage

⁶³ IWM, 77/156/1, Diary of Miss G. M. West, 1917.

⁶⁴ DeGroot, *Blighty*, p. 132.

⁶⁵ *Cardiff Times and South Wales Weekly News*, 17 April 1915, p. 10.

rates, which would destabilise the labour market.⁶⁶ Similar sentiments were expressed across different industries. At a meeting of railway workers in Swansea, the MP Mr J. H. Thomas encouraged those male employees in attendance, including union members, to oppose the introduction of female labour if it 'meant cheap labour and reduced the value of men's work'.⁶⁷ Male trade unions in particular argued that they could not effectively protect their members' interests if non-unionised or unskilled labour was brought in to replace them.⁶⁸ In 1917, the Port Talbot branch of the ASE complained to the Ministry of Munitions that women were being paid below the sufficient rate at the local steel works.⁶⁹ This suggests that some employers were still trying to avoid paying women the agreed district rate. Furthermore, it implies that women workers were still seen as a form of cheap labour.

Dilution took place within a fluctuating labour market and within the context of discussions about women's domestic activity and social roles as well as their paid labour.⁷⁰ Female employees were often subsumed under the title of substitute (or dilutee), in spite of the fact that in many industries they were not replacements at all but additional workers.⁷¹ The Ministry of Munitions often altered job descriptions of particular operations, meaning that wages could be adjusted if women were not employed on the same tasks as their male colleagues.⁷² Furthermore, many employers

⁶⁶ *Cardiff Times and South Wales Weekly News*, 17 April 1915, p. 10.

⁶⁷ *South Wales Daily Post*, 10 January 1916, p. 6.

⁶⁸ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 5.

⁶⁹ TNA, MUN 2/28, Ministry of Munitions: Labour, Offprints of Weekly Reports, Vol. II Jan 6th 1917 to December 29th 1917, Section XII: Report No. 86, Two Weeks ending April 7th 1917, p. 22.

⁷⁰ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 62.

⁷¹ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, pp. 31- 33.

⁷² Janet S.K Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 136.

throughout the war often changed the processes of production to make it look as though women were doing ‘women’s work’.⁷³

Socialists believed that dilution was part of an attempt by the capitalist system to exploit female labour, and openly warned of the dire consequences of this practice. In 1916, an unnamed commentator in the socialist newspaper *The Pioneer* argued that ‘the advantage of women labour to the capitalist is its cheapness’. This correspondent suggests that women had been ‘crushed by ages of subjection in the confined sphere of domestic life without any standard of past wages received to guide them’. With ‘no experience of the benefits of organisation, the women [sic] wage worker is a clay in the hands of the exploiter, and a danger to the pay and conditions won by hard effort on the part of the male wage worker’.⁷⁴ As such commentary suggests, women were often portrayed as pawns in the struggle between the unions and the government. The political left was especially fearful of the potential long-term consequences of greater government control of industry during the war, and believed the policy of dilution aimed to attack union organisation, with the woman worker as the main weapon.⁷⁵ However, these views of female labour reinforced the belief that both married and single women should remain dependent on others and were incapable of being independent wage earners.

The issue of women’s wages continued to be a matter of public debate throughout the war. Although in theory women were entitled to equal pay with men working on the same job, in reality this principle was not always implemented. During October 1915, the Ministry of Munitions set out a memorandum, Circular L2, which

⁷³ Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women’s Experience in Two World Wars* (London: Pandora Press, 1987), p. 50.

⁷⁴ *The Pioneer*, 24 June 1916, p. 4.

⁷⁵ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 65.

outlined the levels of pay for female dilutees in munitions factories. This established a definite time-rate of £1 for a 48-hour week to women on men's work.⁷⁶ By the publication of the Munitions of War Act of January 1916, which gave the Minister control and regulation over wages, Circular L2 became a statutory order to all controlled and government establishments across Britain. It allowed for equal time and piece rates for those women employed on skilled 'men's work', whilst implementing a minimum pound a week time rate for those women doing parts of men's jobs.⁷⁷ By April 1918, a number of statutory orders had been issued by the Ministry of Munitions outlining the revised wage structure of workers in government factories. In shell factories, where wages were controlled by the government, women who were employed as Forewomen, Machine Operators, Labourers, Charge Hands, Toolsetter's Assistants, Tool Room Workers and Viewers, received an average rate of £1 12s 8d. Potential earnings could reach up to £2 2s 4d, whilst their male colleagues could earn upwards of £4 16s 6d.⁷⁸

These measures did not aim to attract women into war work or to recognise their value, but rather to appease the men's unions over the process of dilution.⁷⁹ In reality, and even after any overtime had been paid, women were still paid less than an unskilled man for doing the same job.⁸⁰ Although a significant number of women saw an increase in their wages as a result of entering munitions work, only a handful achieved higher rates by negotiation through a special arbitration tribunal for women's pay and conditions.⁸¹ With strike action officially banned for the duration of the war, this

⁷⁶ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 60.

⁷⁷ Hunt, *The National Federation*, p. 78.

⁷⁸ *Women in Industry. Report of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry* [Cmd. 135, 167], 1919, xxxi, p. 371.

⁷⁹ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 33.

⁸⁰ Kozak, *Women Munition workers*, pp. 156-157.

⁸¹ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 44.

tribunal dealt with increasing protests from women workers who realised they were not getting equal earnings at all.

There was some history of trade union activity amongst female labour before 1914. Women had often been excluded from specialist craft unions primarily because it was feared, as was the case during the war, that skilled men's wages would be undercut if there was an extensive use of unskilled labour.⁸² However, general labour unions were open to both sexes, providing low rates and subscriptions. In the early 1900s, certain trades in Wales which employed comparatively large numbers of women, including tinsplate manufacture, dressmaking and retail, recorded increasing union activity and organisation among their women workers.⁸³ In this period, branches of the Women's Labour League were also established in north and south Wales, with the majority of its members and organisers middle-class women. During the period which became known as the "Great Unrest", women workers in Cardiff participated in a wave of strike action alongside male workers in various trades. With help from the Workers' Union, the Cardiff branch of the League organised collective action amongst female cigar, laundry and bottle workers in the summer of 1911. With the backing of the League, women employed at J.R. Freeman and Son in Cardiff rolling and de-stemming tobacco demanded higher wages in line with other female trades and 'equal pay with men for work of equal value'.⁸⁴ Whilst there are no membership figures available for the number of women who joined trade unions in Wales in the decades immediately before the war, it does seem that women were becoming more organised and confident about expressing their discontent over wages and conditions.

⁸² Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War: The British Experience* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p. 44.

⁸³ Deirdre Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth-century Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 34.

⁸⁴ Griffiths, 'Cardiff Cigar Workers', p. 111.

One of the most active female trade unions in Wales during the war was the NFWW. Established in 1906 under the auspices of the Women's Trade League, the federation provided women with a platform for representation in the workplace. According to Cathy Hunt, the NFWW's first priority was to persuade women that they would benefit financially by joining the federation.⁸⁵ Before the war, the presence of the NFWW in Wales had been limited. According to Cathy Hunt, just three branches were in operation and these were in the south of the country.⁸⁶ Members mainly consisted of dressmakers, hospital domestic workers and laundry workers. However, local support was hard to come by, as women's participation in the workforce was low, and male trade unions such as the South Wales Miners' Federation dominated local labour organisation. However, during the war more branches were established, primarily in south-west Wales, where there was an already sizeable female workforce employed in the tinsplate and tin box trade and where growing numbers of women were employed in munitions factories in the area.

During 1917, it was reported that women workers in factories throughout Britain were instigating trade disputes. However, women were still far less prominent in industrial unrest than men. Of the 201 incidences of industrial unrest recorded by the Intelligence and Record Section of the Ministry of Munitions during the first half of 1917, 129 were started by men whereas only sixteen were instigated solely by women.⁸⁷ The main concerns of workers were the rising cost of living, fatigue and suspicions of profiteering amongst employers. For women, the most frequent complaint was that they were not being paid at the promised district rates. This was also the case amongst

⁸⁵ Hunt, 'Tea and Sympathy', p. 173.

⁸⁶ Hunt, *The National Federation*, p. 45.

⁸⁷ TNA, Ministry of Munitions, MUN 2.28, Reports of the Intelligence and Record Section of the Ministry of Munitions for the first half of 1917 in Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 105.

female labour in south Wales. In July 1917, a strike began at the National Cartridge and Box Repair Factory in Newport regarding women's wages and hours of work. According to a report by the Ministry of Munitions, the strike suspended work for around two thousand male and female workers.⁸⁸ Unfortunately it is not clear who instigated the strike and whether female trade unionists were involved, but it is likely that a section of the female workforce actively participated.

In Britain overall, women's trade union membership grew from 437,000 in 1914 to 1,209,000 in 1918.⁸⁹ This was definitely reflected in south Wales as more branches of the NFWW were established. During 1916, it was reported by representatives of the NFWW that there was increasing unrest amongst the female workforce at the large explosives factory on the Pembrey Burrows in Carmarthenshire. In August 1916, women were substituted for men in the process of balastite rolling at the factory, which involved pressing a wet paste between rollers.⁹⁰ Sieving and the processing of gun cotton were also now performed by women. With the support of the NFWW, those employed on these processes demanded a wage increase in line with their male counterparts.⁹¹ After no action was taken by the Board of Trade during the statutory three week period to respond to such demands, the women, who were also members of the NFWW, went on strike. As a result, the NFWW became involved in negotiations with the workers and employers.

The Woman Worker, the official journal of the NFWW, recalled that the workers, who had 'much spirit', were eventually persuaded to return to work. However,

⁸⁸ TNA, MUN 2/28, Ministry of Munitions: Labour, Offprints of Weekly Reports, Vol. II Jan 6th 1917 to December 29th 1917, Section XV: Report No. 99, Week Ending 7 July, 1917, p. 15.

⁸⁹ Thom, 'Women and Work', p. 316.

⁹⁰ Balastite is a smokeless propellant made from two high explosives, nitrocellulose and nitro-glycerine.

⁹¹ 'Nobels Llanelly', *The Woman Worker: Official Organ of the National Federation of Women Workers*, 8 (August 1916), pp. 1-16 (p. 10).

this was met with ‘special difficulty, as the workers were all aware that their action in striking was legal since the statutory three weeks had passed.’⁹² The fact that these women were persuaded to return to work suggests that there were limits to their militancy. The sense of unrest amongst the female workforce at the factory prompted the NFWW to send a representative to west Wales in order to negotiate on behalf of the workers for a wage increase. Although protest often borrowed the language of trade unionism, it was as likely to be settled by union officers as by management.⁹³ Deborah Thom argues that the organisational practices of women’s unions reinforced the ideology of woman as sweated worker, defenceless, in need of protection. They tended to rely more on organisers, paid or voluntary helpers from outside, than on elected officials.⁹⁴

This was the case in the Pembrey dispute. Miss Isabel Sloan, the Woman’s Officer for the Ministry of Labour working on behalf of the NFWW, visited Llanelli and Pembrey for a series of meetings during April 1917. An agreement with the Ministry of Munitions was subsequently drawn up, with women employed on more dangerous work at government controlled explosives factories set to receive between 6d and 7 ½ d per hour. However, dilution had been accepted, and was even monitored, by the NFWW, which came to an agreement with the ASE that if the male union helped them to organise, the federation would withdraw their members from such work after the war. Sloan remained in ‘Wild West Wales’ during the month and addressed three shifts of women workers at Pembrey in order to explain how these changes would be introduced.⁹⁵ She then travelled to Llanelli, attending a series of meetings with women

⁹² ‘Nobels Llanelly’, p. 10.

⁹³ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 116.

⁹⁴ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 111.

⁹⁵ ‘In Wild West Wales’, *The Woman Worker*, 18 (June 1917), pp. 1-16, p. 1.

workers from the local shell factory. During an address on 'Trade Unionism' there was a great a deal of enthusiasm for the movement shown amongst the women workers. Again the pages of the *Woman Worker* recalled that 'the girls were so enthusiastic, cheering and clapping until the very plaster statues in the niches in the walls of the Popular Cinema seemed wreathed in smiles'.⁹⁶

Women's representatives and other general unions had not been involved in either the initial discussions or the final arrangements over dilution since the agreements were not intended for them but in the interests of the men they replaced.⁹⁷ In non-munitions trades improvements in working hours and pay were not easily forthcoming. A lack of government control over industries other than those categorised as munitions meant that female workforces were often exploited by their employers.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the NFWW continued to try and further its influence in south Wales by organising public meetings in an attempt to encourage women workers to join their ranks.

In Llanelli, Neath and Swansea, there were also demands for higher wages and better working conditions from female tinsplate workers, women employed in laundry work and those in the tin box trade between 1916 and 1918. In the tinsplate industry, there had been on-going attempts to remove female "openers" from their jobs but this was met with resistance from both employers and the women.⁹⁹ With so few employment opportunities available to women, aside from the dreaded domestic service, in areas dominated by the production of tinsplate, these women were determined

⁹⁶ 'In Wild West Wales', p. 1.

⁹⁷ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, pp. 115 – 116.

⁹⁸ Braybon, *Women Workers*, p. 76.

⁹⁹ Edgar. R Jones, *Toilers of the Hills: an historical record in memory of those who worked through more than a century on iron, steel, and tinsplate in villages scattered among the Welsh hills and valleys* (Pontypool: Hughes and Sons, 1959), pp. 16-17. "Opening", which involved separating each sheet of compressed 'tin bars' during the process of 'hot rolling', was generally low paid and unskilled work. Paul Jenkins, *"Twenty by Fourteen": A History of the South Wales Tinsplate Industry 1700-1961* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1995), pp. 89-93.

to keep their positions. Through a system of licences, the production and distribution of tinsplate was controlled by the Ministry of Munitions during the war. Demands for an increase in wages, shortened working hours, and improved conditions were made by workers in Llanelli to the Welsh Tinsplate Co.¹⁰⁰ The uncertainty surrounding the demand for tinsplate production during the war gave women a further incentive to hold onto their jobs and protect their status as workers.

Although it is not possible here to make a full-scale study of the extent of female trade union activity in Wales during the war, there is evidence that more options for collective action were becoming available to women in different trades. In April 1918, a female branch of the Amalgamated Labourers' Union of Great Britain and Ireland was formed among the women workers in the local shipyard at Chepstow, and on a new site.¹⁰¹ Around forty women worked at the shipyard in Chepstow, employed on automatic and engraving machines, in core making, unskilled labouring, and clerical work or charring.¹⁰² This evidence suggests that there was a growing awareness of unionism amongst female labour in some localities of south Wales. It is possible that this was furthered by a growing self-esteem through doing "men's work", relatively higher wages, and increased autonomy over their income alongside greater opportunities for socialising through the workplace.¹⁰³

Women workers began to claim collective bargaining power. They also acquired a feeling of entitlement from their alignment with and solidarity in unions, affecting their sense of importance and status in the workplace.¹⁰⁴ Greater confidence and

¹⁰⁰ 'Rejoicings at Llanelly', *The Women Worker*, 20 (August 1917), 1-16 (p. 6).

¹⁰¹ *South Wales Weekly Argus*, 21 April 1917, p. 8.

¹⁰² Kozak, *Women Munitions Workers*, p. 103.

¹⁰³ Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 102.

¹⁰⁴ Claire A. Culleton, *Working-Class Culture, Women, and Britain, 1914-1921* (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 2000), p. 24-25.

interaction with other female workers established a common bond amongst women in factories which was sometimes conveyed in instances where women refused to carry on working in order to take a stand against management. It was reported in the *South Wales Weekly Post* that in January 1917 at a Munitions Tribunal in Swansea, seven female workers had been charged ‘with refusing duty in a controlled factory and prevailing on other girls to act similarly’.¹⁰⁵ In addition to the Special Arbitration Tribunal, local munitions tribunals were established in order to assess grievances, individual wage questions and issues regarding the much despised Leaving Certificate. The latter had to be obtained from an employer before munitions workers could leave or change job.¹⁰⁶ According to a newspaper report which covered a section of the tribunal proceedings, the women had stopped work after ‘the cloak-room girl’ had been sacked without any explanation.

Addressed to the welfare supervisor employed at the factory, the women had written a letter expressing their dissatisfaction. Signed by all seven workers, it read “‘Madame if you persist in discharging the girl all the girls in this shift will close work until a proper reason is given’”.¹⁰⁷ During the tribunal proceedings the women expressed their frustrations further. One of the workers said ‘We Swansea girls will see that we have our rights’.¹⁰⁸ The women were represented by a member of the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers’ Union, which also represented a large number of male metal workers throughout south Wales. This suggests that other unions in Wales may have accepted female members, and that it was not just organisations solely for women like the NFWW which represented women during their wartime

¹⁰⁵ *South Wales Weekly Post*, 27 January 1917, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Hunt, *The National Federation*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁷ *South Wales Weekly Post*, 27 January 1917, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ *South Wales Weekly Post*, 27 January 1917, p. 3.

employment. Whilst in reality women workers had very few rights under the regulations imposed by the Munitions of War Act, the tribunal proceedings in Swansea show a developing sense of identity as workers, alongside increased self-assurance amongst a group of women workers in the workplace.

This dispute provides an important insight into how women workers negotiated the varying experiences of the workplace during the war and how they combated increasing control over their actions. It also demonstrates wider contemporary perceptions of women's wartime work. The tone of the article and the response of the tribunal committee trivialised the women's actions and reaffirmed the belief that women would have no long-term interest in industrial work after the war had ended.¹⁰⁹ According to the committee the women had acted 'foolishly' and were warned over their future 'conduct'. Furthermore, their actions had prevented men in another department from completing their work, and the women were therefore blamed for slowing down production.¹¹⁰

Negative commentary in the press and other forms of contemporary discourse on the supposedly high wages of female munitions workers also reinforced this belief. It presented these workers as irresponsible, almost childlike and not capable of using their wages wisely.¹¹¹ During the course of the war, newspapers often overestimated the level of wages women received at munitions factories. According to Gail Braybon the "myth of high wages" was reported right across both the national and local press. This was closely linked to a supposed increase in female "frivolity".¹¹² This perception was reinforced by reports in the press of munitions workers going on holiday and spending

¹⁰⁹ Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, pp. 127-128.

¹¹⁰ *South Wales Weekly Post*, 27 January 1917, p. 3.

¹¹¹ Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, p. 136.

¹¹² Braybon, *Women Workers*, p. 163.

their money on expensive items of clothing.¹¹³ This coverage concealed the harsh realities many women experienced whilst in employment in munitions factories, as well as probably encouraging women to volunteer. However, they also reveal deep-seated unease at women's independence and increased earning power. Although women munitions workers had more money in their pockets, these reports wildly exaggerated the increase in earnings, and what they were likely to spend the money on.

The kind of language used by the munitions tribunal committee also had a class element. Throughout the war, middle-class commentators often assumed that the behaviour and actions of young, primarily working-class women needed to be controlled and regulated as they could not look after themselves.¹¹⁴ In a separate tribunal case involving a group of female munitions workers who had refused to begin work, the presiding official drew on his moral and social authority to condemn the women's actions. According to the newspaper report, 'he, however, tendered them some good advice. They were all doing good work for their relatives fighting for our country, and if they have any grievances they should leave it in the hands of their leaders'.¹¹⁵ This suggested that labour regulations and working conditions should not concern working women. Instead, serving their country should be their priority. The emphasis on patriotism mirrors the language used by the press in response to the miners' strike during 1915.¹¹⁶ Whilst the miners were viciously condemned for stoppages, these

¹¹³ *The Holyhead Mail and Anglesey Herald*, 10 August 1917, p. 3; *The Llanelly Star*, 31 March 1917, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ Vicky Long and Hilary Marland, 'From Danger and Motherhood to Health and Beauty: Health and Advice for the Factory Girl in Early Twentieth Century Britain', *20th Century British History*, 20:4 (2009), pp. 460-464.

¹¹⁴ Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, p. 136.

¹¹⁵ *South Wales Weekly Post*, 30 June 1917, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ Catriona Pennell, *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 85-86.

women were also patronisingly informed of their responsibilities to the nation and its soldiers.

This class-based moral authority over the female workforce was also linked to locality and in this case the wider context of industrial activism amongst the male workforce in the South Wales Coalfield. In one diary entry during March 1917, Gabrielle West described ‘the wives and other relatives of the miners, from the Rhondda Valley and other coal pits near’ as ‘very full of socialistic theories’ and ‘perpetually getting up strikes in true Tonypandy style. But although so violent when they think they are being trampled upon, they are very easily influenced by a little oratory and as soon as they have made up their minds “to go back” they become meek as little lambs’.¹¹⁷ Although this is a rather patronising attitude towards these women, it does suggest that in these areas, women were steeped in “socialistic theories”, most likely from growing up in an atmosphere of militant unionism than from the influence of the NFWW. It also shows that some women were actively engaging with socialist approaches, using them as a platform to gain better conditions in the workplace.

The grievances of women workers were sometimes directed towards particular individuals rather than conditions of employment or the level of wages. As suggested in relation to the Swansea workers at the munitions tribunal, another cause of frustration was their relations with factory welfare supervisors. Trade unions including the NFWW called for the full-scale removal of the welfare department provided by the state at individual factories. It was suggested that the rights of organised labour were threatened by the existence of these departments, as growing state intervention became entwined

¹¹⁷ IWM, 77/156/1 Diary of Miss G.M West, 1917.

with an ever-increasing degree of social control.¹¹⁸ In the main, union leaders believed that the state-backing of welfare policy was designed to increase productivity while seemingly appeasing moderate demands for reform. Their interests concerning organised labour and its wider regulation were being challenged by such reforms.¹¹⁹ Therefore, the union was determined to try and disband the welfare department inside factories and workshops.

At the annual conference of the NFWW at Milton Hall in Manchester at the end of August 1918, the union representative Miss Howarth announced that the welfare department had been disbanded at one factory in Llanelli. As an alternative to the disbanded department, the NFWW played an active role in assisting a works committee which was given the task of ensuring the health and welfare of the women employed.¹²⁰ Whether the federation had any direct involvement in the dismissal of the welfare supervisor or in fact whether women workers had campaigned for the individual and the department to be removed is unclear. However, undoubtedly there was a clear motive for the NFWW to remove welfare supervisors or departments introduced by management. According to Miss Codrington, the NFWW representative from Bristol, the public were misinformed about the purpose of introducing a so-called 'welfare worker'. It was clear what the position of a forewoman or lady manager entailed, but the duties and motivations of the welfare supervisor herself in undertaking the role reinforced a level of distrust amongst the workforce.¹²¹ These motivations were believed to stem from notions of social control and the need to regulate workers' behaviour. Workers' representatives remained suspicious of the motivations of welfare workers

¹¹⁸ Noelle Whiteside, 'Industrial Welfare and Labour Regulation in Britain at the Time of the First World War', *International Review of Social History*, 25:3 (1980), pp. 321-322.

¹¹⁹ Whiteside, 'Industrial Welfare', pp. 321-322.

¹²⁰ 'The Manchester Conference: Full Descriptive Report by Our Special Representative', *The Woman Worker*, 34 (October 1918), 1-16 (p. 7).

¹²¹ 'The Manchester Conference', pp. 6-7.

throughout the war. But even though trade unions made it appear that women workers disliked the system of welfare, according to Deborah Thom it was an important part of their working lives.¹²² Although women workers ran into conflict with their supervisors and some made complaints to their union representative, this did not necessarily translate into hostility towards every aspect of welfare provision, as will be seen in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Women undertook a variety of jobs in the production of munitions in Wales during the First World War. This included work that the overwhelming majority of women had not experienced before. A select few were able to pursue training in airplane construction and semi-skilled engineering processes described as men's work, and were praised for their adaptability and enthusiasm. To the surprise of instructors and observers, women were found to be just as capable as men of using this kind of machinery. However, as the wider historiography has noted, most women continued to be employed on tasks defined as repetitive, reinforcing the idea of women's work as being unskilled and having a low status. Some women drew on their prior manufacturing skills and experience in the production of munitions. As other scholars have found, women generally moved between trades during the war and were not "new" workers as the press made out. However, feminine characteristics were still emphasised in descriptions of women undertaking such processes, thereby maintaining traditional gender roles. Furthermore, there remained much resistance towards the employment of

¹²² Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 116.

female labour. Although a growing number of employers came around to the idea of using female labour, there was still apprehension and opposition within industries that traditionally relied on a male workforce. As was the case amongst farmers in rural areas of Wales, the views of colliery managers and other employers showed how a combination of practical obstacles and persisting ideas of gender roles informed their stance. Male trade unions also only accepted the introduction of female labour after it was agreed that the status of male workers would be protected.

This chapter has also attempted to place women workers within the general narrative of labour history and trade unionism in Wales. Groups of women employed in munitions factories across south Wales were actively engaged in the pursuit for higher wages and better conditions. Greater organisation amongst female trade unions including the NFWW, along with growing workplace solidarity, gave women the confidence to express their demands. Although organisers worked to represent women workers and mediate with employers over their wages, their actions ultimately maintained the prominent position of men in the workplace. But whilst class hierarchy alongside notions of gender and patriotism were central to shaping the language and experience of female wartime employment, women's behaviour and their demands for equal pay show how some groups of workers negotiated and indeed challenged such constraints, establishing their own varied experiences of war work.

Chapter 4

Women workers, sport and welfare in Wales during the First World War

As increasing numbers of women entered the workforce greater consideration was given to their general health and welfare. Most historical research into this area has focused primarily on the motivations behind the introduction of welfare policy and the impact of its implementation at factories and workshops under varying degrees of government control. Deborah Thom argues that wartime production took priority over the reproductive health of female TNT workers, whereas in contrast Angela Woollacott has taken a more positive approach by suggesting that the impact and availability of healthier meals and access to different forms of recreation improved the majority of munitions workers' lives.¹ There are also debates over the definition of "welfare". As Chris Brader makes clear in his study of female munitions workers employed at the explosives factory in Gretna, welfare was an 'elastic' term, which comprised a number of different components.² In the context of this chapter, the term welfare covers issues surrounding health, fitness and social morality, alongside attempts to regulate and control the behaviour of working-class women.³ Here, the focus is on the introduction

¹ Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War I* (London: I.B Tauris, 2000), pp. 122-139; Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 59-88.

² Chris Brader, *Timbertown Girls: Gretna Female Munitions Workers in World War I* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2001), p. 52.

³ Wider contemporary debates concerning working-class health have also been assessed within the framework of welfare provision. This has included focusing on infant mortality rates, levels of overcrowding and the supply of foodstuffs in areas with high levels of poverty and economic deprivation. See Linda Bryder, 'The First World War: Healthy or Hungry?', *History Workshop Journal*, 24:1 (1987), pp. 141-57. Studies related to munitions workers in other areas have demonstrated how the nature of female employment makes an empirical assessment of the evidence particularly problematic. Unfortunately, it is not within the scope of this thesis to ascertain whether the provision of welfare and recreation improved the general health of working women in Wales.

and implementation of welfare policies within factories, as well as attempts to institute new leisure activities for women or to police their leisure time outside the factory.

Recent studies focused on specific localities or factories have demonstrated that welfare became a vehicle for the maintenance of social order and led to an increasing growth in class consciousness amongst women workers.⁴ Much of the historiography has focused on the role of female welfare supervisors, who were employed at factories throughout the country. Angela Woollacott in particular has looked at how welfare supervisors negotiated the experience of their new role, by emphasising particular traits associated with masculinity in the workplace in order to establish a degree of authority over women workers.⁵ Both inside and outside the workplace, preventative measures to safeguard female behaviour and sexuality were also undertaken by various branches of the Women Police patrols. Young women especially were considered to be in ‘moral danger’ from prostitution, the lure of alcohol and social immorality.⁶ Upholding “respectable” notions of femininity was often linked to wider efforts at maintaining national strength in wartime. As Woollacott makes clear, these efforts to establish notions of “respectability” were often based on middle-class norms and demonstrated a lack of understanding of working-class notions of acceptable feminine behaviour.

Scholars have also assessed the role of voluntary organisations in providing accommodation and recreational facilities for women workers. These voluntary organisations were motivated by a concern to guard against unwarranted social vices,

⁴ Myra Baillie, *The Women of Red Clydeside: Women Munitions Workers in the West of Scotland during the First World War* (Unpublished PhD thesis, McMaster University Ontario, 2002); pp. 160-170; Brader, *Timbertown Girls*, pp. 28-33.

⁵ Angela Woollacott, ‘Maternalism, Professionalism and Industrial Welfare Supervisors in World War I Britain’, *Women’s History Review*, 3:1 (1994), 29-56.

⁶ Philippa Levine, “‘Walking the Streets in a Way No Decent Woman Should’”: Women Police in World War I’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 66:1(1994), pp. 34-78; Louise. A Jackson, *Women Police: Gender, Welfare and Surveillance in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

but women workers often considered the provision of clubs and hostels by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and Girls' Friendly Society as embodying ideas of class difference.⁷ To ordinary working-class women, these organisations did not adhere to their needs or interests, and many remained suspicious of their intentions. In contrast, the press in particular applauded the activities of middle-class women and the various organisations which they represented. These commentators believed that in their patriotic efforts, these middle-class women were a positive influence upon the women and girls under their authority.

This scholarship shows that the government and voluntary organisations used welfare measures to maintain productivity and uphold social and gendered boundaries.⁸ More recently, there has been a shift within the historiography towards looking at women's own experiences and their reaction to the introduction of welfare. This has questioned not only the extent to which welfare measures were successful in alleviating the strain of physical labour, but also the influence of voluntary organisations in dictating women's behaviour, especially in terms of class and gender alongside the broader relationship between women and welfare practices.

This chapter will build on the historiographical debates outlined above to explore the reasons for the introduction of welfare measures and to examine their implications for women workers in Wales and their employment during the war. It will first examine the role of female welfare supervisors and how welfare measures were introduced in factories throughout Wales. It will then assess how Christian organisations attempted to look after women workers both inside and outside of the

⁷ Baillie, *The Women of Red Clydeside*, pp. 228-229.

⁸ Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War: The British Experience* (London: Croom Helm, 1981).

workplace. This is followed by a consideration of women's participation in sport and recreation, and especially the reaction of the press and nonconformist leaders towards such practices. Analysis of welfare supervision, voluntary organisations, and sport and recreation reveals that notions of class, age, femininity and sexuality were an integral part of the discourse surrounding welfare practices in Wales. In short, welfare reaffirmed the importance of domesticity, gender roles and traditional ideas of women's work in Welsh society.

Women's work, welfare policy, and welfare supervision

Throughout the nineteenth century, only a handful of manufacturers experimented with anything which resembled a concerted welfare policy. It was only at the turn of the century that women's health and welfare in the workplace received sustained official attention. In south Wales, firms such as Lovell & Co, who became leading players in the confectionary industry, took the initiative in providing welfare facilities for its male and female workforce during this period.⁹ The implications of work for women's physical well-being became a matter of state intervention linked to the growth of child and maternal welfare policies.¹⁰ Until the late nineteenth century, the welfare of women workers was generally overlooked in government legislation. This was particularly the case in some heavy industries including coalmining, where there had been a tradition of employing women under such conditions.¹¹ At the end of

⁹ Ian Michael Pincombe, *Out of Rexville: G.F. Lovell and the South Wales Confectionary Industry, c. 1830-c. 1940* (Unpublished PhD thesis, The University of Wales, 1999), p. 62. See also Ian Michael Pincombe, 'Bobby Dazzlers: Women's involvement in the South Wales Confectionary Industry in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', *Llafur*, 8:4 (2003), pp. 31-50.

¹⁰ Jane Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood: Child and Maternal Welfare in England 1900-1939* (London Montreal: Croom Helm; McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), pp. 27-88.

¹¹ Barbara Harrison, *Not only the 'dangerous trades': women's work and health in Britain, 1880-1914* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1996), pp. 11-12.

the nineteenth century, partly in response to the depression of industrial wages and coinciding with the influence of the eugenics movement, more official attention was directed towards industrial women workers, and especially the potential impact of this work on their reproductive health.¹² Although this attention initially focused on married women, increasingly public health campaigners turned their efforts towards young, unmarried women in the workplace.

In the First World War, the mass mobilisation of women into the wartime industrial workforce brought greater urgency to these questions about health and safety in the workplace. The development of social welfare became linked with questions of productivity, industrial relations and the general needs of the war effort.¹³ By 1915, widespread welfare reforms had been introduced under the auspices of the recently established Welfare Department. In 1916, the government introduced the Munitions of War (Amendment) Act and the Police Factories & c. (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act giving them the power to force private employers to introduce a welfare scheme, although not always successfully.¹⁴ At around the same time, the Ministry of Munitions began to appoint welfare supervisors primarily in government-owned factories. The principles of labour and management policy adopted by the government were a mixture of welfare and scientific management, based in part on Taylorism which had been extensively adopted in the United States. In order to achieve victory in the war, the Ministry of Munitions had to organise factories and workshops in such a way as to

¹² For a discussion of how legislative restrictions on women's work alongside government legislation introduced during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century sought to protect women's reproductive health see Carolyn Malone, *Women's Bodies and Dangerous Trades in England, 1880-1914* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003).

¹³ Noelle Whiteside, 'Industrial Welfare and Labour Regulation in Britain at the Time of the First World War', *International Review of Social History*, 25 (1980), p. 312.

¹⁴ Woollacott, 'Materialism', p. 36.

ensure maximum output. This also meant removing pre-war legislation which governed restrictions on working hours and Sunday work for female labour.¹⁵

The aspect of these measures most prominent in contemporary debates on women's work in Wales is the introduction of welfare supervisors. As increasing numbers of women were now employed in factories throughout Britain, predominantly middle-class women were introduced to supervise this workforce. Welfare supervisors were given a wide range of duties, including recruitment, timekeeping, dismissal, factory floor supervision and maintaining health and safety. Most historians have focused on the role of welfare supervisors in different factories, and their relationship to the female workforce and its similarities with nineteenth century modes of social investigation. Angela Woollacott has argued that supervisors adopted a maternal approach to their role which was underpinned by their perceived authority over the workforce, reflecting that of nineteenth century social investigators.¹⁶ In some factories, this caused a certain degree of resentment and mistrust amongst the workers which revealed the importance of age and class in determining perceptions of welfare. Age difference and class formed the basis of supervisors' moral authority over working-class women's behaviour.¹⁷ In looking at the role of class, historians have also noted the fractious relationship between trade unions and welfare supervisors. In particular, all-

¹⁵ Brader, *Timbertown Girls*, p. 51.

¹⁶ Angela Woollacott, 'From Moral To Professional Authority: Secularism, Social Work and Middle-Class Women's Self-Construction in World War I Britain', *Journal of Women's History*, 10:2 (1998), p. 99.

¹⁷ Woollacott, 'Materialism', p. 39.

female unions like the NFWW resented how supervisors were seen to be interfering in the lives of the women workers.¹⁸

Our knowledge of the role of female welfare supervisors in Wales comes primarily from the accounts of three welfare supervisors at NSFs in south Wales, who in 1919 set down a record of their wartime duties. One of their first jobs was to interview and approve prospective workers. Very often management requisitions for operatives were forwarded to the Welfare Department, who then authorised the labour exchanges to secure workers.¹⁹ At the NSF in Maesglas, Newport, applicants were interviewed individually by the Welfare Supervisor, Miss E. C. Wagstaff, who described three criteria required of each candidate: their suitability for the work they would be asked to undertake; the existence of suitable circumstances at home; and finally their overall general health and whether they displayed a good character.²⁰ Applicants were then required to undertake a medical assessment, which very often determined their work within the factory.²¹ These criteria reflected the importance of establishing an efficient workforce, but also demonstrate the attention to ostensibly non-work-related factors such as ‘character’ and ‘home circumstances’. This has led some historians to see welfare supervision as a form of social control. According to a report from the supervisor at Uskside, workers were ‘carefully selected’ and this resulted in the greater efficiency of the female workforce at this factory.²² This discourse suggests that welfare supervisors adopted a language of efficiency, rationality and organisation which

¹⁸ Deborah Thom, ‘Women and Work in Wartime Britain’ in *The Upheaval of War: Family, Work and Welfare in Europe, 1914-1918*, eds by Richard Wall and Jay Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 310.

¹⁹ Brader, *Timbertown Girls*, p. 57.

²⁰ Imperial War Museum, London (hereafter IWM), Women’s Work Collection, MUN 23/15, National Shell Factories, Report of Supervisors, Account of work (Welfare), at Newport, May 1919, p. 1-2.

²¹ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 149.

²² IWM, Women’s Work Collection, MUN 23/24, National Shell Factories, Report of Supervisors, Account of work (Welfare), at Uskside, 1919.

legitimated their own status as participants in the masculine world of industry. But this also involved negative judgements about the workforce and the assumption of power over them.

Although welfare supervisors approved of changes to improve efficiency and the working conditions of women, often the introduction of such changes had been resisted by factory owners and management. According to the Areas of Welfare and Health Section report for south Wales for the end of 1917, some had been employing ‘women under bad conditions for years’, and there was a great deal of ‘conservative prejudice’ around making any changes to the working environment to accommodate the new female workers recruited in wartime.²³ The environment which women were working in was deemed unsatisfactory at factories in many areas of south Wales. Between October and December 1917, thirty-five firms were visited by the Areas of Welfare and Health Section. Twenty had to be re-visited during the next quarter because of the unsanitary working conditions for women.²⁴

At the explosives works in Pembrey, very little in the way of welfare had been introduced by the supervisor prior to the beginning of 1917. Shortly after the government took over control of the factory, Gabrielle West described the factory as ‘very badly equipped as regards the welfare of the girls’: ‘The change rooms are fearfully crowded, long troughs are provided instead of wash basins and there is always a scarcity of soap and towels. The girls [*sic*] danger clothes are often horribly dirty and in rags, many of the outdoor workers, who should have top boots, oilskins and s.westers

²³The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), MUN 5/93/346/133, Ministry of Munitions: Quarterly reports on Areas of Welfare and Health Section, Quarterly Report for the South Wales Area, October 1917 – January 1918.

²⁴ MUN 5/93/346/133, Quarterly Report for the South Wales Area, October 1917 – January 1918.

[sic], haven't them'.²⁵ She also noted that the location of the factory exacerbated the situation, as there were 'no drains owing to the ground being below sea level [...] The result is horrible and smelly swamps'. Even worse, until recently there had been 'no lights in the lavatories, and as these same lavatories are generally full of rats and often very dirty the girls are afraid to go in'.²⁶ Although the conditions were not as bad as this in many factories, this shows that welfare supervisors could push for the introduction of measures which genuinely improved the working lives of many women.

In such cases, the changes which welfare supervisors could introduce to the working environment were justified on the basis of greater efficiency, as well as the "happiness" of the workforce. However, another theme which emerges strongly from the reports of welfare supervisors is the assumption of moral authority over the workforce. Welfare supervisors often believed that a working-class labour force could only be efficient in maintaining production if all aspects of their lives were regulated. Underlying this management strategy was the assumption that these young women were unable to look after their own health and incapable of maintaining a healthy diet. As will be seen, this all-embracing notion of welfare enabled supervisors to extend their control in areas regarding women's behaviour and leisure interests outside the factory.²⁷ This extension of welfare supervision proceeded alongside discouragement of women workers' expressions of their own views about health and work. At the explosives factory at Queensferry it was noted that:

in the special case of the medical attendance required by the women workers, it was often found that a judicious lack of sympathy was greatly beneficial, particularly in the case of new-comers, and while their health was carefully watched, they were not encouraged to talk about it, and everything was done,

²⁵ IWM, Department of Documents: 77/156/1, Diary of Miss G.M West, 1917.

²⁶ 77/156/1, Diary of Miss G.M West, 1917.

²⁷ Marion Kozak, *Women Munition Workers During the First World War*, with special reference to Engineering (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hull, 1976), pp. 265-266.

both to enable them to be fit for their work, and to assure them that this was actually the case.²⁸

This demonstrates a lack of respect for women's own accounts of their health, and the existence of class-based assumptions concerning the superior knowledge and skills of middle-class welfare supervisors. According to Woollacott, the welfare supervisor was on hand to 'protect the health and welfare of women workers as current and future mothers' both inside and outside the factory.²⁹ Wartime debates about the recruitment of women into the industrial workforce were infused with concerns about motherhood. According to some female inspectors working for the government, the purpose behind the introduction of welfare was to better educate women workers in their future roles as wives and mothers. It was believed that subjection to factory discipline, along with the benefits of sensible diets and the greater availability of medical facilities, would make these women better citizens.³⁰

While welfare supervisors believed they could help to teach their younger charges in the skills necessary for motherhood, they also sought to dictate the girls' behaviour. At the shell factory in Uskside, the welfare supervisor, E. Whybrow, claimed that the 'strict' supervision of the cloak rooms cut down loitering and pilfering, and encouraged 'absolute cleanliness'.³¹ As this shows, many supervisors considered their role to be like that of a matron, in charge of a group of school girls who were incapable of using their own initiative.³² In this case, Whybrow obviously did not trust the women working at the factory, and her comments demonstrate a lack of awareness

²⁸ Flintshire Records Office (hereafter FRO), P. Box 7. FL1/11, Ian Hay, *H.M. Factory Queen's Ferry: Its history and Development from May 1915 to November 1918* (Queensferry: Factory Printing Press, 1948).

²⁹ Woollacott, 'Maternalism', pp. 34-35.

³⁰ Braybon, *Women Workers*, p. 143.

³¹ IWM, MUN 23/24, National Shell Factories, Report of Supervisors, Account of work (Welfare), at Uskside, 1919, p. 1.

³² Woollacott, 'Maternalism', p. 40.

of ordinary young women's experiences of home life. In south Wales, standards of respectability and cleanliness were high within the home, with mothers teaching their daughters the value of discipline, hard work and domestic skills.³³ For younger women and girls, this was reinforced at school, where there was a keen emphasis on cleanliness and domestic tasks, and also at chapel where the home lay at the heart of piety and respectable womanhood.³⁴ Therefore, these women and girls would more than likely have already understood the importance of abiding by a set of rules and in maintaining a clean and tidy environment in which to work.

The relationship between welfare supervisors and the female workers varied at different factories and largely depended on the character of the individuals involved. To a large extent, women workers believed that supervisors were part of management and were wary of the intentions behind the system of welfare.³⁵ John Moxon, the secretary of the shell factory at Newport, suggested that 'the women workers generally looked upon the Department with suspicion, failing to appreciate the real purpose for which it was set up'.³⁶ According to Moxon, only under the 'guidance of the welfare supervisor' did the workers eventually become more 'susceptible' to the policies which were being introduced. Moxon believed that the Department was a success because welfare supervisors 'carefully and promptly' investigated all cases, but he showed little respect for the workers when he suggested that their grievances were 'often more imaginary than real'.³⁷ According to Wagstaff, effective welfare supervision created a positive

³³ Sue Bruley, "'Little Mothers': Adolescent Girls and Young Women in the South Wales Valleys between the Wars', *Llafur*, 10:3 (2010), p. 129.

³⁴ Rosemary Crook, "'Tidy Women': Women in the Rhondda Between the Wars', *Oral History Journal*, 10:1 (1982), p. 41.

³⁵ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, pp. 130-131.

³⁶ Newport Central Library, Newport (hereafter NCL), 10425, Record of the Newport National Shell Factory established by the Ministry of Munitions at Newport, Monmouthshire, Correspondence from John Moxon to the Curator of the Library and Museum, Newport (August 1919), p. 6.

³⁷ 10425, Record of the Newport National Shell Factory, p. 6.

environment whereby the workforce pulled together in order to help each other. She recalls how ‘the moral tone of the Factory was excellent. A splendid feeling of camaraderie existed, and it was [a] not infrequent occurrence for an employee who had a good day on piece work to help a less fortunate comrade’.³⁸ Apart from wanting it to seem like she had done her job particularly well, Wagstaff’s comments also reflect attempts to maintain social order in the workplace, as well as a tendency to see women’s work entirely in terms of patriotic efforts rather than as a means of earning money.

In a number of reports from factories throughout south Wales, it appears that supervisors were recruited primarily to improve the behaviour of some female workers, rather than to improve their working conditions. The exact locations of the factories in question are not given, but these reports nevertheless provide some indication of the management’s motives in introducing welfare supervisors. According to one report by the Ministry of Munitions and its Quarterly Report for the South Wales Area, in at least one factory a welfare supervisor had been appointed because ‘the moral tone was extremely bad’, and if this experiment had failed, the women workers would have been dismissed.³⁹ The report also makes reference to the case of ‘one factory [where] a Supervisor was appointed where only 30 girls were employed, as they were so rough that nothing could be done with them. The Supervisor is an exceptional woman and has been wonderfully successful’.⁴⁰ In the face of opposition towards the employment of welfare supervisors from some employers and female trade unions, this was partly an attempt by the Ministry of Munitions to justify their appointments. The language and tone of these reports is also extremely revealing of “official” attitudes towards women

³⁸ IWM, Women’s Work Collection, MUN 23/15, National Shell Factories, Report of Supervisors, Account of work (Welfare), at Newport, May 1919, p. 2.

³⁹ TNA, MUN 5/93/346/133, Quarterly Report for the South Wales Area, October 1917 – January 1918.

⁴⁰ MUN 5/93/346/133, Quarterly Report for the South Wales Area.

workers. Of particular significance is the use of the term 'rough' in describing the female workforce. Jane Lewis has suggested that the term was used derogatively by some social investigators to describe women factory workers in England during the nineteenth century.⁴¹ During the war, the word 'rough' was also used by some members of the church to describe women who were not content to remain in the home.⁴² This view was shared by the Reverend J. Vyrnwy Morgan, a Congregationalist Minister, in his 1916 book on the Welsh experience of the First World War. He blamed women directly for 'social ruination of the mining industries' by neglecting their responsibilities at home.

Morgan connected 'wastefulness at home' with women's 'pride of dress', implying they were vain and selfish. Although Morgan was not concerned with industrial work (he spoke of women working in 'sweet and fancy shops, and small offices'), he believed that women took up this kind of work because they had 'no knowledge of house-keeping' and therefore 'when they have homes of their own, they are unable to play the part of a house-wife [sic] or of a mother'.⁴³ Although this demonstrates a dismissive attitude towards women's knowledge of the domestic sphere, Morgan's view reflected increasing anxiety amongst religious groups in Wales regarding the impact of the war upon femininity and women's social roles. These religious groups also claimed responsibility for the welfare of young women workers, and it is to their efforts that we now turn.

⁴¹ Jane Lewis, *Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and social change* (Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books Ltd, 1984), p. 185.

⁴² Brader, *Timbertown Girls*, p. 73.

⁴³ Morgan J. Vyrnwy, *The War and Wales* (London: Chapman & Hall limited, 1916) , p. 286.

Religious groups and welfare: Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Girls Friendly Society (GFS) and the Temperance Movement

As suggested by their use of similar language to describe women workers, there was considerable overlap between the attitudes of welfare supervisors and religious groups towards the “problems” of the female workforce. Religious groups played an important part in attempts to protect and to regulate the female worker's actions outside the workplace. Voluntary religious organisations took an active interest in the lives of women engaged upon different kinds of war work in Wales. These included the temperance movement alongside branches of the Young Women's Christian Association and Girls Friendly Society.

Temperance groups in Wales had come to prominence during the course of the nineteenth century in opposition to the increasing levels of alcohol consumption especially amongst the working class. During the war, the welfare of women both in the home and those undertaking wartime work became the focus of attention. Branches of the YWCA and GFS took a more practical role by operating clubs, hostels and canteens for women workers throughout Wales. Since its establishment in 1855, the YWCA had seen one of its core activities as looking out for the welfare of young women working in factories and workshops. During the war, local branches of the YWCA also organised events in order to raise money for war workers as they sought to provide practical support for women.⁴⁴

Established in 1874 by Mary Elizabeth Townsend, the GFS was the first organised group for women and girls to have a strong connection with the Church of

⁴⁴ Woollacott, 'From Moral To Professional', p. 99.

England. The endorsement of religious principles and an emphasis on domesticity became an integral part of the organisation's activities with young women throughout the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ During the war, after a successful public appeal, the GFS built hostels, clubs and huts throughout England, Scotland and Wales for women employed in a range of wartime and peacetime occupations.⁴⁶ Aside from identifying how nineteenth century ideas of social philanthropy informed how such organisations approached dealing with women's welfare, the historiography has shown that in some localities they were unpopular amongst women workers because of the moral intention to control and restrict their movements.⁴⁷ In this case, three main themes will be discussed, including concerns surrounding drinking; the provision of clubs and hostels and the attempts to improve housing in some localities. This will allow for a greater understanding of attitudes towards working-class women and the role of class, notions of femininity and domesticity in relation to the provision of welfare in Wales.

A focus on women's moral and sexual behaviour began almost immediately after war was declared. With the spread of so-called "khaki fever" amongst young women and girls during the opening months of the war, there was a renewed emphasis on the control of female sexuality. Alongside concerns about the impact of female prostitution and the spread of venereal disease amongst soldiers, the military and police imposed severe restrictions on women's movements in some areas.⁴⁸ Nowhere perhaps was this taken to such an extreme level than in Cardiff during November 1914. Colonel

⁴⁵ Brian Harrison, 'For Church, Queen and Family: The Girls' Friendly Society 1874-1920', *Past and Present*, 61 (1973), p. 137.

⁴⁶ Vivienne Richmond, "'It is Not a Society for Human Beings but for Virgins': The Girls' Friendly Society Membership Eligibility", *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 20:3 (2007), pp. 306-308.

⁴⁷ Baillie, *The Women of Red Clydeside*, pp. 229-230.

⁴⁸ Angela Woollacott, "'Khaki Fever' and its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29:2 (1994), pp. 327-331.

East, commander of the Severn Defences, exercised the powers given to both the state and the military under Defence of the Realm Act to ban ‘women of a certain character’ from public houses between 7pm and 6am.⁴⁹ This came about as wartime commentators began to suggest a link between those women who regularly smoked and drank with sexual promiscuity.⁵⁰ In fact, the consumption of alcohol amongst women continued to be a topic of great interest to the temperance movement and local press in Wales during the war.

In order to curb supposed excess drinking amongst the wartime workforce and the population at large, as part of the Defence of the Realm Act, the government created the Central Control Board. By 1916, this had resulted in restricting the legalised sale of alcohol in licensed premises for the duration of the war.⁵¹ The temperance movement in Wales became increasingly vocal during the war in trying to combat drinking amongst men and women. This built on the strength of nineteenth-century temperance movements, which culminated in the introduction of the Sunday Closing Act in Wales of 1881. The temperance movement and in particular nonconformist chapels had a long history of attempting to demonstrate the negative effects of drunkenness.⁵² Although its degree of influence upon the working class was in question by the beginning of the twentieth century, temperance groups and leaders demanded further legislation and control. These calls increased in volume as the war seemed to provide an urgent impetus for further regulation of “immoral” behaviour. In November 1915, the Dean of St

⁴⁹ Deirdre Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth-century Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 70.

⁵⁰ Susan R. Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: gender, motherhood, and politics in Britain and France during the First World War* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 1999), p. 122.

⁵¹ Stella Moss, “‘Wartime Hysterics’?: Alcohol, Women and the Politics of Wartime Social Purity in England’ in *British Popular Culture and the First World War*, ed. by Jessica Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 149.

⁵² W. R. Lambert, *Drink and Sobriety in Victorian Wales c. 1820 – c. 1895* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1983), p. 250.

Asaph, at a meeting of the St Asaph Diocesan Branch of the Church of England Temperance Society, suggested that the church needed to become more involved in tackling the supposed increase in drunkenness amongst the civilian population. He reportedly stated that ‘much more money than usually was being circulated amongst the working-classes, many of whom had not been accustomed to handle surplus cash, and, he was afraid, did not always know what to do with it. One disquieting sign was the increasing drinking amongst women’.⁵³

Similar sentiments were expressed by the Chairman of the Flintshire Police Committee who, in light of the fourteen women convicted of ‘drunkenness’ during the last four months, suggested ‘that it was no doubt to be largely accounted for by the fact that many women were receiving more money than they ever had before [...] the saddest thing that could befall a nation was to see drunken mothers and women all over the country’.⁵⁴ Civilian leaders including ministers of religion, local councillors and magistrates routinely condemned female consumption of alcohol.

These condemnations demonstrate widespread anxieties about women’s new-found freedom in terms of their relative financial independence and not being under the direct control and influence of men.⁵⁵ Concerns over “immoral” female behaviour were fuelled by the press, which ran stories throughout the war implying that increasing numbers of women were drinking at home and in public houses. Those targeted most explicitly were married women, especially those in receipt of the separation allowance. At a Licensing Court Meeting for the Borough of Caernarfon the Mayor encouraged those public houses who served women to stop immediately. According to a report in *The Holyhead Mail and Anglesey Herald*, the Mayor believed that ‘[u]nlimited

⁵³ *The Llangollen Advertiser and North Wales Journal*, 26 November 1915, p. 5.

⁵⁴ *The North Wales Guardian*, 19 November 1915, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 69.

indulgence among women did more harm than anything he could think of', including the neglect of their children. He pointed out, with a latent threat, that 'unquestionably there had been cases of drunkenness among women who received separation allowances and in a few the allowances had been stopped in consequence'.⁵⁶

Stella Moss in her study of wartime social purity campaigns in England has argued that discussion concerning excessive female drinking continued throughout the war, and the anti-drink movement particularly emphasised the harmful effects of alcohol on the purity of womanhood.⁵⁷ Whilst it was not stated whether the women referred to in the press reports above were also employed at munitions factories or in any other kind of formal employment, evidence from women patrols in London and Liverpool suggest that most female drinkers were aged between thirty-five and fifty, and therefore older than the average munitions worker.⁵⁸ Outside the press, a claim was made by Miss G. M. West during her employment as a police officer at the explosives factory in Pembrey. In her diary, she suspected one worker who was described as 'a very dark rather handsome woman of the gipsy type' to have been drinking, although West later noted 'she was never actually drunk'.⁵⁹ In fact, allegations of widespread drunkenness amongst women were largely unfounded. A number of reports conducted by the women's advisory committee under the Liquor Control Board during the war suggest that there was no wartime increase in the number of women drinking. In fact, it made a direct link between falling levels of drunkenness and the improved cleanliness of homes and the health of children.⁶⁰ Interviews conducted with women workers confirm that many of them did not visit pubs during the war, and if they did go it was never alone.

⁵⁶ *The Holyhead Mail and Anglesey Herald*, 9 February 1917, p. 8.

⁵⁷ Moss, "'Wartime Hysterics'?", pp. 150-151.

⁵⁸ Woolacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 127.

⁵⁹ IWM, 77/156/1, Diary of Miss G. M. West, 1917.

⁶⁰ Woolacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 127.

This suggests that most women did not spend their higher incomes and separation allowances on drink.⁶¹

It seems that excessive female drinking was not a real problem in Wales either, perhaps partly because the temperance movement was so active in promoting the need to oversee the welfare of women wartime workers. Booklets entitled ‘Rhybudd i ferch amser rhyfel’ (‘A Warning to a Girl in Wartime’) aimed at the mothers of younger working-class girls emphasised the dangers of alcohol, especially the potential for drinking to lead to pregnancy.⁶² During a committee meeting in 1918 of the North Wales Women’s Temperance Union, branches were urged to engage directly with the welfare of women workers, ‘whenever any opportunity presents itself’.⁶³ Although what came of this declaration in practical terms for women workers in Wales cannot be identified, other religious organisations were seemingly more active in engaging women workers.

At seven sites in Wales, the YWCA provided accommodation and recreational facilities for women and girls.⁶⁴ The instability of wartime combined with women entering munitions factories provided groups such as the YWCA with an opportunity to promote Christian values amongst the working class.⁶⁵ As with welfare supervisors, many of those working within the YWCA were middle-class women, including Miss Edith Picton-Turbervill from Bridgend who became a national vice-president of the

⁶¹Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women’s Experience in Two World Wars* (London: Pandora Press, 1987), p. 70.

⁶²Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, (check) ‘From Temperance to Suffrage?’ in *Our Mothers’ Land: Chapters in Welsh Women’s History, 2nd edition*, ed. by Angela V. John (Cardiff: University Press, 2011) pp. 140-141.

⁶³The National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth (hereafter NLW), M.S 17517 E, North Wales Women’s Temperance Union, Committee Minute Book, The Literature and Finance Committees, Prestatyn, Feb 7th 1918, p. 40B.

⁶⁴ Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick (hereafter MRC), Records of the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), MSS 243/63, ‘List of YWCA Centres for Wartime Work 1914-1918’.

⁶⁵ Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 155.

YWCA. Prior to 1914, she worked in Britain and abroad holding conferences, opening hostels and establishing holiday camps for girls.⁶⁶ Many of the themes discussed in relation to welfare supervisors within factories, such as class antagonism and lack of understanding of working-class life, can also be seen in the dealings of religious organisations with women workers.

Local branches of the YWCA organised events in order to raise money to provide hostels and clubs for women workers. Rest huts near or on the grounds of munitions factories and clubs in primarily working-class neighbourhoods provided places where women could relax, gain access to strictly non-alcoholic drinks, and engage in a number of recreational pursuits.⁶⁷ Collections were organised specifically in support of those women engaged upon factory work and lists of donations were often printed in the local newspaper.⁶⁸ However, progress was hampered by financial constraints and many hostels and clubs intended to provide sanctuary for such workers were not established until 1918.⁶⁹

A number of public appeals and advertisements were made in the Welsh press advocating the establishment of hostels and clubs for women. In 1916 at Cardiff City Hall, a public meeting was held involving local dignitaries and members of the YWCA. The Lord Mayor of Cardiff, Dr R. J. Smith, advocated the notion that if soldiers fighting at the front were to be supported, good facilities for women workers should also be made available. According to the *Western Mail*, Smith argued that if there proved to be a lack of facilities for women workers, ‘the effect would be felt by their fighting men

⁶⁶ Edith Picton-Turbervill, *Life is Good: an autobiography* (London: F. Muller, 1939), p. 112.

⁶⁷ Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 155.

⁶⁸ NLW, Records relating to the Y.W.C.A (Welsh Division), File: 395B Aberystwyth Branch Minute Book, 1913-1924, Item: ‘Women’s Day’, Aberystwyth, April 9th, 1917.

⁶⁹ MRC, MSS 243/98/2, National Appeal Committee: Typescript signed minutes, pp. 1-98a 1917; Minutes June 25th, 1918, p. 172.

and anything they could do should be done to establish self-respecting conditions [and] proper facilities for working, and all that would avoid the murder of their soldiers by inertia at home. These necessary conditions meant better housing and all those facilities that encouraged and assisted the women workers'.⁷⁰

For the good of the war effort and most importantly to show tangible support for the soldiers at the front, such appeals were part of wider objective to galvanise the wartime economy and maintain civilian morale.⁷¹ As with the government's intention behind the introduction of welfare inside the factories, the emphasis in such appeals was towards maintaining productivity by providing women workers with such accommodation.⁷² The purpose of the meeting at City Hall was to ask for a contribution of £5,000, part of a nationwide appeal for £25,000, which would then lead to the establishment of further hostels and huts for women war workers throughout the country, including Cardiff. Miss Picton-Turbervill, chairman of the YWCA appeals committee, sought to encourage the middle-classes in Wales to provide financial assistance and become more aware of their responsibilities in making such facilities for women workers available.⁷³ This appeal was also made in response to a serious shortage of accommodation for war workers in some areas.

Both rural and urban areas of Wales struggled to provide housing accommodation for war workers. At Burry Port in Carmarthenshire, no provision was made for any additional accommodation to serve the munitions factories in Pembrey and Llanelli. As a result, many of the houses in the town were desperately overcrowded. In a report published in 1916, Dr Owen Williams the Minister of Health for Burry Port

⁷⁰ *Western Mail*, 11 October 1916, p. 4.

⁷¹ Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Longman Publishing, 1996), p. 80.

⁷² *Western Mail*, 3 July 1918, p. 3.

⁷³ *Western Mail*, 9 October, 1916, p. 3.

concluded that the ‘advent of Messrs Nobel’s Works to the District has caused overcrowding’.⁷⁴ In response to this, at a meeting of the Burry Port Council in March 1916, it was decided that the issue should be referred to the Ministry of Munitions immediately.⁷⁵ Attempts had been made to build the additional housing in the town but the government had not provided the necessary funds.

The seriousness of the situation was exemplified by comments made by the local councillor Mr Edwards, in which he stated that ‘the Council had to prove that the people in the munitions works were suffering and that there was no accommodation in place for them’.⁷⁶ In order to combat this shortage, workers living in Swansea and areas of Carmarthenshire were transported to the filling and explosives factory at Pembrey by a special train.⁷⁷ In Llanelli, middle-class households were encouraged to billet female workers to meet the shortage of housing. A Mrs W. Y. Nevill wrote a letter to a local newspaper in May 1917, arguing that the provision of accommodation for women workers working in local factories would ‘make their “off” hours more comfortable and happy’.⁷⁸ This was also the intention of the YWCA as they sought greater control and influence over the behaviour of young women.

The perceived need for these clubs and hostels was also linked to the concerns about immorality among young working-class women discussed earlier in this chapter. Social workers often portrayed them as helpless victims, susceptible to outside influences but above all irresponsible and unable to look after themselves.⁷⁹ A reporter

⁷⁴ Robin Barlow, *Aspects of the Great War in Carmarthenshire* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wales Lampeter, 2001), pp. 223-224.

⁷⁵ *The Llanelly Star*, 11 March 1916, p. 4.

⁷⁶ *The Llanelly Star*, 11 March 1916, p. 4.

⁷⁷ TNA, Ministry of Munitions, MUN 5/365/1122/8, History of Pembrey National Filling Factory 1915-1918, 26 May 1920.

⁷⁸ *The Llanelly Star*, 19 May 1917, p. 1.

⁷⁹ Grayzel, *Women’s Identities at War*, p.123

in the *North Wales Guardian* noted ‘these clubs have mostly been started at the request of the women police patrols, in the hope that they would take young women off the street’.⁸⁰ Policewomen tended to venture into public places, separating couples thought to be embracing too closely, following those they suspected might be about to embark on unsavoury courses of behaviour. As the war continued, their duties expanded, and by 1916, as pragmatic considerations dictated government policy, they were also policing women factory workers in munitions factories and in private industries engaged upon wartime contracts.⁸¹

In Rhyl, a Girls Patriotic Club was established by the YWCA in June 1915 for women and girls probably in response to the increasing number of soldiers at the Kimmel Park Camp. This was not just a club for those engaged in war work, but also for girls and young women living in the surrounding area.⁸² In Newtown, Tenby, Abergavenny and Holyhead, clubs were also established for local girls and those serving in women’s voluntary organisations including the Voluntary Aid Detachment.⁸³ Lodges operated by the GFS in Wales also accommodated women workers and those displaced by the war.⁸⁴ Whilst the total number of women who at any one time attended each of the clubs and hostels established by the Ministry of Munitions and YWCA in Wales during the war has not been found, there is evidence to suggest that workers were drawn to them, but in relatively small numbers.

At the explosives factory in Penrhyndeudraeth north-west Wales, where one hundred girls were employed, the YWCA asked the management whether

⁸⁰ *The North Wales Guardian*, 10 January 1919, p. 3.

⁸¹ Levine, ‘Women Police in World War I’, p. 45.

⁸² *The Rhyl Journal*, 11 November 1916, p. 4.

⁸³ MRC, MSS 243/63, ‘List of YWCA Centres for War Time Work 1914-1918’, p. 7.

⁸⁴ The Women’s Library, London Metropolitan University (hereafter WL), 5 GFS/02: Records of the Girls Friendly Society, Minutes and Papers, c. 1888-2001, 5 GFS/2/167 Lodges, Homes and Hostels, Newport (Monmouth), 1909-1922, File: Lodge and Registry Report for 1915, p. 4-5.

accommodation could be provided to set up a club. The YWCA pointed out that women waiting for their shift to begin had nowhere to go and that the irregular train services to their place of work was believed to necessitate such action. After close consultation with factory management about the establishment of a YWCA branch in the area to support the workers a cottage in the vicinity was chosen as a suitable location for a club. Welfare functions of management also allowed managers to extend their control in areas regarding women's behaviour and leisure interests outside the factory.⁸⁵ The club was officially opened by Mrs Lloyd George on 10 September 1918, with seventy women subsequently registering to become members.⁸⁶ This would probably have included the majority of the female workforce at the factory in Penrhyndeudraeth, where only 2 per cent of 352 workers were female in March of the previous year.⁸⁷ A club room, a reading room, a dining hall, a kitchen and three bedrooms were made available, alongside weekly intercession prayer meetings. The workers undertook an active role in the day to day running of the club, reinforcing the organisation's emphasis on educating young women in domestic tasks. Under the guidance of the resident Club Leader it was reported that 'the girls do a good deal of the household cleaning themselves and they have great schemes for the garden'.⁸⁸ Like the provision of sewing and cooking inside the factory, giving young women and girls these jobs emphasised that their primary role was still as homemakers.

A club was opened by the Ministry of Munitions in September 1918 at the Old Gymnasium in Wrexham to provide a range of activities for female workers. To begin

⁸⁵ Kozak, *Women Munition Workers*, pp. 265-266.

⁸⁶ NLW, 385B Origin and History, Reports written by Miss Grace Williams, 1917-39, Report: April 29-October 30 1918, p. 1.

⁸⁷ IWM, *Report on Labour in Controlled Establishments*, Table XXII, High Explosives and Propellants, p.18.

⁸⁸ NLW, 385B Origin and History, Reports written by Miss Grace Williams, 1917-39, Report: April 29-October 30 1918, p. 1.

with it restricted entry to only munitions girls employed at Queensferry, providing French classes and establishing a war savings committee. The girls were also encouraged to bring male friends along on ‘special occasions for supervised socialising’.⁸⁹ However, by this time large numbers of munitions workers from the explosives factory at Queensferry were leaving the town as demand for munitions steadily subsided. As a result the club was let by the National Shell Factory in Wrexham, however the women workers still employed there were seemingly not interested in the venture because according to the press report there were sufficient facilities already in place for them at the factory.⁹⁰ Mrs Helena Phillips of the GFS had planned to introduce a Girls Social Club into the factory, and there was supposedly much interest in the scheme amongst the workers. The manager, W.O. Hesketh, wrote to Mrs Phillips that, ‘I understand that the majority of the girls in the factory are looking forward to a periodical Social, and are quite prepared to subscribe a nominal sum weekly to cover unavoidable expenses’.⁹¹

However, whether this club was actually established or if the workers were in fact being “encouraged” by their welfare supervisor to contribute out of their own wages towards this venture is not clear. Furthermore, in this particular instance the women were probably not concerned about who was running the scheme but more enamoured by the opportunity of breaking the long hours spent doing dangerous and physically demanding work in the factory. Myra Baillie has shown that organisations including the YWCA were not attractive to women employed at factories on the Clyde in Scotland as they resented the limits put in place on their actions.⁹² The evidence

⁸⁹ *The North Wales Guardian*, 10 January, 1919, p. 3.

⁹⁰ *The North Wales Guardian*, 10 January, 1919, p. 3.

⁹¹ Mold Library, Community Archive, Uncatalogued Item: Letter from Mr. W. O. Hesketh the Manager of the National Shell Factory, Wrexham to Mrs Phillips of the Y Rhual, Mold, 12 December 1917.

⁹² Baillie, *The Women of Red Clydeside*, p. 228.

available for Wales does not allow for such a definitive conclusion. Nevertheless, women did attend such clubs during the war and those that did would have welcomed the break from the factory floor. Perhaps a more publicly visible part of the wartime experience for women was playing sport.

Sport, leisure and recreation

A relatively novel aspect of welfare provision was the setting up of sports and leisure activities. These included football, hockey and swimming and were often established at the behest of welfare supervisors. During the final decades of the nineteenth century with the expansion of female education, women's participation in sport began to increase, especially amongst the middle classes.⁹³ Women who participated in sport also became part of the growing "physical culture" reflected in forms of public discourse, which principally examined its impact upon domesticity and motherhood.⁹⁴ As a result two competing ideologies emerged around the encouragement of women to participate in sport. Games like football, which was primarily a male working-class sport, promoted aggression and competitiveness which were deemed to be unsuitable especially for women of a higher social status. The alternative view was that games including hockey had health benefits for such women and promoted qualities of grace and beauty associated with an idealised vision of womanhood and respectability.⁹⁵ However, for many young women living in both rural and urban areas of Wales, many of these activities were simply not encouraged.

⁹³ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the body: beauty, health and fitness in Britain, 1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) pp. 111-113.

⁹⁴ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Managing the body*, pp. 111-113.

⁹⁵ Kathleen E. McCrone, *Sport and the Physical emancipation of English women* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 136.

As in other parts of Britain, opportunities for working-class women to take part in team games and exercise for enjoyment were virtually non-existent during the nineteenth century.⁹⁶ In Wales, outside private education, the emphasis primarily in the curriculum at secondary and intermediate schools was on domestic training courses in cookery and housewifery.⁹⁷ Physical education at school for girls predominantly consisted of remedial exercise including gym classes, part of the drive for greater “national efficiency” amongst the British population.⁹⁸ In the South Wales Coalfield where gender roles were especially rigid, opportunities for leisure and any forms of recreation were few and far between. Due to their responsibilities to their families in the home, married women especially had very little time for such activities. The local chapel was perhaps the only place where women and girls could have any form of leisure time, with the provision of organised day trips and other religious events in the local community.⁹⁹ Whilst this would have remained the case for many during the war years, for some groups of mainly young women and girls, working in munitions factories gave them the opportunity to participate in a different range of sports and recreational activities.

This section will focus on the sports and forms of recreation which most explicitly challenged notions of gender and class, with a particular emphasis on football. The historiography has found that women’s football matches in particular were presented by the press as a novel wartime event, so as not to challenge the gendered boundaries in terms of participation. Alethea Melling has shown that football amongst female munitions workers developed out of a ‘paternalistic infrastructure’ which was

⁹⁶Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting females: critical issues in the history and sociology of women’s sports* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 68.

⁹⁷ W. Gareth Evans, *Education and Female Emancipation: the Welsh experience, 1874-1914* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990), p. 162.

⁹⁸ Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 118.

⁹⁹ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 98.

geared towards maintaining productivity in factories.¹⁰⁰ Here, I will briefly examine how sports were introduced in some factories in Wales and how women's football was conceived within the management structure of individual factories. Looking at the coverage of the games themselves in the press and the reaction amongst some within the religious community sheds light on contemporary attitudes towards women's football in the context of wartime. Themes including notions of femininity and the degree of social control which have been prominent thus far in this chapter will be discussed in relation to the provision of, and reactions to, different forms of recreation. Throughout the analysis an attempt will be to uncover the significance behind women's participation in football and make some tentative suggestions as to how it may have affected their experiences of the war effort.

At the shell factories in Uskside and Swansea, a range of activities were made available to women workers. In Swansea, a 'Sports Club' was established where workers could play hockey, tennis and football, or participate in choral singing or join the debating society.¹⁰¹ Whilst welfare supervisors provided guidance and encouragement, the workers often initiated the establishment of various societies and clubs. Angela Woollacott has claimed that these societies reflected a 'culture of self-improvement' amongst women workers, a philosophy which had previously been denied to them in the workplace.¹⁰² Such initiatives were also popular with management as they maintained morale which kept production at a high level.¹⁰³ As the hostels, clubs and canteens established by the YWCA, managers were keen to encourage such activities.

¹⁰⁰ Alethea Melling, 'Managing the Mutionettes: "Ladies" Football and the First World War Factories', *European Sports History Review*, 5 (2003), p. 133.

¹⁰¹ IWM, 23/18, Report of Supervisors, Account of work (Welfare), at Swansea 1919.

¹⁰² Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 137.

¹⁰³ Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 136.

Women also learnt new skills including learning how to swim, possibly for the first time. N. Griffith Jones, the welfare supervisor at the shell factory in Swansea, describes how ‘the Swimming section proved of exceptional interest, and the town Baths were engaged one evening each week, when instruction was given to all those requiring it. Over one hundred and sixty members availed themselves of this opportunity’.¹⁰⁴ This probably would have been a new experience for these women as organised swimming in public baths had previously been undertaken predominantly by middle-class women.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand at the factory in Uskside, the introduction of different sports had varied rates of success. According to the welfare supervisor ‘it was always difficult to find time to practice outdoor games. However, the Hockey Team survived three seasons and some good games were played. The Football Team was short lived as it was found to be too strenuous a game for women working on a 12 hours Shift. A Tennis Club was next tried, 30 girls joined, 2/6 per head was given towards entrance fees and Rackets were bought at cost price. Eight or nine who did not go away for their Summer Holidays made good use of the courts’.¹⁰⁶ The example of the football team shows that in some cases women workers themselves found it difficult to combine such activities with the demands made upon them inside the factory. Such comments would also have reinforced the idea that football was unsuitable for women.

Nevertheless, these remarks show was the variety of recreational activities women were undertaking and the popularity in particular of team sports. At Jenner Park in Barry it was reported by the local press that a ‘ladies rugby football match’ between two teams from the ‘Newport Munitions Works’ had taken place. However, no further

¹⁰⁴ IWM, MUN 23/18, Report of Supervisors, Account of work (Welfare), at Swansea 1919.

¹⁰⁵ Catherine Horwood, ‘Girls who arouse dangerous passions: women and bathing, 1900-1939’, *Women’s History Review*, 9:4 (2000), pp. 656-658.

¹⁰⁶ IWM, MUN 23/24, National Shell Factories, Report of Supervisors, Account of work (Welfare), at Uskside, 1919.

information was given on any of the players.¹⁰⁷ Some factories provided athletics events for their workers, including Finch's and the Standard Shipbuilding Co which established a Workers Institute at the shipyard in Chepstow.¹⁰⁸ There is evidence of female participation, with a photograph showing a group of women employed at the factory who competed in a tug of war contest.¹⁰⁹ This suggests that women participating in a traditionally male event must have caused a great deal of interest. For factory officials such events were an effective means of promoting social cohesion amongst the workforce and were given a great deal of support.¹¹⁰ Further evidence from photographs and press reports suggests that one of the most popular sports amongst women was football.

Unfortunately there are no figures available for the number of women who participated in the sport during the war, however teams were established in Cardiff, Swansea, Newport, Llanelli and Welshpool and each one was connected to or originated directly from a factory or industry engaged in the production of munitions.¹¹¹ Photographic evidence suggests that those who played football in Wales during this period were young, probably working-class women, as was the case throughout England and Scotland (see image below).¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ *Barry Dock News*, 15 March 1918, p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Anne Rainsbury, *Chepstow and the River Wye in Old Photographs: from the Severn to Tintern: from the collections of Chepstow Museum* (Gloucester: Sutton, 1989), pp. 114-115.

¹⁰⁹ Rainsbury, *Chepstow and the River Wye*, pp. 114-115.

¹¹⁰ Brader, *Timbertown Girls*, p. 205.

¹¹¹ Jean Williams, *A game for rough girls? A history of women's football in Britain* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 31.

¹¹² West Glamorgan Archives (hereafter WGA), Women's Archive Wales Collection, WAW 6/14, Swansea National Shell Factory Women's Football Team, 1914-1918.



Figure 8: Swansea National Shell Factory Football Team, 1914-1918

Interest in women's football was stimulated by their wartime role and the money which could be raised for wartime charities. Managers or senior male employees of individual factories often coached such teams, with female welfare supervisors often on hand to give guidance and encouragement to the players.¹¹³ Furthermore, it caught the attention of the local press bringing into sharp focus attitudes towards gender and class, alongside the relationship between women playing football and the importance of raising money for wartime charities and keeping a fit and healthy workforce.

One of the most successful teams in Britain during the war was the Swansea National Shell Factory. Formed at some point during 1917, the team won 'three silver cups' raising about £700 for various wartime charities.¹¹⁴ During May 1918, the *Llanelly County Guardian* reported on two of their matches against a team from a

¹¹³ Melling, 'Managing the Mutionettes', p. 133.

¹¹⁴ IWM, 23/18, Report of Supervisors, Account of work (Welfare), at Swansea 1919.

munitions factory in Newport. After the first game ended in a draw, the replay of the local munitions cup was held at Halfway Park in Llanelli.¹¹⁵ The following month saw the establishment of a 'South Wales Football League for Ladies' with representatives from munitions factories in Swansea, Newport, Llanelli and Cardiff in attendance along with male members of Swansea AFC.¹¹⁶ Teams from munitions factories were often coached by men and these representatives would have been more than likely have been male.¹¹⁷ The male football team in Llanelli also played at the Halfway Athletics Ground as it was also known. However by the spring of 1915 the Football Association (FA) under both financial pressure and criticism from sections of the middle class and the press temporarily suspended the league system.¹¹⁸ Although given a great deal of attention by writers and contemporaries, women's football was generally accepted, predominantly because of its novelty and the fact that it was raising money for the war effort. Matches at a recreational level between munitions factories carried on throughout the war with both men's and women's teams participating in local tournaments and charity matches.¹¹⁹ In contrast, those working-class men still playing professionally for money were seen as unpatriotic and in turn publicly condemned for not joining the army.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, the matches played by these women were not seen to be part of a serious, competitive sport, but as an event in a series of local wartime fundraising events.

Both matches between Swansea and Newport drew exceptionally large crowds demonstrating a great deal of interest amongst local people in women playing football.

At the first game it was reported that 8,000 people attended the match at St Helen's in

¹¹⁵ *The Llanelly County Guardian*, 9 May 1918, p. 4.

¹¹⁶ *The Cambria Daily Leader*, 21 June 1918, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Melling, 'Managing the Mutionettes', p. 134.

¹¹⁸ DeGroot, *Blighty*, p. 229.

¹¹⁹ Brader, *Timbertown Girls*, p. 214.

¹²⁰ Brader, *Timbertown Girls*, p. 214.

Swansea, with an equally impressive 7,000 the following weekend. A reporter in the *Llanelly County Guardian* covering the replay noted that: ‘the railings round the field [at Halfway Park] proved unequal to the task of holding back the spectators and gave way under the strain. It was a record crowd for any match since the start of the war at Llanelly, and a sum of £75 was taken at the gates [...] an hour before the start of the play not a seat could be secured in the grand stand, which was taxed to its upmost capacity’.¹²¹

The matches also attracted local dignitaries, convalescent soldiers from the military hospitals and representatives from voluntary organisations including the Young Men’s Christian Association who were often involved in organising women’s teams. They were billed as major civic events in support of the war effort, with the main purpose being to raise money for the local Prisoners of War Fund. For the newspaper’s reporter, having the replay in Llanelli would be a ‘rare treat’ for ‘Llanellyites’.¹²² This reinforced the idea that women playing football was an unusual spectacle, one never likely to be repeated. With a predominantly male working-class audience, such matches commonly filled the capacity of league grounds throughout Britain.¹²³ In part, this was due to the sheer novelty of seeing women playing any kind of sport at all in public. When mainly middle-class women had played sports it was generally watched by a selected audience from their own social group.¹²⁴

Impressions of women’s football as a novel occurrence were reinforced in the article by a description of how the women reacted to the news that a large amount of money had been raised by them playing. The reporter commented that the football

¹²¹ *The Llanelly County Guardian*, 9 May 1918, p. 4.

¹²² *The Llanelly County Guardian*, 2 May 1918, p. 4.

¹²³ Williams, *A game for rough girls?*, p. 69.

¹²⁴ Brader, *Timbertown Girls*, p. 211.

players ‘were all highly delighted when they heard that the £150 secured from the fixture would almost provide sufficient provisions for two weeks supply to prisoners on the list – a result of which all who helped along the game have reason to feel proud’.¹²⁵ In terms of the game itself, the writer was particularly complementary towards the women describing their high level of skill on the ball and praising one or two stand-out players. Their stamina was also mentioned as ‘the ladies proved wonderfully active, keeping up such a hot pace as would have made many a men’s side crack up in such a scorching sun’. Language that expressed competitive or aggressive behaviour was too masculine and therefore could not be associated with women. This would have challenged the exclusivity of this traditionally male, working-class sport which could have further destabilised gender roles.¹²⁶

Some women also began to challenge such roles by wearing shorts, knee-high socks and jerseys. Team and individual photographs of players and their coaches were printed in the press or as postcards. A picture of Martha Lewis, who reportedly scored thirty-one goals for Newport during the 1917 and 1918 season, was printed in the press accompanying the article covering the match with Swansea. Whilst Martha appears to be wearing shorts, socks and a football jersey, her opponents seemingly played in shirts, skirts, ties and mob caps. Whilst it is difficult to ascertain how these women felt about wearing this kind of clothing in public, Jean Williams tentatively suggests that ‘the notoriety of women wearing trousers’ [for work in munitions factories] may have meant that some women decided they didn’t want to play in clothing that would perhaps be perceived as unfeminine.¹²⁷ As some women adapted munitions uniforms to establish

¹²⁵ *The Llanelly County Guardian*, 2 May 1918, p. 4.

¹²⁶ Williams, *A game for rough girls?*, p. 34.

¹²⁷ Williams, *A game for rough girls?*, p. 27.

their own character and individuality, teams of footballers attached different meanings to the kit they wore on the field.

Whilst the press reports convey that women were proud of their achievements in raising money for wartime charities, the experience of playing football or any other team sport may have fostered a range of emotions. In the context of wartime, playing the game in order to raise money for wartime charities was one way that working-class girls could express their own patriotism. As raising money became a national issue, munitions workers often took great pride in the amounts they collected.¹²⁸ Angela Woollacott has suggested that by playing football women were expressing a class allegiance with men.¹²⁹ This may have been the case as girls from working-class communities would have grown up surrounded by their male relatives playing football. It was a game they were familiar with. It is probable that friendships also developed amongst the workforce. This fostered a team spirit which was evident in the events after Newport had beaten Swansea in the local munitions cup. After the presentation of the trophy, the Newport team carried their star player and Captain Martha from the field in celebration of their victory.¹³⁰ Although this was away from the work of making weapons and ammunition, such activities remained very much rooted in the factory and allowed women to identify with the place in which they worked and as munitions workers.¹³¹ That sense of accomplishment and perhaps confidence which came from such events was something perhaps many of these young women had not experienced in their pre-war lives outside the domestic sphere. Such feelings were also expressed after Swansea gained revenge on Newport in the following season of the local munitions cup

¹²⁸ Melling, 'Managing the Mutionettes', p. 131.

¹²⁹ Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 138.

¹³⁰ *The Llanelly County Guardian*, 9 May 1918, p. 4.

¹³¹ Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 139.

final.¹³² However, not everyone approved of women playing football and some sections of the religious community voiced their opposition in the wake of the match at Halfway Park.

According to a resolution passed by the congregations of two chapels at Cwmbwrla in Swansea, which was subsequently then sent to the Mayor of Swansea, the practice of women playing football should be banned, and all places of worship in the town should take a similar stance against it. It outlined 'that we strongly object against the great degradation that has taken place recently in our town in allowing females to play football at the Park. We earnestly beg of you, as our Mayor and as a Christian, to use all your power, even when it is under the guise of helping War Charities, to prevent such taking place, for the sake of our future girls and womanhood'.¹³³ However, this resolution appears to have gone against the tide of popular opinion. Studies looking at women playing football matches for charity taking place during the First World War have noted that there appears to have been very little public condemnation. According to some historians this was the case because the matches were often portrayed by the press as source of amusement.¹³⁴ However, this group of nonconformists believed that young women playing football would only have a negative long-term impact on femininity. Whereas those inside the factory believed that encouraging such ventures would help to maintain productivity and morale, for many people living in communities where ideas regarding female behaviour, domesticity and motherhood were governed by the local chapel, playing football was considered to be unsuitable for women. In this case, the belief was that playing football was undesirable for women even if it was being used as a means to raise money for the war effort. This shows the importance that

¹³² *South Wales Weekly Post*, 16 November 1918, p. 2.

¹³³ *The Cambria Daily Leader*, 7 May 1918, p. 1.

¹³⁴ Brader, *Timbertown Girls*, p. 214.

some within the religious community in Cwmbwrla placed upon maintaining their spiritual and moral authority, especially over young women. In fact, the increasing accessibility to and popularity of different forms of recreation had not been received favourably by nonconformists during the early 1900s. By playing football, young girls could be encouraged to neglect their domestic responsibilities to their families.

Such a position corresponds with the views of the Reverend. J. Vyrnwy Morgan, discussed earlier in this chapter, who argued that women's primary role was to maintain the sanctity of the home and that young girls needed to be prepared for their future lives as wives and mothers. Although chapel attendances had been in decline before 1914 in Wales, religious ministers were instrumental in encouraging support for the war effort in local communities. This was especially the case during the opening months of war as the influence of both the established and nonconformist churches were particularly apparent in getting men to volunteer.¹³⁵ However, in the late nineteenth century, the rise of commercialised leisure was considered by religious leaders as a direct threat to the existence of 'spiritual' communities and to organised religion itself.¹³⁶ Ministers often preached against football claiming that it encouraged drinking and gambling amongst working-class men which was drawing them away from religious activities. Furthermore, both watching and playing the game promoted competitive and aggressive behaviour which went against Christian teachings. However, the wider influence of nonconformity at this time was in decline and the momentum of the growth of the game was greater than the level of antipathy towards it.¹³⁷ Some churches and chapels did attempt to embrace the game by incorporating football into religious events and this

¹³⁵ Barlow, *Aspects of the Great War*, p. 36.

¹³⁶ Andy Croll, *Civilizing the Urban: Popular Culture and Public Space in Merthyr, c. 1870-1914* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 178.

¹³⁷ Martin Johnes, *Soccer and society: South Wales, 1900-1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002), pp. 30-31.

continued to an extent during the war with matches played at a junior level by local church groups and societies.¹³⁸ Whilst the resolution presented to the Mayor may not have been reflective of opinion throughout the religious community in Wales, it could be tentatively suggested that the notion of women playing football would have sat rather uncomfortably with many. This was in line with some observations made by both middle-class men and women prior to the war arguing that the sport was unsuitable for women.¹³⁹ Although the pleas of those in Cwmbwrla fell on deaf ears, with women being allowed to continue playing football in Wales well into 1919, this source does demonstrate that there was not a complete acceptance of women playing football and that traditional views regarding femininity and gender roles remained prevalent amongst nonconformists during the war.

Conclusion

The provision and introduction of welfare, sports and different forms of recreation both inside and outside the factory in Wales demonstrate that attitudes towards working-class women remained rooted within traditional ideas regarding domesticity, femininity and gender roles. Notions of class difference were apparent in the views of welfare supervisors towards the factory workers and their emphasis on productivity caused a certain degree of friction with female trade unions. Both welfare supervisors and notable public figures suggested that working-class women did not have the knowledge or ability to adapt to their assumed post-war roles of domesticity and motherhood. Within the context of social and economic uncertainty in wartime Wales, the reaction of leading nonconformist ministers and congregations towards female

¹³⁸ *The Brecon and Radnor Express*, 20 January 1916, p. 2.

¹³⁹ McCrone, *Sport and the Physical*, p. 128.

labour and their participation in sport was reflective of the importance they attached to women's traditional role in the home. Whilst notions of femininity were emphasised in press reports of football matches, these games were perceived differently by those more directly involved in the war effort as they considered the benefits of physical recreation in terms of increasing morale and maintaining production.

Religious organisations including the YWCA and GFS also attempted to subtly reinforce gender roles in hostels and clubs for women workers, whilst wrongly assuming working-class naivety and susceptibility towards the influence of the Church. Public debate surrounding female sexuality and their consumption of alcohol also reinforced the notion that women were under constant control and surveillance. Nevertheless, for those women who did participate in various sports and activities during the war, some for the very first time, such leisure activities were an integral part of their wartime experiences which publicly challenged gender constructions of dress and behaviour. Although sometimes constrained by the pressures of wartime and patriarchy, some became local celebrities as their exploits on the field caught the attention of the press. In addition, they took great pride in doing something for the war effort, which allowed them to express themselves, not only as individuals but as groups of women.

Chapter Five

‘Call To The Women’: Demobilisation and women’s wartime work

In November 1918, hundreds of women workers employed at the National Cartridge and Box Repair Factory and Lovell and Co. took part in the peace procession through the streets of Newport. They did not realise that public praise and adulation for their contribution to the war effort would be so short lived. Within weeks many of female employees at the box factory in Newport were applying for an out of work donation, given to them as a “reward” for their wartime service.¹ By the end of 1918, thousands of women throughout Britain who had been asked to keep the country supplied with munitions, work on the railways and maintain the food supply faced an uncertain future. After being portrayed as patriots and heroines during four long, gruelling years of conflict, the state argued that it no longer needed their services.

This chapter examines the experiences of women workers in Wales, primarily former industrial workers, during this period of ‘demobilisation’. This focus is necessary as most of the evidence relates to this group of workers. It examines the extent to which opportunities in the workplace existed for women between 1919 and 1921, and argues that traditional social expectations and gender roles were reinforced during this period of intense economic instability. This analysis will focus on the immediate period of transition after the war, covering the post-war boom right before the general slump in employment throughout Britain by 1921. In Wales, this in part was caused by a falling demand for Welsh coal and tinsplate overseas. This analysis contributes to existing historical narratives which have examined the lives of working-

¹ Terry Underwood, *Yesterdays Newport* (Newport: Newport Printing Company, 1980), p. 154.

class women in Wales during the 1920s. This scholarship has focused on levels of unemployment, health concerns, alongside the reinforcement of gendered ideas of domesticity and motherhood.² It suggests that for the majority of working-class women, the war did not change their position within Welsh society as they faced growing hardships and challenges.

Some historians who have considered women's wartime work during the First World War in Britain have only very briefly considered the impact of demobilisation.³ Amongst those who have gone into greater depth, the focus has been more broadly on how the government and male trade unions attempted to reintroduce pre-war labour practices and force women back into traditional spheres of employment. This has allowed historians to question further the extent to which the war brought about social change for women.⁴ Deborah Thom has looked at how state policy dictated the process of demobilisation, showing that legislation including the Restoration of Pre-war Practices Act implemented in December 1919 was intended to remove women from their wartime jobs and get returning servicemen back into the workplace.⁵ Focusing on a collection of interviews conducted during the 1970s, Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield have found that there were very few options for working-class women for employment outside of traditional trades, such as domestic service or needlework.⁶ Others have examined in more depth the kinds of relief and training provided for those

² Deirdre Beddoe, 'Women between the Wars', in *Wales between the Wars*, eds by Trevor Herbert and Gareth-Elwyn Jones (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1988), pp. 129-160. Rosemary Crook, "'Tidy Women': Women in the Rhondda Between the Wars", *Oral History Journal*, 10:1 (1982), pp. 40-46. Sue Bruley, "'Little Mothers': Adolescent Girls and Young Women in the South Wales Valleys between the Wars", *Llafur*, 10:3 (2010), pp. 126-144. Steven Thompson, *Unemployment, Poverty and Health in Interwar South Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006).

³ Most notably Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers in the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

⁴ This question is discussed in more detail in both the main introduction and conclusion.

⁵ Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War I* (London: I.B Tauris, 2000), pp. 188-190.

⁶ Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, *Out of the Cage: Women's Experience in Two World Wars* (London: Pandora Press, 1987), p. 129.

out of work. Attempts by the government to reabsorb women into the workforce through training schemes, which focused primarily on domestic work, served to restore both social norms and economic stability. Marion Kozak has highlighted the disorganised introduction of such schemes, as well as how some middle-class women and female trade union representatives reacted against a series of allowances that reinforced female dependency and motherhood.⁷ This strand of scholarship emphasises the strength of belief in traditionally “feminine” roles among some sections of the population.

The impact on women’s employment opportunities has also been considered within the context of social deprivation in parts of Britain. By examining the appeals process behind the out of work donation scheme, Myra Baillie has shown how the authorities in Scotland failed to understand the level of poverty and deprivation amongst working-class women, and women’s own resistance at being forced to return to domestic service.⁸ Along similar lines, other historians have analysed the reaction of ordinary women to being made unemployed, and have shown the extent to which the war altered perceptions of their lives and behaviour. Whilst in some cases protests by female munitions workers to being laid off highlighted the importance of group identities forged in the workplace, in light of the social and economic dislocation brought about by the war, others were more concerned about returning to a sense of “normality” and therefore were prepared to accept their pre-war jobs.⁹

This chapter contributes to these debates through an exploration of public reactions to the demobilisation of wartime women workers throughout different

⁷ Marion Kozak, *Women Munition Workers during the First World War, with special reference to Engineering* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hull, 1976), pp. 385-388.

⁸ Myra Baillie, *The Women of Red Clydeside: Women Munitions Workers in the West of Scotland during the First World War* (Unpublished PhD thesis, McMaster University Ontario, 2002), pp. 286-289.

⁹ Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 107; Chris Brader, *Timbertown Girls: Gretna Female Munitions workers in World War I* (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2001), p. 251.

occupations in Wales. It examines the extent of practical support and relief provided for those women made unemployed after the war, the positions taken by those writing in press, and the concerns of groups representing female labour. A key concern is how women responded to the experience of unemployment, and the extent to which this suggests that the war had altered their perspectives on employment. Consideration of these different perspectives enables fuller understanding of the degree to which war changed perceptions of women's social roles in Wales.

The initial stages of demobilisation and post-war unemployment

It is necessary to examine the first stages of the demobilisation of the female civilian workforce in Wales, and the significance of this process for understanding attitudes towards women's employment in Wales immediately following the war. Long before the armistice was signed in November 1918, those concerned with industrial developments, including employers and the government, realised that the demobilisation of soldiers and female labour may prove difficult to orchestrate. Journalists and civic leaders in Wales implored the government and trade unions to put measures in place to alleviate the potential impact of demobilisation on labour conditions and local communities.¹⁰ One commentator in the *Welsh Outlook* believed that trade unions would need to tackle the question of female labour as 'it is hardly likely that the women who have during the War entered into industry will withdraw on return to peace conditions'. This anonymous writer suggested that trade unions would need to overcome the 'problem' of incorporating women into the workforce without

¹⁰ *South Wales Daily News*, 30 November 1918, p. 4.

‘displacing’ men.¹¹ Of course it had never been intended that female labour would remain in various industries in such large numbers, as it was usually assumed that getting men back into the workplace should be the main priority for government and employers. As a result, after the war women war workers were encouraged to return to the private sphere, either to take up their roles as wives and mothers or, for younger, single women, to enter domestic service. In fact, this trend was already being set in motion during the war itself. By the beginning of 1918, increasing pressure by the military authorities and groups representing disabled soldiers began to be placed upon the government to employ ex-servicemen instead of female labour.

As demand for munitions from overseas began to decline, the impact on the workforce became evident by the start of 1918. At many shell filling factories, growing levels of unemployment were also caused by temporary disruptions in the supply of raw materials, with many workers put on short time.¹² It is not possible to compile reliable statistics for the number of male and female workers dismissed from factories in Wales before the end of the war, but there is some evidence from discussions between military officials and government ministers suggesting that no further women were to be employed at some factories at the beginning of 1918.¹³

As was the case in agriculture and farming, there is some evidence that returning soldiers or injured veterans were now being employed in preference to women. During a meeting at the Home Office in January, when asked whether women were being employed in preference to disabled soldiers at the explosives factory at Penrhyndeudraeth, the Minister of Munitions reassured a military representative that

¹¹ R., ‘Labour Problems’, *The Welsh Outlook*, 4 (November 1917), pp. 373-410, p. 407.

¹² Official History of the Ministry of Munitions (hereafter HMSO), *Volume V: Wages and Welfare, Part II: The Control of Women’s Wages* (London: 1921), p. 118.

¹³ *The Llanelly Star*, 23 February 1918, p. 1.

disabled soldiers were now being hired there.¹⁴ This indicates that the government was under pressure to provide employment for these men, especially for those who had lost limbs serving King and Country. But overall, there was very little state support for disabled servicemen and even though relatively small numbers had been employed at munitions factories during 1918, many more had to rely on voluntary organisations including the Disabled Soldiers and Sailors Association. As Adrian Gregory points out, although the civilian population recognised the sacrifice of the dead, they also supported a public policy that impoverished surviving servicemen.¹⁵ It was not until September 1919 that the Ministry of Labour began to negotiate and encourage businesses and employers to hire disabled ex-servicemen.¹⁶ Although schemes and training opportunities were established as part of an attempt to get discharged soldiers back into employment, many thousands of men throughout Britain remained dependent on the out of work donation right up until the scheme was disbanded at the close of 1919.¹⁷

In addition, the example of Penrhyndeudraeth also suggests that the male breadwinner model was still strong, and that it was believed that men needed the work more than women as they had families to support. Women's post-war employment was deemed less necessary than getting men back into the workplace. At the end of March 1918, the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Soldiers complained to the Ministry of Labour that ex-servicemen should be recruited to work for munitions work in preference to women.¹⁸ However, in the munitions industry, although there was some discussion of the state encouraging public works and giving contracts to

¹⁴ Hansard, HC (series 3) vol. 101, cols. 1422 (29 January 1918).

¹⁵ Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 266.

¹⁶ *Western Mail*, 26 September 1919, p. 4.

¹⁷ Marjorie Levine-Clark, 'The Politics of Preference: Masculinity, Marital Status and Unemployment Relief in Post First World War Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 7:3 (2010), p. 240.

¹⁸ Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 106.

engineering and munitions employers, the government decided to bring many war contracts to an end in 1918.¹⁹ This resulted in large numbers of men and women being thrown out of work.

It has been estimated that between November 1918 and October 1919 three-quarters of a million women in Britain were released from wartime occupations. Clerks, conductresses, tram drivers and munitions workers were all forced to relinquish their positions, in theory to allow men to return in their place.²⁰ The concerns of skilled men, that the women would take their places after the war, were never realised as the restoration of jobs to returning servicemen proceeded in the majority of places without any animosity.²¹ However, the demobilisation of military personnel took longer than anticipated and there were initial shortages of skilled male labour in some trades. During February 1919 at the high explosives factory near Queensferry, around 250 female workers were kept on to work in the TNT section (this compares to a female workforce of around 2,500 at the peak of the factory's production in 1917). Those who had been employed in other sections of the factory and then discharged were encouraged to re-apply and be medically assessed as to their suitability for the job.²² The factory at Queensferry seems to represent wider trends: only a fraction of the female wartime munitions workforce in Wales was kept on in various capacities, predominantly on short-term agreements of no more than a few months for cleaning and general repair work. By the end of March it appears that most of the female workers at Queensferry had been dismissed, and the future of the factory began to be debated.

¹⁹ Braybon, *Women Workers*, p. 179.

²⁰ Deirdre Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth-century Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 75.

²¹ Baillie, *The Women of Red Clydeside*, p. 280.

²² Gale Cengage Learning, Women, War and Society 1914-1918 Database, Imperial War Museum (hereafter IWM), Employment: Ministry of Labour; 4th Jan – 24th May 1919; EMP 80/6 Department of Civil Demobilisation and Settlement. Weekly Report (week ending 8th February 1919), p. 9.

Eventually, the government decided to keep the Queensferry site operational, and used it as a temporary stores depot for locomotives arriving back from France.²³ The future of the explosives factory at Pembrey was also called into question during this period, but there was very little mention of employing women in any long-term capacity.²⁴

There was much opposition to the way in which the demobilisation of female labour was conducted, especially from women's organisations.²⁵ One complaint was that women were sacked while men continued to be employed on overtime. At many government controlled factories, groups of male workers were often kept on until at least 1921 to remove and dismantle machinery. In addition, although the Ministry of Munitions had laid down a system of discharges, in practice this was widely ignored in many factories.²⁶ In some cases women workers were just left outside the factory gates to fend for themselves. Thom points to abuses such as laid-off women workers left with no means of transport to return home.²⁷ In the munitions industry, those with little or no previous industrial experience were let go first, followed by workers who could be transferred back into their previous occupations and women with only short periods of employment. Those able and prepared to leave immediately were given two weeks pay plus a bonus. Finally, skilled employees or those in training, probably at centres in Cardiff and Newport, were then released.²⁸

²³ *The North Wales Guardian*, 21 March 1919, p. 3.

²⁴ *The Llanelly Star*, 18 January 1919, p. 1.

²⁵ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 190.

²⁶ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 189.

²⁷ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 190.

²⁸ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, p. 190.

Male demobilisation and the context of post-war employment

In some trades skilled men who had volunteered for the army either chose not to return to their pre-war jobs, or had not still been released by the armed forces some months after the Armistice had been signed. During the war, large numbers of workers had left the tinplate trade to join the army or to find work in other industries, including steel, coal and munitions production. In addition, factory closures due to restrictions on production and the need for steel in shell-making had caused a displacement of labour in many areas of south Wales.²⁹ During January 1919, the manager of the Welsh Tinplate and Metal Stampings Company of Llanelli declared that there was no male labour available to begin operating six new furnaces which had been built in the district. He stated that ‘for every man released he would be able to put on five women’ and claimed that two additional factories were going to be built, with the majority of the 1,000 strong workforce to be made up of female labour.³⁰ However, the construction of the two factories was subsequently delayed by a lack of available equipment and machinery.³¹ Ultimately the terms of the Restoration of Pre-war Practices Act prevented women from obtaining more skilled and better paid industrial work, which generally required more training.³² Therefore, it is most probable that even if these women had been employed, it would only have been on a short-term basis.

The press and central government reports indicate an increasing number of requests for the out of work donation amongst men and women in Wales by the

²⁹ *Western Mail*, 1 September 1919, p. 10.

³⁰ IWM, *Women, War and Society 1914-1918, Employment: Ministry of Labour*; 4th Jan – 24th May 1919; EMP 80/4 Department of Civil Demobilisation and Settlement, *Weekly Report* (week ending 25th January 1919), p. 9.

³¹ EMP 80/4 Department of Civil Demobilisation and Settlement, *Weekly Report* (week ending 25th January 1919), p. 9.

³² Kozak, *Women Munition Workers*, p. 369.

beginning of 1919. This was issued to discharged civilian workers, including women, and to military servicemen on their return to Britain. The donation, which came into operation on 25 November 1918, provided ex-servicemen with twenty-six weeks of support at the rate of 29s a week during the first twelve weeks after discharge.³³ According to an article printed in the *Western Mail* at the beginning of 1919 thousands of claims from men and women were being made throughout south Wales. The largest number of requests were made in Newport, Swansea and Llanelli and ‘other large South Wales centres [...] owing to the stoppage of purely war work’.³⁴ The biggest wartime employers in such localities had been primarily geared towards production for the war effort, including having the largest concentration of munitions factories in Wales. The drop in demand for materials was responsible for the high levels of unemployment in some trades. The level of unemployment amongst male workers including ‘general labourers, iron and steel men, dock labourers, tinsplate workers, shipyard labourers, porters and messengers and clerks’ scattered throughout Cardiff, Newport, Swansea and Llanelli appears to have risen by October 1919. The iron and steel producing areas of Ebbw Vale, Dowlais and Merthyr Tydfil were noted as particularly badly affected.³⁵ Unemployment in these areas was undoubtedly exacerbated by the growing number of returning servicemen also looking for work in various industries.

Even within the South Wales Coalfield, there were distinct local differences in levels of unemployment. Miners from Aberdare in the Cynon Valley were some of the first to return at the insistence of the Prime Minister Lloyd George, along with

³³ Levine-Clark, ‘The Politics of Preference’, p. 240.

³⁴ *Western Mail*, 20 January 1919, p. 3.

³⁵ IWM, *Women, War and Society 1914-1918*; Employment: Ministry of Labour; 18 Oct. 1919 – 17 Jan 1920; EMP 80/40 Departmental Weekly Report (week ending 25th October 1919), p. 11.

prisoners-of-war and policemen.³⁶ However, as mining was still controlled by the government, wage rates amongst colliers continued to grow with employment in coalfield areas reaching its highest point during the following year.³⁷ Lisa Snook has found that in Pontypridd and the surrounding districts the situation was very different, and returning servicemen found it difficult to find any kind of formal employment, despite pleas from the local War Pensions Committee during the war encouraging firms to take on returning soldiers in 'light work'. Furthermore, combined with the large numbers of men who could not work because of injuries they sustained at the front, many coal pits in Pontypridd and the surrounding districts had also closed because of a shortage of labour.³⁸ Employers roundly criticised the government for not demobilising soldiers quickly enough with large numbers of men not being sent home until the summer of 1919.³⁹ Returning servicemen also faced their own disillusionment with the war, as well as emotional and physical disabilities which affected their ability to find and to retain employment. Many men and boys had left for the front without the necessary training for the adult labour market.⁴⁰ The press was outraged by the government's apparent lack of provision for ex-servicemen. When courses were established, like a series of trade classes for former soldiers living in Cardiff during the 1920s, much publicity was given in the press.⁴¹ This appears to indicate that employers and the press were more concerned with getting men rather than women back into the workplace.

³⁶Anthony Mór-O'Brien, *A Community in Wartime: Aberdare and the First World War* (Unpublished PhD thesis, The University of Wales, 1986), p. 244.

³⁷Chris Williams, *Capitalism, Community and Conflict: The South Wales Coalfield 1898-1947* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p. 21.

³⁸Snook, Lisa, 'Out of the Cage? Women and the First World War in Pontypridd,' *Llafur*, 8:2 (2001), p. 86.

³⁹Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Longman Publishing, 1996), pp. 253-270.

⁴⁰Levine-Clark, 'The Politics of Preference', p. 236.

⁴¹*Western Mail*, 7 January 1920, p. 10.

Post-war hostility to women workers

The press also joined the debate surrounding the claims of women war workers to post-war employment. The government had made few formal guarantees or provisions to support women war workers as the conflict came to an end, apart from the introduction of the out of work donation. Until offered alternative employment by their registered local labour exchange, women over the age of eighteen were given 25s a week, with additional allowances for dependent children. This allowance was stopped if they refused an offer of employment, regardless of the working conditions or indeed the level of skill involved.⁴² Almost immediately following the end of the war, local labour committees in both north and south Wales attempted to deal with the anticipated demobilisation of the civilian workforce. The supervision of applications for the out of work donation for men and women fell under the responsibility of these committees.⁴³ Sub-committees were also established to deal specifically with the large numbers of women now out of work. Such groups were usually headed by women who had played an integral part in organising the recruitment and organisation of female labour during the war. Following a meeting of the Caernarfon Local Advisory Committee, the Women's sub-committee decided to focus its attention primarily on 'discharges from munition works, domestic service, the training of war widows, emigration and work on the land'.⁴⁴ This proved a difficult challenge as the labour exchanges began to deal with the increasing number of requests for the donation from women in both north and south Wales.

⁴² Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 107.

⁴³ Mór-O'Brien, *A Community in Wartime*, p. 244.

⁴⁴ *The Merioneth News and Herald and Barmouth Record*, 6 December 1918, p. 2.

Throughout Britain, to begin with large numbers of women drew the donation. By March 1919, a staggering 530,000 were receiving the payments; a much greater number than the men on the list, including demobilised soldiers. However, by November only around 60,000 remained on the unemployment donation or insurance.⁴⁵ One report from the Department of Civil Demobilisation and Settlement in February stated that ‘at Cardiff, 330 fresh out-of-work donation policies have been issued during the week. Additional policies are being issued at Swansea to workers from His Majesty’s Factory, Pembrey’.⁴⁶ This corresponds with high numbers of women receiving the donation in other parts of Britain, especially in heavily industrialised, urban localities.⁴⁷ This opposition to women claiming the out of work donation demonstrates the same kinds of negative attitudes towards women workers which resulted later in the year in legislation to force women back into domestic service.

Women living in areas of north Wales also applied for the donation. At a meeting of local district representative in Caernarfonshire, ‘surprise’ was expressed at the numbers claiming the donation in various districts of the county.⁴⁸ Employees living in Briton Ferry who were employed at the explosives factory in Pembrey also began to apply for the donation. In order to receive the allowance, men and women were required to attend their local labour exchange every day. For some this had an enormous impact on their daily lives, especially during a period of financial and personal hardship. Having been employed at various wartime factories in south-West Wales, those living

⁴⁵ Adam W. Kirkaldy, *British Labour: Replacement and Conciliation 1914 – 1921* (London: Isaac Pitman, 1921), p. 109.

⁴⁶ IWM, Women, War and Society 1914-1918; Employment: Ministry of Labour; 4th Jan – 24th May 1919; EMP 80.6 Department of Civil Demobilisation and Settlement. Weekly Report (week ending 8th February 1919), p. 9.

⁴⁷ Baillie, *The Women of Red Clydeside*, p. 282.

⁴⁸ *North Wales Chronicle*, 21 March 1919, p. 8.

in Briton Ferry had to travel over two miles every day to the labour exchange at Neath in order to get their ‘unemployment benefits’. According to a report in *Llais Llafur* in January 1919 ‘the complaints were many’, as this requirement also meant that unemployed workers had to pay their own travelling expenses. These complaints forced the Ministry of Labour to establish a temporary labour exchange in the town.⁴⁹ With perhaps no other regular income due to male relatives either having been killed during the war or out of work themselves combined with growing food shortages, this additional expense caused a large degree of anger and resentment among women claimants. This could also be seen as a form of popular protest amongst women from Briton Ferry, moulded perhaps by their experiences of working in an environment which experienced a number of strikes amongst sections of the female labour force during the war (see Chapter 3). Furthermore, what this action and the figures from Cardiff, Caernarfonshire and Swansea demonstrate was that women throughout Wales were in need of the out of work donation.

The initial experiences of the women of Briton Ferry appear to be in line with deliberate attempts to discourage women from applying for the donation. The terms of the donation stated that women and girls who had stayed in the home prior to 1914 or during the first year of the war were not eligible for the benefit at all.⁵⁰ Considering the lower economic activity rates amongst many women in Wales compared with certain areas of England prior to the war, this may have meant that a significant number of the Welsh female wartime workers were ineligible for the donation.

The out of work donation also had the unintended effect of hardening public opinion towards women workers.⁵¹ The backlash against women workers was

⁴⁹ *Llais Llafur*, 18 January 1919, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Braybon, *Women Workers*, p. 180.

⁵¹ Baillie, *The Women of Red Clydeside*, p. 283.

heightened by fears that high levels of female unemployment would add to the already charged political situation throughout Britain, characterised by worker discontent and protests from returning soldiers.⁵² The growing threats of strike action by miners in south Wales expressed concerns amongst ordinary people about the financial security of themselves and their families, but created further unease amongst government officials.⁵³ It was in this context that administrators attempted to solve the problem of the growing numbers of women out of work by attempting to draw them back into traditional female occupations, primarily domestic service.⁵⁴ An article published in the *Western Mail* in January 1919 encapsulated many of the issues invoked in debates on the position of women war workers. The anonymous author openly criticises women in south Wales for not accepting work in the domestic sphere and argues that this is down to the ‘artificially inflated wages’ they received in munitions factories. They also claimed that they decline to accept anything offered to them as ‘suitable’ and stick to the 25 shillings a week donation on which they continue to enjoy their holiday.⁵⁵

In short, these women were being portrayed as not understanding the post-war economic climate, and as having too much of a good time on state assistance to find a job in domestic service. The belief intensified during the period immediately following the armistice that some women war workers preferred to stay on the donation rather than accept the work offered to them. According to another article from a journalist writing in the *Cambria Daily Leader*, a large number of female war workers from Swansea who were found to be drawing the out of work donation were married women or those ‘not normally employed’.⁵⁶ This feeds into a narrative which was prevalent

⁵² DeGroot, *Blighty*, pp. 255-256.

⁵³ Mór-O’Brien, *A Community in Wartime*, pp. 254-255.

⁵⁴ Kozak, *Women Munition Workers*, p. 377.

⁵⁵ *Western Mail*, 20 January 1919, p. 3.

⁵⁶ *The Cambria Daily Leader*, 24 March 1919, p. 1.

throughout British press during this period which suggested that women receiving the benefit were basically scrounging. In this case, emphasising that married women should not be receiving the donation at all and should return to the home.

The author of the *Western Mail* piece directly criticised the government's introduction of the donation for encouraging 'idleness' amongst both male and female former war workers, and claimed that it was a barrier to getting them back into their 'pre-war occupations'.⁵⁷ Criticism of the out of work donation was encouraged by press reports of men and women exploiting the system by obtaining the donation 'by false pretences'.⁵⁸ Reports which concerned apparent false claims by women suggested that women did not need the money they received, and that they were being reckless with it.⁵⁹ Throughout 1919, the Ministry of Labour believed that the system was being extensively abused, particularly by married former munitions workers who were entitled to the donation, even if they did not intend to continue working.⁶⁰

The return to domestic service

In the press, criticism of women drawing the out of work donation was voiced especially by middle-class housewives, who found it difficult to comprehend why women continued to live on unemployment benefit. In a letter to the *Western Mail* in March 1919, an unknown reader expressed her frustration at being unable to find a domestic servant. Responding to an article written in the newspaper some days before which argued that the high levels of women out of work was down to 'mistresses'

⁵⁷ *Western Mail*, 20 January 1919, p. 3.

⁵⁸ *Herald of Wales*, 5 April 1919, p. 4.

⁵⁹ Deirdre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars 1918-1939* (London: Pandora, 1989), p. 53.

⁶⁰ Jane Lewis, *Women in England 1870-1950: Sexual Divisions and social change* (Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books Ltd, 1984), p. 189.

refusing to employ women and girls with insufficient experience of domestic service roles, the 'Constant Reader' instead lays the blame, as the anonymous commentator above, at the feet of women themselves. She states that 'I have just advertised for a domestic help in a Cardiff evening paper for 6 days [...] but with no response whatsoever [...] most women and girls can do some domestic work and there must be hundreds of Cardiff households who would be glad to get unskilled help. It seems evident that most of the 2000 women in Cardiff now in receipt of the unemployment donation prefer to remain as they are'.⁶¹ Such instances appear to show that some working-class women were now far more assertive in deciding for themselves what kind of work suited them. This interpretation is supported by protests and agitation amongst munitions workers in other parts of Britain at being laid off, which demonstrated that some at least considered themselves of value to the workforce and believed they had been badly treated.⁶² Whilst there are no recorded instances of such agitation in the Welsh press, which of course does not mean that no unrest occurred, it is clear that some women workers in Wales expressed their desire for better conditions by refusing to return to domestic service.

This trend was evident even before the war ended as local government groups attempted to deal with the growing numbers being released from war work. The Ministry of Labour ignored the possibility that women might not want their old job back or that it could be unavailable.⁶³ During a meeting of the Local Labour Advisory Committee for the Swansea district, it was agreed that representatives would meet with the women directly, after many had turned down jobs in domestic service, with a 'view

⁶¹ *Western Mail*, 29 March 1919, p. 6.

⁶² Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 107.

⁶³ Braybon, *Women Workers*, p. 179.

to making arrangements as to their resettlement in work'.⁶⁴ In 1919, the Women's Department of the Employment Exchange in Swansea organised a meeting in which former war workers were invited. Just as they had been asked to serve their country during the war by undertaking war work, women were now encouraged to do their "duty" again through return to their pre-war occupations, or to work deemed more "suitable" for women. Although this did not just mean domestic service, this was the occupation favoured by the majority of the committee. One of the speakers reiterated the 'necessity of women taking any available work, if suitable, even if it were not perhaps congenial'.⁶⁵ It appears to have been far more difficult for women in Swansea to find employment than for men because of the greater range of industries available to male workers. Although there are no available figures for the levels of unemployment amongst women in the town during 1919, reports in the press suggest that a large number of women in Swansea were still out of work in the summer of 1919, with the Swansea Employment Council branding the situation as very 'serious'.⁶⁶

It appears that many women who registered at the labour exchange in Cardiff, also refused positions in domestic service. The labour exchanges played an especially important role in accommodating women to "normal" conditions. Apart from their responsibility as the mediators between employers and those looking for work, the exchanges also processed the out of work donation, and later unemployment benefits.⁶⁷ In an interview with the Committee of Enquiry into the Work of the Employment Exchanges in 1920, Mr Charles H. Bird, Chairman of the Cardiff Employment Committee, explained that a number of vacancies filled by women so far had not been in domestic service. He said 'that we have had great difficulty in inducing women to

⁶⁴ *The Cambria Daily Leader*, 23 April 1918, p. 1.

⁶⁵ *South Wales Weekly Post*, 17 May 1919, p. 3.

⁶⁶ *The Cambria Daily Leader*, 17 June 1919, p. 5.

⁶⁷ Kozak, *Women Munition Workers*, p. 369.

accept domestic work. They prefer the freedom of work of other kinds'. Pressed further by the committee about whether those who had registered were given the option of domestic service and if they understood that they would lose their benefit if they did not accept, Bird replied that 'when we thought they were suitable for domestic work, they were offered domestic work if no other work was available'.⁶⁸ His answer implies that women's level of training or their character determined the kinds of work to which they were allocated. The "suitability" of women for domestic service or other employment was decided by a female officer employed at the exchange, reminiscent perhaps of the approach taken by welfare supervisors in deciding who should work in a munitions factory. Frustratingly, Bird did not explain which occupations the 1,354 women who had found work via the Cardiff Labour Exchange were placed in. However his comments again suggest that women's experiences of wartime employment had perhaps made domestic service far less appealing.

The limited oral testimony of women workers in Wales supports this interpretation. Agnes Greatorex, who left domestic service to work on a farm in Ely in Cardiff, explains her impression of what women workers had felt at the time. She said that 'the first war changed women I think because the girls wouldn't go back to service once they'd had a taste of being a porter on the railway or bus conductress or in munitions. They didn't want to go back into service again, they were free'.⁶⁹ Although it is impossible to know whether Agnes' recollections were shared by others who undertook war work in Wales, Lisa Snook's study of women's wartime experiences in Pontypridd argues that women's incentive to stay in generally higher paid roles with a greater degree of independence had much to do with whether they had been employed

⁶⁸ Ministry of Labour. Minutes of evidence taken before the Committee of Enquiry into the work of the employment exchanges [Cmd. 1140], 1921, xi, p. 258.

⁶⁹ BBC Radio Wales, tx 21/1/1994, All of Our Lives, "Tears and Telegrams", Interview conducted with Agnes Greatorex, 1993.

before the war or not. Married wartime workers continued to bear the so-called “double burden” of home and work’ and therefore may have felt relief at leaving their jobs at the end of the war.⁷⁰ This suggests that at least one group of women looked on themselves as temporary workers and were willing to go back to their homes.⁷¹ This is supported by evidence from the industrial districts on the Clydeside and in Glasgow which suggests that many women, in particular the wives or relatives of enlisted men, were content to relinquish their jobs as male relatives returned.⁷² However, it is likely that the situation was not as straightforward as first appears. Why were married former war workers in Swansea supposedly claiming the donation? Although there could have been cases where women used the system in an underhand way, it is highly likely that the overwhelming majority saw the donation as way to temporarily supplement the family income. On the other hand, their experiences of the workplace during the war may have encouraged them to want to continue working and perceived the donation as a stepping stone towards finding employment in the future. Therefore, different women had different motivations for deciding whether to return to the home or pursue the search for work. Marital status, age and locality played important parts in determining what their next move would be.

Using surveys taken at the time in other parts of Britain, historians have found that women expressed a variety of plans for peacetime. Such findings can be broadly applied to Wales. Angela Woollacott, using a poll conducted by a journalist in London, suggests that the munitions workers questioned felt confident in expressing their desire to be treated more fairly by future employers. They were apparently willing to make a return to their previous occupations, including domestic service, partly because of the

⁷⁰ Snook, ‘Out of the Cage?’, p. 86.

⁷¹ Kirkaldy, *British Labour* p. 108.

⁷² Baillie, *The Women of Red Clydeside*, p. 280.

need to keep earning money. However, they also expressed a desire for better conditions, including higher wages, fairer treatment by employers, and greater flexibility in their hours. The other group of respondents, which actually outnumbered the munitions workers, included shop, office and warehouse workers.⁷³ Many women who had worked in shops and offices throughout the country were kept on as this kind of work proved increasingly unpopular amongst men.⁷⁴ For women in other parts of the country, it seems that returning to their pre-war jobs was part of getting back to how things had been before. Feelings of financial security and a return to normal life were the priorities of women who had experienced four years of enormous personal upheaval in their lives.⁷⁵ Many of the women interviewed as part of the project orchestrated by the Imperial War Museum during the 1970s either spent some time looking for work or went back into traditional female trades undertaking repetitive work.⁷⁶

Although it seems that the experience of war work had heightened the employment expectations of younger women, the economic downturn in the decade after the war meant that alternative employment opportunities contracted. Jobs in retail, clerical or light manufacturing did not begin to expand until the mid-1930s and the majority of these were in the south of England.⁷⁷ With male unemployment in certain districts also reaching unprecedented levels by this time, women already in an unfavourable position in the labour market were even less likely to be taken on by employers. In addition, with no light industries in Wales arriving until the mid-1930s, alongside a further fall in tinplate production and a decline in the numbers of women

⁷³ D.G., "War Girls 'Pack Up'", *Daily Mail*, 9 November 1918, p. 2 in Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend*, p. 110.

⁷⁴ Braybon and Summerfield, *Out of the Cage*, p. 120.

⁷⁵ Brader, *Timbertown Girls*, p. 251.

⁷⁶ Braybon and Summerfield, *Out of the Cage*, p. 129.

⁷⁷ Selina Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family in England 1918-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 22.

employed in the woollen industry during the same decade, women continued to be forced into domestic roles right up until the outbreak of the Second World War. In Wales, the offers of employment were largely in domestic service as the sector continued to experience a shortage of labour. Advertisements for “domestic help” were frequently found in the pages of the Welsh press during 1919, but as uninsured workers, domestic servants were not entitled to any further benefits. Even so their numbers continued to rise between 1921 to the beginning of the next decade.⁷⁸ Large numbers of women from Wales moved to London and other areas further afield to answer advertisements for posts as domestic servants. If women in Wales wanted factory work, as they had done during the war, they travelled to factories in the Midlands where they were used as a form of cheap labour, largely on unskilled processes.⁷⁹ For those women working in the tinsplate factories in Wales, the division of labour was strictly reinforced as women’s work continued to be viewed as unskilled and low paid during the 1920s and 1930s. Although women were used as replacements for male labour in tinsplate production throughout south Wales during the war, by 1930 only 3,430 women and girls, compared with 24,270 men and boys, were employed at Welsh mills.⁸⁰ In fact, this was slightly lower than the 3,800 women and girls employed in the industry during 1914.⁸¹ It appears that attitudes towards women’s capabilities in the workplace and gender roles changed very little over the course of the war.

Assumptions regarding women’s inability to undertake both skilled and physically demanding work were apparent in responses made to the shortage of male labour in the tinsplate trade. One journalist in the *Western Mail* argued that men did want

⁷⁸ Beddoe, ‘Women between the Wars’, p. 133.

⁷⁹ Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 82.

⁸⁰ Hilary A. Marquand (ed.), *The Second Industrial Survey of South Wales, Volume One* (Cardiff: University Press, 1937), pp. 125-127 in Sheila Owen-Jones, ‘Women in the Tinsplate Industry: Llanelli, 1930-1950’, *Oral History Journal*, 15:1 (1987), 42-49 (p. 43).

⁸¹ Owen-Jones, *Women in the Tinsplate Industry*, p. 42.

to return to the trade and therefore it was necessary to train ‘boy labour’ to develop the necessary experience in skilled work. This commentator argued that women, already occupied in another stage of manufacture, were not strong enough or ‘suitable’ to start doing the more physically challenging work.⁸² This perhaps reflected concerns about the future of the tinsplate industry in Wales as well as the state of the post-war labour market, but this kind of language was also reminiscent of wartime debates on dilution. Although some women had performed both skilled and physically challenging work in various engineering processes during the war in Wales, it was assumed that women would not want, and should not be expected, to take on this kind of work in peacetime. Employers who continued to employ female labour believed that it could only be in an unskilled capacity on low wages as to prevent the development of competition within the labour market.⁸³ Therefore, it appears that the war did very little to increase women’s participation in the tinsplate industry or to change conceptions of their role within the production process. Opportunities in the aircraft industry for women in Wales also appear to have disappeared by the autumn of 1919. During September, the *Western Mail* reported that the Cambrian Aircraft Constructors’ (Limited) workshop at East Moors in Cardiff was planned for closure.⁸⁴ Even by this time, companies like Cambrian were recruiting discharged men in much larger numbers than female labour as male trade unionists positioned themselves to claim that the aircraft industry was now a male only trade.⁸⁵

Especially for married women in Wales, barriers to further employment were re-established after the war. Married women were targeted as employers and male trade

⁸² *Western Mail*, 1 September 1919, p. 10.

⁸³ Braybon, *Women Workers*, pp. 183-184.

⁸⁴ *Western Mail*, 18 September 1919, p. 10.

⁸⁵ Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls*, pp. 188-189.

unions again began to publicly claim that they should not be hired. The idea of the male breadwinner was again reinforced, especially in government literature regarding demobilisation which was frequently reprinted by the press. In December 1918, the *South Wales Daily News* published a circular sent by the Ministry of Labour. A capitalised passage printed in bold at the very end underlined that although women were still expected to demonstrate patriotism, this time it was not about getting them into the workplace but encouraging them to leave: 'IF YOU ARE A WOMAN WORKER WHO CAN AFFORD TO STAY AT HOME INSTEAD OF WORKING, IT WOULD BE PATRIOTIC TO DO SO, AND SO LEAVE THE FIELD OPEN TO THOSE WHO HAVE TO WORK TO EARN A LIVELIHOOD'.⁸⁶ Therefore the aspirations of those married women, keen on being employed during the immediate post-war period, were once again being denied to them. Rather than the principle of the right to work, other factors including family background and marital status determined whether these women should be employed.⁸⁷

Many trade unions in Wales shared these sentiments. During the 1920s when the majority of men had been demobilised and unemployment was beginning to rise, criticism began to shift directly towards those women who refused to relinquish jobs previously done by men.⁸⁸ Employers privileged the rights and needs of male workers. During a meeting of the Cardiff Shop Assistants Union in October 1920, it was decided that married women whose husbands were in employment would not be recruited. According to the newspaper report, the Union also resolved to 'review the engagements of those already employed, as many married women accepted employment at reduced

⁸⁶ *South Wales Daily News*, 20 December 1918, p. 4.

⁸⁷ Braybon, *Women Workers*, pp. 189-190.

⁸⁸ DeGroot, *Blighty*, p. 263.

salaries to the detriment of males who wished to make a living'.⁸⁹ This very much corresponded with wartime concerns amongst trade unionists regarding female labour and its potential long-term effect on male wage rates.

Training, recruitment and the reassertion of traditional gender roles

In many industrial centres of Wales, the only training courses open to women were in domestic service. As with ex-servicemen, there was a keen emphasis on showing how former war workers were being introduced back into the workplace. Throughout Wales, the press printed reports from a number of different localities detailing how local committees planned to meet the shortage of female domestic servants. Under the headline 'Good Times for Domestic Servants' printed in the *North Wales Guardian* during April 1919, the Women's sub-committee of the Wrexham Local Advisory Committee promised that recruits would have 'a scale of wages, ranging from £40 to £18 per year, according to age, experience, and circumstances, and generous holidays and "nights out"'. Attempts to raise the popularity, status and wages of this kind of employment could be seen in the continuation of the ideology of homework as a fitting occupation for women.⁹⁰ Back in Wrexham the training 'of cooks, kitchenmaids and scullerymaids' was the priority, with a local hotel used to train them.⁹¹ During the previous December, concerns had been raised by the committee in Wrexham over absorbing the labour displaced from war work. A list of householders in the town and the surrounding areas willing to employ domestic servants had also been drawn up, with employers urged to contact the labour exchange if any vacancies became available.⁹²

⁸⁹ *South Wales Daily News*, 6 October 1920, p. 6.

⁹⁰ Kozak, *Women Munition Workers*, p. 380.

⁹¹ *The North Wales Guardian*, 11 April 1919, p. 4.

⁹² *Llangollen Advertiser and North Wales Journal*, 6 December 1918, p. 7

Women living in Newport, south Wales, were also encouraged to attend a series of training courses in the town and surrounding districts. Under the control of the Ministry of Labour, the Central Committee for Women's Employment established a number of 'home training centres' in industrial localities. As well as one such centre in Newport, 'domestic instruction' was purposefully introduced in many areas with a large female population who once again had few options for employment.⁹³ In an article printed in the *South Wales Weekly Argus* in June 1920 under the headline 'The Women of Newport. Munition Workers Re-absorbed. Domestic Openings', a female official from the Ministry of Labour on a recent visit to Monmouthshire gave her account of the intention behind the training programme.⁹⁴ It appears that the number of women registered as unemployed at the labour exchange had fallen dramatically since February 1919. Although the official noted that 'the tin works and a local box factory' employed a small group of female labour, there were few 'industrial openings' for women.⁹⁵ However, there still appears to have been a shortage of domestic servants in Newport, along with other traditional female trades including dressmaking and tailoring, by the summer of the following year. Assuming that this was what working-class women wanted to do and 'in answer to local demand' the official suggested that 'Newport alone can absorb some 3,000 domestic workers. So no woman need be unemployed here who has the desire and ability, to carry out the necessary home arts'. She argued that women were struggling to get jobs back in these trades because they 'had lost skill in their former occupations or have missed their opportunity to obtain training in a peacetime

⁹³ Beddoe, *Women between the Wars*, pp. 134-135.

⁹⁴ *South Wales Weekly Argus*, 19 June 1920, p. 5.

⁹⁵ *Women, War and Society 1914-1918, Employment: Ministry of Labour*; 4th Jan – 24th May 1919; EMP 80/4 Department of Civil Demobilisation and Settlement, Weekly Report (week ending 25th January 1919), p. 8.

industry'.⁹⁶ The latter may have included young women like Florence Nield who was employed at the explosives factory in Pembrey during the war. She had perhaps helped at home, but apart from at school may not have had access to any kind of formal employment or training.

The possible consequences for women and girls who had received no prior training or experience of employment, but had gone straight into wartime employment, had been raised by the Welsh Appointments Board in 1917. It was feared that the many receiving only routine training in various capacities including factory work or clerical work would 'swell the class of badly-paid inefficient workers, and their numbers will tend to lower the standard of women's work generally'. In contrast, those women trained as nurses or teachers as a 'profession' would always 'command a fair salary'.⁹⁷ Although a significant number of Welsh women became nurses and teachers both during the war and in the inter-war period, the majority of women continued to be employed in low-status work. Many women in the poorest areas of the country had no choice but to be forced back in to service by the labour exchanges, as the meagre amount provided by the out of work donation was either taken away or reduced to 15s a week after a period of thirteen weeks.⁹⁸ Opportunities to become nurses and teachers simply were out of reach for the majority.

Other government officials visiting factories in Wales had also made observations about women potentially being unable to return to their pre-war jobs. During a visit to the explosives factory in Queensferry during 1916, one official recalled 'it was said that those [women] who were dressmakers or shop assistants, of whom there were a considerable number, would have lost their touch for silk and other

⁹⁶ *South Wales Weekly Argus*, 19 June 1920, p. 5.

⁹⁷ *The Merthyr Express*, 8 September 1917, p. 2.

⁹⁸ Braybon and Summerfield, *Out of the Cage*, p. 129.

material, and that it would be difficult to restore it.⁹⁹ Not only was it assumed that these women would want to return to their previous occupations, but also the skills and techniques required for these jobs were different from those needed for certain kinds of munitions work. This account ignored how women adapted to munitions jobs in the first place, often using their experience and transferable skills to undertake various kinds of processes. It implicitly contradicted wartime public discourse that emphasised women's adaptability in the male workplace, and again overlooked continuities in women's experiences of employment.

The Ministry of Labour official in Newport claimed that the provision of training facilities 'will serve as an object-lesson that ex-munition workers and Service women, with adequate instruction can be transformed into expert workers in skilled industries.'¹⁰⁰ Although these women may have benefited from such courses by finding employment, men and women's work was once again clearly divided. In addition, tailoring and dressmaking, for which 1,600 and 1,700 women respectively had been trained by 1921, did not fare particularly well in combating unemployment. In Newport, a separate government document found that trained dressmakers could not get work and others could not obtain union rates in the trade.¹⁰¹ The relatively small numbers who attended such classes in Newport and the level of disinterest shown amongst women towards jobs in domestic service suggests that some women may have remained unemployed or gone directly into another traditional female trade, as seen in other parts Britain.

⁹⁹The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), Ministry of Munitions, MUN 5/158/1122.7/2, H.M. Explosives Factory, Queensferry Chester, Report of a visit by Mr George. H Duckworth, 8 December 1916, p. 16.

¹⁰⁰ *South Wales Weekly Argus*, 19 June 1920, p. 5.

¹⁰¹ Lab 2/1224/TW 1821/1920, Memorandum about the Newport dressmaking and sewing class, 26 April 1920 cited in Kozak, *Women Munition Workers*, p. 381.

For those looking to expand women's employment opportunities after the war, strong criticism was directed towards the government for making no effort to help women retain the skills they had acquired during their time in industry. There was some hope that new industries would be created. The left-wing newspaper *Llais Llafur* printed a statement from an 'authority' in January 1919 claiming that 'it is the fact that at present until the position of the woman dilutee is decided by the trade unions, the outlook for women in industry is uncertain, although a certain number of new industries are about to develop throughout the country where women's services will probably be employed'.¹⁰² In Swansea by March 1919, where greater numbers of women were drawing out the donation than demobilised men and male civilian workers, there was some hope that new factories would be constructed.¹⁰³ However, although some Ministry of Munitions officials suggested that a reorganisation of British industry could re-absorb wartime female labour especially in engineering, very little practical effort was made to facilitate this transition.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, trade unions always intended to maintain the primacy of men's position in the workplace. With a relatively small skilled male workforce employed in Wales, opportunities for women remained limited in engineering as trade unions wished to maintain their members' position. During 1919, the Restoration of the Pre-War Practices Act, which would remain in force for a year, had reintroduced trade practices, union regulations and the privileges attributed to skilled male labour. During an address at a meeting of the South Wales Munitions Committee in 1915 the President of the ASE had argued that unskilled and female labour was engaged 'upon government work for the duration of the war' only and that the 'old rules' would be implemented when the

¹⁰² *Llais Llafur*, 25 January 1919, p. 3.

¹⁰³ *The Cambria Daily Leader*, 24 March 1919, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ Kozak, *Women Muniton Workers*, pp. 376-377.

conflict ends.¹⁰⁵ The establishment of ‘new’ jobs for women was made impossible by the very little means of representation in the economic or political sphere. Amongst the female trade union movement and women in the Labour Party, traditional ideas remained about women’s role in society. The NFWW did defend women’s right to not undertake badly paid or work which was deemed exploitative, but it was readily accepted that training schemes would be in domestic subjects.¹⁰⁶ However, some organisations representing women were more forthright in promoting the role of female labour in the workplace.

Whilst chairing a meeting of the Newport branch of the Women’s Industrial League (WIL), Lady Rhondda feared that these women would be pushed back into ‘sweated industries’ and argued that there ‘should be equal opportunity for women as men’. She stated that ‘the Ministry of Labour seemed to have been blindfolded during the war, and to think that the whole of women’s capacity was in laundry and domestic work, and they set up in a small way some training in those two spheres. That was their main contribution to the problem of the employment of women, who had since the termination of the war been losing the skill they had acquired’.¹⁰⁷ Headed by Lady Rhondda, the WIL set out to make women workers more ‘acceptable’ in industry. Although viewed with suspicion by those in the labour movement including the NFWW, the WIL gained a great deal of publicity in the press.¹⁰⁸ Ultimately however, despite the promises made by the Prime Minister David Lloyd George that ‘there would

¹⁰⁵ TNA, MUN 5/150, 1121.25/4, Memorandum: Early History of the Organisation of the output of munitions in South Wales, 27th May 1915, p. 2-3.

¹⁰⁶ Braybon, *Women Workers*, p. 198.

¹⁰⁷ *The Western Mail*, 20 November 1919, p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Braybon, *Women Workers*, p. 201.

be no discrimination against women in the new industries’, the pleas made by Lady Rhondda and others fell on deaf ears.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

As in the rest of Britain, women war workers were demobilised *en masse* in Wales at the end of the First World War. In a post-war climate of drastic change and movement, thousands of men and women were made redundant. Although further study is needed into the social and economic impact of the end of the war in Wales, it appears that there were a number of changes in the labour market. The availability of the out of work donation was vital for many former war workers to support themselves. In particular, areas surrounding large munitions factories such as at Pembrey experienced high numbers of women drawing the donation.

Much of the same commentary existed in the Welsh press as elsewhere in Britain regarding attitudes towards those women who were receiving the donation. Although praised for their contribution to the war effort just a few years earlier, Welsh women workers were now described as unpatriotic and selfish for not returning to their pre-war occupations or to the home. Whilst younger, single women were urged to take up domestic service through the activities of local labour exchanges and employment committees, once again there was no place for married women in the workplace. The idea of the male breadwinner and female dependency was reinforced through the press. It was also practically enforced by trade unions who sought to retain the primacy of men’s position in the workplace. The idea of women’s independence as wage earners continued to be downplayed with an emphasis on getting soldiers back into the workplace. It appears that the experience of war did little for working-class women’s

¹⁰⁹ Angela V. John, *Turning the tide: the life of Lady Rhondda* (Cardigan: Parthian, 2013), p. 219.

opportunities in the industrial workforce in Wales except reinforce traditional notions associated with women's role in the workplace.

By the 1920s, training schemes for work in traditional female trades were prevalent in many areas, including in the largely urban and industrial districts of north and south Wales. As was the case in other parts of Britain, the authorities were oblivious to the notion that women might not want to return to domestic service. However, the experience of war work perhaps made younger women especially more confident in wanting to find alternative employment. Furthermore, it is possible that married, perhaps older, women in industrial districts claimed the donation not so that they could find work, but to temporarily support their families, just as they had always done. The fact remained however that women had been forced back into the private sphere and into a narrow section of the labour market once again.

Conclusion

Women in Wales contributed to the war effort by doing a range of paid work. The war created many different jobs for women, including becoming clerks in offices, ticket collectors at railway stations or tram conductresses and shop workers. While more research remains to be done on these workers and their wartime experiences, this thesis has demonstrated that Welsh women made a vital contribution to production in munitions and agriculture. Factories and farms in different localities and districts employed both male and female labour in the production of crops, ammunition and explosive material. As a result of their mass entry into these fields of production, women gained experience of new kinds of employment, and it seems that many gained new skills, self-confidence and a sense of their own importance in the war effort. However, the recruitment and organisation of female labour remained conditioned by existing conceptions of female “nature” and appropriate work for women, and the strength of these conceptions meant that in the unstable economic conditions of the immediate post-war period, women were nevertheless sent “back to home and duty”. An examination of the different themes covered by this thesis, including recruitment, women’s entry into munitions and agriculture, the organisation of work, and public representations of female labour, suggests that the experience of war had little long-term effect on women’s roles.

In local recruitment material and in the Welsh press, women’s war work was portrayed as an expression of national sentiment. The recruitment and organisation of women’s work drew on notions of service as way to encourage women to take up work in support of the war effort. In recruitment campaigns for both munitions and the WLA,

women's wartime work was linked to service and sacrifice with their male counterparts in the trenches. The evidence from Wales therefore supports historiographical arguments that the equation between war work and military service was necessary to make women's employment socially acceptable. However, it has also been shown that recruiters, including feminist campaigners, drew on a distinctly Welsh patriotic tradition to promote women's wartime work and to encourage men to fight. Issues of gender and patriotism were right at the heart of military and civilian recruitment campaigns in Wales.

Yet this evidence needs to be placed alongside consideration of women's motivations for wartime work. Although there are few accounts by Welsh women of their reasons for taking up wartime employment in unfamiliar areas such as agriculture and munitions, it seems that financial incentives such as higher wages, as well as the need to fulfil their familial responsibilities, were as, if not more, important to many women than abstract notions of patriotism. The willingness of some women to undertake strike action suggested their growing confidence as workers and their intention to stand up for their rights against government attempts to justify poor or unequal conditions on the basis that these were necessary for the war effort. As a result of war work, it seems that many women gained greater freedom and self-confidence. The representation of the Welsh war effort constructed by the press and by recruitment literature may have meant little for ordinary women, and at best can only be considered a partial representation of their reasons for undertaking work which was often dirty and dangerous, and always demanding.

Whatever their reasons for taking up war work, it is undeniable that at least for its duration, the war vastly expanded women's employment opportunities in Wales.

Both married and single women were employed in the munitions industry throughout Wales. Employment for married women in the coal industry and in other trades was still opposed, but munitions work offered these women an opportunity to become formally employed. Young, single women left school or work in the home behind them to take on a wide variety of jobs in munitions production. A number of women worked in engineering workshops and factories, and in major centres of population including Cardiff, Newport and Swansea women in the surrounding districts had more opportunity to find employment outside of domestic service and other female traditional trades. The development of munitions production had a significant impact on the presence of women in the Welsh industrial labour force. For the first time Welsh women became a visible part of an industrial workforce which had previously been perceived as an all-male domain.

In agriculture, demand for additional labour was markedly slower than in the munitions industry. Before 1917, opportunities in farm work primarily consisted of contributions to village gangs or other groups, which had a strong existing tradition of female labour. Likewise, the seasonal recruitment of casual labour, including women, from immediately surrounding areas, continued during the most intensive periods of production. Village gangs provided much needed assistance to farmers in localities where there was a growing shortage of agricultural labour. The increasing numbers of female agricultural students enrolled at colleges participated in such ventures, by doing jobs such as weeding and clearing soil ready for potato planting. Those who came to work on farms from surrounding towns and further afield had sometimes never undertaken agricultural labour before. Some of the women came from towns and villages within the boundaries of the South Wales Coalfield, where traditionally women's participation in the formal economy had been small, and had ventured far

afield for agricultural war work. WLA recruits undertook a range of tasks, including general farm work, forestry and market gardening. On the one hand then, the war opened up new and different opportunities for work, including amongst younger women from urban, industrial districts where there remained few employment options.

However, unlike in munitions, where the majority of the female labour force were new entrants to this kind of work, in agriculture the war often meant an expansion of the roles of women previously involved in such work, and therefore war did not represent such a dramatic shift. The wives and daughters of farmers continued to fulfil their existing responsibilities on the farm, although in many cases they also had to undertake jobs previously done only by male members of the household. Farmers' daughters took on extra responsibilities, depending on the demand for the farm's produce, availability of additional labour and the size of the farm itself. In the absence of the male head of household or adult sons, farmers' wives took over the running and operation of the farm. While this constituted a significant increase in the level of work and responsibility, there were precedents for this kind of transfer of power to adult female relatives. Therefore while the war provided women from urban areas with new experiences of agricultural production, for those already living on small-holdings and in the surrounding locality, much remained the same in terms of everyday participation in farm life. In both cases, women undertook some tasks which had previously been done by men, as well as those traditionally associated with women, but their existing experience and expertise determined the extent to which this was a novelty, and how likely women were to continue in similar work after the war ended.

This shows that factors such as previous experience and expectations are crucial to understanding the extent to which the war acted as a force for social change. The

important point is not simply whether women took on men's jobs, but whether employers (and women themselves) saw female labour as equalling men's work, and as liable to lead to permanent changes in the constitution of the labour force. The experiences of women in munitions and in agriculture were again different, although ultimately it seems that in both fields, government and employers viewed women as useful labour merely "for the duration". In agriculture, there was widespread acceptance that recruits could undertake jobs previously done by men. This included ploughing with a horse, cutting down trees, driving a tractor and using other equipment efficiently. However, WLA recruits were still expected to carry out tasks normally associated with female labour during production on many farms, including much of the domestic work. In all, it seems that although it was accepted that women *could* take on many aspects of male agricultural work, in many rural areas assumptions amongst farmers regarding women's temperament and suitability for farm work remained steadfast. The recruitment of female labour was dictated by local labour practices and economic conditions, which has also been true before the war, and therefore ultimately there seems to have been little change in attitudes towards women's ability to take on agricultural labour.

In industry, the question of the replacement of male labour – and therefore of women's ability to take on equivalent work – was complicated by the presence of a highly organised male labour force and trade unions. These issues were less complicated in the small number of industries, including brickmaking and tinsplate production, which had traditionally employed women on certain processes. Although women in these industries gained some experience of different stages of production, they mostly remained in work defined as unskilled. At the other end of the spectrum, in comparatively new industries such as aeroplane construction, women were trained and

equipped for more skilled work. There were also small pockets of change elsewhere. In heavy industry, small numbers of women undertook more specialised work, such as driving cranes. However, for the most part, the introduction of women into industry, especially in engineering, was feared as potentially undermining and threatening the position and wage rates of skilled male labour. This meant that women's work tended to be defined as unskilled, which in turn maintained their status as cheap labour and kept existing conceptions of the appropriate division of labour firmly in place.

These trends were most evident in the munitions industry, which was also the most visible and publicly-discussed arena of women's wartime work. The issues of dilution and substitution dominated debates on women's employment in the munitions industry. It is clear that women did become proficient in many new areas, including the use of different kinds of machinery and equipment, and sensitive work with chemical explosive substances. In the engineering sector and shipbuilding, Welsh women were trained on different kinds of machinery, often for the first time. However, in all these areas women were either initially directed into unskilled and repetitive work or the processes they undertook were then split up and defined as unskilled. At factories in Pembrey, Carmarthenshire, and in Queensferry, Flintshire an estimated 6,000 women were employed on different production stages over the course of the war, but this work was virtually all repetitive and unskilled. The underlying belief amongst the government and employers remained that women were best suited to unskilled and repetitive work. The introduction of dilution and substitution confirmed the strength of these ideas. This evidence of limited opportunities for women in manufacturing and heavy industry corresponds with the findings of historians who have researched women's wartime work in other areas of Britain.

As this suggests, existing views of appropriate “feminine” behaviour continued to dominate attitudes towards female employment. This is perhaps most evident in the coal industry, where women’s employment on the colliery surface remained unthinkable for employers and male trade unions, and was strongly opposed. However, even in new industries such as munitions, descriptions of women workers emphasised their “feminine” characteristics, such as nimble fingers and greater capability for repetitive work, and therefore ultimately maintained the divide between men’s and women’s work. In this respect, the growing numbers of women in the workplace did little to challenge existing views of femininity. Indeed, ideas of motherhood and femininity were reaffirmed in much of the public discourse surrounding women’s wartime employment in Wales. By emphasising the patriotism of women workers in munitions factories, the local press attempted to quell the challenge to gender roles in terms of participating in a traditional male sphere. This was explicitly linked to a wider narrative of how different towns and villages in Wales were contributing to the war effort. If anything, the war reaffirmed the idea of separate spheres as married women were virtually excluded from the workplace once again after the Armistice, and single women forced back into traditional female trades.

If the war did not overturn traditional ideas of femininity, it also failed to overturn notions of appropriate class roles. Class difference informed much of the narrative surrounding perceptions of women war workers. Working-class women in Wales were the subject of much scrutiny and observation both inside and outside the workplace during the war. Middle-class commentators and religious groups portrayed working-class women as unable to control their own actions and behaviour. Reports in the press discussing women’s supposedly high wages for working in munitions factories developed closely in line with concerns surrounding the behaviour of young working-

class women. Wartime concerns surrounding large groups of young women living and working in localities surrounding munitions factories prompted organisations like the YWCA to act. Middle-class women became welfare supervisors and were trained to coordinate and “look after” women industrial workers. Even in new industries, then, working-class women remained subjected to the supposed moral authority of middle-class women. The conditions of war gave middle-class women opportunities for authority both inside and outside the workplace, as welfare supervisors and female policewomen, but this authority came at the expense of the relative lack of freedom and opportunity of working-class women.

In several directions, including representations of appropriate reasons for working, types of work for women, ideas of female “nature” and capability, and the roles of women in different classes, it seems that existing views of women’s work and capabilities remained largely unchallenged during the war in Wales. Although greater numbers of women entered the workplace, ultimately conventional perceptions of appropriate gender roles at home and the workplace remained prevalent. This conclusion regarding women’s employment in industry and agriculture throughout Wales corresponds with the findings of other historians of women’s wartime work in Britain. However, it is also clear that social and economic conditions in Wales, including the extremely low proportion of married women in paid labour before 1914, shaped attitudes towards women’s participation in the workplace. This thesis has explored a previously untold story, and has shown the many ways in which women contributed to the Welsh wartime economy. This emphasis on women complicates existing labour histories of Wales and war, which have primarily concentrated on male roles. Furthermore, this study has also made an important contribution to labour and gender histories in revealing the experiences of working-class women beyond the

confines of the home and domestic service. However, this is only the beginning of the history of women's work in wartime Wales, and it remains for other scholars to build on the work of this thesis to understand more about this neglected area of modern Welsh women's history.

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