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Leah Strickland March 18, 2025

Makeup, Motherhood, and Manufacturing: Good Women in British World War II Propaganda

by

Leah Strickland

Patrick Allitt
Advisor

History Department

Patrick Allitt
Advisor

Matthew Payne
Committee Member

Robyn Clarke
Committee Member

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An abstract of
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Abstract

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By Leah Strickland

The Second World War required the complete mobilization of British society. To convince the public to act in ways that best helped the war effort, the British government turned to propaganda. This thesis specifically analyzes propaganda aimed at women on the British home front, with a focus on housewives. It uses a wide range of propaganda posters, pamphlets, and films, government surveys and publications, personal diaries, and parliamentary transcripts to demonstrate how the British government used propaganda to feminize women's contribution to the war effort. Through emphasizing the importance of action in traditionally feminine spheres and glamorizing traditionally masculine responsibilities, propaganda ensured that gender roles were never completely overhauled during the war, but rather that a continued emphasis on femininity served to maintain traditional gender frameworks despite women moving into new roles throughout the war.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor, Patrick Allitt, for his support, time, advice, and encouragement throughout this process and for reading countless drafts of my thesis.

I would also like to thank my committee members, Matthew Payne and Robyn Clarke, for their time, support, and feedback.

I would like to thank the Emory History Department, whose Cuttino Scholarship allowed me to do archival research in London, without which I could not have accessed many primary sources critical to this project which had not been digitized.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends for their encouragement.

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Introduction

While male British soldiers engaged in combat all over the world during World War II, British women fought their side of the battle on the home front. Their orders included keeping children healthy and happy, homes well-kept, their countrymen fed and clothed, and, as the war went on, increasingly maintaining industrial and agricultural production in the face of a diminishing male workforce. To motivate women to act in this way and best support the war effort, the British government created a large amount of propaganda aimed at influencing their behavior. This mobilization of the home front was necessary in response to the outbreak of World War II.

The Second World War began in September 1939 when Nazi Germany invaded Poland. The United Kingdom, recently allied with Poland, subsequently declared war on the Germans when the Third Reich failed to respond to an ultimatum demanding it pull its troops from Polish soil.[1] The conflict quickly escalated to a total war, encompassing the European continent and involving nations around the world. Though somewhat protected from the bloodshed on the European mainland due to its position as an island, the United Kingdom suffered greatly during the war. The nation was cut off from imports on which it had previously relied, leading to difficulty producing enough to feed its population and rationing of both food and consumer goods. The Ministry of Food, Board of Trade, and Ministry of Fuel and Power controlled the prices of food, clothing, household goods, gasoline, coal, and oil.[2] In addition to being subject to price controls, food, clothing, and fuel were also heavily rationed.[3] Black markets soon emerged in response to rationing, and leading to increasing penalties in turn.[4] Going beyond physical

[1] "How Europe Went to War in 1939." Imperial War Museums. Accessed March 11, 2025. https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/how-europe-went-to-war-in-1939
[2] Mark Roodhouse, *Black Market Britain, 1939-1945*. (Oxford University Press, 2013).
[3] Ibid.
[4] Frederick James Marquis Woolton, The Diaries and Letters of Lord Woolton, 1940-1945. (Oxford University Press, 2020), 143

goods, a shortage of workers also emerged as large numbers of working-aged men joined the military, whether as volunteers or conscripts. And beginning in fall of 1940, the Nazi air force, the Luftwaffe, began bombing large British cities in the Blitz.

The British government turned to women to help confront these challenges. However, traditional ideas of British womanhood involved being housewives and mothers, while men worked in manufacturing and other forms of manual labor. While there was a long tradition of women working outside the home among the British working class, distinct gender roles remained, as working-class women typically held roles such as domestic servants or textile factory workers. In addition, the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had seen primarily young single women comprising the female labor force, rather than wives and mothers.[5] For this reason, the government had to convince the public that this wartime shift in gender roles, particularly in the case of housewives, was socially acceptable.

To do this, the British government generated propaganda to promote a new idea of what it meant to be a good British woman. The ideal woman, according to government campaigns, worked for the war effort, often outside the home in formerly-masculine industries such as manufacturing or agriculture, grew her own food, and, if she lived in a large city, sent her children away to the countryside without her to escape the threat of bombing. However, while the new wartime woman moved into historically masculine roles, she did not completely distance herself from traditional ideas of femininity. Instead, propaganda continued to promote the wartime woman as someone who cared deeply for children, put effort into her appearance, and maintained her duties as a homemaker. In fact, the British government specifically appealed to housewives as a wartime force of their own. Terms such as the "kitchen front" and "domestic

[5] Pamela Sharpe, "Continuity and Change: Women's History and Economic History in Britain." *The Economic History Review* 48, no. 2 (1995): 353–69. https://doi.org/10.2307/2598407.

front" were introduced, highlighting the key role of the housewife in the war effort. The Ministries of Health, Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, Fuel and Power, as well as the Board of Trade and Armed Forces, all utilized propaganda to recruit women, particularly housewives, to their causes.

The propagandists behind each department's campaigns varied largely, but most were men. During World War II, only 15 Members of Parliament were women, and the majority of women working in government ministries served as typists and secretaries.[6] The Ministry of Information did employ a select number of women, most of whom had already risen to prominence in other areas, such as former BBC department director Isa Benzie, who will be discussed in more detail later.[7] The Ministry of Information also employed a number of female surveyors when reaching out to housewives, such as in their "Study of Public Attitudes towards Six Ministry of Information Books," in which at least 53 of the 54 investigators were women, both married and single.[8] The last, listed only as "Dr. C. Maule," is of unknown gender but may also have been a woman. In addition, one of the two Senior Research Officers on the survey was a woman, as were the two of the three Research Officers, and both the tabulator and the coding and classification specialist.[9] However, while the social survey workers on this particular project were overwhelmingly female, the Director of Research who led the project was a man, as were the overarching heads of each Ministry described above. However, while the Ministries were overwhelmingly male, the BBC employed a significant number of women during the war years,

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[6] Penny Summerfield and Corinna Peniston-Bird. "Women in the Firing Line: The Home Guard and the Defence of Gender Boundaries in Britain in the Second World War." *Women's History Review* 9, no. 2: 231–55. doi:10.1080/09612020000200250.
[7] Kate Murphy, "Relay Women: Isa Benzie, Janet Quigley and the BBC's Foreign Department, 1930-1938." *Feminist media histories* 5, no. 3 (2019): 114-139
[8] "A Study of Public Attitudes towards Six Ministry of Information Books," June-July 1943, RG23/42, Government Social Survey Department: Social Survey: Reports and Papers. The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[9] Ibid.

not only as typists but as department heads, program editors, and broadcasters.[10] The organization remained male-dominated, but numerous women, such as Isa Benzie and Janet Quigley, played key roles in the creation of broadcasting made for women, and even in other fields such as the Foreign Department.[11]

Overall, British World War II propaganda directed at women on the home front aimed to feminize their contributions to the war effort through emphasizing the importance of action in traditionally feminine spheres and by glamorizing traditionally masculine roles. This emphasis on femininity served to make women's movement into new roles during wartime socially acceptable to both women and men, as well as portray an ideal wartime woman's role to which women on the home front should aspire by behaving as the government wanted.

This thesis will examine the ways in which different elements of the British government used propaganda to target women on the home front during the Second World War, what this propaganda was intended to achieve for the war effort, and how traditional ideas of womanhood were both challenged and reinforced during this era.

Historiography

As described by Harold L. Smith, scholars of gender in World War II-era Britain generally fall into two camps: the more traditional argument that the war caused a complete overhaul in gender roles and opened new opportunities to women lasting into the future, and the more recent argument presented by sociologists and social historians that changes in gender roles during the war were superficial and temporary.[12] Immediately after the war, studies such as those

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[10] Murphy, "Relay Women"
[11] Ibid.
[12] Harold L. Smith, *Britain in the Second World War: A Social History*, 1st ed. (Manchester University Press, 1996)**;** Harold L. Smith, "The Womanpower Problem in Britain during the Second World War." The Historical Journal 27, no. 4 (1984): 925-45. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2639033.

by Margaret Goldsmith (1946) and Gertrude Williams (1945) on the war's effect on women's position in society claimed a "revolution" had taken place.[13] Many scholars in the following decades, such as Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein (1956) and Arthur Marwick (1968, 1974) similarly viewed the war to have permanently changed the expectations, opportunities, and role of women in British society.[14] Myrdal and Klein went as far as to say that "sex discrimination in matters of employment almost disappeared" as a result of the war – even though women received lower pay than men for the same wartime jobs.[15] More recently, sociologists and social historians – many of them female – have argued that while changes did occur during the Second World War, those changes were temporary and did not last after the war's end. Sonya O. Rose and Penny Summerfield, both key scholars of British women during World War II, fall into this second camp and their work serves as a building point for this thesis. Other scholars who consider there to have been a brief, temporary change in gender roles during the war include Elizabeth Wilson, a British scholar of feminism, who wrote that the changes of World War II were temporary and brought women "only halfway to paradise," in her 1980 book of the same name, and Sarah Boston, who referred to the war years as a "brief surge forward for women, a bright interlude between the dark days of the thirties and the conservative days of the fifties" in which traditional values and gender roles returned to the forefront.[16] Jane Lewis similarly described an immediate post-war return to the idea of "full-time motherhood" where women

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13 Gertrude Williams. *Women and Work*. (Nicholson and Watson, 1945), I; Goldsmith, Margaret Leland. *Women and the Future*. (Lindsay Drummond Limited, 1946), 9

14 Arthur Marwick, *War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century*, (Macmillan, 1974); Arthur Marwick, *Britain in the Century of Total War: War, Peace and Social Change, 1900-1967,* (Bodley Head, 1968.)

15 Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein, *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work*, (Routledge & K Paul, 1956, revised 1968), 52.; Smith, *Britain in the Second World War,* 13

16 Sarah Boston, *Women Workers and the Trade Unions* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1987), 185.; Elizabeth Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Postwar Britain, 1945-1968* (Tavistock Publications, 1980)

were once again "expected to make children their sole concern" in her book *Women in Britain since 1945.*[17]

While building on the work of historians from the second group, this thesis does not fall neatly into either of the two camps. Instead, it argues that women's participation in the war effort, including their movement into traditionally masculine roles, was deeply feminized from the beginning, particularly in government propaganda justifying the necessity of women's participation in nontraditional roles. Propaganda emphasized the importance of the housewife in the war effort and glamorized women's work in the industrial sphere and armed services. Rather than arguing whether or not wartime overhauled gender roles persisted in Britain after World War II, this thesis argues that gender roles were never in fact completely overhauled in the first place: an emphasis on femininity during the war instead served to maintain traditional gender frameworks; not overwhelmingly changing gender roles but simply expanding what actions fit within them.

Wartime gender expectations still placed women in the realm of caregiving and housekeeping, and expected them to appear feminine. Propaganda, then, was designed to convince the public that women involved in traditionally masculine spheres were still fulfilling these womanly duties. A woman laboring in a muddy vegetable garden, therefore, was ensuring her children were properly fed. A woman in the armed services styled her hair and wore a uniform with a cinched waist, maintaining her femininity. A woman who sent her children away from the city without her was making the ultimate maternal sacrifice, protecting her children as any mother should. In this way, British home front propaganda during World War II twisted

[17] Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain since 1945: Women, Family, Work, and the State in the Post-War Years* (Blackwell, 1992), 18

non-traditional feminine actions to fit into existing gender roles, therefore not only challenging but reinforcing traditional ideas of gender.

This thesis will build on the work of propaganda scholars, such as David Welch, by adding a gendered analysis, while also building on existing scholarship of British women's experiences during World War II, such as that by Sonya Rose and Penny Summerfield, by analyzing propaganda and what the government wanted from British women. While bolstered by attention to women's reactions to propaganda and their experiences during the war, this analysis will focus primarily on the reasons behind propaganda aimed at women and the propaganda's aims. In this way, it will sit at the intersection of work by scholars of propaganda and scholars of gender, to provide a deeper understanding and analysis of British World War II propaganda aimed at women on the home front. In addition, while British housewives in World War II have been a common subject of historical fiction and popular histories, they have received far less scholarly attention than working women of the era and the conscription of British women during World War II. Summerfield, a key scholar of British women's experiences during World War II, focuses her work primarily on women working in war jobs and the armed services. Similarly, in her works on gendered citizenship in World War II Britain, Rose too centers women's movement into industry and military roles and the tensions that occurred as a result. On the other hand, scholars of propaganda such as Welch have often generalized women into a broader category, rather than breaking down their analysis to specific categories such as housewives, mothers, and working women, therefore missing valuable insights into the role specific demographics of women, such as housewives, played in the war effort, and the ways in which government agencies attempted to reach them and shape their actions.

This thesis aims to remedy the oversight of housewives' contributions to the war effort, and while it discusses propaganda aimed at women more broadly, a special focus will be given to housewives and the large amount of propaganda directed at the group. Similarly, this thesis aims to challenge the popular notion that World War II represented a seismic change in roles and expectations for women, instead arguing that propaganda reinforced as well as challenged traditional ideas of femininity.

Chapter One of this paper will be about food, both about cooking and growing one's own produce, and how propaganda encouraged housewives to grow their own food and cook in specific ways. Chapter Two will move into other traditional aspects of housekeeping, such as clothing and cleaning. Chapter Three will focus on motherhood and childcare, including sending children away from large cities as part of the Ministry of Health evacuation plan, and Chapter Four will focus on the workforce and armed services and how the women in these roles were glamorized in propaganda in order to reinforce traditional ideas of femininity.

Chapter One • Feeding the Family

With the sharp decline in imports caused by the war, the British government found itself concerned about having enough food to sustain its population. Before 1939, "considerably more than half" of Britain's food was imported from abroad, and the government was aware of this vulnerability, which had been an issue during the First World War.[18] A Ministry of Food was created in 1916 to respond to this wartime food crisis, but it was disbanded after the First World War's end.[19] However, the British government remained aware of the threat of future war, and for this reason a 'Food (Defence Plans) Department' was created within the Board of Trade as early

[18] Paul Collinson and Helen Macbeth, eds., *Food in Zones of Conflict: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* (Berghahn Books, 2014), 107
[19] Woolton, The Diaries and Letters of Lord Woolton, 40

as 1936.[20] On September 8th, 1939, five days after the declaration of war, this department was reorganized into the Ministry of Food.[21]

The Ministry of Food took charge of the imports which continued to arrive in Britain after the outbreak of war, implemented rations, and led the effort to increase domestic food production. Despite planning by the Food (Defence Plans) Department, the situation was dire. The scale of the problem is most evident through the drastic example of wheat: at the time, only 13% of consumed flour was made from British-grown wheat.[22] Facing the challenge of feeding the population, the new Ministry put into place immediately most of the prospective courses of action which had been outlined by the former Department.

W.S. Morrison, the first Minister of Food, chose to take over the distribution of nearly all food, but not to introduce rationing right away, despite it being preplanned, including ration books having already been printed.[23] Morrison instead decided to ease the public into the rationing plan, by announcing its imminent arrival but reassuring them it would be minor, and that citizens would have "nothing to complain about."[24] However, the rations announced in November 1939 were far from minor in the eyes of the British public, particularly the news that butter would soon be limited to four ounces per week. The resulting public outcry targeted Morrison specifically, claiming he had gone back on his promise that rations would be minimal, and the Ministry ended up delaying their implementation by a month.

Recognizing that housewives did the majority of grocery shopping in Britain, Morrison turned to women in hopes of restoring his reputation. Derided by the press and public alike, and with the unpopular rationing plan recently put into action, he decided to invite "a number of

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[20] Collinson and Macbeth, Food in Zones of Conflict, 108
[21] Woolton, The Diaries and Letters of Lord Woolton, 43
[22] Graham-Little, E. "Flour in the Loaf," *British Medical Journal*, 1 (1945): 530-531
[23] Woolton, The Diaries and Letters of Lord Woolton, 44
[24] Ibid.

women editors and journalists" for tea in March 1940, to discuss "closer cooperation on matters concerning the housewife."[25] However, these efforts to win over the press failed, and the next month, he was replaced.

Morrison's replacement was Frederick James Marquis, Earl of Woolton (1883-1964) – known by the title Lord Woolton – who took a strong interest in both practical and humanitarian measures. Despite his title, Lord Woolton was not born into the aristocracy but rather to a working-class saddle-maker.[26] He attended grammar school on a scholarship and turned down his Cambridge acceptance as he was unable to afford it.[27] He was a far more popular leader than Morrison among the British public, who saw him as a fellow member of the people due to his humble upbringing and approachable manner in radio broadcasts. While at the University of Manchester, Lord Woolton studied science and became involved in social work through the Ancoats Hall settlement attached to the school. During the First World War he authored reports on prices and supplies of consumer goods for his local Government Board before eventually joining the War Office. Though he moved into a business career in the interwar period, he was asked to rejoin the War Office in May 1939 before replacing Morrison as Minister of Food in 1940.[28] It was also in 1939 that he received his peerage, at which point he became known by the name Lord Woolton – he could not continue to use his birth surname, Marquis, as it happened to be another peerage title, so instead he used Woolton after the city where he'd lived.[29] Lord Woolton famously refused to affiliate himself with any political party during the war, and he was not a Member of Parliament before receiving his peerage title. He originally took his seat in the House of Lords as an independent. However, after the war in Europe had ended, he abruptly

[25] Woolton, The Diaries and Letters of Lord Woolton, 45
[26] Rosemary Cresswell, "Lord Woolton: A Life of 'Social Work' and Humanitarianism." *Cultural and Social History* 20, no. 3: 405-28. doi:10.1080/14780038.2023.2201055.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.

joined the Conservative party when Churchill lost the 1945 general election.[30] During the war, Lord Woolton held the status of Baron, although he was later promoted to Viscount and then to Earl. With his background in social work, Lord Woolton took a key interest not only in the practical production and rationing of food, but also spoke on topics such as infant nutrition, youth mental health, and the importance of guaranteed meals for all school children.[31] Lord Woolton remained Minister of Food until 1943, when he became the Minister of Reconstruction, but it was during his three year tenure – the longest tenure of the three wartime Ministers of Food – that the Ministry of Food implemented its most numerous and successful campaigns, and Lord Woolton remained the figure most remembered and applauded for his wartime work on food.

Under Morrison, the Ministry of Food's early campaigns to promote vegetable gardens and livestock-raising had poor results, as hastily-produced pamphlets published in late 1939 contained several errors which experienced gardeners immediately noticed.[32] A"Food From the Garden" leaflet published in late 1939 advised planting marrows only a few inches apart, when the large plants in reality needed closer to a meter of distance between them, and also provided poorly-timed advice to plant cabbages which inevitably did not survive the cold winter of 1939-40.[33] The public decried these publications as condescending and inaccurate. In response, the Ministry of Food changed course and instituted the more successful 'Dig for Victory' campaign in summer 1940, shortly after Lord Woolton's appointment in April.[34] This multi-agency campaign worked in tandem with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, which similarly promoted growing and saving one's own food, and benefited from promotion by the

[30] Woolton, The Diaries and Letters of Lord Woolton
[31] "Feeding of Infants in Wartime: Address by Lord Woolton." *The British Medical Journal* 2, no. 4253 (1942): 50.
[32] Judith Sumner, *Plants Go to War: A Botanical History of World War II* (McFarland & Company, 2019), 33
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., 34

Ministry of Information as well. Posters, pamphlets, and newspaper advertisements encouraged those on the home front to "dig for victory," and provided advice on which produce to grow and how. The Ministry of Information released a "Dig for Victory" short film in 1942 that touted a list of benefits of growing one's own food, as well as releasing numerous other short films with gardening tips and tricks.[35] These videos aired before feature films at movie theaters, to a wartime audience primarily consisting of women, children, and the elderly.[36] The Dig For Victory campaign largely targeted women as growing numbers of men entered the armed services. One Dig for Victory ad in a women's magazine proclaimed "Women! Farmers can't grow all your vegetables - you must grow your own."[37] The ad went on to explain that it was up to women to "provide the vegetables…vital to [their] children's heath." This tied their agricultural labor to being good, responsible mothers, a key aspect of traditional womanhood. As Judith Sumner stated in *Plants Go To War*, "victory gardening" became "another category of women's war work, an expected part of wartime culture."[38]

In addition to encouraging home gardens, the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries publicized instructions to make them more productive, much of which was aimed at women. One poster on the benefits of composting, "Food for your garden, from your garden," features a cartoon of a smiling housewife spoon-feeding an anthropomorphic head of lettuce.[39] While the instructional images feature a man doing the heavy labor of shoveling compost, the cartoon woman holds a much larger and more noticeable position on the poster, indicating the way in

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[35] Ibid., 37
[36] Ibid.
[37] Jane Waller and Michael Vaughan-Rees. *Women in wartime: the role of women's magazines 1939-1945* (OPTIMA, 1987), 50
[38] Sumner, *Plants Go to War*, 38
[39] "Food for your garden, from your garden" poster issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, INF 13/140 (30), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom

which women were specifically targeted by government campaigns during the Second World War.

Personal photograph, July 20, 2024

The heavy labor involved in gardening was also glamorized through published photographs of royal women "digging for victory" themselves. In April 1940, a photograph was released of the teenage Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret hoeing in their garden near Windsor, a wheelbarrow in the background.[40] The princesses wore matching dresses and blazers, and smiled for the camera.[41] A similar photograph was released in August 1943, once again showing the princesses at work in the garden, with Elizabeth hoeing as Margaret crouched in the dirt, working with her hands.[42] The royals wear dresses with Peter Pan collars as they work. In addition to the class element of these images, showing that gardening should be done by high society as well as

[40] Sumner, *Plants Go to War*, 33
[41] Topical Press Agency. Untitled Image, April 1, 1940. Hulton Royals Collection, Hulton Archive, Getty Images. https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/princess-elizabeth-and-her-sister-princess-margaret-news-photo/576746261?
[42] Topical Press Agency. Untitled Image, August 11, 1943. Hulton Royals Collection, Hulton Archive, Getty Images. https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/princess-elizabeth-and-her-younger-sister-princess-margaret-news-photo/88681212?

the working class, they also highlight the role of gender in agricultural propaganda. If the royal princesses gardened, with their matching dresses and warm smiles, certainly it was an acceptable feminine activity, as well as a necessary wartime contribution.

Outside of the Dig for Victory campaign, the Ministry of Food published a wide variety of posters and pamphlets on other food-related matters. Due to the shortage of flour, a standardized bread called the National Loaf was mandated in 1942, although it had existed since early in the war. A May 1940 *Manchester Guardian* headline asked "Standard Loaf Coming?", while an April 1941 "Food Facts" ad in the *London Observer* provided facts on the benefits of National Wheatmeal Bread and encouraged readers to "ask [their] baker" for it, reminding them that "it's up to you!"[43] However, soon it was no longer a choice.

The National Loaf had a wheat flour extraction rate of 85%, meaning that 85% of the grain was made into flour during the milling process.[44] Higher extraction rate flour includes more bran, germ, and wheat endosperm, which contain more nutrients, and can make more flour from a given amount of grain. However, it is coarser than lower-extraction white flour and creates denser bread. The wholewheat bread was fortified with vitamins and better utilized limited domestic grain resources, while also allowing other more critical goods to be shipped into Britain. Millers were only permitted to produce the national wheatmeal flour as of March 1942.[45] The public responded very poorly to the bread's texture and taste, and complained it grew moldy faster than white bread. However, the National Association of Master Bakers blamed the rotting on women's "faulty keeping" of the bread and stated that they "expect[ed] housewives to play

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[43] "Food Supplies Assured: Standard Loaf Coming? Minister and Brewing." *The Manchester Guardian*, May 21, 1940, Proquest Historical Newspapers.; "Display Ad 34 – no Title." *The Observer*, April 6, 1941, Proquest Historical Newspapers.
[44] Derek J. Oddy, "The Second World War: The Myth of a Planned Diet, 1939-1950," in *From Plain Fare to Fusion Food: British Diet from the 1890s to the 1990s* (Boydell & Brewer, 2003)
[45] "The White Loaf to Disappear: National Wheatmeal When Present Flour Stocks are Exhausted." *The Manchester Guardian*, March 12, 1942, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

their part".[46] One woman, Joan C. Strange, complained in her wartime diary in October 1942 that "bread was grey in colour due to the flour".[47] Even Marguerite Patten, a home economist with the Ministry of Food, recalled of the wartime wheatmeal flour in 1992 that she "hated it for baking" and "[could] not recall enjoying the bread, any more than the flour" of the era.[48] However, working for the Ministry, she did not publicize those sentiments at the time, though other members of the public did. The Ministry of Food countered this negative public sentiment using posters highlighting the importance of the National Loaf, as well as by attempting to make the bread sound more exciting, such as in announcement posters which pronounced "your national wheatmeal bread is here!"[49] However, as late as 1944, only a quarter of respondents to a survey on the bread actually believed it was healthier than white bread, and another third stated they simply did not care about the health benefits.[50]

In addition to the many pamphlets and posters of the 'Dig for Victory' campaign and the poster and newspaper effort to convince women of the National Loaf, the Ministry of Food also promoted the idea of the "Kitchen Front" through both visual and aural media. Created by Lord Woolton or a member of his staff, he announced that it was a top priority for "women…to mobilise themselves on the kitchen front," and the expression was soon widespread.[51] Posters appeared such as "Help win the war on the kitchen front," which showed a well-dressed woman

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[46] 'Our Woman Representative'. "The Perfect Load: Blaming the Bin." *The Observer*, November 8, 1942, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

[47]Phipps, Katherine M. "The Second World War Diary of Kate Phipps," 1939-1945. (Alexander Street, 2004): 825. https://search-alexanderstreet-com.proxy.library.emory.edu/view/work/bibliographic_entity|bibliographic_details|4193216.

[48] Marguerite Patten, "Those days of rationing." *Nutrition Bulletin* 17 (1992): 116, https://doi-org.proxy.library.emory.edu/10.1111/j.1467-3010.1992.tb00117.x

[49] "Your National Wheatmeal Bread is Here!" poster, Art.IWM PST 20684, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/36047.

[50] Siân H Nicholas, *The Echo of War: Home Front Propaganda and the Wartime BBC, 1939–45* (Manchester University Press, 1996), 82

[51] Woolton, The Diaries and Letters of Lord Woolton, 55

with lipstick doing her grocery shopping and advised women to "above all avoid waste."[52] Meanwhile, the BBC program *The Kitchen Front* aired each morning with recipe suggestions, informational speakers, and other wartime cooking tips for housewives.[53] These recipes provided "tasty" ways to use common foods, such as potatoes, and alternatives for heavily-rationed ingredients such as eggs, butter, sugar, and lard.[54]

This "kitchen front" was the housewife's battleground, and the government made sure women were aware of this responsibility through posters, radio broadcasts, pamphlets, and advertisements such as those described above. For example, the Ministry of Food regularly published "kitchen front" dietary recommendations in women's magazines throughout the war years.[55]

These magazine ads were a key part of food-related propaganda for housewives. In fact, scholars Jane Waller and Michael Vaughan-Rees write that many women's magazines' "principal source of revenue" during the war years "came from the constant stream of adverts placed by the Ministries of Fuel and Power, Food, Health, Supply, and Agriculture."[56] Throughout the 1940s, the Ministry of Food "consistently" advertised in 92 different home and women's magazines.[57] The Ministry noted that women read magazines at a "different time and in a different mood" compared to newspapers, and therefore the advertisements were designed differently. Similarly they noted that women were already "accustomed to look to magazines for advice" about caring for their families, meaning magazine ads allowed for "long-term education" of readers.[58] Many

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[52] "Help win the war on the kitchen front!" poster published by the Ministry of Food, Art.IWM PST 20697, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/36056
[53] Collinson and Macbeth, Food in Zones of Conflict, 112
[54] Urvashi Gautam, "Image of the Enemy: German and British Propaganda in the Second World War." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 73 (2012): 1099-1106. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44156310.
[55] Collinson and Macbeth, Food in Zones of Conflict, 112
[56] Waller and Vaughan-Rees, *Women in wartime*, 6
[57] Ministry of Food reflection on magazine advertising, 1948, MAF 223/22, Ministry of Food: Publications. The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[58] Ibid.

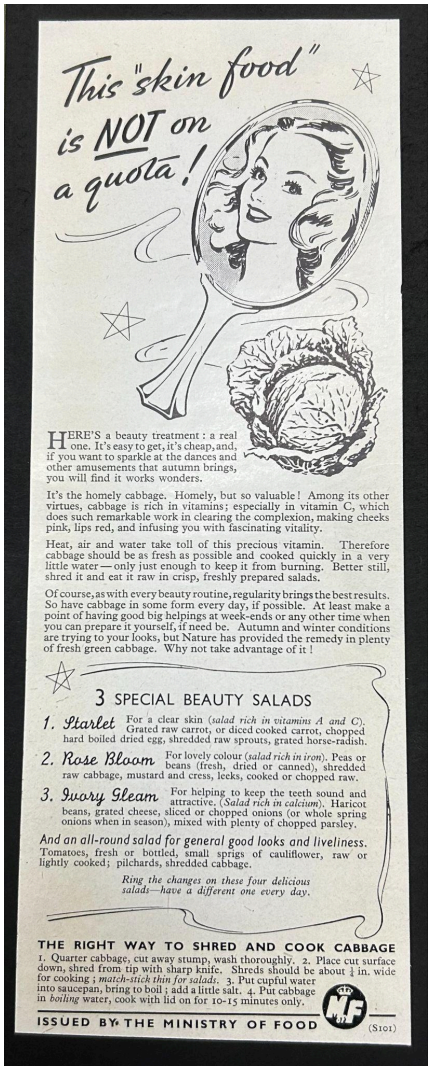
of these ads featured recipe suggestions, while others gave advice on getting the correct ration books, feeding children, and eating well during pregnancy. For example, one ad titled "Spring Mood on the Food Front" gave women advice on utilizing fresh foods during the spring season, with a reminder at the end for expectant mothers, reminding them to take advantage of the special ration book for pregnant women and to eat the extra food themselves rather than sharing it.[59] Another ad aimed at new mothers gave nutrition advice for during pregnancy as well as for when the baby arrived.[60] Likely due to their placement in women's magazines, these ads were specifically aimed at housewives and featured traditionally feminine topics.

In addition to reinforcing traditional feminine roles through the expectation that women were housewives responsible for feeding their families, many of these advertisements also emphasized the importance of a good appearance. Whether directly promoting beauty ideals or simply referencing appearance-related benefits of healthy foods, these ads, along with much of the propaganda aimed at British women during the Second World War, solidified the belief that a woman should care about her looks. For example, the "Spring Mood on the Food Front" advertisement mentioned above notes how fresh greens "bring colour to your cheeks and lips."[61] An advertisement explaining how to cook greens in a manner that best preserved the Vitamin C ended with a note that Vitamin C was essential for "all-round fitness, noticeable in clear skin, lips of good colour, [and] bright eyes."[62] Similarly, an ad promoting the health and flavor benefits of raw cabbage and providing recipe ideas with the ingredient states that it is also "first class…for clearing the skin, for rosy cheeks, good teeth, and glossy hair." Other ads focus specifically on the topic, such as "Eating for Health and Beauty" and "If you had three wishes," a

[59] Ministry of Food magazine ads, 1945, MAF223/21, Ministry of Food: Publications. The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Ibid.

Ministry of Food advertisement featuring the image of a smiling young woman and opening with the question "if you could be granted three wishes about your looks, wouldn't they run something like this: a lovely complexion; a good figure; a lively and attractive personality?" The ad continues with an explanation of how eating the correct foods contributes to good looks. "This 'skin food' is NOT on a quota!" is another similar magazine ad, featuring the image of a lipstick-wearing, mascaraed blonde woman smiling in a mirror and espousing the value of cabbage for good looks. It also features three recipes for "special beauty salads."[63] As mentioned in the ad, cabbage was plentiful and not rationed, and therefore the government wanted the population to eat more of it. The Ministry of Food saw its linkage with good looks as a way to encourage women to eat and serve cabbage more often. "Fresh as a daisy or a drooping wallflower?" also brings a woman's looks into the importance of healthy eating. The ad compares the "foundation" foods from weekly rations to the foundation used in a make-up routine.[64]

[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.



This "skin food" is NOT on a quota!

HERE'S a beauty treatment : a real one. It's easy to get, it's cheap, and, if you want to sparkle at the dances and other amusements that autumn brings, you will find it works wonders.

It's the homely cabbage. Homely, but so valuable! Among its other virtues, cabbage is rich in vitamins; especially in vitamin C, which does such remarkable work in clearing the complexion, making cheeks pink, lips red, and infusing you with fascinating vitality.

Heat, air and water take toll of this precious vitamin. Therefore cabbage should be as fresh as possible and cooked quickly in a very little water — only just enough to keep it from burning. Better still, shred it and eat it raw in crisp, freshly prepared salads.

Of course, as with every beauty routine, regularity brings the best results. So have cabbage in some form every day, if possible. At least make a point of having good big helpings at week-ends or any other time when you can prepare it yourself, if need be. Autumn and winter conditions are trying to your looks, but Nature has provided the remedy in plenty of fresh green cabbage. Why not take advantage of it!

3 SPECIAL BEAUTY SALADS

1. *Starlet* For a clear skin (*salad rich in vitamins A and C*). Grated raw carrot, or diced cooked carrot, chopped hard boiled dried egg, shredded raw sprouts, grated horse-radish.

2. *Rose Bloom* For lovely colour (*salad rich in iron*). Peas or beans (fresh, dried or canned), shredded raw cabbage, mustard and cress, leeks, cooked or chopped raw.

3. *Ivory Gleam* For helping to keep the teeth sound and attractive. (*Salad rich in calcium*). Haricot beans, grated cheese, sliced or chopped onions (or whole spring onions when in season), mixed with plenty of chopped parsley.

And an all-round salad for general good looks and liveliness. Tomatoes, fresh or bottled, small sprigs of cauliflower, raw or lightly cooked; pilchards, shredded cabbage.

Ring the changes on these four delicious salads—have a different one every day.

THE RIGHT WAY TO SHRED AND COOK CABBAGE

1. Quarter cabbage, cut away stump, wash thoroughly. 2. Place cut surface down, shred from tip with sharp knife. Shreds should be about ¼ in. wide for cooking; *match-stick thin for salads.* 3. Put cuptul water into saucepan, bring to boil; add a little salt. 4. Put cabbage in *boiling* water, cook with lid on for 10-15 minutes only.

ISSUED BY THE MINISTRY OF FOOD (S101)

Personal photograph, August 3, 2024

The Ministry of Food also connected the idea of glamor with that of feeding the family on wartime rations by publicly bestowing awards on housewives who fit their ideals. The Ministry, in partnership with the *Sunday Pictorial* newspaper, ran a "Britain's Best Housewives" competition in 1941 to celebrate the "women who [were] carrying on so heroically on the Home Front."[65] In order to be considered, housewives across the country submitted detailed descriptions of their households, a weekly meal plan with how they utilized their rations to

[65] Letter to Mrs. Fyffe from the assistant editor of the *Sunday Pictorial*, November 6, 1941, 7EFY, Papers of Elsie Fyffe, Nov-Dec 1941, London School of Economics The Women's Library, London, United Kingdom.

sustain the family during wartime, and how they supported the war effort at home via salvage collecting, vegetable plots, taking in evacuees, or other means. One of the twenty winners of this competition was Elsie Fyffe of Letchworth, Hertfordshire, who described in her household summary how she had her husband and three children, as well as a "little evacuee girl" they had taken in. She noted many behaviors in her essay for consideration that various government ministries promoted in their campaigns - such as giving the children halibut oil daily, having a home vegetable garden to supplement the family's diet, and knitting socks for the troops in order to make a further impact on the war effort. She also noted that she had taken in an additional 14-year-old evacuee for the prior week, to provide respite for another foster mother. Letchworth, a town about 50 kilometers from London, received over 3,000 evacuees.[66] The rewarding of these traditionally feminine traits of caring for children, feeding her family, and knitting garments reflect the way in which traditional women's roles were not only preserved but encouraged among British women during the Second World War, despite their movement into historically masculine spheres.

The winners of this competition, whose names were published in the *Sunday Pictorial*, each received a diploma signed by Lord Woolton, recognizing their "outstanding service to Britain" via their "housewifely thrift and ingenuity under war-time conditions," and were gifted ten War Savings Certificates. Competitions such as these, whose winners received formal diplomas with the seals and signatures of important people, as well as the glory of seeing themselves celebrated in the newspaper, served as an indirect form of propaganda during the

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[66] "How the Evacuees Arrived in Letchworth," *The Citizen*, September 8, 1939. LBM4101.15.19, Garden City Collection, Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation Digital Archive. http://www.gardencitycollection.com/object-lbm4101-15-19; "Evacuee Census Figures," LBM4101.15.20, Garden City Collection, Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation Digital Archive. http://www.gardencitycollection.com/object-lbm4101-15-20

Second World War. While they did not provide direct advice or instruction, they rewarded those who fit the government ideal, consequently encouraging others to do the same.

While these ads and competitions motivated women to support the war effort through cooking and gardening, radio broadcasting also played a central role in the Ministry of Food's propaganda aimed at housewives. *The Kitchen Front* broadcast mentioned above was a key method of reaching housewives throughout the country, and had an audience of over five million listeners.[67] Though technically run solely by the BBC, *The Kitchen Front* producers worked closely with the Ministry of Food, including running all scripts by the Ministry for approval before the program was recorded.[68] The program was spearheaded by BBC Talks Producer Janet Quigley, who also pioneered later radio broadcasts for women in the armed forces.[69] Quigley had joined the BBC in 1930 as an assistant to Major C.F. Atkinson, who was the press' foreign liaison for international media outlets.[70] She originally handled non-European relays, and rose through the ranks alongside her friend and fellow assistant to Atkinson, Isa Benzie. When Atkinson left his role in 1933, Benzie was appointed to replace him, taking over all European relays while Quigley became primary liaison to both the American press and that of the rest of the British empire. Benzie and Quigley were the sole salaried staff members of the Foreign Department, besides one administrator, and the fact that the BBC's international sector was run by two women received much attention, including both skepticism and praise.[71] In 1936, Quigley was moved to the Talks Department, where she would "ultimately become a doyenne of women's programs" such as *The Kitchen Front*, and multiple new staff members had to be hired

[67] Asa Briggs, "Sounds of War," in *The War of Words: The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume III* (Oxford University Press, 1995)
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Murphy, "Relay Women"
[71] Ibid.

to take over the large amount of work she had handled in the international sector.[72] Benzie, who retired from the BBC in 1938 after getting married and becoming a mother, would soon return to work during the war, first for the Ministry of Information and later, in 1943, as a talks producer for the BBC.[73]

To appeal to as many housewives as possible, *The Kitchen Front* featured a diverse array of guest speakers from around the United Kingdom and occasionally from abroad, including both men and women. One regular speaker on *The Kitchen Front* was Marguerite Patten, a home economist for the Ministry of Food as well as an advisor in their Food Advice division.[74] She spoke on the radio frequently, as well as did in-person work, meeting with citizens and giving cooking demonstrations around Britain.[75] Patten was called the "queen of ration book cuisine" for her focus on practical, unflashy recipes, and quickly became a household name.[76] Patten remained a popular figure after the war, continuing her radio and later television cooking demonstrations, releasing numerous cookbooks, and writing for journals on nutrition. In a 1992 reflection on her work during the rationing years, Patten described the methods used by the Ministry of Food to reach women. She wrote that "giving them interesting recipes" and "making [certain foods] … a part of daily life" through posters and recognizable characters such as Potato Pete, was the key way of reaching housewives.[77] She also found her in-person work with the Ministry crucial, as people could actually taste the recipes she was promoting before making it themselves. She wrote that she and her fellow Ministry employees "tried to lure" people using

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[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Rachel Moseley, "Marguerite Patten, Television Cookery and Post-War British Femininity: Reconstructing Early Television for Women in Britain" in *Feminism, Domesticity and Popular Culture*, ed. Stacy Gillis and Joanne Hollows (Routledge, 2009)
[75] Patten, "Those Days of Rationing"
[76] Grimes, William. "Marguerite Patten, 99, Food Author and TV Chef in Britain, is Dead." *New York Times*, June 11, 2015, Proquest Newspapers.
[77] Patten, "Those Days of Rationing," 13

"the written word in the press [and] the talks by a wide range of people, many of whom were famous in all walks of life, on the radio," and that they tried "to praise, and encourage, rather than wag fingers, at the public."[78]

Another set of speakers, sisters Elsie and Doris Waters – playing the roles of housewives "Gert and Daisy" on their *Kitchen Front* radio show – did comical, short sketches providing food advice. As Patten described, the Ministry of Food utilized existing celebrities to promote their various campaigns, and the Waters sisters fell into this category, as they were already known before the war as a comedy and music duo. The combination of their humor and working-class accents attracted listeners to their broadcasts. An experimental two-week program of their sketches, *Feed the Brute*, drew an extremely high percentage of working-class listeners, compared to the usual middle-class listenership of BBC household-management programs.[79] For example, 71% of housewives in Fulham, a working-class area in West London, reported having listened to Gert and Daisy, and viewers commented on how their "accent and dialogue identified themselves and their problems with the genuine housewife."[80]

Despite the high number of listeners, the Ministry of Food remained concerned about the reach and impact of *The Kitchen Front*, and in 1941 the Ministry of Information compiled a survey of housewives on the MoF's behalf to investigate. 3004 interviews were conducted with housewives from England, Scotland, and Wales, with the goal of understanding trends such as who listened to *The Kitchen Front* broadcasts, the reasoning behind those who didn't listen, and which speakers were preferred or disliked.[81] In the report of the findings, women with a lack of interest in the broadcast were referred to as a "problem," highlighting the importance the

[78] Patten, "Those Days of Rationing," 115
[79] Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, 75
[80] Ibid.
[81] "The Kitchen Front Broadcast Programme: A Survey amongst Housewives conducted for the Ministry of Food," November 29, 1941, RG23/3, Government Social Survey Department: Social Survey: Reports and Papers. The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.

Ministry placed on all British housewives listening to their programming. The survey report also broke down housewives' answers about their listening patterns, interest, and usage of the program's advice by demographics such as whether the women came from urban or rural households, if they had children, their income level, their region within the United Kingdom, and their age.[82] The Ministry also asked for feedback on how survey participants would change the program, and if broadcasting it at a different time of day would be more convenient for them. These questions reflect the Ministry of Food's mission to have as many housewives as possible tuning into *The Kitchen Front* broadcast, and the general importance placed on reaching these women through the government's propaganda efforts.

In addition to *The Kitchen Front*, Lord Woolton often spoke directly to British housewives both over the radio and in person. Utilizing rhetoric and figurative language, he made clear the importance of women's choices in the kitchen, calling them a "new army," and stating that he knew that he could rely on their help.[83] This direct form of address, as well as the sense of importance it bestowed upon housewives, was met with strong approval from the public.[84] In a December 1940 speech, broadcast over the radio, Lord Woolton went as far as to say that "food control is really a woman's affair, and that's why I talk to women in these broadcasts."[85] He also spoke at meetings of the Women's Institutes.[86] Statements such as these served the dual function of both urging the goals mentioned on the surface of the speech as well as bestowing a sense of purpose and national importance upon women, in the hopes of improving their opinions of the Ministry and subconsciously encouraging them to listen to Ministry advice.

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[82] Ibid.
[83] Woolton, The Diaries and Letters of Lord Woolton, 55
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid., 114
[86] Ibid., 157

Chapter Two • Housekeeping

Housewives' use of energy for cooking, cleaning, and heating their homes became a key issue for the British government as fuel became increasingly limited. While Britain could rely on its domestic coal mines, much of the nation's oil came from the Middle East.[87] The wartime closure of the Mediterranean route to Allied shipping in 1940 as well as the growing loss of tankers greatly limited the amount of oil that could reach Britain from the Persian Gulf.[88] In addition, many British miners joined the Armed Forces, leaving fewer workers to mine Britain's domestic coal supplies. In the face of this crisis, the Ministry of Fuel and Power was created in June 1942 to handle fuel supplies, prices, and rationing, which had previously been split among multiple government agencies.[89] However, even with rations introduced on coal, oil, and gasoline, fuel was still limited and the Ministry of Fuel and Power needed domestic consumers to use less. For that reason, the Ministry created informational campaigns to reduce energy usage among the population.

Women were targeted particularly by these fuel campaigns. Pamphlets such as the "Save fuel: information leaflet" were distributed to households with instructions on how to cut back on energy usage. This leaflet was specifically "prepared to help housewives to save fuel whilst actually improving the results of their work."[90] The leaflet advised them to limit loads of laundry, use as little hot water as possible, and ration their soap usage, as well as provided a list of things one should "always" or "never" do while ironing and washing clothes.[91] Similar leaflets such as

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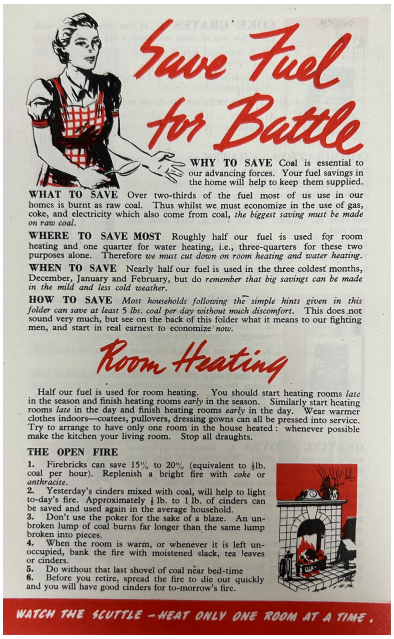
[87] Anand Toprani, *Oil and the Great Powers: Britain and Germany, 1914 to 1945* (Oxford University Press, 2019), 120
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] "Save fuel information leaflet" issued by the Ministry of Fuel and Power, INF 13/299 (18), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[91] Ibid.

"Save Fuel for Battle" also targeted women. This particular leaflet featured a smiling housewife on the front, and provided instructions on energy-effective room heating, water heating, and cooking.[92] Posters were also used to encourage women to conserve energy, such as one which showed an image of Allied troops coming ashore in an unspecified location and reminded viewers in large capital letters that "they need all the fuel you can save." Underneath, in smaller font, it stated that "every housewife can help the Armed Forces by keeping her fuel consumption as low as possible."[93]



Personal photograph, July 13, 2024; Personal photograph, July 20, 2024

The Ministry of Fuel and Power distributed guides to local committees on how to best promote the campaign among their constituents. In addition to the distribution of informational leaflets, posters also played a large role in the Ministry's campaign. The local committee guides advised leaders to display posters "where large numbers of people pass or congregate" and asked

[92] "Save fuel for battle" leaflet issued by the Ministry of Fuel and Power, INF 13/299 (11), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[93] "They need all the fuel you can save" poster, INF 13/146 (39), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.

if there were "a women's organisation or meeting place" where fuel-saving posters could be displayed.[94] Furthering their local-level strategies, the Ministry also attempted to reach as many people as possible by printing Welsh-language energy-saving posters for use in Wales.[95] 88% of respondents to a December 1943 Ministry of Information survey on the Fuel Saving Campaign replied that they had seen advertisements on how to save fuel.[96]

While not every fuel-related advertisement targeted women, many did. One poster, showing a cutaway view of a house, listed a number of energy-saving actions that "Mrs. Housewife can learn to do."[97] Many of these actions would typically have fallen to the man of the house, for example to "mend fuses," "maintain appliances," and "protect cold water tanks and pipes against frost."[98] Insulating water tanks and pipes, called "lagging," was a key way of reducing fuel usage, and housewives were often encouraged to take the lead on lagging their pipes and tanks. One such poster shows a woman in a bright red blouse and matching lipstick carefully wrapping cloth around her water tank.[99] While she participates in a traditionally masculine task, her nails are well-manicured, her hair nicely styled, and her clothing feminine. This portrayal of women remaining feminine while doing historically male jobs was common throughout government propaganda. In addition, as women had traditionally been homemakers,

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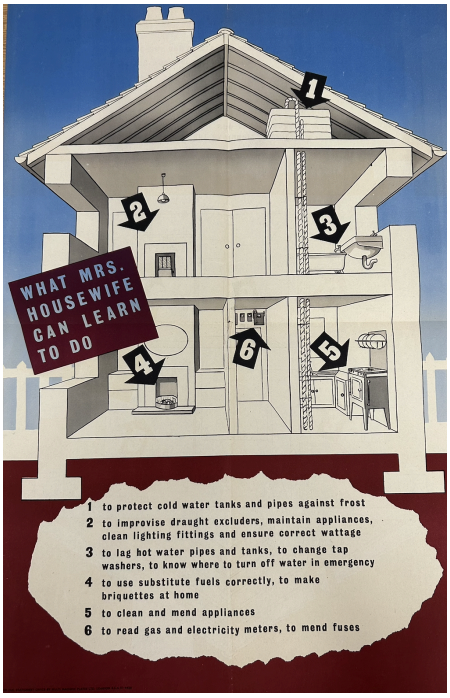
[94] "Fuel saving campaign publicity! Ways and means for local committees" guidebook, issued by the Ministry of Fuel and Power, INF 13/299 (44), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[95] "Cwtogwch ar nwy a thrydan" Welsh language poster issued by the Ministry of Fuel and Power, INF 13/146 (22), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.; "Chwyth y gogleddwynt eto…" Welsh language poster issued by the Ministry of Fuel and Power, INF 13/146 (24), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[96] Ministry of Information, "Home Intelligence Special Report: A Survey of the Fuel Saving Campaign," December 1943. MOI Digital, Accessed March 13, 2025. https://moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/home-intelligence-special-report-inf-1-293/idm140465681363872/
[97] "What Mrs. Housewife can learn to do" poster, INF 13/299 (42), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[98] Ibid.
[99] "'LAG' to keep heat in!" poster published by the Ministry of Fuel and Power, INF 13/146 (48), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.

the government was able to expand ideas of housekeeping to include more historically masculine tasks such as repairing and upgrading appliances, as they contributed to the functioning of a home. However, in terms of energy-saving propaganda, there was far more reinforcement of traditional gender roles than there was challenging or even expanding them, as the Ministry of Fuel and Power inundated women with energy-saving advice for cooking and cleaning.



Personal photograph, July 13, 2024; Personal photograph, July 20, 2024

One such series of posters, "I am saving gas and electricity," featured a number of designs, each with a central female figure reminding viewers that she was saving fuel, even at her own personal expense. One such poster features a housewife drinking tea and facing forward as if she is directly addressing viewers. Playing on words, she notes that she is "saving gas and electricity," even though cutting back her usage is "not exactly [her] cup of tea."[100] Another poster in the series features a young mother, dressed nicely with curled hair and lipstick, noting

[100] "It's not exactly my cup of tea" poster, INF 13/299 (16), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.

that while "a baby makes it harder," she too manages to save gas and electricity.[101] A third poster in the series features a woman in a floral apron holding a teddy bear under her arm, noting that though she "never thought it possible," she does save electricity and gas.[102] Yet another poster features a housewife washing dishes, similarly fashionable in lipstick and styled hair, remarking that while she "must have SOME hot water," she still saves gas and electricity.[103] Each poster in this series ends with a large reminder in capital letters to "watch your meters."

Personal photographs, July 13, 2024

This series emphasizes the role ordinary housewives played in the war effort and campaign to save fuel. Limiting energy use in the home for cooking, cleaning, and heating was of great importance to the Ministry of Fuel and Power, and the demographic responsible for ensuring this energy conservation was housewives. For this reason, they were specifically targeted with propaganda from the Ministry.

Another Ministry of Fuel and Power poster campaign aimed at housewives used photographs of real women doing household chores, with a red brick background designed to

[101] "A baby makes it harder" poster, INF 13/299 (29), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[102] "I never thought it possible" poster, INF 13/299 (30), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[103] "I must have SOME hot water" poster, INF 13/299 (31), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.

look like a house. The top of each poster in this series reminds women to "save fuel" during daily tasks, such as "when ironing," "on bath night," "at the sink," "at tea-time," "at breakfast-time," and "in the living-room."[104] At the bottom, each featured the image of a piece of coal, as well as more detailed instructions such as "sift your cinders and use again" and "never iron woollies, socks or towels."

Personal photographs, July 13, 2024

Another method of saving fuel introduced during the war was to diversify the types of fuel which one used. Though the Ministry of Fuel and Power made an effort to explain to consumers that "gas & electricity both come from coal" and therefore had all fuels to be conserved, they also emphasized the importance of alternating between different types of fuel usage.[105] One poster advertised "alternative fuels for domestic consumers" in large capital letters, noting that large coal was in heavy demand for "essential war purposes" and therefore

[104] Household tasks "save fuel" poster series, INF 13/299 (27, 33, 35, 26, 38, 39), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[105] "The fuel situation and you!" poster issued by the Ministry of Fuel and Power, INF 13/146 (45), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.

households would need to take different sizes and qualities of coal that could then be mixed with "ordinary coal".[106] The poster stated that "at least 10 per cent. of [one's] coal requirements" should be taken in alternative fuels, and that coal merchants could advise consumers on how to best mix fuels. A similar pamphlet, featuring the image of an aproned housewife, noted that while consumers "must economize" in the use of all fuels, "the biggest saving must be made on raw coal."[107] According to an April 1943 Ministry of Information Home Intelligence Special Report, this desired reduction in domestic coal use did occur: the amount of coal in all forms delivered to domestic consumers fell from 19,208,600 tons in the second half of 1941 to 17,840,900 tons in the second half of 1942, a decrease of 1,367,700 tons or just over seven percent.[108]

Like the Ministry of Food, the Ministry of Fuel and Power also utilized the radio in their propaganda efforts. While no other ministry's radio propaganda could compare with that of *The Kitchen Front*, the Ministry of Fuel and Power's 1942 Fuel Economy Campaign included "Fuel Flashes" broadcasts directly after the six o'clock news on the BBC, and a weekly broadcast titled "How to Save Fuel."[109] Another weekly program was "Fuel Discussions," where a broadcaster spoke about fuel with groups of housewives from around the United Kingdom.[110] These "Fuel Discussions" broadcasts specifically targeted women, to both encourage them to save fuel in domestic tasks and to help adapt to fuel restrictions.

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[106] "Alternative fuels for domestic consumers" poster issued by the Ministry of Fuel and Power, INF 13/146 (53), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[107] "Save fuel for battle" leaflet
[108] Ministry of Information, "Home Intelligence Special Report No. 43: Secret: The Effect of Publicity in Reducing Domestic Fuel Consumption," April 12, 1943. MOI Digital, Accessed March 13, 2025. https://moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/home-intelligence-special-report-inf-1-293/idm140465679720048/
[109] Ministry of Information, "Home Intelligence Special Report No. 29: The Fuel Economy Campaign" August 27, 1942. MOI Digital, Accessed March 13, 2025. https://moidigital.ac.uk/reports/home-intelligence-reports/home-intelligence-special-report-inf-1-293/idm140465679837328/
[110] Nicholas, *The Echo of War*, 87

Anne Jane Walker Shepperd, a housewife in London during the war, noted in her diary one day during the Blitz in late 1940 that "gas [was] so poor" that week that "little cooking" could be done if "more [did] not come thro" (sic).[111] To compensate, her husband bought her a "good electric kettle," which she celebrated in her diary as a "real boon".[112] In addition to allowing Anne to boil water when gas was difficult to come by, electric kettles helped save fuel overall, something the government noted in their pamphlets, such as one which informed the public that using electric kettles was "more economical" than boiling in "ordinary kettles."[113] While the electric kettle helped with boiling water, however, it didn't solve all of the domestic issues of having limited gas. Anne noted in a later entry that she didn't dare try to make a cake, as the "gas [was] not good enough to risk that," and the ingredients would be wasted if the cake couldn't be cooked, a particular worry as cake ingredients were heavily rationed. Anne, who was in her late sixties in 1940, spent most of her time during the war doing household duties and participating in women's meetings with her church, both of which were frequently interrupted by sirens and bombings.

Wartime scarcity also prompted a governmental salvage campaign for rags, paper, bones, and tin, all of which were needed for the war effort. Rags were used to make maps, uniforms, blankets, and gun-wadding, while paper was needed for cartridges, first aid supplies, and mortar shell carriers, among other uses.[114] Bones were turned into animal feed, fertilizer, glue, and glycerin for explosives, and tin was needed to package military food rations and to make vehicle parts.[115] As housewives took care of their households, they were often the target of salvage

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[111] Shepperd, Anne Jane Walker. "Mother's Diary during Blitz 1940." Published by Alexander Street, 2004. https://search-alexanderstreet-com.proxy.library.emory.edu/view/work/bibliographic_entity|bibliographic_details|4193211.
[112] Ibid.
[113] "Save fuel for battle" leaflet
[114] "Save every scrap for more munitions" poster, INF 13/148 (12), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[115] Ibid.

campaign propaganda by the Board of Trade. One salvage poster shows a giant human-like character made of scrap paper, calling through a megaphone for more waste paper, and a much smaller housewife looking up at him as she delivers an armload of the needed paper.[116] Another poster is divided into four quadrants, each showing a smiling, make-up wearing, blonde housewife dumping a trail of a specific salvage material: metal, paper, rubber, and bones, respectively.[117] A separate series of salvage posters, each featuring the same cartoon woman wearing a blue blouse, black skirt, and high-heeled shoes, gives advice on "where to look" for salvage in the home and "what to do" to prepare it for collection, with another poster in the series noting that clean or dirty, in regards to rags "all are wanted".[118]

Personal photographs, July 23, 2024

[116] "Waste paper still wanted" poster, INF 13/148 (2), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[117] Salvage poster, INF 13/148 (22), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[118] "Clean rags - Dirty rags," "What to do," and "Where to look" posters, Art.IWM PST 14753-55, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/32254

These salvage posters all specifically targeted women, who were of particular importance due to their housekeeping duties naturally creating bones, rags, and paper for salvage. In 1942, the Ministry of Information surveyed 3078 housewives about their salvage habits, hoping to learn how to further encourage salvage among women and to make the collecting process more efficient.[119] In the survey report, the Ministry wrote that "the housewife is the member of the family who takes the greatest interest in salvage," and found that while their propaganda was functioning as intended to motivate salvage collection, uneven emphasis on certain resources had led to some salvage sources being disregarded. An analysis of salvage campaigns showed a disproportionate focus on paper, food waste, and metal, which was reflected in their collection by over 70% of housewives surveyed. Meanwhile rags and rubber, which the Ministry believed had been "neglected" in the propaganda campaign, were collected by less than ten percent. While this survey and analysis gave the Board of Trade insight into how to restructure their propaganda, it also highlighted practical issues in salvage collection by showing how mismanagement in the actual collection process was discouraging housewives.

One housewife interviewed in the survey stated that the system "wants re-organizing," while another lamented that she had "no place in the house to keep things," and wished "they'd collect [salvage] more often".[120] Another housewife complained that she had "no means of finding out" whether her salvage was actually being put to good use. This feedback from housewives allowed the government to restructure their approach to salvage collecting, in terms of both the propaganda encouraging it and the collection itself. Their choice to specifically interview housewives for the survey shows their importance to the salvage campaign.

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[119] "Salvage: An inquiry into the salvage habits of 3078 housewives in March 1942," March 1942, RG23/9B, Government Social Survey Department: Social Survey: Reports and Papers. The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[120] Ibid.

Joan Strange, who was in her late thirties when the Second World War broke out, noted in June 1940 in her wartime diary that "housewives (good ones!) keep all their rubbish in orderly consignments" so that it could be used for salvage.[121] Her witty interjection about "good" housewives shows how the salvage campaigns not only had an impact on the general public, but also reshaped ideas of what it meant to be a good housewife - regardless of whether those ideas were accepted or viewed with slight skepticism or humor as in the case of Miss Strange. Miss Strange, a medical masseuse living in Sussex, also noted in her diary how "typical newspaper 'posters' in wartime" encouraged salvage-collecting behavior.[122]

In addition to salvage collection, the Board of Trade was greatly invested in housewives' actions relating to the procurement and care of clothing and household linens. The Board of Trade was responsible for commerce and industry, including consumer goods, and with textiles being a key part of the British economy, they kept a close eye on cloth product usage.[123] As with food and fuel, "resupply by sea was increasingly difficult" for consumer goods, and clothing imports dropped drastically.[124] Quotas were introduced for the domestic textile industry in September 1940 to increase production, but as the products were needed in large quantities for the military, to replace civilians' clothing destroyed in bomb raids, and as a significant percentage of British exports, there were still clothing shortages even with the quotas in place.[125] The industry was also hampered by an exodus of textile workers to the armed services and

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[121] Strange, Joan C. "The Second World War Diaries of Miss J.C. Strange," 1939-1945. Published by Alexander Street, 2005. https://search-alexanderstreet-com.proxy.library.emory.edu/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C4237867#page/1/mode/1/chapter/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4237917

[122] Ibid.

[123] David Clayton, "Buy British: The Collective Marketing of Cotton Textiles, 1956-1962," *Textile history* 41, no. 2 (2010): 217-235

[124] Rachel Maines, "Wartime Allocation of Textile and Apparel Resources: Emergency Policy in the Twentieth Century," *The Public Historian* 7, no. 1 (1985): 29-51. https://doi.org/10.2307/3377298.

[125] Ibid.

munitions manufacturing jobs. For this reason, civilian rations on textiles and clothing were introduced in June 1941.[126]

To further lessen the strain on the textile industry, the Board of Trade encouraged women to make existing clothing and linens last as long as possible through good washing practices, careful use, and skilled mending and tailoring. The "Make-Do and Mend" campaign, launched in Fall 1942, included posters, pamphlets, and even in-person advice centers where women could receive help with sewing projects in order to encourage repairing, resizing, and repurposing clothes and linens rather than making or buying new. The "Mrs. Sew-and-Sew" character, an apron-clad ragdoll cartoon, appeared on many of these items, including signs for the advice centers.[127] Pamphlets attributed to the fictional housewife Mrs. Sew-and-Sew such as "How to Patch a Shirt," "The ABC of Making Buttonholes," "How to Reinforce for Extra Wear," and "Hints of Renovating and Recutting!" provided simple step-by-step instructions and corresponding illustrations for various sewing projects.[128] Other pamphlets gave advice on "what mothers can do to save buying new" and declared "every woman her own clothes doctor."[129]

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[126] Ibid.
[127] "Advice Centre" banner, INF 13/144 (17), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[128] "How to Patch a Shirt," "The ABC of Making Buttonholes," "How to Reinforce for Extra Wear," and "Hints of Renovating and Recutting!" leaflets, INF 13/145 (19), INF 13/145 (11), INF 13/145 (14), INF 13/145 (6), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[129] "Make do and Mend Leaflet No. 4: What mothers can do to save buying new" leaflet issued by the Board of Trade, INF 13/145 (27), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.; "Make do and Mend Leaflet No. 8: Every woman her own clothes doctor" leaflet issued by the Board of Trade, INF 13/145 (22), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.

Personal photograph, July 20, 2024

The Board of Trade also organized clothing and shoe exchanges, particularly of children's apparel as growing children required new clothes more often than adults. Partnering with the Women's Voluntary Service for Civil Defence, or WVS, they appealed to mothers to bring clothes that were "clean and in good condition" to exchange.[130] Founded in 1938 by philanthropist Lady Reading, the WVS was a women's organization which helped with civil issues throughout the war, such as to help civilians during and after Nazi air raids, and to evacuate and care for displaced children.[131] In partnership with the government, it was primarily run by wealthy landed women who had previous experience with charity work, though its large membership crossed class divides.

In addition to children's clothing exchanges with the WVS, the Board of Trade also encouraged women to go through their own closets to find clothes to mend or exchange.[132]

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[130] "Children's shoe and clothing exchange" poster issued by the Board of Trade, Art.IWM PST 14952, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/32386
[131] Jill Stephenson, "The Home Front in 'Total War': Women in Germany and Britain in the Second World War," in *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937–1945*, ed. Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Bernd Greiner. (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 220
[132] "Go through your wardrobe" poster, INF 13/144 (1), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.

Overall, women's actions in taking care of their households was of the utmost importance to the British government during World War II, leading a large amount of propaganda to be directed at housewives.

Chapter Three • Motherhood and Caregiving

In addition to taking care of the home, caring for children was another traditional aspect of British femininity. In her article "Women's Rights, Women's Obligations: Contradictions of Citizenship in World War II Britain," Sonya O. Rose notes that "British women were understood to be…wives and mothers first, and citizens of the nation second."[133] For this reason, caring for children and raising the next generation of Britons was seen as the hallmark of good citizenship for women. The centrality of this role was both challenged and strengthened during the war: within the larger population of British women on the home front, there was a sharp divide between the expectations placed on urban and rural women. While urban mothers were encouraged to send their children away as part of the evacuation program, propaganda appealed to rural women to welcome these evacuees into their homes.

Under the threat and later the reality of Nazi bombardment, the Ministry of Health worked to evacuate children from large cities, the targets of devastating aerial raids. Evacuations began on September 1, 1939, two days before Britain declared war on Germany.[134] The government knew immediate retaliation was possible, and therefore wanted to evacuate children and mothers with infants as quickly as possible. However, these evacuations were entirely voluntary, and many parents were hesitant to send their children away without them, and new

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[133] Sonya O. Rose, "Women's Rights, Women's Obligations: Contradictions of Citizenship in World War II Britain," European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire 7, no. 2 (2000): 277-89. doi:10.1080/713666747.

[134] Niko Gartner, "Administering 'Operation Pied Piper' - How the London County Council Prepared for the Evacuation of Its Schoolchildren 1938-1939," *Journal of educational administration and history* 42, no. 1 (2010): 17-32.

mothers reluctant to leave their homes and husbands. Preparing in 1938 for the possibility of war and need for evacuations, a group of London planners wrote that "the real difficulty" would not be the practical elements of moving large numbers of children, but rather "would lie in educating both those who would have to part with their children and those whom one would hope to persuade to receive those children."[135] For this reason, the government turned to propaganda to encourage participation in their evacuation plan.

One series of posters encouraging evacuation contained a photograph of two children, with a boy placing his hands protectively on a younger girl's shoulders. The boy stares forward, a blank look on his face, while the girl looks to the side, also with a serious expression, indicating the trauma associated with keeping children in large cities during the war. Multiple posters were made with this photograph on a blue background, featuring captions such as "Mothers - send them out of London" and "Mothers let them go," all finished with the instruction to "give them a chance of greater safety and health" by sending them away.[136]

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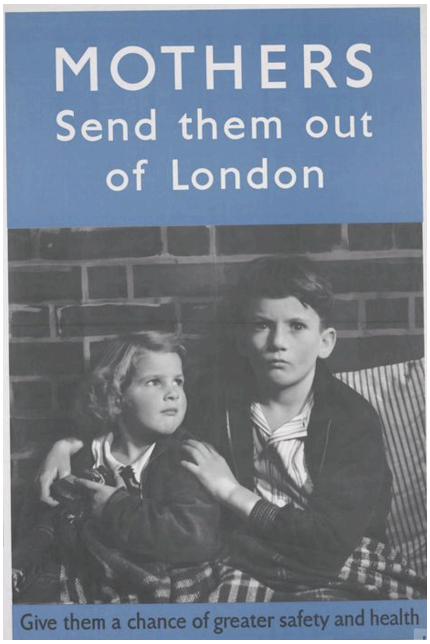
[135] Ibid.

[136] "Mothers - send them out of London" poster, Art.IWM PST 15104, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/32476; "Mothers - send them out of London poster 2, Art.IWM PST 8233, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/29086; "Mothers let them go" poster, c. 1939-1940, WWP 9/1/1, Manuscripts and Special Collections, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, United Kingdom.



Personal photograph, July 13, 2024

When bombing began, there was great risk to children who stayed in cities. Over the course of the Blitz, over 43,000 British civilians were killed in bombings and many others injured, as well as millions of people made homeless.[137] The Imperial War Museums report that 7,736 children were killed throughout the Blitz, and 7,622 more seriously wounded, as well as countless children who were orphaned or otherwise lost family members.[138] Anne Jane Walker Shepperd described a tragic case in her diary, writing how a woman who had been coming by once a week to help with housekeeping had been hospitalized with a concussion after an air raid, with her "two children 10 & 12 yrs" (sic) also "seriously injured" and hospitalized and, worst of all, her husband "blown away…beyond recognition."[139] The experience of this working-class family, the father killed and mother and children hospitalized with serious injuries, serves as an example of what the British government feared would occur to their population.

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[137] Stephenson, "The Home Front in 'Total War,'" 217
[138] "Growing Up in the Second World War," Imperial War Museums, Accessed March 13, 2025. https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/growing-up-in-the-second-world-war#:~:text=During%20the%20Blitz%207%2C736%20children,were%20involved%20in%20relief%20efforts.
[139] Shepperd, Anne Jane Walker. "Mother's Diary during Blitz 1940."

Anne Shepperd's own granddaughter, Jean, who was 11 years old, had been evacuated from London, while her parents, Anne's daughter Ivy and son-in-law Victor, remained in the city along with Anne and her husband Will. Anne described in her diary a "very comforting letter from Jean's foster mother," which stated that the girl was happy and having fun with her foster family's young children, "keep[ing] them amused" and "help[ing] in many little ways."[140] While Anne doesn't explain her daughter and son-in-law's thought process in sending Jean away from the city, it is clear that the parents were convinced by the government's messaging that the countryside was safer for children. This belief was likely reinforced by their daily experiences during the Blitz: Anne describes in her diary constant sirens and bombings in their London neighborhood, with many neighbors' houses destroyed and people injured or killed.

While evacuation posters directed more broadly at parents existed, many specifically featured mothers as their targets. This may have been due partially to the large number of fathers who were in the armed forces overseas, removing them from most decision-making surrounding their children. However, it also emphasizes the mother's role as the primary caregiver for children, and as the parent more likely to need convincing to send her children away without her.

This power of mothers to be the deciding factor in whether or not their children were evacuated was yet another reason why the cooperation of housewives was so critical to the British government. Keeping the nation's children alive and as unscarred as possible – both physically and psychologically – was of the utmost importance for the country's future. At the time, scholars believed the trauma associated with the hunger, violence, and destruction during the First World War had led to a generation of damaged people on the European continent. A 1941 article in the British Medical Journal described the fear of "neurosis and social delinquency…on a large scale" after the war as a result of "war strain" in children, although it

[140] Ibid.

noted that mental health difficulties were also seen amongst evacuated children struggling with separation from their mothers.[141] The psychological impact of the Blitz on children was reflected in one 1942 school essay assignment in Hull, which had been heavily bombed. In the assignment, a class of ten-to-twelve year old girls were tasked to write an essay titled "What Happened to Me and What I Did in the Air Raids."[142] One student, Winifred Stubbins, wrote about how people were "fainting, screaming and crying" during raids for a 1942 school essay assignment, and how she "lay on the floor and prayed for help," while her classmate Sheila Stothard wrote how her family "thought every minute was our last."[143] Another student, Hilda Chalk, wrote how she "felt too sick and ill to do anything", while classmate Enid Billany described her terror at any sound of airplanes.[144] The potential for this lasting mental trauma among youth greatly concerned the British government.

In the same vein, Lord Woolton himself, Minister of Food, gave an address on feeding children in wartime in which he noted the "abnormalities" and "mental twist" seen in the "rising generation" on the Continent who went hungry as children during World War I.[145] With the future of the nation seemingly on the line, the government had to convince mothers to support their evacuation plan.

Propaganda posters were also posted to discourage mothers from bringing their evacuated children back to London. The period from the declaration of war in September 1939 until April 1940 was unexpectedly peaceful for the British, earning it the title the "Phoney War" or "Bore

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[141] "War Strain in Children." *The British Medical Journal* 1, no. 4177 (1941): 124.
[142] J. Greenhalgh, "'Till We Hear the Last All Clear': Gender and the Presentation of Self in Young Girls' Writing about the Bombing of Hull during the Second World War," *Gender & History*, 26 (2014): 167. https://doi-org.proxy.library.emory.edu/10.1111/1468-0424.12057.
[143] Ibid., 172
[144] Ibid.
[145] "Feeding of Infants in Wartime: Address by Lord Woolton." *The British Medical Journal* 2, no. 4253 (1942): 50.

War."[146] By the start of December 1939, about a third of evacuated school children had returned to their homes, and by January 1940, that number had risen to almost half of evacuated children.[147]

One poster discouraging return, "Don't do it mother," features a ghostlike Hitler whispering "Take them back!" repeatedly in a mother's ear, indicating that bringing one's children back to their home in the city would help the enemy.[148] As motherhood was a key aspect of traditional British womanhood, posters such as these indicate the way World War II led the government to promote different ideals for women based on wartime needs. This propaganda challenged traditional feminine roles by encouraging women to send their children away without them, while simultaneously solidifying the idea of women as the primary caregivers to their children.

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[146] Joel Morley, "The Memory of the Great War and Morale during Britain's Phoney War," *The Historical journal* 63, no. 2 (2020): 437-467.
[147] Daniel Todman, *Britain's War: Into Battle, 1937-1941* (Oxford University Press, 2016)
[148] "Don't do it Mother. Leave the children where they are," c. 1939-1940, WWP 9/1/3, Manuscripts and Special Collections, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, United Kingdom.

While urban women were encouraged to send their children away without them, rural women were encouraged to welcome the young evacuees into their homes. The tagline "caring for evacuees is a national service" became commonplace, appearing on a variety of posters and newspaper ads. In making caring for evacuated children a womanly form of wartime duty, posters said of caregivers, "she's in the ranks too!" Posters proclaimed "the soldier" "says thank you" to those taking in evacuees, showing that even those putting their lives on the line for Britain were impressed by the caregivers' actions.[149] Propaganda campaigns calling for rural caregivers specifically targeted women, highlighting the place traditional gender roles continued to hold throughout the war. Posters reading "women wanted to help the children" and "women wanted for evacuation service" went up in rural areas, showing smiling women greeting and caring for evacuated youth.[150] One such poster went as far as to remind readers that "all women love children and like to help them."[151] This reinforcement of traditional gender roles for rural women counters the ideas put forward by scholars such as Arthur Marwick that World War II led to a complete overhaul of traditional gender roles in Britain.[152]

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[149] "Thank you says the soldier" poster issued by the Ministry of Health, Art.IWM PST 15091, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/32466
[150] "Women wanted to help the children" poster, Art.IWM PST 8237, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/17603; "Women wanted for evacuation service" poster, Art.IWM PST 5873, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/17601
[151] Ibid.
[152] Marwick, War and Social Change

Image: IWM (Art.IWM PST 8237), reproduced with permission for non-commercial research from the Imperial War Museums

While many women did come forward to help evacuated children, there were sharp class and rural versus urban divides that caused difficulty in the process. Kate Phipps, a nurse who was originally from Canada but whose family had moved to England before the war, noted that many evacuees in the rural Yorkshire town where her mother lived were "problem children who wet the bed, use bad language and wont (sic) settle down."[153] The influx of urban children, who had arrived "in full force," had made the local school "grossly overcrowded," she wrote, and that schoolteachers said the local children were being "contaminated (morally as well as verminously)" by the evacuees.[154] Phipps, who was nursing in London at the start of the war and only occasionally in the town where her mother lived, did note that she felt people may have been exaggerating the issues. "There has always been a certain amount of misunderstanding, shall we say, between 'town' and 'country'," she wrote.

[153] Phipps, "The Second World War Diary of Kate Phipps,"
[154] Ibid.

Phipps' nuanced opinion of the evacuees – as troublesome and overwhelming in number, but also misunderstood and pitiful – was further complicated by her agreement with the government that the children were far safer in small towns than in cities. Her own niece and nephew had been sent to stay with family in Canada.[155] And during an October 1939 visit to her mother's town during the so-called Phoney War, she derided "the mums who arrive to take their chicks home to danger areas regardless of advice."[156] Later, during a visit after the Blitz had begun, Phipps noted that she "personally found [the evacuees] rather cute," and that she was "sure it [was] good for them to be brought up in the country instead of in the slums," though she had "no doubt" they were very troublesome for their teacher. She was horrified by their lack of education, noting an incident in her diary in which one of the boys staying with her mother asked Phipps what country was directly across the sea from England, and when she asked him to guess, he believed it was New Zealand.[157]

This complex opinion reflected many citizens' perspective towards evacuation, and highlighted the challenges the government faced not only from reluctant mothers and potential foster parents, but from the public at large, who may have agreed with the government's reasoning but balked at the realities of evacuation, especially the cultural clash between urban and rural society and distinct social classes. However, an effect of these tensions was that rural women were seen as making increased personal sacrifices for the war effort by continuing to care for "difficult" children. This supported the idea of women as being heroic through their unceasing maternal care, a theme which the government integrated into its messaging on evacuation.

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[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.
[157] Ibid.

While this emphasis on helping evacuated children as a form of heroism fits into the larger trend in British homefront propaganda of feminizing women's contributions to the war effort, it also fits into scientific ideals of the time. Dr. M.B. Wright, a respected British physician, stated in a lecture in early 1939 that women "would stand stress and danger just as well if not better" than men during wartime, however they would need "an outlet for their maternal instincts."[158] This was the case for Phipps' mother, who took in evacuees, and her friend Griselda, who felt "like she [was] doing something in the War" by helping with evacuated children.[159] By encouraging rural women to take in evacuated children, the British government was both protecting urban children from the physical and mental dangers of the Blitz, and providing an opportunity for women to serve their country in a way they believed was particularly suitable.

There were also financial incentives for women who became foster mothers, though the payment amount and source of the funds were frequently debated. In 1938, while planning for the possible evacuation of children should war break out, London planners considered making evacuees' parents contribute at least some fraction of the cost of their children's care.[160] However, they decided that a fee would not only deter parents from evacuating their children, but would also be difficult to collect. Similarly, they decided that offering the evacuation service for free would be better for morale and faith in the government. At the time, the existing government rate for public assistance children was ten shillings and six pence per week.[161] The working committee of London planners recommended a higher payment for wartime foster parents "to attract a sufficient and early response," however later payments remained the same as the

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[158] "Neuroses in War-Time." *The British Medical Journal* 1, no. 4072 (1939): 126-28.
[159] Phipps, "The Second World War Diary of Kate Phipps"
[160] Gartner, "Administering 'Operation Pied Piper,'" 23
[161] Ibid.

original stipend for public assistance children. The London committee's recommendations were incorporated into the official report of Sir John Anderson's committee on evacuation, which took evidence from the Air Ministry, Board of Education, Health Departments, the Ministry of Labour, and the Home Office in order to create a report detailing "the various aspects of the problem of transferring persons from areas which would be likely, in time of war, to be exposed to aerial bombardment."[162] The Anderson committee completed its report in July 1938, proposing that evacuation should not be compulsory, that the government should bear the initial costs of evacuation, and that schools should be evacuated together under the care of the teachers.[163] When war broke out in September 1939, the committee's plans were put into action.

In addition to helping evacuated children, British women were encouraged to become "home helps" during the war. Home helps provided essential services to those struggling during the war – mothers of many children whose husbands were fighting overseas, for example, or elderly couples who could no longer manage their own shopping or housekeeping. A pamphlet highlighting this "crying need for emergency home helps" stated it was "calling all women" to help the cause, even those with domestic responsibilities of their own.[164] The pamphlet noted that women could still volunteer even if they could "give the time only while [their] children [were] away at school."[165] Being a home help, according to the pamphlet, was a "valuable contribution to the War effort" and those in the role "serve[d] their community and their country."[166]

Women's historic role as the caretaker of the home and family can be seen through this emphasis placed on their participation in the war effort's "domestic front," and move next into other historically feminine roles such as home helps, rather than being called immediately into

[162] Richard Morris Titmuss, *Problems of Social Policy* (HMSO, 1950), 27
[163] Ibid., 28
[164] "There's a crying need" pamphlet, INF 13/215 (12), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.

professional industrial, agricultural, and military roles, which were traditionally seen as the hallmarks of good citizenship for men. However, as the war continued, the need for labor increased and women moved into industrial and defense roles at a greater rate. This movement required a shift in public ideas of what was acceptable for women, which the government accomplished through propaganda.

Chapter Four • Industry, Armed Services, and Civil Defense

As the war went on, British women were encouraged to join the armed services and industrial and agricultural workforces. Originally, this was purely voluntary, and propaganda urged women to take jobs of their own volition for the war effort. However, in December 1941, a National Service Act was passed which included conscription for young, single women.[167] It soon expanded to include older women and childless married women and widows. By September 1943, approximately 7,258,000 British women were engaged in national service of some kind, including 80% of childless married women aged between 18 and 40.[168]

Working-class women had historically worked outside their own homes in Britain, often as cooks, maids, and in other domestic servitude roles. In some regions, women also played a large role in the textile industry.[169] Many women of various classes and ages, however, entered the workforce during World War I. Exact numbers are unknown, and many scholars have taken issue with the Board of Trade's 1918 calculation of 3,276,000 female workers in 1914 growing to 4,935,000 in 1918.[170] However, while there is significant disagreement about the total number of working women at the start and end of World War I, both the British government and most

[167] Smith, "The Womanpower Problem," 934
[168] Ibid.
[169] Alan G.V. Simmonds, *Britain and World War One*. 1st ed (Routledge, 2012), 129
[170] Ibid.

scholars agree that there was an increase of between 1.3 and 1.7 million working women during the war years.[171] In addition to industrial and commercial jobs, the Women's Land Army (WLA), which did agricultural work in place of men who were fighting overseas, peaked at around 16,000 members in World War I, while the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (later called Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps) had approximately 9,000 members serving non-combat jobs in France.[172] The Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS or WRENS), formed in November 1917, and Women's Royal Air Force, formed April 1918, also recruited women during World War I, but had significantly smaller numbers than in World War II.[173] While the WRENS maintained their name during the Second World War, the Women's Royal Air Force was recreated as the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF). Though women moved into the workforce and armed services in large numbers during The First World War, the Second World War involved greater mobilization of British women than ever before.

With large numbers of able-bodied men away at war, much of the civil defense, industrial labor, and agricultural work on the home front fell to women, including housewives. Not only young, unmarried women were expected to participate, but mothers and older married women as well. To recruit women to civil defense, posters featuring the face of a middle-aged woman declared "Housewives! WVS needs your help!" and advised that "even if tied to your home you can help the wardens and your neighbours."[174]

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[171] Ibid., 130
[172] Ibid., 153
[173] "The Vital Role of Women in the First World War," Imperial War Museums, Accessed March 13, 2025, https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-vital-role-of-women-in-the-first-world-war
[174] "WVS needs your help" poster, Art.IWM PST 19869, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/35418

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Due to the growing need for women's participation in the armed services and labor force, propaganda to encourage them to join up also increased as the war went on.[175] Though the call-up was mandatory, it was important for morale and social stability for women to enjoy or at least understand the necessity of their wartime work. Janet Quigley noted in February 1942 her belief that "no single factor [was] at the present moment more important than getting the call-up of women to run efficiently and happily," and that the BBC needed to do more in terms of "reaching and influencing women."[176] This was despite an existing program Quigley produced for women in the armed services, *Women at War*, which had begun broadcasting in October 1941, as well as *The Kitchen Front* programming for housewives. By early 1943, a new program aimed at women, *Women's Page,* was being planned at the BBC.[177]

One organization in which many women joined as part of the national call-up was the Auxiliary Territorial Service, or ATS. The ATS was the women's branch of the British army, and

[175] Briggs, "Sounds of War"
[176] Ibid.
[177] Ibid.

ATS women held roles both behind-the-scenes and in active roles such as in anti-aircraft batteries.[178] Many posters emphasized these behind-the-scenes roles, such as one which encouraged women to join the ATS and "cook for the troops."[179] Another praised the "skilled ATS bakers" who provided fresh bread for soldiers.[180] Others showed glamorous women in ATS uniforms, such as one poster reminiscent of a Bette Davis film poster, featuring a woman in profile, with bright red lipstick, perfectly-styled short blonde hair, and eye makeup, which became known as the "Blonde Bombshell" poster.[181]

Image: IWM (Art.IWM PST 4718), reproduced with permission for non-commercial research from the Imperial War Museums

While many posters showed women from the shoulders-up, those with full-body drawings usually showed the uniforms with a well-cinched waist, emphasizing the feminine

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[178] "The Vital Role of Women in the Second World War," Imperial War Museums, Accessed March 13, 2025, https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-vital-role-of-women-in-the-second-world-war
[179] "ATS - Cook for the troops," poster, Art.IWM PST 14532, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/32106
[180] "ATS - In the bakeries" poster, Art.IWM PST 14533, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/32107
[181] "Join the ATS" poster, Art.IWM PST 4718, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/10404

figure, and some of the uniforms pictured consisted of skirts rather than pants.[182] The women wear lipstick in nearly every poster for the ATS. Even a poster aimed at the broader category of "women in the armed forces," advising those already in the military of grants available to them, shows three women's heads in different uniform caps (representing the WRENS, ATS, and WAAF respectively), each with bright red lipstick, blue eyeshadow, and heavily mascara-ed eyes.[183] In addition to visual media, the BBC *Women at War* radio broadcast also included a segment called 'Beauty in Battledress.'[184]

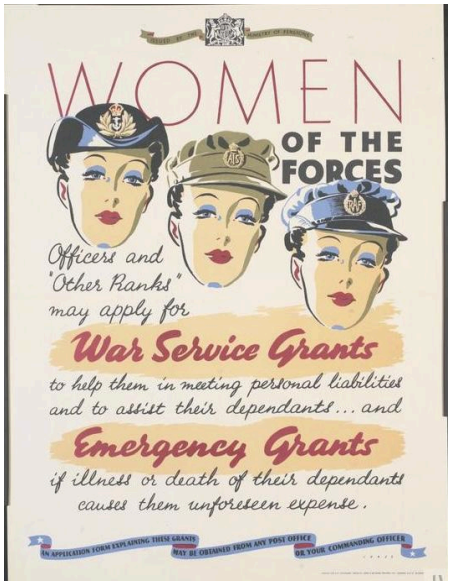

Image: IWM (Art.IWM PST 14539), reproduced with permission for non-commercial research from the Imperial War Museums

These unrealistic depictions of wartime work made traditionally masculine roles appear more feminine. In reality, many women in the ATS did take on traditionally-masculine duties, such as in anti-aircraft crews, and written descriptions of ATS roles acknowledged that

[182] "Women with a will to win!" poster, Art.IWM PST 14542, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/32116; "You can still volunteer" poster, Art.IWM PST 8302, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/29102
[183] "Women of the forces" poster, Art.IWM PST 14539, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/14466
[184] Briggs, "Sounds of War"

"members work[ed] side by side with men in the Army."[185] The "Blonde Bombshell" ATS poster shown above was denounced by female MP Thelma Cazalet-Keir, who saw it as too glamorized and seductive, and it was not reprinted after the original stock was finished.[186] However, much of the advertising for the ATS still emphasized traditionally feminine roles and featured overly-glamorized images, preserving traditional gender ideals even in the recruitment of women into the armed forces.

The perceived value of attractive uniforms was key to those planning women's recruitment. One male Member of Parliament, Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Thomas Moore, stated in a 1941 parliamentary debate that "the ATS are discarding their uniforms for a smarter and more up-to-date one," and he recommended that if women were allowed into the Home Guard – the subject of the contentious debate during which he was speaking – "they must have uniforms" similar to the stylish new ATS ones, which would "add to the pleasure of being a Home Guard."[187] This focus on uniforms was not limited to male officials – many female recruits to the Armed Services cited the uniforms as important to them. One recruit to the WRNS, Peggy Erskine-Tulloch, wrote that her choice of service was "partly influenced by the fact that khaki would have done very little for mousy hair and a sallow complexion," while Iris Lambert, an enlistee of the WAAF, wrote that she chose the branch because of its navy uniform, as "brown didn't suit" her.[188]

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[185] "Government appeal to women" poster issued by the Ministry of Labour and National Service, Art.IWM PST 14535, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/32109

[186] Chloe Ward, "'Something of the Spirit of Stalingrad': British women, their Soviet sisters, propaganda and politics in the Second World War," *Twentieth Century British History*, 25, no. 3 (2014): 435-460.

[187] House of Commons Debate, 18 December 1941. Hansard, UK Parliament, vol. 376, col. 2152-2189. Accessed 15 November 2024.

[188] Jeremy A. Crang, *Sisters in Arms: Women in the British Armed Forces during the Second World War* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 30

The glamorized portrayal of women in traditionally masculine roles - whether it be careers outside the home, helping in agriculture, or simply doing household repairs - was commonplace throughout British Second World War propaganda, regardless of the government branch it came from. However, reactions varied to this propaganda. While some nurses found posters promoting their profession as "very good" and "attractive," a much larger number complained that the posters were "too glamorous" and unrealistic.[189] This was revealed in a 1943 Ministry of Information study which interviewed 490 student nurses in an attempt to gather feedback that could improve recruiting and publicity information about the profession. 63% of student nurses in the study criticized the recruitment posters they had seen, with the overly "rosy" portrayal of nursing being the most common critique.[190] One respondent dismissed the images of "nurses just looking beautiful and holding a thermometer" as "so unreal," while another decried the publicity as "all glamour and no practical facts."[191] This glamorization of women's wartime work – even in a job such as nursing, which had a long history of female employment – reflects the British government's desire to preserve and promote traditional aspects of femininity during the war.

[189] "Recruitment to Nursing: An inquiry into the Attitudes of Student Nurses to their Profession with special reference to the present Recruiting Campaign," October 1943, RG23/52, Government Social Survey Department: Social Survey: Reports and Papers. The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid.

Images: IWM (Art.IWM PST 6389), IWM (Art.IWM PST 14189), and IWM (Art.IWM PST 14561), reproduced with permission for non-commercial research from the Imperial War Museums

The desire to emphasize traditional feminine traits in women doing war work can also be tied to fears at the time of their immorality, and accusations that it was unnatural for them to be in historically masculine roles. In "Women's Rights, Women's Obligations," Rose describes the societal fear of women in war jobs having loose morals, as their roles took them away from their families and often required interacting with men frequently and walking around at night.[192] This fear was exacerbated by the wartime rise in sexually transmitted infections. Alarming numbers, such as a 63% increase in the rate of syphilis among British women by 1941, led the Ministry of Health to launch a robust and highly public campaign to combat the issue, in tandem with health centers offering free and confidential advice and treatment.[193] However, in 1945 the number of first time cases of sexually transmitted infections was nearly double that of 1940.[194] These infections were collectively referred to as "VD," short for venereal diseases, and posters and

[192] Rose, "Women's Rights, Women's Obligations," 286
[193] Bex Lewis and Gary Wanaby, "The Contribution of Posters to the Venereal Disease Campaign in Second World War Britain." Contemporary British History 36, no. 4 (2021): 487-515. doi:10.1080/13619462.2021.1996234.
[194] Smith, *Britain in the Second World War,* 8

radio broadcasts were used to educate the public about them. Though most of the VD posters were aimed at men, some targeted women as well, especially those highlighting the danger of passing venereal disease onto one's children. In addition, many of the posters aimed at men featured women in them, alternatingly shown as the cause or the victim of men's illness. One poster shamed men for infecting their wives with VDs, calling it a "vile crime" against their wives and future children.[195] On the other hand, another poster asked men "what has she got that your girl at home hasn't?" with the answer, simply put: "VD."[196] This poster blamed sexually active, unmarried women – the unidentified "she" – for the spread of venereal diseases.[197]

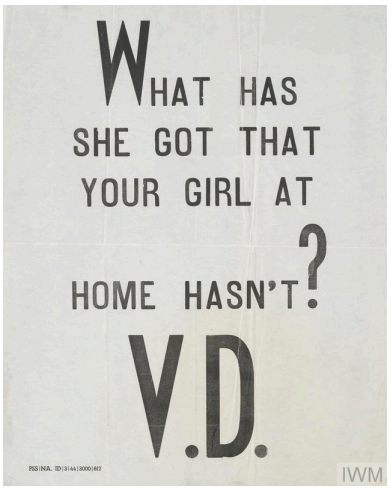

Image: IWM (Art.IWM PST 20184), reproduced with permission for non-commercial research from the Imperial War Museums

The anti-venereal disease campaign involved large posters – some over three feet tall – in heavily-trafficked locations such as rail stations, ensuring the public was well-informed of the

[195] "Here comes the bride" poster distributed by the Ministry of Health, Art.IWM PST 14092, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/19809
[196] "What has she got" poster, Art.IWM PST 20184, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/35640
[197] Ibid.

issue.[198] However, this heightened awareness also led to prejudices towards women workers and concerns over their public participation in the war effort such as those described by Rose.

There was also serious public concern about interactions between young British women on the home front and the many Canadian and American soldiers who passed through the British Isles during the war.[199] Relations among British women and American soldiers were most common, as many British men were away at war, and the healthy young Americans arrived in the British Isles with spending money and access to small luxuries such as chocolates or cosmetics, drawing the attention of young women who had been living under multiple years of shortages and heavy rationing.[200] While relations between British women and any American soldiers were heavily frowned upon, relationships with Black American soldiers caused even greater concern among white Britons.[201] News stories popped up in local papers throughout the war about local women and American soldiers, such as one in the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* in 1943 which described police officers hearing "subdued American voices" and catching "girls… [inside] lorries with men," including "a negro and a girl with their arms round each other."[202] The emphasis on the Black American's race reflects the particular "moral panic" surrounding interracial relations in Britain at the time. As described by Rose, "in the [British] press, virtually the only identifying feature ever supplied about American soldiers was race," which was "usually given only when the soldiers were black."[203] In another incident, a WAAF recruit recalled a lecture during basic training in which an officer "absolutely forbid" the recruits

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[198] "Tomorrow's citizen" poster distributed by the Ministry of Health, Art.IWM PST 14093, Imperial War Museums Online Collections, https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/19810
[199] Stephenson, "The Home Front in 'Total War'"
[200] Ibid., 216
[201] Sonya O. Rose, "Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain," *The American Historical Review* 103, no. 4 (1998): 1152. https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/103.4.1147
[202] Ibid., 1158
[203] Ibid., 1152

from talking to Black American soldiers.[204] However, relationships between white British women and Black American soldiers occurred nonetheless. Home Secretary Herbert Morrison went as far as to state his concern about social issues arising from the "half-caste children" of these relationships.[205] Though rarer, sexual relations between British women and European POWs also occurred in the later war years and similarly caused social outrage.[206] Alongside the rising rates of sexually transmitted infections, these relationships raised concerns about the morals of British women, especially working women who spent more time outside of the home. Criticism came from across British society: the clergy, social and welfare workers, local and national government officials, the military, the press, and private citizens themselves.[207] British army leadership also worried that it was dangerous to British men's morale, to the point that it employed welfare workers specifically to try to discourage the behavior.[208]

The government also worried that the perception of women in the armed services as sexually immoral had a "bad effect on recruitment".[209]

In addition to societal criticisms of working women's supposed sexual immorality, the perspective also existed that working in a physical job, whether agricultural, industrial, or in emergency services, made women more masculine and less maternal. The ATS uniforms were called "defeminising," "drab," and "unglamorous," and cartoons portrayed ATS women as "amazons of gross proportions."[210] As reported in a 1940 edition of the *Land Worker*, one male

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[204] Crang, *Sisters in Arms*, 147
[205] Lucy Bland, "Interracial Relationships and the 'Brown Baby Question': Black GIs, White British Women, and Their Mixed-Race Offspring in World War II," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 26, no. 3 (2017): 424-453.
[206] Stephenson, "The Home Front in 'Total War,'" 216
[207] Rose, "Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation," 1150
[208] Stephenson, "The Home Front in 'Total War,'" 216
[209] Penny Summerfield and Nicole Crockett, "'You Weren't Taught That with the Welding': Lessons in Sexuality in the Second World War." *Women's History Review* 1, no. 3 (1992): 435-54. doi:10.1080/09612029200200015.
[210] Crang, *Sisters in Arms*; Summerfield and Crockett, "'You Weren't Taught That with the Welding,'" 437

employer commented of a "manly" female agricultural worker that "no one can say that yon girl is womanish."[211] Another man wrote into the Leicester Evening Mail in 1943 denouncing the many female war workers who socialized in bars with men after work and "neglect[ed] their first obligation– to their children."[212]

However, figures such as Dr. Edith Summerskill, a female Member of Parliament during the war, publicly disagreed with the judgment levied against women in war jobs, viewing it as an expression of long-standing antagonism to women in public spheres.[213] As described by Sharon Thompson, Dr. Summerskill was a "doctor, politician, and feminist activist at a time when women were (only just) allowed to participate in public life."[214] She became an MP in 1938, and went on to later become one of the first female life peers in 1961, when she moved into the House of Lords. She was a member of the Labour party, and identified as a socialist. She took a large interest in women's concerns, particularly the rights of married women and mothers. While many feminists of the time sought to challenge marriage as an institution, Dr. Summerskill rather advocated for equality within marriages.[215] Unlike most female MPs at the time – though there were only fifteen – she was married with multiple children, and often stated that her family came before her career. She was a strong advocate for birth control, abortion law reform, and better maternal healthcare, as well as equality in the workplace.[216] Her beliefs – and her tendency to "express her views forcefully" – made her a controversial politician.[217] For example, birth control was not part of the Labour Party platform, as the party had a significant number of Catholic

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[211] Rose, "Women's Rights, Women's Obligations," 280
[212] Ibid., 286
[213] Summerfield and Crockett, "'You Weren't Taught That with the Welding,'" 438
[214] Sharon Thompson, "Edith Summerskill: Letters from Deserted Wives." *Women's history review* 32, no. 6 (2023): 843-862.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Penny Summerfield, "'Our Amazonian Colleague': Edith Summerskill's problematic reputation," In *Making Reputations: Power, Persuasion and the Individual in Modern British Politics*, ed. Richard Toye and Julie Gottlieb. (Palgrave Macmillan, I.B. Tauris, 2005)
[217] Ibid.

supporters who disagreed with it, yet Dr. Summerskill advocated for it nonetheless. Her outspoken support for women's rights led Sir James Grigg, the Secretary of State for War, to refer to her in a 1942 letter as his "Amazonian colleague," and at one point tell her directly that he did not "want to hear any more about [her] bloody women."[218] In the post-war years, on a tirade against his women colleagues on the Labour Party's National Executive Committee, MP Ian Mikardo singled Dr. Summerskill out specifically and called her "Medusa the Gorgon."[219]

However, not all of her colleagues felt that way. In the words of Penny Summerfield, Dr. Summerskill "presented herself as the embodiment of feminine modernity," balancing the private and public spheres, and using her different identities – as a politician, medical doctor, wife, and mother – to her political advantage.[220] She frequently used her medical knowledge and authority as a doctor to support her political arguments, such as when explaining in parliament that providing official uniforms to women working in war jobs could not make them less feminine, because femininity came from hormonal secretions, and it was "scientifically impossible and quite unsound to suggest that a uniform, however severely cut, can influence the secretion of the hormones."[221] She also legitimized her authority through her position as a wife and mother, allowing her to speak on behalf of the experiences of women throughout the country. Dr. Summerskill held an essentialist view of gender, and wrote that she believed that women were motivated above all else by the desire to have children.[222] However, this essentialist idea of femininity coexisted with her belief that women should have equal rights as men, despite their inherently different biology and mindset.

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[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid.
[220] Ibid.
[221] Ibid.
[222] Ibid.

Dr. Summerskill also had the habit of using humor and sass with her fellow MPs, furthering her controversial reputation.[223] During the war, she was "the most consistent and determined advocate" of women's participation in the Home Guard among the fifteen female wartime MPs.[224] Promoting that view in a December 1941 debate, she asked "if boys of 16 are now allowed to join the Home Guard, why not have mature women to help the Home Guard" as well?[225] When fellow MP Benjamin Smith questioned "what is a mature woman?", Dr. Summerskill replied "I am sorry the honorable member has never met one. I will take the opportunity of having a word with him after the Debate." In addition to this humorous quip, Dr. Summerskill also argued more practically that "there are women who have certain household responsibilities" but might have a few "odd hours per week which they could devote to the Home Guard," and that she hoped women in their thirties, forties, and fifties could serve a useful purpose in the organization.[226] She also believed that women should be allowed to bear arms in the national service, and be trained to shoot rifles in case of invasion. However, even as a recognized feminist with many controversial beliefs on gender, Dr. Summerskill also maintained her focus on the family and traditional feminine roles, stating that "it would be more in keeping with woman's traditional role as guardian of the home to play her part in the Home Guard of 1941."[227] Also, as a mother, she voiced her concern with boys as young as sixteen being allowed to join, calling it exploitative of young boys' enthusiasm, and noting that her own fourteen-year-old son would certainly join if he were allowed, to his likely detriment. To Dr. Summerskill, it made far more sense for adult women to join the Home Guard than teenage boys. However, she did not see this as a change in their femininity, and she still believed that women

[223] Ibid.
[224] Summerfield and Peniston-Bird, "Women in the Firing Line"
[225] House of Commons Debate, 18 December 1941. Hansard, UK Parliament, vol. 376, col. 2152-2189. Accessed 15 November 2024.
[226] Ibid.
[227] Ibid.

were meant to be mothers, she just believed they could do other things at the same time, unlike many of her male colleagues who saw them as mothers exclusively.[228] It was not until April 1943 that women were allowed into the Home Guard, however, their participation was limited. Only women over 45 could participate, and only in the supporting roles of drivers, cooks, and clerks.[229]

As women's role as caring mothers and promoters of civic virtue were considered the hallmarks of good female citizenship, the allegations of promiscuity among women in war jobs, as well as the perspective that they made women overly masculine, had to be countered to make expanded gender roles socially acceptable. Even Dr. Summerskill, a female Member of Parliament and outspoken supporter of women's rights, particularly the right to bear arms in national service, believed in traditional ideas of femininity, including that all women had the inherent desire to be mothers and caregivers. However, she also believed in equal opportunities in historically masculine spheres, which to her did not necessarily contradict traditional ideas of womanhood. Therefore, traditional ideas of gender could exist alongside the expansion of roles for women, if those roles were shown to fit existing ideas of femininity. For this reason, ministries such as those of Food and Agriculture, and the various branches of the Armed Forces, portrayed in their posters feminine women with cinched waists and make-up as they labored in traditionally-masculine war jobs, in order to show the public that these roles could in fact be feminine.

[228] Summerfield "'Our Amazonian Colleague'"
[229] Ibid.

British Propaganda in Comparison to Other Countries

Being both a total war and a global war, the United Kingdom was not the only country which had to mobilize women on the home front to help with the war effort during World War II. Women in Germany, Japan, the Soviet Union, and the United States were also targeted by propaganda from their respective governments.

In Germany, propaganda targeting women aligned with the Nazi ideology of Aryan Germans as a master race. Propaganda expected women to be maternal, beautiful, and submissive to their husbands, concerned primarily with producing the next generation of ethnically-superior Germans. Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, stated nearly a decade before the war that "the mission of women is to be beautiful and bring children into the world," comparing them to a bird which "pretties herself for her mate and hatches eggs for him."[230] This "ideological chauvinism" which pervaded National Socialism guided Nazi propaganda aimed at women.[231] Like in Britain, German propaganda emphasized traditional feminine roles, and newsreels limited coverage of wartime women to their domestic activities.[232] There was an emphasis on traditional German peasant culture, and propaganda posters frequently featured blonde German women in traditional clothing, smiling with their equally-blonde husbands and children. One such poster, showing a kerchiefed Aryan woman holding an infant with her husband and children beside her, encourages women to turn to their local Nazi Party organization if they are in need of aid.[233] Another poster shows a tall, blonde German woman with Aryan features breastfeeding a blond infant, with the idyllic German countryside in the background.[234] However, while Britain began mobilizing women early in the

[230] David Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema 1933-1945* (Oxford University Press, 1983). 66
[231] David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (Routledge, 1993), 111
[232] Ibid.
[233] Ibid.
[234] Konstantinos D. Karatzas, "The Image of the Ideal German Mother in Nazi Era Posters," *Perichoresis (Oradea)* 22, no. 1 (2024): 77-91.

war, with conscription of single, childless women as early as 1941, it wasn't until 1943, after the Nazis failed to capture Stalingrad, that full mobilization of German society began to take place, including women moving into industrial jobs.[235] Overall, German propaganda like that of Britain emphasized traditional ideas of femininity, however it was deeply rooted in Nazi racial and gender ideology, unlike British propaganda which, while rooted in traditional ideas of gender, did not promote a mandatory national ideology from which citizens were not allowed to deviate.

Meanwhile, Britain's ally the Soviet Union simultaneously both embraced conventional ideas of womanhood in their propaganda and also encouraged non-traditional roles for women, promoting what Karel Berkhoff called an "inconsistent" idea of women and war.[236] As in Germany, the Soviet Union had a strong national ideology – Communism – to which all citizens were expected to adhere. The ideals of Communism included gender equality, and though motherhood was still a central part of Soviet womanhood, women also entered historically masculine spheres. For example, women in the Soviet Union held combat roles during the war, including as snipers, pilots, and machine-gunners, which was not the case for British women. However, they were also expected to be caring mothers and homemakers. This inconsistent ideology included their depiction "as [alternatively] warriors or mothers."[237] The Soviet government promoted female combat heroes such as the sniper Liudmila Pavlichenko, who had over 300 kills and became a prominent public figure in late 1942, being featured in the youth paper *Komsomolskaia pravda* and giving speeches at home front rallies.[238] However, they also promoted vegetable gardens – which Berkhoff compares to the British *Kitchen Front* campaign – and many posters, even those of non-traditionally feminine women, often show them providing

[235] Welch, *The Third Reich*, 111
[236] Karel C Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda during World War II* (Harvard University Press, 2012), 53
[237] Ibid. 231
[238] Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 159

support to men in some way.[239] The fact that the Soviet citizens, particularly women who remained at home while men fought in the army, suffered from direct invasion and occupation by German soldiers also impacted Soviet propaganda. While British women were killed in bombing raids, Soviet women were directly shot, beaten, stabbed, starved, and sexually assaulted by the Nazis moving through their towns and villages. Female partisans and martyrs to the Soviet cause therefore became the subject of significant propaganda. One such female partisan, eighteen-year-old Zoia Kosmodemianskaia, was tortured and hung by German soldiers and soon after was the subject of a front page article in the official Soviet newspaper *Pravda*, a radio broadcast by her grieving mother, and a brochure about her heroism of which 1.5 million copies were distributed.[240] Her story featured in over twenty publications throughout the course of the war.[241]

As Lord Woolton praised British women in his radio speeches, so did Soviet leaders. In May 1944, Stalin gave a Labor Day speech thanking women for their courage and selflessness, saying they were an inspiration to the Red Army as they labored in farms and factories on the home front.[242] Overall, Soviet propaganda promoted a more diverse, and at times contradicting, array of roles and expectations for women than the British government, which reflected their different experiences in the war as combatants and more direct victims of Nazi violence than their British counterparts, as well as Communist ideology surrounding gender equality.

In the United States, there was also a large amount of propaganda targeting women. The iconic Rosie the Riveter poster is the best known example, showing a serious-faced woman in

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[239] Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*, 271; Susan Corbesero, "Femininity (Con)scripted: Female Images in Soviet Wartime Poster Propaganda, 1941-1945," *Aspasia* 4, no. 1 (2010): 103-120. doi:https://doi.org/10.3167/asp.2010.040107.
[240] Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*, 231; Anja Tippner, "Girls in Combat: Zoia Kosmodem'ianskaia and the Image of Young Soviet Wartime Heroines," *The Russian review (Stanford)* 73, no. 3 (2014): 371-388.
[241] Ibid.
[242] Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger*, 231

work clothes with her hair tucked under a bandana, flexing her bicep as she says "We can do it!". The United States entered the war later than the United Kingdom and Soviet Union, but between September 1939 and December 1941 published propaganda encouraging support of their allies the United Kingdom. During this period, the propaganda was not highly divided by gender, as its primary goal was to convince the general public as to why Britain needed American support. In President Roosevelt's January 1941 State of the Union address, he praised "gallant" Britons for defending democracy, promoted Lend-Lease aid, and reminded Americans why their support of Britain was necessary, even if they themselves were not yet at war.[243] He referenced American heroes such as George Washington and appealed to patriotism and a shared sense of values among "the American people" as a whole.[244] However, when the United States officially declared war after the attack on Pearl Harbor and large numbers of men joined the armed services, propaganda directed at women on the home front became commonplace.

As in the United Kingdom, American women entered the industrial workforce to compensate for the number of men leaving for the military, and to increase production of war materiel such as planes and ammunition.[245] Also like the United Kingdom, women's movement en masse into industrial employment went against traditional gender norms. Propaganda targeting women in the United States followed a similar pattern to that of Britain: glamorizing women's work and emphasizing traditional gender roles within a wartime context. One such propaganda poster from 1944 shows a working woman in overalls with her hair under a bandana, wearing lipstick and blush, with a man – presumably her husband – with his hands on her shoulders, with an American flag pattern in the background. The caption reads "I'm proud… my

[243] Karen Garner, "In Pursuit of America's Friendship, January to June 1941," in *Friends and Enemies* (Manchester University Press, 2021)
[244] Ibid.
[245] Hall, Martha L., Belinda T. Orzada, and Dilia Lopez-Gydosh. "American Women's Wartime Dress: Sociocultural Ambiguity Regarding Women's Roles during World War II." *The Journal of American Culture* 38, no. 2 (2015): 235

husband wants me to do my part."[246] This poster simultaneously emphasizes the femininity of the female worker, as well as promotes traditional gender roles in which the wife is submissive to her husband's wishes. In another similar strategy to the United Kingdom, the American military also focused on the importance of flattering uniforms for women in the armed services as a method of both recruiting women and making their participation socially acceptable. Recruitment posters for women's branches of the military showed "beautiful and chic" women in "tailored uniforms."[247] They deliberately highlighted the bust and waist, and were designed to be "flattering to women and attractive to men."[248] In this way, American propaganda aimed at women functioned in a similar way to British propaganda.

Among the Allied nations, there was also propaganda which targeted women in multiple countries, including propaganda not directly created by the government. Films, for example, were often created by private studios and screened in multiple countries. In the United Kingdom, the Ministry of Information controlled which films could air in cinemas. One such movie was the 1942 Hollywood film *Mrs. Miniver*, which was made in the United States and told the story of a wartime British housewife. In the film, Mrs. Miniver is a middle-class housewife living through the Blitz, trying to keep her family safe as her older son joins the Royal Air Force and her husband joins the local guard watch and volunteers to transport soldiers home from Dunkirk via boat.[249] Her older son is hoping to get married, but there is debate about the class difference between himself and the young woman. Finally, they are able to be wed – but his new bride is soon killed in a bombing raid.[250] The movie emphasizes the strength of the British people and their ability to carry on in times of tragedy, as well as the war's deadly impact on Britain's

[246] Ibid., 236
[247] Ibid., 239
[248] Ibid.
[249] Lewis Adam Lawrence, "Propaganda Cinema and the Mobilization of the British Home Front in World War II: *In Which We Serve* and *Mrs. Miniver*," *Film Matters* 3, no. 2 (2012): 24-25
[250] Ibid. 26

civilian population. It also highlights unity between different social classes and shared sacrifice and dedication to the war effort.

The film was released in both the United Kingdom and United States to large, mostly female audiences, to whom the fictional Mrs. Miniver served as an aspirational role model, and an empathetic character which encouraged Americans to empathize with and support their British counterparts. *Mrs. Miniver* was a huge success in both the United States and United Kingdom, earning largely positive reviews from audiences and critics, and winning six Academy Awards, including Best Picture.[251] Kate Phipps noted in her diary that she'd seen the film, calling it "rather 'American' and sentimental" but stating that she "enjoyed it" nonetheless and "infact (sic) sat thru (sic) it twice!"[252] She later commented in her diary on another wartime Hollywood film set on the American home front, when she "went to see 'the War and Mrs. Hadley'" (the film is actually called *The War Against Mrs. Hadley*), which she wrote was "said to be the U.S. counterpart of 'Mrs. Miniver' but [was] not nearly as good."[253]

Another movie, the 1942 British film *In Which We Serve*, focused on a group of British naval sailors from different social classes, with flashbacks to their families and pre-war lives at home – the strategy of having equally-admirable characters from different classes ensured that "almost anyone in the audience could find someone to identify with."[254] The 1944 British film *This Happy Breed* similarly focused on family and sacrifice, featuring an everyday British family in which the parents had already endured the First World War and were struggling with the fact a second generation would now experience a new, devastating war. Films such as these, which were screened in multiple countries, served as international forms of propaganda, motivating

[251] Ibid., 25
[252] Phipps, "The Second World War Diary of Kate Phipps," 127
[253] Ibid., 164
[254] Laurence, "Propaganda Cinema," 22

American viewers to sympathize with England's plight and British viewers to emulate the strong, humble, and hardworking characters in the film. In opposition to this, Nazi propaganda films rarely focused on female characters: David Welch wrote that, as far as he was aware, "no film made during the Third Reich feature[d] a heroine as the main protagonist" as opposed to a male hero.[255]

Conclusion

Overall, the British government created propaganda which feminized women's participation in the Second World War war effort, by both emphasizing the importance of traditional feminine roles and glamorizing women's involvement in traditionally masculine spheres, finding ways to make physical work in the industrial and agricultural industries or armed services fit into traditional ideas of womanhood. Rather than overhauling gender roles, this emphasis on femininity in wartime propaganda helped maintain traditional British gender frameworks.

After the Second World War ended, propaganda continued along a similar line. Rationing did not end until 1954, and while many women left their wartime jobs outside of the home when men returned from war, many others did not. In 1951, not only were over a third of women employed in the labor force, but 26% of all married women held paid jobs outside the home, far higher percentages than before the war.[256] Approximately 19,000 women in the United Kingdom were also left widowed by the Second World War, and while they received pensions, they were heavily taxed and often not enough to survive on, especially for those with children.[257] However,

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[255] Welch, *Propaganda and the German Cinema,* 66
[256] Lewis, *Women in Britain since 1945*, 65
[257] "War Widows Association: Supporting the Families of the Fallen," National Army Museum, https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/war-widows-association-supporting-families-fallen

there was a large decrease in women workers from the war years into the post-war years, although the number remained higher than in the interwar period. Scholars who fall into the camp which argues that a temporary wartime change in gender roles occurred often see this exodus of women from the workforce as evidence for the short-term overhaul in values. However, significant propaganda in the immediate post-war period continued to encourage – and feminize – women's participation in the workforce in the same manner as during wartime. The slogan "Britain's bread hangs by Lancashire's thread," which encouraged textile production by a largely female workforce, came into prominence. It appeared on posters which showed dress-and-lipstick-wearing female workers in cotton mills, with the image of two young children eating bread in the middle of the slogan.[258] In addition to showing a traditionally feminine mill worker, the image of children eating alongside the "Britain's bread hangs by Lancashire's thread" slogan emphasizes the connection between keeping one's children fed – the most basic maternal role – and working in the textile mills. Similar posters sponsored by the Ministry of Labour and Board of Trade went up in Yorkshire, stating that "a woman in the mills helps put beef into Britain!" and urging "Come on Yorkshire! Let's get spinning, let's get weaving" with an image of a full plate of food.[259] As Britain was still under heavy rations at the time, this well-plated meal was aspirational and similarly hinted at women's traditional responsibility of feeding the family. Textile production had also been a historically female industry, although before industrialization most textile making had been done in the home. Other propaganda which feminized women's labor, such as beauty pageants of female workers, also occurred in the post-war years. For example, in 1948 a group of Lancashire mills held a highly advertised

[258] "How are we doing in cotton?" poster, INF 13/298 (21), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.
[259] "Come on Yorkshire!" poster issued by the Ministry of Labour and the Board of Trade, INF 13/298 (22), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.

"Production Princess" pageant in which female workers from various mills competed for an audience.[260]

Overall, British World War II propaganda aimed at women should be understood in the context of feminizing women's contributions to the war effort and emphasizing the importance of action in traditionally feminine spheres, rather than attempting to change gender roles themselves. Studying propaganda and the British home front in World War II through this lens allows for a more accurate understanding of the expectations placed on women at the time and how the government targeted them with messaging in various forms.

[260] "Who will be Nelson's production princess?" poster, INF 13/298 (25), Ministry of Information and Central Office of Information: Posters and Publications, The National Archives, Kew, London, United Kingdom.

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Note on Images