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Nobility, Duty and Courage: Propaganda and Inspiration in Interwar Women's and Girls' Pageants

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For women, the interwar years have often been seen as a period of conservative reaction. Women who had gone out to work during the war largely returned to the home: doing men's jobs was now widely seen as selfish, not patriotic. New civic organisations such as the Women's Institute (WI) upheld traditional gender roles and lauded 'responsibility', in contrast to the law-breaking militancy of the pre-war fight for the vote. The political dominance of the Conservative Party was partly due to its success in appealing to the newly enfranchised women, not least by means of innovative propaganda specifically addressing these voters.[1] Nor did the winning of the vote for women of property over 30 in 1918 herald the opening of many further doors. Women continued to face resistance at every stage in their advance: into political parties, trade unions and Parliament. Prior to 1945, there were never more than 15 women MPs in the House of Commons at any one time.[2]

But to paint these years as wholly reactionary is simplistic. Women were growing into their new roles as enfranchised citizens. They were searching for new identities without the comradeship of the fight for the vote; and they were reconciling their new status and opportunities with traditional roles as wives and mothers. Political energy still existed, but splintered into new campaigns, such as those for better housing and freely available contraception. The generation of 'war spinsters' fought for a better economic deal while finding creative ways of living without men.[3]

One reason for the prevalence of interpretations emphasising the regressive character of interwar society is the prominence, in the archival record, of material associated with large, extant institutions such as the WI. Hundreds of other smaller, informal or short-lived groups have left fainter traces, yet they represented a wider range of views.[4] Many of these varying women's groups produced historical pageants, as did the WI itself. These events, although largely neglected by historians,[5] give us a valuable window onto their ideas, as they created new narratives and celebrated forgotten heroines. There was no standard or accepted women's history, and so dozens of groups created their own. The organisation of pageants gave women a chance literally to step on to the public stage, using a large-scale and (sometimes) profitable format to promote their own visions of what has been and could be. The hustings, the debating halls and even the letters pages of newspapers were guarded by male gatekeepers, and gaining access demanded considerable confidence and assertiveness. Yet the staging of a pageant enabled women creatively to express political views on women's roles, freely or subtly, while supported by friends.

Pageants as a political statement had been well-known to the women's movement long before the First World War. Suffragettes used a pantheon of heroines as part of their justification for the right to vote. The Christian military figure of Joan of Arc was particularly popular; women personified her in parades in Britain and the United States, sometimes with other heroines such as Grace Darling, Charlotte Brontë, Jenny Lind and Harriet Martineau. The concept was formalised in Cicely Hamilton's 'Pageant of Great Women' which toured Britain from 1910.[6]

After the landmark of suffrage in 1918, however, these politics had to change. The suffragettes, always a loose and factionalised movement, moved into political parties on a wide spectrum from left to right.[7] In this context fresh – and often quite divergent – ideas about women's roles as citizens within the state began to be articulated. Thus women's postwar pageants were diverse in form and content. They encompassed the very traditional messages of the Girls' Friendly Society (to which only virgins were admitted), the unorthodox biblical heroines of the Methodist sisterhoods and the robot-servants of the future imagined by the Women's Institute.[8] Their choices of characters and framing give us an insight into the beliefs of women rarely seen in the male-dominated media of the day, reflecting a wide variety of perspectives on class, religious beliefs and education.

For some women, there was disappointment in the return to traditional roles after the excitement and profitability of war work. For others, however, these were buoyantly optimistic years. Even a partial enfranchisement was a huge step forward, and many women looked forward

confidently to a future in which they would take a full part.[9] This future was not universally welcomed, however. Other women felt the pace of change was too fast, and they continued to promote a very traditional view of gender roles. The pageants of the Girls' Friendly Society (GFS), run by Church of England ladies predominantly for servant girls, reflect a concerted effort to promote the most traditional virtues. It is these to which we now turn.

The Girls' Friendly Society: purity propaganda

The 'propaganda plays' only make sense against the background of the GFS. Still running today, the society is one of the lesser-known youth organisations, despite once boasting more than 300,000 members in various categories. It was founded in 1875 by a group of Anglican ladies concerned to prevent virtuous working-class girls from falling into ruin. Though this may seem priggish and controlling from a twenty-first-century perspective, the founders of the GFS were working against a background of endemic venereal disease, not least syphilis. By the 1870s and 1880s there was increasing feminist indignation about male 'vice' and its effects on unsuspecting new brides and their infants.[10] With no reliable prophylactics or cure for syphilis, the purity organisations could be seen as public health campaigners.

The GFS ladies brought respectable working-class girls together to train them in religious and domestic duty and to ward off temptation through fun weekly meetings, cheap, female-only hostels and recommendations to good positions. Such efforts can be interpreted as being led by a social control agenda – a desire to keep these women in their place at a time when it was becoming difficult to find servants. The lady organisers had access to a pool of trained, unmarried girls who were being kept away from the chance to build their own relationships. Saving maids from unwanted pregnancies also saved their employers from having to find replacements. But the social control paradigm has its limitations, and the GFS was not entirely self-serving.[11] Long before the #MeToo movement, harassment by predatory men was recognised as an established feature of everyday life for women. Many novels, such as Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*, describe older, wealthier men grooming unsuspecting, dependent girls.[12] In the interwar period abused women continued to have little recourse to the law; in a real sense, therefore, the GFS functioned as a protective sisterhood. Its success is shown in its numbers: at its peak in 1914 it had nearly 200,000 members and 80,000 younger 'candidates' in England and Wales, led by 40,000 'lady associates', with sister societies throughout the world.[13]

The GFS was always hierarchical, with two tiers of membership: working, unmarried girls and lady associates. As it mimicked the founders' own relationships with their servants, so it naturally attracted the huge domestic servant class, particularly girls who led a tough, lonely existence as maids-of-all-work. The society was uninterested in women's suffrage, devoted to imperial ideals and deeply conservative. Lady associates had to be Anglican (no Dissenters were allowed), girls had to be given written permission by their employers before they could join and all members had to be 'of good character' – usually interpreted as meaning virgins, though it is unclear how far this requirement was tested in practice.[14] Indeed, the virginity rule was highly contentious among clergymen in particular: some were in favour, while others argued that it went against the Christian ideal of forgiveness. This difference of opinion was partly the reason why the GFS never became an official Church of England organisation – which, in turn, meant that it remained entirely female-managed.

The conservatism of the GFS meant that it flourished best in rural areas and the south of England. The servant members repelled the urban shop and clerical young ladies while the northern mill girls were, according to a GFS report,[15] too 'undisciplined, impatient of reproof and entirely wanting in self-control'. Freed by a modest financial independence, as typified by the bold weaver Fanny Hawthorn in Stanley Houghton's stage play *Hindle Wakes*,[16] the mill girls were immune to the GFS ideals of modesty, thrift, and quiet, uncomplaining respectfulness. These ideals were promoted through the GFS's huge literature and propaganda department, produced as a counterattack on the evils of frivolous light literature. Harrison has argued that the influence of this propaganda should not be underestimated, either in ideological terms or in sheer weight of numbers – and there is no denying its considerable reach and popularity. The most popular of the four GFS monthly magazines, *Friendly Leaves*, sold 60,000 copies a month, double the circulation of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU)'s *Votes for Women*.[17] Dozens of tracts, leaflets, plays and pageants along the same lines were also produced. A few pageant titles held by the British Library give a flavour of this material: 'Burden-Bearers', 'The Prayer Book Pageant', 'A Pageant of Empire', 'A May Pageant of Oak Apple Day', 'A Jubilee Pageant', 'The Glorious Ranks' and 'The Signpost'.[18]

One of the most successful GFS productions was *The Quest*, written by the famous pageant-master Louis Napoleon Parker and first performed before Queen Mary at the Albert Hall in 1925. (The GFS, being firmly 'establishment' in its character, had royalty as patrons: first Queen

Figure 6.1 Margaret Tarrant, 'The High Way or the Low?' Frontispiece to Louis Napoleon Parker, *The Quest: A Pageant of the Girls' Friendly Society* (London: Girls' Friendly Society, 1925). Reproduced with kind permission of the Girls' Friendly Society.

Victoria, then Queen Alexandra, then Queen Mary. Their larger pageants were often attended by local dignitaries.)[19] *The Quest* followed the pattern of many pageants: its scene was set when a wise narrator met a young or ignorant character and taught them a lesson through a series of historical episodes (see chapter 5). *The Quest* opened with an old woman, wrapped

in a shawl, huddled against a signpost. An exhausted girl then limped up (Fig. 6.1). On the left was the High Way: a rocky path leading up to a cleft in the rocks, through which poured a wonderful light. On the right was the Low Way, a gaudy path of gilded pillars and tinsel. The Old Woman urged the Girl to take the High Way, but the Girl replied that while men may be strong enough to climb it, she was weak and alone. The Old Woman asked if she had lost her way, to which the Girl responded by saying that she was wandering, seeking happiness. The Old Woman then declared:

> Only the impossible is worth a struggle.
> In every woman's life there comes an hour
> When she must choose her way: or this – or that.
> Some heed me not: elect the primrose path,
> And sink into the slough; but those who heed,
> And seek my help, achieve their happiness.
> You are disheartened. Rest. Your eyes shall see
> What joys those win to who believe in me.

Thus was introduced a series of inspirational figures: St Hilda of Whitby, St Elizabeth of Hungary, St Joan of Arc, Queen Elizabeth I, Elizabeth Fry and finally Florence Nightingale. Representations of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland then appeared, followed by the founding members of the GFS from 50 years earlier and GFS members of the time in the uniforms of various professions. They in turn were followed by younger members: 'The Candidates; the Novices; white souls, / Eager to join, and keep their souls unspotted'.[20] Yet the Girl still doubted, saying that among all the throng she had no friend. At this the Old Woman threw off her disguise and revealed herself as Friendship: 'Oh! Hither to my arms! For I am Friendship! All the love that burns in all these hearts is symbolised in me!' After a hymn the whole crowd marched off, leaving the Girl, now radiantly happy, to move on easily up the rocky path with Friendship's arm about her.

The references to virginity are clear even to modern eyes: the weakness of women, the white souls of the youngest girls and the hour in every woman's life when she must choose between the difficulties of virtue and the primrose path to unhappiness. Of the six named heroines, four are unmarried, including the Virgin Queen. (It is perhaps worth noting here that one nickname for the GFS was the 'Godforsaken spinsters'.)[21] But though the pageant may seem patronising, it was more even-handed than it first appears. It concealed a clever secondary message worthy of Parker – one clearly inspired by Ophelia's reply to Laertes in Hamlet:

Do not, as some ungracious pastors do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,
Whiles, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,
Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads.[22]

Thus the pageant was not only a message and inspiration to the young girls. It also threw down a challenge to those in the audience educated enough to understand a Shakespearean reference. Did love burn in *their* hearts? Or did they recommend virtue for others while enjoying a life of luxury? What were they doing to help others keep to the 'steep and thorny way'? Such pageants, after all, often ended with an appeal for funds or assistance, and this one was partly a reminder of the duties of the better-off.

A similar message is given in *The Signpost*, written by J. A. S. Edwards in 1924. This shows the limits of the vision offered by the GFS to its members. Sitting down to rest by the signpost to a village was pretty young Virginia, surely named for the GFS's central tenet. She was bored with her routine and was bunking off the weekly meeting. While Virginia drowsed in the summer evening, a series of inspirational women walked past, all seeking to get on their way whatever the difficulties. These figures included the Sanskrit scholar Pandita Ramabai, the headmistress Dorothea Beale and the purity campaigner Josephine Butler. Virginia repeatedly suggested that they should choose different paths if the way ahead was so hard, but the women told her firmly that they could not 'pick and choose'. In the face of these responses, Virginia finally realised that the signpost no longer read 'To the village' but 'The way of love and duty'. 'Horribly ashamed' to realise she had deserted her own duty, she prayed at the foot of the signpost and was rewarded with a vision of the Virgin Mary. In this pageant, then, the parade of courageous, learned women is not shown as an inspiration for young girls to find their own adventures, but instead to enjoin their conformance to everyday duties, however dull. Having ideas beyond your station is presented as a sin.

Although aimed at servants, GFS pageants rarely commemorated working-class women. One example was a large-scale Essex production in 1925, which introduced a series of famous local women.[23] As with *The Quest*, the framework is pure GFS propaganda. Here the wise narrator was a GFS lady associate, while the younger character was a country girl alone and frightened at a London railway station, having foolishly agreed to meet a young male acquaintance who had stood her up. The lady associate sought to raise her interlocutor's spirits by telling her of Essex women who had made history, but here the taste of the upper-class

organisers becomes plain. Their choices are skewed to commemorate elite and aristocratic women: Essex queens, abbesses, martyrs, scholars and authors, beauties and heiresses, philanthropists and, finally, burgesses and justices.

Indeed, in GFS pageants as whole, the only working-class woman featured was the devoted servant St Zita, whose best-known saying was 'a servant is not holy if she is not busy'. There were no suffrage campaigners. The ideals and qualities celebrated were of visionary Christianity and service; the women leaders were figures such as abbesses who worked within an unquestioned framework of male power. Only queens such as Boudica and Elizabeth I, empowered by man-made rules, slipped through the net. But in the interwar years the GFS hierarchical ideals were already starting to look dated. By 1931 membership had fallen by 42 per cent in 18 years.[24] Far less oppressive ideals were moving into the mainstream.

The Guiding spirit: courage and comradeship

The Girl Guide movement was very much of the zeitgeist. Though a girls' club like the GFS, it had a different ethos from its beginnings in 1910, when it was formed as a sister organisation to the Boy Scouts. The Guides' membership quickly overtook the declining GFS during the 'pageantitis' of the interwar years. By 1928 there were 430,000 Guides, Brownies and Rangers, all with a cross-class membership. Unlike the Anglican GFS, these groups commonly met at schools, synagogues and even factories, as well as churches of all denominations. And while the GFS had imperialism at its heart, the Guides took inspiration from the new League of Nations and aspired to a global sisterhood, although inevitably cultural and racial hierarchies crept in.[25]

The Guides' inception in 1910 came just as ideas of femininity had already been challenged by the New Woman and the suffragists. The war gave added impetus to its development as a practical movement which freed girls to take part in previously off-limits energetic activities such as camping. It was intended to 'appeal to the more adventurous type of girl', who would, as founder Robert Baden-Powell said, become men's 'partners and comrades, rather than dolls'.[26] However, this liberation was built on a bedrock of conservatism: it never challenged the idea that these girls' future roles were as wives and mothers. In fact, the Guides were promoted by Baden-Powell's wife Olave as being an antidote to the boy-mad, empty-headed flappers, aiming to take in girls of every type and turn them out as 'clear-headed happy women of trained character'.[27] This

confusing mixture of freedom and control was reflected in their name: Girl *Guides*. Although named for the South Asian military guides' keenness, courage and resourcefulness, the name also reflected the founder's view that as adult women their role would be to influence men's actions and quality.

The Guides routinely took part in public events, such as the dedication of war memorials, wearing their distinctive, military-style uniforms. They were a reliable source of performers for large-scale town pageants, as well as producing their own pageants. Some of these latter were the typical mix of local happenings and characters, fables and fun that characterised the free approach to history adopted by many pageant-writers. One of the first was 'A Lancashire Pageant: Camp Fire Tales', performed by about 250 North East Lancashire Guides for a fête in the grounds of Gawthorpe Tower in 1925. The event was opened by the Marchioness of Aberdeen; the close of the fête included a march-past of 5,000 Guides and Scouts in front of Lady Olave Baden-Powell herself.

Gawthorpe Tower, now owned by the National Trust, is close to Pendle Hill, where a group of witches were famously arrested and tried in the seventeenth century. Thus the pageant begins with Witch Past, Witch Future and Witch Present chanting the well-known lines from *Macbeth*: 'Double, double, toil and trouble'. The witches then take us back to the invading Saxons and forward through a series of scenes, all using the motif of outdoor camps and fairs. They end with the arrival of the mills and canals and the famous local inventors of textile machinery.[28]

The pageant was a lavish and successful affair; it was followed by similar events throughout the country. These duly received glowing reviews in local newspapers, but they did not really depart from the standard fare of local pageants of the time. However, some Girl Guide pageants were more revealing of the movement's own beliefs and can be seen as propaganda aimed as much at the performers as the audience. One such was *The Amber Gate*. Produced by Girl Guide groups nationwide for more than 30 years, this pageant has a far more forward-looking feel to it than the GFS equivalents, reflecting the Guides' adventurous and determined spirit. The choices of heroes and heroines bear closer examination, representing as they do the spirit of this successful organisation. Male and female characters are presented in similar numbers and with equal respect, with Guides playing all the roles.

The Amber Gate was written by Kitty Barne, a Carnegie-medal-winning author and for several years the Girl Guides 'Commissioner for Music and Drama'. Published as a play with an alternative prologue for Girl Guide troops, it was first produced in 1923, in Eastbourne.[29] The

story was then published as a children's book in 1933 and, after several editions, was still in print in the 1950s.[30] Like the GFS Essex pageant described above, *The Amber Gate* used a framework of a narrator who slowly convinces a sceptical listener, but these are not stock Victorian morality figures. An older, uncle-type figure ('Gaffer') addressed 11-year-old Eve, who was too bad-tempered and lethargic to join her Girl Guide friend on a 'supper hike' in the woods on a hot summer evening. He persuaded her to shut her eyes and see the Amber Gate leading to that country where children, including many Girl Guides, were playing, building and having fun. This was a kingdom of opportunity, inherited by the new generation. Eve climbed on to the arm of Gaffer's lounge chair and they jetted back through history to see the pioneering boys and girls who helped to push the gate open. These individuals are very different from the elite women of the GFS Essex pageant, celebrated for the queenly virtues of beauty, philanthropy, scholarship and religion. The overwhelming virtue extolled in the Girl Guides' pageant was courage, as Gaffer explained when they met the first character, David, who in the Bible slew Goliath:

> He opened it with his courage, you see. You'll find that all these children have courage. You can have all sorts of other qualities too, but you must have courage with them to open the Gate.[31]

Gaffer was a forthright character, learned enough to correct Eve's misnaming of Handel's Larghetto but dismissive of school poetry recitals and apocryphal tales such as the six-year-old George Washington's chopping down of his father's cherry tree. Gaffer praised 'tough girls' such as Grizel Home, who saved her Protestant father from King Charles's men, and was approving of the Guides' supper hike menu of sausages and eggs: 'Guides don't starve themselves'. For Gaffer, the days of feminine uselessness were consigned to the dustbin of history:

> Specially when girls were supposed to be silly little feeble things, as was the fashion then. It was not considered suitable in a female to do anything at all well, but Grace [Darling] knew how to manage a boat, didn't she? … No good being brave unless you know your job too.[32]

Toughness, loyalty, persistence and level-headedness in a crisis were all common themes, as personified by Flora Macdonald, William Tell's son,

the Maid of Saragossa (who manned a cannon alone when all her comrades deserted) and Hans the Dutchman (who jammed his elbow in a leaking dyke). Commodore Casabianca's son (the boy who stood on the burning deck) was praised for 'obeying orders, sticking to your job whatever happens'.[33]

But the pageant was not militaristic in tone, nor just a celebration of physical courage. The inventiveness of Giotto, James Watt and child diarist Marjorie Fleming were also praised, along with the visionaries St Joan of Arc and Bernadette of Lourdes and the commitment and generosity of Dick Whittington. The most complex discussion was around Lady Jane Grey:

> 'Is she going to read her way through the Gate?' asked Eve, watching her. 'She can't do that, can she?'
>
> Gaffer pondered. 'Not exactly, I suppose. You can't open it with theories. But her books informed her, as they used to say … Her death was all her father's fault, and she knew it, and yet the night before she died she wrote him a most beautiful and forgiving letter … I think that's how she opened the Gate.'[34]

Not all the young heroes were famous, however. Nine-year-old Agnes Green, another 'nice, tough little thing, full of common sense', appeared on account of her caring for her five young siblings for four days when her parents lost their way and died in a blizzard near their remote Lake District home.[35] The Gaffer made the point that many nameless children have also helped open the gate, though they are unknown to history.

The final characters celebrated in the pageant were deaf-blind writer Helen Keller (then still living) and Jack Cornwell VC, a Boy Scout and sailor boy in the First World War. The gate was then opened wide and hordes of children rushed through. Eve was among them, now fired with enthusiasm to join her Girl Guide friend. But Gaffer was clear that the story was not yet over:

> Enjoy yourself … and don't forget there's another Gate the other end that leads into another country. It'll want opening.[36]

Thus the pageant ends with a message to audience and participants alike – the work was not yet done and the duty of today's children was to build on the work of the past, showing the same courage as their forebears.

Missing manuscripts, missing voices: outside the Establishment

The pageants organised by large institutions were popular and influential. They were staged over and over, as guaranteed crowd-pleasers with a palatable message. For the historian, they are relatively straightforward to study because their books of words were published. The organisations producing them were well-disciplined, national bodies with archive facilities. Sometimes the pageants were written or produced by influential figures whose lives were well-documented and whose papers were preserved. In short, they benefit from 'survival bias'. Susan Mumm has described the greater body of academic work on larger and extant organisations in this way.[37] She explains that smaller, local philanthropic organisations may do a lot of work, but are less likely to leave a record trace.

One set of such organisations is made up of those associated with the many Nonconformist churches: the thousands of Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Congregational, Quaker and other denominations that between them once had more members than the Church of England, but which saw precipitate mid-to-late twentieth-century decline.[38] A few of these churches were entirely independent; others existed under an umbrella body, such as the Methodist Connexion, but nevertheless prided themselves on being self-governing. The founding principles of the Free Churches included this right to self-determination. Their members, who had formed, paid for and built their own churches, were unwilling to be imposed upon from above.

Unfortunately, the fascinating and varied independence of Nonconformist churches and organisations presents difficulties for the historian. For one thing, they were less likely to submit records to archives, either during or at the end of their existence. Unlike the Church of England, which requires lengthy procedures before closing a church, many Nonconformist churches closed without fanfare, on the decision of their members and without leaving much of a documentary trace, if any. Hundreds have closed since the war as congregations shrank and the costs of maintaining ageing, outsize buildings increased – this is indeed a process that continues to this day. Their papers may sometimes be transferred to a council archive or central body, but they may also be reduced to a few handfuls of souvenirs kept by former members, and discarded as worthless on their deaths.

All this means that exploring their histories is a somewhat hit-and-miss affair, involving combing through the British Newspaper Archive and multiple county record offices. By this patchy process I have found 75

pageants by the female members of Nonconformist churches or organisations on the theme of 'Noble Women', held between 1915 and 1947 and featuring a great variety of heroines. (This figure of 75 is an underestimate, as the British Newspaper Archive is incomplete and many events will have gone unreported in the press.[39]) The 'Noble Women' theme was one used by other women's and youth organisations, but it was most popular with the Nonconformists and the associated Temperance movement (Fig. 6.2). Indeed, it is notable that it was largely the Free Churches that were most likely to produce pageants on this theme. These churches had granted power in the church to women far earlier than the Church of England and had a tradition of women preachers from the outset.[40] In contrast, I have not found a single Roman Catholic 'Noble Women' pageant.

The Nonconformists' progressive views were shown in their response to a government survey in the 1920s which revealed that the Free Churches supported the use of contraception (then opposed by both the Church of England and the Roman Catholic church).[41] Their stance on this issue was in part a function of a politically left-wing stance: Dissenters were usually working-class or recent arrivals in the middle class, with links in the Victorian era to the trade unions, the Chartist movement and radical liberalism, as well as a commitment to universal literacy through the Sunday School movement.[42] Yet this political progressiveness was married

Figure 6.2 Ladies of the Hatfield House Land Primitive Methodist Church, Sheffield, in a performance of 'A Pageant of Noble Women', *c.*1930s. Photographer unknown. Reproduced by kind permission from the collection of Brian Woodriff.

to socially conservative principles. Some historians have even claimed that Methodism prevented a British revolution. The most influential of these, E. P. Thompson, castigated the Wesleyan 'anti-intellectualism' and described their Sunday schools as inculcating 'barbaric and evil superstitions'.[43] This amalgam of progressivism and conservatism is evident in the pantheon of heroines chosen by the Sisterhoods, Temperance branches and Dorcas societies that organised these Nonconformist pageants.[44] Alas, for all these dozens and perhaps hundreds of events I have not been able to locate a single entire script. Fortunately, thanks to the local newspaper practice of listing performers with their characters, we can at least learn which heroines they chose, even if it is impossible to gain much of a sense of how they were portrayed.

Of all the Nonconformist productions of 'A Pageant of Noble Women', 25 cast lists were printed in newspapers; from these we can rank the popularity of characters chosen. The top choices include many of the usual suspects who were doubtless fun to play: Florence Nightingale is the character most frequently mentioned, followed by Boudica, Grace Darling, Joan of Arc, Elizabeth I, Queen Victoria and Queen Bertha of Kent (the consort of Aethelbert whose influence in the sixth century helped lead to the Christianisation of England). But scattered among these popular favourites are Dissenter heroines: Elizabeth Fry, Quaker campaigner for prisoners' welfare; Susannah Wesley, mother of John and Charles; Catherine Booth, a campaigner for women preachers and co-founder of the Salvation Army; Harriet Beecher Stowe, Calvinist author of the anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; Alice of Lisle, executed for sheltering anti-Royalist soldiers; and Mary Slessor, a Presbyterian missionary who prevented many infanticides by confronting an African superstition that twins were possessed by demons. Learning is also highly valued. The Greek mathematician Hypatia is one of the most popular characters, while scientists Mary Somerville and pioneering sociologist Harriet Martineau also get several mentions each. Authors appear only as they support morality, with examples including Harriet Beecher Stowe (mentioned above), the campaigning poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning and religious poets Frances Havergal, Fanny Crosby and Anne Bradstreet.

The omissions are also revealing. Emmeline Pankhurst is honoured only once by a Nonconformist group – perhaps the Dissenters did not approve of militancy even while supporting suffrage. The Pankhursts' patriotism during the First World War was also at odds with Quaker pacifism. Novelists are rare: Charlotte Brontë, creator of the moral but passionate Jane Eyre, appears twice in Nonconformist productions, while Emily, author of the more Gothic *Wuthering Heights*, is mentioned just

once and then only as Charlotte's sister. Jane Austen and Mary Shelley are entirely missing – idle husband-hunters and tragedians were apparently unpopular with this down-to-earth, hard-working audience. Actresses, singers and artists are likewise absent.

In stark contrast to the GFS's Essex production, nobility is defined without reference to beauty or wealth. The Nonconformist 'noble women' are strong-minded, opinionated and outspoken, but only in the service of Christian morality and the rights of the oppressed. They are educated above usual standards and use this to create a better world, even in the face of opposition. But women who break with convention for selfish reasons – whether gain, fame or sexual satisfaction – are excluded. Yet despite the exclusions and restrictions, there is evidence of much creativity and a wide range of opinion. Some scripts were obviously passed around – the Temperance *White Ribbon* magazine mentions that a script for their youth branch can be sent out but must be copied and returned promptly as it is in great demand[45] – but there is no evidence of published, generic pageants as in the Girl Guides or the GFS. No two lists of characters are the same. Each chapel had their own favourites and, as we will see, some were highly unorthodox.

An unusual grouping of biblical characters appeared in two pageants: one in a Baptist church in Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, and another in a Methodist church in Penzance, Cornwall. In both these pageants (and in common with Nonconformist pageants more generally), the best-known female Bible characters are missing: the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, the sisters Martha and Mary and the Old Testament mothers are all absent, as are most of the best-known female saints. In the Cornish and Yorkshire pageants these figures are replaced with an entirely different group. This included two prophetesses, Miriam and the more warlike Deborah; mother- and daughter-in-law Ruth and Naomi, often used as an emblem of female friendship; and wealthy trader Lydia. But the most striking inclusion in this group is the five-times-wed Woman of Samaria – unashamedly shacked up with lover number six – who speaks with Jesus and testifies for him.[46]

These biblical characters were joined by many other less familiar historical figures, such as the suffragist and war medic Dr Elsie Inglis, the pioneering gynaecologist Mary Scharlieb, the working-class philanthropist Kitty Wilkinson and the Temperance campaigner Agnes Weston. These varied choices all speak of long debates in draughty Sunday schools between women seeking to commemorate a different pantheon to those they saw immortalised in church windows and civic statues. But although varied and creative in their content, these pageants were

generally humble affairs compared to the full-blown spectacles of those most iconic of interwar organisations, the Women's Institute, and its sister, the Townswomen's Guilds.

The WI: diverse and feminist agendas

The WI was a secular organisation, originally created to help rural women help each other in Canada. It arrived in Britain in 1915. Although known for 'jam and Jerusalem', handicrafts and hobbies, the WI was also a successful lobbying group. Its campaigns included agitating for improvements to water supplies and rural housing. Branches spread quickly throughout the 1920s and their popularity led to the concept being copied for urban women with the formation of the Townswomen's Guilds in 1929.[47] Like the Girl Guides, the WI and Townswomen's Guilds would often join forces with other groups to produce large-scale civic events, as well as producing their own pageants. Some were small, but others used the county federation networks to produce spectacles involving many hundreds and even thousands of performers, including massed choirs. The pageant format lent itself naturally to this, with each local branch made responsible for a scene and the whole production being co-ordinated by the county federations. Though often thought of as conservative and 'respectable', the WI pageants show a surprising diversity, embracing women of all kinds from working-class northerners to powerful goddesses. They openly celebrated women's history and women's rights.

The WI and Townswomen's Guilds had access to vast resources in terms of skilled women with expertise in costume making and catering, with a mix from ladies of the manor to the wives of shopkeepers and labourers. They could create imaginative, lavishly staged events. While most of the Free Churches described above performed in a Sunday school or chapel, WI branches had aristocratic members who could supply glamorous locations, such as the grounds of stately homes. Many of their productions took the form of traditional historical pageants – but pageants in which women played all the roles, including male ones. This gave women the opportunity to play the 'best' parts. Pageant-master and actress Gwen Lally, who always wore masculine clothes and played male parts, began working with the WI from 1923. She encouraged other women to act in male roles (demanding, among other things, high standards of make-up and fake beards).[48]

Women's Institute pageants were more likely than mixed-sex civic pageants to include episodes from women's history and to give greater

weight to female characters. One of their earliest, in 1926, was the Earlham Pageant, organised by the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes.[49] Due to the large number of branches taking part, there were two performances with a different set of scenes in the afternoon and evening. The afternoon performance told the history of the county from a more male perspective, but nevertheless included many romantic scenes foregrounding women. These included the romance between the Earl of Leicester and Amy Robsart and the marriage of John Rolfe to Princess Pocahontas. The evening performance told the history of Norfolk from a female perspective, featuring the queens Boudica, Eleanor, Anne Boleyn and Elizabeth I. It also incorporated stories from the famous cache of letters written by Margaret Paston in the fifteenth century, including 'The Love Story of Margery Paston'.[50]

Not everyone was impressed. In an odd piece of double-dealing, the *Yarmouth Independent* devoted two columns on page 7 to the usual detailed report, presumably written by a staff writer, which named many local worthies and contained much praise of the performers, costumes and organisations. On the same page, however, the newspaper gave almost as much room to a blistering review of the pageant's historical inaccuracies by Mr Walter Rye; he had used the programme sold in advance to write a point-by-point critique of its romantic touches.[51] Comments include 'too ridiculous', 'absurd', 'not the faintest evidence', 'the episode as described is fantastic and impossible' and 'the compiler has mixed up his [*sic*] dates sadly'. Rye's article is really a very strange inclusion. Local newspapers thrive on contention, but they also do well not to offend too many readers; one can imagine a sack-full of cancelled subscriptions landing on the editor's desk on Monday morning.

However, criticism certainly did not deter the WI, which continued to produce many major pageants over the next decades, and did so right across the country. These pageants also continued to feature strong female characters and – notwithstanding the strictures of Mr Rye and others – did not hesitate to include popular legend at the expense of historical scholarship. For example, Coleford WI used the 'Pageant of Noble Women' format so beloved of the Free Churches for their first public entertainment in 1936, but chose a very different set of characters.[52] This pageant portrayed the popular favourites of several queens, Elizabeth Fry, Grace Darling, Florence Nightingale, Catherine Booth and missionary Mary Slessor, but added many more romantic figures such as the actress Sarah Siddons, all the Brontë sisters, Kate Burless and other popular singers and Scottish darling, Flora Macdonald. The Native American environmental writer Anahareo, then still living, also made an appearance; so did the Pankhurst family.

There were also two characters of doubtful authenticity from narrative poems. One was Barbara Frietche, an old woman who refused to lower her Confederate flag when confronted with Union troops during the American Civil War, and the other was 'Bessie of Curfew fame'.[53] In this legend, dating back to the fifteenth century, Bessie was desperate to save her imprisoned lover, due to be hanged when the curfew bell tolled, even though a horseman was on his way from the king (or Oliver Cromwell, in later versions) with a pardon. After fruitlessly pleading with the curmudgeonly old sexton not to ring the bell, she saves her lover by climbing the tower and hanging on to the clapper until the pardon arrives. It is not known what music was used to accompany this episode, but there were several comic songs associated with the story ('As you swing to the left and swing to the right, remember curfew must not ring tonight!'), so perhaps the audience joined in with one of these. Altogether the pageant seems to have aimed more at entertainment than serious historical representation.

The representation of the Pankhurst family was unusual in a pageant of this type, but the Coleford ladies were not the only WI members to acknowledge a debt to the suffragettes. A larger-scale production in the same year, titled *Mother Earth*, was held by five branches in Northumberland. It was written and produced by Elsie Reed for about 200 performers, including a choir 100-strong. It had a similar 'great women' grouping of characters, from the Old Testament mother of Moses, Rebecca and Ruth, through to Florence Nightingale. However, unlike most pageants, it carried on through the suffragettes to the land girl, lady doctor and airwoman of the time.[54]

The framing of the pageant still feels contemporary today, with Mother Earth – a female deity and forerunner of Gaia – presiding over the action. First, she acknowledged the gifts of the fruit and flower bearers, declaring: '[t]hey are fruits of healing and love. The women of the world know the value of my fruits'. She was followed by flower bearers. One of these children carried 'the sad little poppy which speaks of little mounds in Flanders'. Mother Earth had a consoling message:

> Yes, the poppy speaks of our loved ones, but gives us too, the message of eternal life … The women of the world must see to it that such things must cease. There must be no more war and it is the duty of every woman to train every child to realise that war is contrary to all decent thinking.

The last, timid child sadly carried wild flowers and spoke of the thoughtlessness and cruelty of humanity:

> When they see a bank of primroses or a dell of bluebells, they cannot be content with a pretty bunch, but must pull up roots and destroy the plants.

Mother Earth again commented that it was the duty of women to see that such things cease, before making way for the entrance of characters through the ages. The final scene was of Northumberland's fisherwomen: this offered a template for modern working-class womanhood, seamlessly integrating traditional values with a practical attitude. As three of these fisherwomen explained,

> There are houses to keep clean, bairns to mind and all the jobs that good wives do … But yet when we are needed we do not mind giving a hand to launch the lifeboat – aye – and to man it too, if we are needed … Then we can always spare time to remember to pray for those at sea.

A pageant involving an even more forthright celebration of women's emancipation was held in nearby Sunderland only two years later. Written by the headmistress of a local girls' school, Miss W. J. E. Moul, and organised by the Sunderland Townswomen's Guild, this 'play-pageant' was staged in the Victoria Hall and was accompanied by a choir contest and handicraft exhibition (see chapter 5). More than 1,000 women took part.[55] The five scenes covered an impressive amount of ground, including the need for social and economic as well as legal independence across all classes, and the restrictive effect of public opinion. The action began with Lord Shaftesbury's inquiry into working conditions in mines and factories. Next came an episode depicting the awakening of social conscience among young middle-class women who wanted the freedom to go out and do their bit – and the resultant horror of the Victorian 'heavy father'. Then the need for married women's legal independence was shown through a dramatisation of Mrs Caroline Norton's fight for custody of her children from her violent, drunken husband. The *Sunderland Daily Echo* said that the fourth scene, featuring Florence Nightingale, showed 'that women's exclusion from power, position and employment is not based on any logical recognition or natural inferiority'.[56] The final part of the pageant, involving all the guilds, comprised a series of short scenes showing how women had got the vote, largely through their war work. The *Sunderland Daily Echo* concluded:

> Finally there is the plea that women are not afraid of work of any sort, however difficult or exacting; that, if they come to be

> recognized as having a natural right to share in the work creating a happier world for men and children, they are prepared to enter upon all the hazards and to pay all the penalties of life.[57]

In this way Moul's 'Play-pageant' culminated with a contemporary, future-oriented message.

Such messages were not unusual in pageants, but one extraordinary WI production in Preston went further, offering a vivid vision of the countrywoman of the twenty-first century, surrounded by appliances and wrestling with the new robotic servant problem. *Pedlar's Ware, or the Countrywoman's Life Through the Ages* was written by the vicar of Preston, Canon E. W. Wallis; it was performed by the Lancashire Federation of Women's Institutes in 1935. In this pageant Wallis sought to 'get away from the glorification of Queen Elizabeth and other stock figures, and the very trifling incidents of local history, magnified out of all proportion'. Instead, all the scenes focus on ordinary women of the past, living domestic lives which have messages for the present.[58] The pageant used the motif of the pedlar wandering through the centuries, renewed through seven episodes and 18 centuries into various characters including a travelling clock-mender and a female con-artist. In 2060 the last pedlar was a saleswoman from Saturn, selling 'autobetties' controlled by a keyboard. The naughty children took over the controls, the robots went berserk and attempted to kill them until disarmed by the parents. But despite the technology, little seemed to have changed for this countrywoman – the final scene ended with father asking mother what is for dinner as he has a golf match to go to on Neptune. It was a very original piece, requiring a huge amount of organisation by the producers who travelled to far-flung parts of Lancashire to rehearse the various branches. Only the WI would have been capable of such a feat of organisation or used such an imaginative production.

Conclusion

The interwar years have been represented as being conservative ones, in which women reacted against the hard-won rights of earlier feminists. The relative freedoms and progressiveness of the war years and the militancy of the suffragettes have been depicted as stalling in the face of a traditionalist backlash. However, a close examination of this generation's ideologies as shown through their pageants reveals that they were more feminist than previously thought. Even traditional organisations such as the Girl Guides and WIs were experimenting with new histories and

projecting them into new and exciting futures. Indeed, the pageants staged by these groups often ended with a call for further progress. The Guides' paradise beyond the Amber Gate has a silver gate at the far end, one that is still to be opened; Mother Earth calls on the women in the audience to prevent future wars; the inclusion of living women, such as environmental campaigner Anahareo, shows that the work goes on.

Churches outside the establishment were consciously creating new pantheons of heroines, which challenged traditional views of female virtue. They ignored beauty, birth and the religious imperative of silent obedience. Though Christian, their new pantheon did not include traditional figures such as Martha and Mary, who served and listened to men. Rather these women celebrated education, the single life and the practical achievements of working women. Their heroines were Elizabeth Fry, Mary Slessor and Harriet Beecher Stowe – women who were devout but outspoken. In this way, the Nonconformist women of the interwar generation used pageantry as a means of celebrating the disruptive influences which – embodied in the activism of their heroines – had done so much to change society.

Reading the reports of these interwar pageants, it does seem that women sidelined their most recent history. They largely ignored the Pankhursts and other suffragist campaigners, but this is not evidence of a reaction against their ideals. The bitter divisions associated with the suffragists may still have been too raw to be staged. On a more personal level, the omission is understandable. What woman wants to be endlessly reminded of her mother's glory days? No generation wants to give too much credit to the one immediately before. For 'Generation X', the ageing babyboomers' endless reminiscing about the 1960s was annoying, boring, dispiriting and often unbelievable. Many interwar women may well have felt the same way about the suffragettes.

These, then, were years not of conservatism but consolidation. Through pageants, women took stock of their new position and their history, reframing the past as leading up to their new freedoms and futures. Through history, they showed themselves as deserving of their new citizenship. They claimed as their forebears many generations of extraordinary women. Perhaps paradoxically, these were also years of diversity. The fight for the vote had been a focus of energy. Now that energy could diverge into multiple streams, forming new channels and spreading over wider territories.

These groups did not all agree on what was worthy of veneration. Rather they selected various heroines, scenes and virtues in varying, imaginative reconstructions of the past. Indeed it is this imagination that sets apart the productions by women's and girls' groups of the interwar

years. From the grandest county pageant to the smallest Free Church event, their pageants included surprising, novel elements that show widening perspectives on what history and culture could mean. Arranged as an historical pageant, by now a 'traditional' form, these new perspectives were given legitimacy. The groups that expounded them, from the WI to the Guides to Nonconformist churches, claimed the right for their heroines and stories to be included as a part of British national history. And by performing in symbolically significant spaces, such as stately homes, churches and public halls, they literally planted their banners in the territory of the establishment.[59] Thus the pageants conceived and organised by women's groups served many purposes. They created a new pantheon of role models for women as they adjusted to great social and political changes, they promulgated these new ideas to wider audiences and they confirmed the new social order as being part of a reassuring continuum of British and local history. Above all, they did so in a format that the women themselves could own.

Notes

1. David Jarvis, 'Mrs Maggs and Betty: The Conservative Appeal to Women Voters in the 1920s', *Twentieth Century British History* 5 (1994): 129–52.
2. Brian Harrison, 'Women in a Men's House: The Women MPs 1919–1945', *Historical Journal* 29 (1986): 623–54.
3. Jane Lewis, 'The Ideology and Politics of Birth Control in Inter-War England', *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 2 (1979): 33–48; Virginia Nicholson, *Singled Out: How Two Million British Women Survived Without Men After the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
4. Susan Mumm, 'Women and Philanthropic Cultures', in *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800–1940*, ed. Sue Morgan and Jacqueline DeVries (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 54–71.
5. Though see Zoë Thomas, 'Historical Pageants, Citizenship, and the Performance of Women's History before Second-Wave Feminism', *Twentieth Century British History* 28 (2017): 319–43.
6. The script by Cicely Mary Hamilton, published in 1910 by the Suffrage Shop, was digitised by Google from the University of Michigan's copy and is available at https://archive.org/details/apageantgreatwo00hamigoog/page/n13/mode/2up (accessed 28 June 2019). See also Katharine Cockin, 'Cicely Hamilton's Warriors: Dramatic Reinventions of Militancy in the British Women's Suffrage Movement', *Women's History Review* 14 (2005): 527–42.
7. Helen Lewis, 'Why the Suffragettes Still Matter', *Guardian*, 19 September 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/sep/19/suffragettes-why-still-matter-abi-morgan-film-writers-reflect (accessed 31 May 2020).
8. For these robot-servants (the 'autobetties'), see p. 151.
9. Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991); Adrian Bingham, 'An Era of Domesticity? Histories of Women and Gender in Interwar Britain', *Cultural and Social History* 1 (2004): 225–33; Maria DiCenzo, 'Our Freedom and Its Results: Measuring Progress in the Aftermath of Suffrage, *Women's History Review* 23 (2014): 421–40, and other articles from this special edition of *WHR*; Caitriona Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens: Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928–64* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

10. Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 50, 256.
11. For a still-pertinent critique of 'social control' interpretations, applicable to the twentieth quite as much to the nineteenth centuries, see F. M. L. Thompson, 'Social Control in Victorian Britain', *Economic History Review*, new series 34 (1981): 189–208.
12. Elizabeth Gaskell, *Ruth* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1853).
13. Vivienne Richmond, '"It is not a Society for Human Beings but for Virgins": The Girls' Friendly Society Membership Eligibility Dispute 1875–1936', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 20 (2007): 304–27; Brian Harrison, 'For Church, Queen and Family: The Girls' Friendly Society 1874–1920', *Past and Present* 61 (1973): 107–38.
14. Richmond, '"It is not a Society for Human Beings but for Virgins"'.
15. This report from the Chester diocese in 1881 is quoted in Harrison, 'For Church, Queen and Family', 116–17. He also quotes a Cleckheaton Branch secretary who wrote in the *Associates Journal* of August 1896 that associates had little idea of the work situation, courting customs or modes of speech of the girls they were trying to guide (p.120).
16. Stanley Houghton, *Hindle Wakes* (1910). It was first performed in 1912 and was made into a film in 1952.
17. Harrison, 'For Church, Queen and Family'.
18. Many are held in the British Library as a collection: *Miscellaneous Pamphlets, Leaflets etc*., Girls' Friendly Society (England and Wales) (London, 1920–?). These include: Mrs Hubert Edwards, *Burden-bearers – A Jubilee Pageant for Five Characters and Ten Groups* (1925); Henry Millar and Louis N. Parker, *The Quest – A Pageant* (1925); Mrs Aylmer Astley, *A May Pageant – Oak Apple Day, 1661* (1927); M. F. Unwin, *A Jubilee Pageant for a GFS Country Branch* (1930); J. A. S. Edwards, *The Signpost: A Play for GFS Members, based on the Characters in the GFS Calendar* (1924); Margaret Cropper, *The Glorious Ranks – A Pageant with Scenes in Mime* (1936). Further titles are given in the same file under the pamphlet, *GFS List of Recommended Plays, Pageants, Dialogues* (1921).
19. *Birmingham Daily Post*, 3 July 1939, 13; *Western Daily Press*, 5 October 1931, 7.
20. Louis N. Parker. *The Quest: A Pageant of the Girls' Friendly Society* (London: Girls' Friendly Society, 1925), 7.
21. Miriam Glucksmann, *Cottons and Casuals: The Gendered Organisation of Labour in Time and Space* (Durham: Sociology Press, 2000), 101.
22. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 3.
23. *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 15 May 1925, 5.
24. Richmond, '"It is not a Society for Human Beings but for Virgins"'.
25. Kristine Alexander, 'The Girl Guide Movement and Imperial Internationalism During the 1920s and 1930s', *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 2 (2009): 37–63.
26. Tim Jeal, *Baden-Powell: Founder of the Boy Scouts* (London: Hutchinson, 1989), 470.
27. *Daily Mirror*, 15 July 1918, quoted in Richard A. Voeltz, 'The Antidote to "Khaki Fever"? The Expansion of the British Girl Guides during the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History* 27 (1992): 627–38.
28. Angela Bartie, Linda Fleming, Mark Freeman, Tom Hulme, Alex Hutton, Paul Readman, 'A Lancashire Pageant: Camp Fire Tales', *The Redress of the Past*, http://www.historicalpageants.ac.uk/pageants/1112/ (accessed 29 December 2018).
29. Angela Bartie, Linda Fleming, Mark Freeman, Tom Hulme, Alex Hutton, Paul Readman, 'The Amber Gate', *The Redress of the Past*, http://www.historicalpageants.ac.uk/pageants/928/ (accessed 29 December 2018). See also *The Stage*, 5 July 1923, 6 and Kitty [Marion Catherine] Barne, *The Amber Gate: A Pageant-Play of Episodes in Lives of Children Famous in History with Prologue and an Alternative Special Prologue for Girl Guides* (London, n.d.; Bratton Collection, Roehampton University).
30. Kitty [Marion Catherine] Barne, *The Amber Gate* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1936).
31. Barne, *Amber Gate* (1936), 21.
32. Barne, *Amber Gate* (1936), 277.
33. Barne, *Amber Gate* (1936), 277.
34. Barne, *Amber Gate* (1936), 84.
35. Dorothy Wordsworth later took in one of the bereaved children. The story is included in Edmund Lee, *Dorothy Wordsworth, The Story of a Sister's Love* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1886).
36. Barne, *Amber Gate* (1936), 280.

37. Mumm, 'Women and Philanthropic Cultures', 54–71.
38. Held on a Sunday in 1851, Britain's only religious census held in 1851 revealed 'to the horror and anguish of the Victorian Establishment that more people had gone to Chapel than to Church that day'. Nonconformity remained very vibrant into the early decades of the twentieth century, but while in 1932 there were 32,000 Methodist chapels in England and Wales, fewer than 7,500 remained by 1980. See Ken Powell, *The Fall of Zion: Northern Chapel Architecture and its Future* (London: SAVE Britain's Heritage, 1980), no pagination [pp. i, 16]. The quotation is from the foreword ('A Conspiracy of Silence') by Marcus Binney [p. i].
39. Amy Binns, 'New Heroines for New Causes: How Provincial Women Promoted a Revisionist History through Post-suffrage Pageants', *Women's History Review* 27 (2018): 221–46. Full spreadsheets detailing the pageants are available on the University of Central Lancashire's CLoK online archive: see https://doi.org/10.17030/uclan.data.00000122 (accessed 20 February 2019).
40. Olive Anderson, 'Women Preachers in Mid-Victorian Britain: Some Reflexions on Feminism, Popular Religion and Social Change', *Historical Journal* 12 (1969): 467–84; Pamela J. Walker, '"With Fear and Trembling": Women, Preaching and Spiritual Authority', in *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures*, ed. Morgan and DeVries, 94–116; Deborah M. Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).
41. Sue Morgan, '"The Word Made Flesh": Women, Religion and Sexual Cultures', in *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures*, ed. Morgan and DeVries, 159–87.
42. D. W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics, 1870–1914* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982).
43. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963).
44. Dorcas Societies were small philanthropic groups who sewed together and provided clothes for the poor. They are named for Dorcas of Acts 9:36.
45. *White Ribbon*, February 1916. The White Ribbon magazines of the British Women's Temperance Association are held in archive by the White Ribbon Association.
46. John 4:29.
47. Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Institute as a Social Movement* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 2015 [1997]).
48. 'Women's Institute Drama Festival', *Warwickshire Advertiser*, 12 April 1930, 8.
49. Angela Bartie, Linda Fleming, Mark Freeman, Tom Hulme, Alex Hutton, Paul Readman, 'Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes Pageant', *The Redress of the Past*, http://www.historicalpageants.ac.uk/pageants/1388/ (accessed 29 December 2018).
50. The Pastons were a Norfolk gentry family. Margery (b. *c.*1450) was the daughter of Margaret (1421/2–84); her love affair with and subsequent marriage to Richard Calle, steward of the Paston estates (and therefore a servant), caused a major scandal.
51. *Yarmouth Independent*, 12 June 1926, 7.
52. *Gloucester Journal*, 16 May 1936, 14.
53. Angela Williams, writing at http://www.literaryplaces.co.uk/?p=351 (accessed 29 December 2018), describes the various versions of the story, including a narrative poem by Rose Hartwick Thorpe (1867) and a play and short story by Albert Smith (1842).
54. Angela Bartie, Linda Fleming, Mark Freeman, Tom Hulme, Alex Hutton, Paul Readman, 'Mother Earth', *The Redress of the Past*, http://www.historicalpageants.ac.uk/pageants/1264/ (accessed 28 June 2019). Quotes are from a partial script contained in 'Papers Relating to WI Pageant at Blagdon Hall, 1936', Northumberland Archives, Ashington, ref. PC20/22.
55. *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 13 May 1938, 16; and 26 May 1938, 8.
56. *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 13 May 1938, 16.
57. *Sunderland Daily Echo and Shipping Gazette*, 13 May 1938, 16.
58. Angela Bartie, Linda Fleming, Mark Freeman, Tom Hulme, Alex Hutton, Paul Readman, 'Pedlar's Ware', *The Redress of the Past*, http://www.historicalpageants.ac.uk/pageants/1241/ (accessed 28 June 2019).
59. The use of symbolic space is discussed in George A. Tresidder, 'Coronation Day Celebrations in English Towns 1685–1821: Elite Hegemony and Local Relations on a Ceremonial Occasion', *British Journal of Eighteenth Century Studies* 15 (1992): 1–32. See also Michael Woods, 'Performing Power: Local Politics and the Taunton Pageant of 1928', *Journal of Historical Geography* 25 (1999): 57–74.

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