

The Impact of World War II on Women in Great Britain

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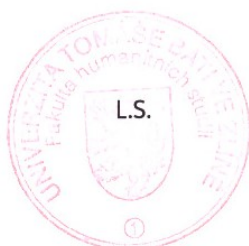
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ABSTRAKT

Tahle bakalářská práce se zabývá tím, jaký vliv měla druhá světová válka na postavení žen ve Velké Británii. V první části se zaměřuje na události, které ovlivnily role britských žen před druhou světovou válkou a tím shrnuje to, jak byly ženy vnímány před jejím začátkem. Následující tři kapitoly analyzují oblasti života britských žen, které byly válkou zasaženy nejvíce, jako práce v továrnách i v armádě a jejich rodinný a společenský život. Poslední část rozebírá to, jak se ženy popraly s tlakem vlády a společnosti vrátit jejich role tam, kde byly před válkou. Důkladným rozbořem těchto událostí si tahle práce klade za cíl odkrýt a prezentovat změny způsobené druhou světovou válkou, které změnily pohled na ženy v britské společnosti a tím vedly k urychlení procesu emancipace žen ve Velké Británii.

Klíčová slova:

Druhá Světová Válka, historie Velké Británie, feminismus, emancipace žen, genderová nerovnost, ženy v britské armádě, zaměstnanost žen, ženy ve válce, rodinný život během druhé světové války.

ABSTRACT

This bachelor's thesis analyses the impact that the Second World War had on the status of women in Great Britain. In the first part, the thesis focuses on events that had influenced the roles of British women before the Second World War. It summarises how they were perceived before the war started. The following three chapters examine areas of lives of British women that were affected the most by the war, such as work in factories and Armed Forces as well as their family and social lives. The last part evaluates how women managed to cope with the pressure to restore the pre-war practices. By a thorough analysis of these areas, this thesis aims at detecting and presenting the changes brought by the Second World War which transformed the perception of women in British society and by that accelerated the emancipation process of women in Great Britain.

Keywords:

World War II, Second World War, history of Great Britain, feminism, women's emancipation, gender inequality, gender history, women's employment, women in the British army, women at war, family life during World War II

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I hereby declare that the print version of my Bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

War has always been associated with men and with the qualities that manliness represents, such as, strength, courage, and protectionism. However, during the Second World War, women had to embrace similar, if not the same qualities as men. Especially women in Great Britain were due to Britain's broad engagement in the war compelled to reveal exceptional bravery, toughness and urge for protection, whether in the combat zone or on the home front. The war situation and the profound impact it had on the lives of British women remodelled their traditional roles as well as the way they were perceived by others and most importantly by themselves.

The Second World War was, however, not the only historic event that challenged the conventional view of gender roles in Great Britain which was highly stereotypical and old-fashioned. The First World War and the Suffrage Movement in Great Britain ensured that women in the pre-war period had the same voting rights as men and some new workplaces were added to the list of works women were allowed to perform. Nevertheless, some convictions and stereotypes still prevailed because they were deeply rooted in British society. Therefore, another historic event needed to happen in order to give women the opportunity to gain more confidence and to break those prejudices to the point where the society itself would recognize that something has changed and that women are also needed elsewhere than behind the stove.

Women received this kind of opportunity with the outset of the Second World War. Their participation in this major conflict had an impact on many areas of their lives, especially on the area of work and consequently on their personal lives. In contrast to the First World War, women participation in the war effort was not only voluntarily because in the year 1941 the National Service Act No.2 ordered compulsory conscription of specific categories of women to war work. These women could have been told to do the jobs men left when they were called up to the Armed Forces or women themselves could have been conscripted to work in the Army, too. As a result of that, their family and social lives were upside down, and they struggled with maintaining a pattern of combining work with their domestic responsibilities. Women were exposed to situations that they had never experienced before. However, many of them eventually adapted to their new roles and their participation in industrial work or many women's military services as well as the new power they acquired in their homes and relationships made them stronger and more independent. This war gave women such a high number of opportunities and provided many changes that

not even the pressure to restore the pre-war practices which emerged after the war could reverse their roles entirely back to where they were before the war.

After the war ended, not only society but also women themselves started to believe in their own capabilities. The extensive range of tasks and challenges they underwent during the war, provided them with the self-confidence they needed to keep pursuing their equality and independence. However, they did not have to go much further because the Second World War was precisely the one event that was needed in addition to the First World War and the Suffrage Movement in order for the society to realize the real power women hold in their possession. Additionally to these events, the Second World War accelerated the emancipation process of women in Great Britain.

1 THE PERCEPTION OF WOMEN IN GREAT BRITAIN BEFORE WORLD WAR II

1.1 Traditional View of Gender Roles in British Society

“It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of good fortune must be in want of a wife.”¹ In this opening line of the novel *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen ironically portrays the real and traditional gender relationships in the 18th and 19th century Britain. What she is saying in that sentence is that women were, in fact, the ones searching for a wealthy man, who would secure them financially. Given the circumstances, a lot of women were on a hunt for a husband at that time, because the male-dominated British society did not give them any other options.

A single woman was expected to get married in her early 20ies in order to not become a burden for the family and to make sure she will not suffer financially once her father dies because a male heir was usually the only one who could inherit property at that time in Great Britain.² Apart from marriage, women could also enter the workplace, which not many of them did, because they believed that their place was at home, bearing children, taking care of them, of their husband and the household. It was also a known fact that a man should be the breadwinner of the family.³ Therefore, many women chose marriage over work. Both genders were used to this segregation since childhood. Girls at school age, no matter if they went to school or were home educated, were taught how to cook, sew, knit, how to take care of a child and other activities that were supposed to prepare them for marriage or for gender-specific work. Boys, on the other hand, were predominantly educated in science and technical subjects.⁴ Moreover, the children were exposed to this stereotype at home. They grew up in an environment, where their mothers were doing all the housekeeping activities, their fathers were going to work to earn money, their elder sisters and brothers were getting married and establishing families corresponding to those circumstances in which they grew up. Consequently, many of them saw this division as something normal and right. Women

¹ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (New York: Modern Library, 1995), 1, Kindle.

² Luhaib Khalaf, “Irony and Feminism in Jane Austen’s novel *Pride and Prejudice*,” *International Journal of English Research* 3, no. 4 (2017): 70-73, accessed January 22, 2019, <http://www.englishjournals.com/archives/2017/vol3/issue4/3-4-28>.

³ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain: Social, Cultural and Political Change* (London: Routledge, 2014), 76.

⁴ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 37-43.

were, due to these conditions, forced by society to get married, and as a result of that, they lost most of their rights and erased their legal existence, because once they married a man, they became his property. The husband was the owner of his wife's personal belongings, even the possessions like clothes or jewellery, and he was also responsible for her debts. A married woman, who joined the workforce, had to give over the money she earned to her husband, because the money legally belonged to him. What also belonged to the man was the woman's body, with which he could do anything he desired. Not even rape or violence would lead to divorce because at that time, divorce was a privilege of rich people and aristocracy and the court would need direct evidence of these allegations. However, the biggest issue for the woman was probably the fact that she would lose her children after divorce because she had no right over them, they were in custody of the father. Women were chasing after marriage but little did they know that these legal conditions that were set by the common law would put them into prison, from which it was almost impossible to escape.⁵

The roles of men and women and their relationships were defined and prescribed by the so-called separate sphere ideology, which began to evolve in the 18th and 19th century in Great Britain. Except for prescribing the roles, this ideology was also used for justifying the legal conditions that were discriminating British women. The two genders at that time indeed lived like in separate spheres and were perceived as almost incomparable. This separate sphere ideology described men as strong, reasonable, dominant, socially active, visible in public and as the ones who should work and be involved in politics. In contrast, women were described as submissive, with no rights, with no education, being overly emotional and as the ones who should stay at home to do domestic work and to look after the children.⁶ These convictions and stereotypes have deep roots and even though much had changed from the time, when they were all valid, they are still affecting many areas of the lives of women even in the 21st century.

⁵ Joan Perking, *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 2003), 10-24, Kindle.

⁶ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 8-9.

1.2 Changes in the Perception of Women in Great Britain before World War II and What Had Influenced It

The prescribed roles of women in Great Britain were challenged over several centuries. Even before the Second World War, British society had experienced some historic events that had a meaningful impact on how the women were perceived.

1.2.1 Changes Caused by the First World War

One of the events that had influenced the roles of women before the Second World War was undoubtedly the First World War. Before the beginning of this war, women either stayed at home or performed only female jobs like domestic servants, milkmaids, midwives or they worked in laundries and textile factories. The female-specialized jobs were often supervised by man and did not require any special knowledge or training. After the war began, women served as a replacement for the men, who had to join the armed forces. Even though women substituted men only in automatic or semi-automatic work and in monotonous tasks, they certainly learned some new skills and gained new experience, because they were suddenly forced to work under conditions that were unknown to them and to perform jobs they had never done before. The number of women who adopted a man's job was approximately two million in 1918. Nevertheless, this substitution did not last long, because a lot of women returned to their previous occupations and routines. The First World War, however, did something to raise the women's status as workers. If nothing else, they were at least offered a wider job choice and eventually even slightly higher wages. Apart from that, women started to gain more freedom in other areas at that time, too. Women could, for example, eventually manage their own property.⁷

1.2.2 Changes Caused by the Women's Suffrage Movement

Another change of great importance women achieved by their own strengths. In 1918 the suffrage movement in Great Britain ensured the voting right for women, however, they still could not vote equally as men. The equal franchise came ten years later in 1928.⁸ Besides the voting right, the suffrage movement helped women to gain better access to universities. It took over half of a century to accomplish this because women started to feel the need and

⁷ Janet McCalman, "The Impact of the First World War on Female Employment in England," *Labour History*, no. 21 (1971): 36-47, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27508026>.

⁸ Rebecca Myers, "General History of Women's Suffrage in Britain," *Independent*, May 28, 2013, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/general-history-of-women-s-suffrage-in-britain-8631733.html>.

wanted to participate in the politics already in the middle of the 18th century. They felt misunderstood, underestimated and not fully appreciated. They also felt irritated by the fact that they had to submit to the laws that mostly discriminated them and that they had no power to change those laws. Therefore, they started to fight for their freedom and equality by themselves. One of their major arguments was that, in government, women power is needed, because there are some areas that will never be fully understood by men as they are by women. For example, areas related to childcare, education or moral and social matters. Moreover, they argued that in the past the right to vote was not strictly forbidden to them and that some women were more qualified to hold this right than some men.⁹ The enfranchising of women created a noticeable crack in the imaginary wall that was separating women's and men's spheres.

1.2.3 What these events did not change

The events in British history described earlier undoubtedly started shifting the traditional views of women's roles. They had brought some changes, but some assumptions and stereotypes still prevailed. For example, women with university degrees remained an exception even though the barriers for women to access the university decreased. This was due to the fact that many schoolgirls left school after they finished their elementary education. One of the reasons was great competition and limited places. But most importantly, providing secondary education for girls meant that the family would lose money for paying the educational fees, uniforms or for travelling to school. If the girl continued in her post-compulsory education, the family would also lose the income they would get if she joined the workforce instead of studying. Because of these reasons, many girls left school in their early age to start working or to help at home with the household and with taking care of their siblings. Therefore, even though women gained better access to universities, society and the way of living in Great Britain was still keeping women from acquiring some respectable education.¹⁰

The employment of women during the first world war added some new occupations to the list of the women's jobs, raised their wages and by that slightly improved the status of women as workers. However, because women were regarded as unskilled and unreliable, they were entrusted only with tasks that did not require much knowledge and, moreover,

⁹ Edward Raymond Turner, "The Women's Suffrage Movement in England," *The American Political Science Review* 7, no. 4 (1913): 588-609, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1944309>.

¹⁰ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 40-41.

after some job had been done by a woman the respectability of the job significantly declined, even if the replacement was, however, only temporarily. The law Restoration of the Pre-War Practices from the year 1918 forced women to return to their original women's jobs and to their home life in order to vacate the space for men who came back home. Surprisingly, the majority of women returned to their old jobs and routines with enthusiasm. Even though they had new opportunities which enabled them to enter new types of workplaces, they usually chose the ones intended for women. They preferred jobs and tasks that were known to them. The society and community did not stop underrating and depreciating the women's work, and therefore women kept underestimating themselves too. Consequently, they kept unknowingly delaying the achievement of equality.¹¹

Apart from the areas of education and work, where there were some changes, although not very significant ones, there were areas where there was no change at all. Divorce was still an exception, but when the exception happened and the divorce took place, women still had less rights than men. A man could, for example, divorce his wife for adultery, but women could not divorce a husband for the same act. Another area in which nothing much had changed was women's sexuality. Before the Second World War, the majority of women still considered sex as a duty and were mostly disgusted by it. Moreover, they were not able to control their own fertility, because birth control was mainly associated with prostitution and it was not in line with the Church.¹²

Each of these events in British history and the changes they brought with them contributed their own piece to the emancipation of women in Great Britain, however, some prejudices were still deeply carved in the minds and subconscious of people. Therefore, something more needed to happen in order to break down those beliefs that were known to the society for centuries and to encourage the women to keep fighting for their freedom and equality.

¹¹ McCalman, "The Impact of the First World War on Female Employment in England," 36-47.

¹² Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 51-54.

2 BRITISH WOMEN AT WORK DURING WORLD WAR II

After the interwar period when almost nothing had changed in terms of the division of gender roles, another historic event emerged to challenge the conventional practices and stereotypes of British society. When the Second World War began in Great Britain, it did not bring only death, fear and terror. It also brought new workplaces and even more significant need for women labour than the First World War did. Moreover, the overall number of women who participated in the war work in Great Britain was much higher than in other countries affected by the Second World War.¹³ However, women not only had to replace men in their positions but they also had to cope with many other problems associated with the situation in which they found themselves. The Second World War presented another great opportunity for women to raise their status not only as workers but also as recognized members of society.

2.1 Mobilisation of Women for War Work

The need for a women labour supply undoubtedly did appear at the beginning of the war, but the number of women workers was rising slowly in the first two years, mainly due to various interventions of the government. When men left their occupations in order to join the armed forces, the Ministry of Labour faced a troublesome situation. It had to mobilize women for war work, but at the same time, it did not want to disrupt or reverse the traditional gender roles by tearing women out of their domestic spheres.¹⁴

For a reason to avoid the intrusion of women's home responsibilities were women divided into two categories – mobile and immobile. Mobile women could perform jobs anywhere it was needed possibly even away from their home, on the other hand, immobile women could perform jobs that were available only in their location. To meet the requirements of being mobile, women had to be single or widow, living alone or with someone of whom they did not have to take care of and with none or only little domestic responsibilities. In contrast, immobile women were the ones who were married and had domestic responsibilities. However, even some married women were regarded as mobile when they did not have to take care of children and were living alone.¹⁵ The target type of mobile women for the Ministry of Labour was: “single women aged 20-21, not engaged in

¹³ Harold L. Smith, “The Womanpower Problem in Britain During the Second World War,” *The Historical Journal* 27, no. 4 (1984): 934, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2639033>.

¹⁴ Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 29.

¹⁵ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 44-47.

a full-time paid occupation, without responsibility for a household or young children and not engaged in full-time study.”¹⁶

At first, the war recruitment was based on voluntarism because the Minister of Labour Ernest Bevin thought that when women enter the war work voluntarily, they will do that because of their own determination to help their country. For that reason, he thought that they would do their tasks better and more rigorously. Moreover, he believed that only mobile women who had the time to do the war work would register. Therefore, there would not be any side effects of the recruitment in a form of neglecting the domestic duties or absenteeism at work. It was also the reason why the employment was not rising noteworthy in the first two years of the war.¹⁷ However, a report presented by the Manpower Requirements Committee at the end of 1940 revealed the number of women who will be needed to join the war workplaces in the following years. Particularly it was 400 000 women in engineering and 800 000 women in munition factories. These predictions could not have been met by using the voluntary method. As a result, the Minister of Labour had to withdraw from his beliefs about the voluntary principle.¹⁸ In the year 1941, all women were told to register with the Employment Exchange. These women who had registered could have been either transferred from their current occupation or from their work at home to work in the workplaces with an urgent need for the women workforce. If women had objections against the displacement, they could have been forced to translocate by the law. At first, only women who belonged to the age group of 19-40 years were proposed to register, but later in 1943, the age limit was raised to 50 years¹⁹ which made the Second World War revolutionary in terms of employing older women.²⁰

Even though the Ministry of Labour tried hard to maintain the pre-war gender roles division, it was becoming more and more difficult as the war continued and the need for women labour grew. Moreover, another momentous milestone in the emancipation of women in Great Britain was just about to happen when Minister Ernest Bevin allowed the formation of a women committee. At first, this committee was only supposed to help him make decisions about the use of women power in the war effort. However, over some time, this group of women evolved into an organisation called the Woman Power Committee

¹⁶ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 45.

¹⁷ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 57-60.

¹⁸ Smith, “The Womanpower Problem in Britain During the Second World War,” 932.

¹⁹ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 34-35.

²⁰ Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and subjectivity in oral histories of the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 3.

which acquired significant power during the war era. Even though many recommendations made by this committee were ignored by the ministry, women workers suddenly had representatives fighting for their rights that were in direct contact with the minister himself.²¹

2.2 Propaganda of War Work

As the need for women labour force grew, the government slowly started to retreat from its original goal to not disturb the women's traditional domestic roles and instead of that, started to encourage them by certain means to participate in the war effort. One of these encouragements was propaganda of war work in the film and cinema industry. The Ministry of Information had an idea to motivate women and influence their minds and approaches to war work by showing them how they can enjoy the work, and moreover, feel meritorious and appreciated. They also wanted women to forget about the struggling brought by the war and provide an escape from reality. This idea was supported by some film producers, for example, Edward Black or Leslie Howard. These producers created films that appealed to women by an interesting plot and romantic story and at the same time encouraged them to join the war work. Probably the most influencing film from the war period is called *Millions Like Us*. The film aimed to inspire women to enter the work in factories just like Celia, the main protagonist, did. Owing to joining the aircraft factory, Celia found the love of her life, by which the plot met the romantic story requirement. Another propaganda film called *The Gentle Sex* was created in order to influence women to consider joining the Auxiliary Territorial Service. Women were inspired and mostly highly influenced by these films because on the screen, they were depicted like they were doing an honourable job, just like the man in the battles were doing. Furthermore, it was probably for the first time that their work was publicly appreciated.²²

The government was also in charge of the propaganda of national unity and equality. The base of this campaign was to show that all women working in the factories are equal. The imagination was that the women from a higher class like the wives and daughters of the men with high rank were working in the factories alongside women from the lower class. Also, parades and exhibitions were organized in the years 1941 and 1942 in order to encourage women to register for war work. These parades went through the main streets of

²¹ Smith, "The Womanpower Problem in Britain During the Second World War," 928-930.

²² Josephine Botting, "How British Film Celebrated the Role of Women During the Second World War," British Film Institute, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/news-bfi/features/british-cinema-women-second-world-war>.

towns, the women workers from local factories were dressed in their working overalls and sitting on tanks or parts of aeroplanes by which they wanted to show the spectators what they had made in the factories and perhaps inspire more women to join them in participating in the war effort.²³

Another type of war work propaganda were posters. These posters were usually portraying women working in factories as heroes taking after the men's jobs, and by that providing a service to their country. The government gave women what they wanted to see and consequently, many women were searching for jobs that would make them look like heroes, and that would bring them the feeling of doing something meaningful. The most popular poster of that time is called Ruby Loftus which is the British equivalent of Rosie the Riveter, the famous American women worker. The poster depicts a good looking, skinny woman with curly brown hair in blue working overall, screwing a breech ring for an aircraft weapon. Ruby is portrayed as a gender chameleon that represents both femininity and masculinity. The red lipstick and precisely shaped eyebrows refer to fragile feminine power, and the sleeves rolled up showing the oil covered hands are pointing out the masculinity of the job. The poster was painted by Laura Knight, and it revolutionarily demonstrated the change of women's roles in society.

Many other posters and movies emerged during the war depicting women in traditionally male environments, doing jobs initially intended only for men. Women were in the past discouraged to interfere in these activities, and this was for the first time that someone for a change encouraged them to participate in the men's business. Moreover, this new and modern view of women was even documented and presented directly in front of their eyes either on the screen in a cinema, on the pages of the magazines or on the walls of the streets. As women and the whole community saw this here, there and everywhere, they started to adapt to the changes of women's roles. For the sake of that, there was no possible way for women to get entirely back to their old and traditional roles, even though there was some pressure to restore the pre-war practices after the war ended.²⁴

²³ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 56.

²⁴ Mike McKiernan, "Dame Laura Knight Ruby Loftus screwing a Breech – ring 1943," *Occupational Medicine* 60, no. 6 (2010): 421-422, accessed February 2, 2019, <https://academic.oup.com/occmed/article/60/6/421/1393375>.

2.3 Types of War Work

During and after the First World War, women were only scarcely allowed to perform tasks that were intended primarily for men. There were cases when they had to replace men, but they were offered only positions that did not acquire much knowledge. Before the war, there was a low number of women employed in industrial workplaces. For example, in the engineering industry, the number of women workers before the Second World War was only 97 000. However, during the war, that number rose to 602 000 women workers. Before the war, there was a low proportion of women also in areas like chemical, water and electricity industries or building and transport industries. During the war, the number of women working in these workplaces rose significantly, too. While the number of women in typical men industries was on the rise, the number of women in female occupations, however, declined. The reason was mainly reduced production due to the war situation in areas such as boots, textile, clothing or food industries. Another reason was the translocation of women to industries and workplaces in which there was an urgent need for women labour like an ammunition or aircraft factories.²⁵

In some companies, women represented more than half of all the employees. In one specific company which aimed at producing tanks, women represented even 70% of the employees. Apart from the tank or aeroplane producing organisations, women worked also in shipyards and dockyards as bus drivers or engine cleaners. Moreover, during the Second World War, women for the first time replaced men in positions that are nowadays occupied mainly by women because they are regarded as more suitable for them than for men, for example, post women.²⁶

For the duration of the war, the marriage bar that restricted married women from being employed was abolished for the majority of occupations. Nonetheless, for example, women who wanted to be teachers could still occupy this position only if they were single and childless. After the men teachers left to fight in the war, the shortage of schoolteachers that originated, however, compelled the board of education to abolish the marriage bar even for women teachers. As a result of that, in 1945 there were over 33 000 women teachers that were married at the same time.²⁷

²⁵ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 29-35.

²⁶ Barbara Ward, "Women in Britain," *Foreign Affairs* 22, no. 4 (1944): 562, accessed February 15, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20029854>.

²⁷ Smith, "The Womanpower Problem in Britain During the Second World War," 942.

The war situation also brought the need for women power in the armed forces. There were many organizations under which women participated in the British army. For example, the Auxiliary Territorial Service, Women's Voluntary Service or Women's Land Army. Women, who joined these organisations were doing mainly supplementary jobs, in order to enable men to do more important tasks. However, these organisations later became important and essential parts of the British Army, and they gained more responsibility and respectability.²⁸ The matter of women in the British Army will be discussed more thoroughly in the following chapter.

The overall employment of women during the Second World War was more than 7.5 million. Moreover, this number includes two and a half million women who had never been employed before and even so, they joined the war workplaces and performed tasks that were always regarded as unsuitable for women.²⁹

2.4 Equal Pay for Women

When these replacements took place, the issue of equal pay rates for women arose. Though women were allowed to do the men's jobs, they were still discriminated by the pay rates because the pay they received was considerably lower than the pay men originally earned for the same service. This gender pay gap was a government strategy, how to preserve gender differentiation.³⁰ It suggested that women were still not qualified enough to do the jobs as good as men and therefore they could not be paid the same amount of money for it. It also suggested that women were not the ones who should be working for money, because they were not the breadwinners of the family like men were. It should have reminded them that the place where they were supposed to work was at home, taking care of their children and household because that is what their legacy was proposing.³¹

In order to determine the pay for women, the government divided them into two categories. In the first category were women who were performing tasks formerly regarded as only men's work. In the second category were women doing jobs which could have been done by women as well as men even in time of peace. An important breakthrough in remunerating women was an Extended Employment of Women Agreement from the year 1940 which stated that women will earn the same amount of money as men, after a

²⁸ Winifred C. Cullis, "Impact of War Upon British Home Life," *Marriage and Family Living* 4, no. 1 (1942): 10-11, accessed February 2, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/346646>.

²⁹ Ward, "Women in Britain," 561.

³⁰ Smith, "The Womanpower Problem in Britain During the Second World War," 926.

³¹ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 143.

probationary period of eight months. Nonetheless, this concerned only women from the first category, which means mainly women in the engineering industry. The pay rates of women doing interchangeable work stayed the same. This agreement, however, had a loophole which some of the employers found and used. It included a statement saying that women who were replacing men but needed some further supervision should receive lower pay. However, even though there was this complication that affected some women, generally many women workers in the engineering industry received the same wages as men.³² Also, there were the wives of Servicemen who were under the patronage of government because their husbands were risking their lives in order to protect the country. These women received considerably higher payments than other women and even some men.³³

In the year 1944, an Equal Pay Campaign Committee that aimed at securing the equal pay for all women was established in cooperation with the Women Power Committee. However, a reform urged by this committee was kept delaying by the cabinet to the point when it lost its necessity after the war. As a result of this, the remarkable rise of women earnings was recorded primarily with the women industrial workers, especially in the engineering industry. Even though the gender pay gap was still an issue, in general, it was diminished at least a little during the war.³⁴

2.5 Women's Reaction to Mobilisation

Even though the rise of employment of women was substantial during the war, the numbers could have been even more extensive if the willingness of women to work was higher and the conditions were better. The government, on the one hand, tried to persuade women to enter the workplace, but on the other hand, did not alleviate the problems women faced. Most importantly, during the first years of war, there were no part-time jobs available which mean that even married women, who entered war work in their locations had to work full time. Consequently, due to the lack of time, they were neglecting their domestic responsibilities. Moreover, the lack of canteens in schools and workplaces or their financial requirements did not help them either. For that reason, many married women refused to join

³² Smith, "The Womanpower Problem in Britain During the Second World War," 934-935.

³³ Sally Solokoff, "How Are They at Home? Community, State and Servicemen's Wives in England, 1939-45," *Women's History Review* 8, no. 1 (1999): 31, accessed January 29, 2019, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09612029900200196>.

³⁴ Smith, "The Womanpower Problem in Britain During the Second World War," 935-936.

the workforce.³⁵ They did not even respond to the government propaganda of women as heroes because they already regarded their work at home as essential and admirable.³⁶

However, not only married women refused to work, but also some single and young women did. There were a lot of different reasons for their lack of enthusiasm for war work, but all were connected to the attachment of women to home and to the conventional roles which have been instilled in their minds for a long time. Mainly they did not want to leave their homes and known environment to go to work where it was needed. They would have rather worked in their locality instead, but these jobs were already occupied by married, immobile women. Moreover, many single and young women also had home responsibilities. In many cases, they had to at least help their parents with the household duties because that was what the society expected them to do.³⁷

Regardless of these problems, many women joined the workforce even though they had to cope with the so-called double burden. The proportion of single women who were employed during the wartime was 80%, and the proportion of married women was 41%.³⁸ These numbers are pointing out that many women eventually found a way of combining work with their household responsibilities. Consequently, it ensured them that they are not only good enough to do the men's jobs but also that they are able to do these jobs even when they have to take care for the household and children.

2.6 The Outcome of Women's War Employment

The women who participated in the war work ensured great changes for women workers in Great Britain. "Women were permitted to hold jobs previously reserved for men, the proportion of married and older women in the labour force increased significantly, some women industrial workers obtained equal pay for equal work, and public opinions developed in favour of that reform."³⁹ Furthermore, the Second World War provided a change in employment in terms of employing older and even married women and women from remote regions, although many employers were at first reluctant to hire these women. As a result of that, even women who had never been employed had an opportunity to broaden their

³⁵ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 38-41.

³⁶ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 153.

³⁷ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 37.

³⁸ Sokoloff, "How Are They at Home?," 30.

³⁹ Smith, "The Womanpower Problem in Britain During the Second World War," 944.

horizons, learn new things and prove themselves that they are not so unreliable and undisciplined as they were considered to be before the war.⁴⁰

Additionally, the experience of war work contradicted the traditional role distribution in society saying that men should protect women and keep them safe. Without taking into account women in the armed forces, many women were mobilized to do dangerous tasks also in factories and other industrial workplaces. The production, maintenance, and storage of materials needed for war required many security measures. In case of non-compliance with these measures, a dangerous situation arose. Testimony of one woman worker called Moira Underwood disclosed an incident that happened in an ammunition factory while manipulating with gun powder. She described how one girl who was working in the factory together with her three sisters and a father lost her arm during an explosion. Moira could not understand why the father let his daughters perform such task when he knew how dangerous it was. It proves that even though people tend to preserve the stereotypes and traditions concerning the women roles, there were situations in which these patterns were being overlooked and women were regarded as equal to men.⁴¹

Also, women war employment ensured the loosening of some government regulations. Although the government was careful about giving women more power and freedom, the pressure to meet the women's demands grew with the pressure to employ more women. As long as the war continued, the government had to withdraw from many of its strict rules, like for example, from the ban on married women teachers. The war employment therefore not only provided more opportunities for women but also shifted the opinions about them that prevailed in British society for a long time.⁴²

⁴⁰ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 29-35.

⁴¹ Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, 100-101.

⁴² Ward, "Women in Britain," 570.

3 WOMEN IN THE BRITISH ARMY DURING WORLD WAR II

“It wasn’t just my brother’s country, or my husband’s country; it was my country as well. And so this war wasn’t just their war; it was my war, and I needed to serve in it.”⁴³ This statement of one of the women members of armed forces flawlessly captures the feelings of many other women in Great Britain.

The war situation itself divided the gender roles as follows: “Men go away to fight; women remain at home.”⁴⁴ This division had its own reason. Women were always regarded as the foundation of the nation, and they were told to stay at home in order for the men to have something to fight for and something to return to after the war ends. Wives and mothers were the ones who kept the nation, families, and home together in the time of war. This segregation was promoted during the war by various means. For example, one war propaganda poster portraying a man with a shield protecting a woman holding a baby was a proper reminder of how the roles are divided and that people should stick to this traditional division.⁴⁵

That was, however, not how many women felt. A lot of them wanted to contribute to the war effort by joining the military forces, so they could feel like they directly helped to win the war. The women’s participation in the armed forces was, at first, only voluntary as well as their participation in the industrial war work. Few months after the war began, there were 43, 000 women volunteers in women auxiliary services, 18, 000 women more than before the war in 1938. There were three auxiliary services for women in the time when the Second World War began: Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS), Women’s Royal Naval Service (WRNS) and Women’s Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF).⁴⁶ Additionally, women volunteered also in services like Women’s Voluntary Service, Women’s Land Army or Auxiliary Fire Service, Air Transport Auxiliary, Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service or in Air Raid Precautions work.

During the first years of the war, women volunteering in these services, performed less essential tasks, so that the men who did these tasks formerly, could be released for combatant duty.⁴⁷ These tasks were called non-operational support duties and consisted of cooking,

⁴³ Yashila Permeswaran, “The Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps: A Compromise to Overcome the Conflict of Women Serving in the Army,” *The History Teacher* 42, no. 1 (2008): 95, accessed February 17, 2019, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40543776>.

⁴⁴ Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907-1948* (London: Routledge, 2006), 15, Kindle.

⁴⁵ Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, 104, Kindle.

⁴⁶ Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, 105-107, Kindle.

⁴⁷ Cullis, “Impact of War Upon British Home Life,” 10.

storing, ordering food, cleaning or driving. When the Registration for Employment Order was introduced in 1941 and women had to register for war work, mobile women could have been translocated from their home, to join the army and help the volunteers with their support duties. Therefore, their participation in the armed forces was no longer voluntary.⁴⁸

As time went by and the war continued, women shifted from the support duties to more responsible tasks. Regardless of the great responsibility, bravery, and knowledge that the army nurses showed, many women replaced men in officer posts,⁴⁹ in aircrafts and even in positions close to combat, which undoubtedly required great courage, too. Moreover, women acquired command authority over men⁵⁰ and even could have been superior to men in rank.⁵¹

3.1 Front-Line Nurses

British nurses saving lives of soldiers during the Second World War revealed exceptional courage and heroism. They were serving under the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service or Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service. All women, who joined these two services were State Registered Nurses who underwent proper training. Women who wanted to volunteer as nurses could have been recruited by the Voluntary Aid Detachment if they had passed the first aid and nursing examinations.⁵² Though the nurses did not fight the enemy directly, they faced them from the front line. Therefore, they must have dealt with the same situations as the front-line soldiers experienced, including bombs, mines or machine gun bullets. Even in these conditions, they did not fail or hesitate to help the wounded.⁵³

One of the first horrifying direct encounters of the British nurses with the Nazis was at the Battle of Dunkirk in 1940. Over 1000 nurses were sent to France on hospital ships to help evacuate the encircled British soldiers and allied troops to the British soil.⁵⁴ "These brave women sailed back and forth across the English Channel many times, enduring bombs, mines and attacks by the Luftwaffe, rarely stopping to think about the danger they were in

⁴⁸ Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, 112, Kindle

⁴⁹ Cullis, "Impact of War Upon British Home Life," 10.

⁵⁰ Helena Page Schrader, *Sisters in Arms: The Women Who Flew in World War II* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Aviation, 2015), 1.

⁵¹ Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, 114, Kindle.

⁵² Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It: British Women In World War II* (Wiltshire: Picton Publishing & Chippenham, 1994), 20.

⁵³ Eric Taylor, *Front-line Nurse: British Nurses in World War II* (London: Robert Hale, 1997) 24-29.

⁵⁴ Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It*, 20.

but all the time caring for the wounded men entrusted to their care.”⁵⁵ However, the nurses not only took care of the soldiers but also of the passengers of other ships that were bombed. Moreover, though the hospital ships were marked with the big red crosses, they were bombed, too. Particularly, one hospital ship named Paris was attacked when it was on its way to Dunkirk for the sixth time and when the nurses that survived boarded the lifeboat, it was bombed too.⁵⁶

However, the heroism of British nurses at Dunkirk has not been left unnoticed. Nurses who served at hospital ships were highly praised by the captain of one of these ships John Ailwyn Jones. He was amazed mainly by how calmly and efficiently these women worked under such stressful and extreme conditions.⁵⁷ Additionally, a memory of one evacuated soldier tells a heroic story of British nurses helping the men on the beach of Dunkirk. “I saw one party of them dressing wounded who were lying out in the open. A plane began bombing. They just lay down by their patients and continued bandaging.”⁵⁸ In his testimony, he refers to them as angels who continued in their duty even when they were asked by the soldiers to return to the ships and save themselves. He also describes how horrible it was to see some of them die.⁵⁹

Two months after the Battle of Dunkirk ended, the Battle of Britain began. At that time, many nurses were serving in the RAF hospitals located in RAF camps that were one of the targets of the Luftwaffe pilots. During the still repeating attacks, nurses had to work when others were panicking. Between explosions they were quickly nursing everyone they stumbled upon, helping patients to cover under their beds and comforting them. Moreover, some raids lasted for several hours, and they could not wait for the bombs to stop falling, they had to take care of the severely wounded patients and operate them even during the attacks.

One of the targets was also London with many of its hospitals. According to Bette Anderson, the absolute number of hospitals in Great Britain damaged in air raids was 500.⁶⁰ When one hospital in South-East London was attacked twice during one night, it attracted the attention of journalists, who were honouring the young probationer nurses who were

⁵⁵ David Worsfold, “Nurses at War: At and After Dunkirk,” Historic UK, accessed February 20, 2019, <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/Nurses-At-War-Dunkirk/>.

⁵⁶ Worsfold, “Nurses at War.”

⁵⁷ Worsfold, “Nurses at War.”

⁵⁸ Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It*, 20.

⁵⁹ Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It*, 20.

⁶⁰ Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It*, 25.

helping patients and did not care about the bombs hitting the ground next to them.⁶¹ The nurses who served in these hospitals were also praised by the Queen Elizabeth. The Queen devoted them a speech saying: “I must say a special word for the nurses, those wonderful women whose devotion, whose heroism will never be forgotten. In the black horror of a bombed hospitals they never falter, and though often wounded, think always of their patients and never of themselves.”⁶²

British wartime nurses, however, did not serve only in Great Britain. Many were sent, for example, to the Middle East, where they experienced “a two-thousand mile chase across the Western Dessert through Alamein, Tripoli and on to Tunis.”⁶³ When Italy attacked Greece, nurses moved from the Middle East to Greece, Crete, and Malta. British nurses also served in Sicily, Salerno, Naples, and Bari or Normandy.⁶⁴ Even though they were so far from home, they did not forsake their obligations and continued helping the wounded. Some of the nurses were even taken into captivity by Gestapo together with the patients they refused to abandon.⁶⁵

A high number of nurses in the Second World War were young women around 20 years old, who had never seen a dead person before and the training they underwent could only hardly prepare them for the reality of war. Even so, they quickly adapted to the extreme situation. This experience undoubtedly made women much stronger, independent and confident. When the war ended, they were not the same women in their own eyes or in the eyes of others.⁶⁶

3.2 Women’s Military Services

As mentioned earlier, there were several military organisations through which women could have contributed to the war effort apart from the nursing services. Each one of them had different functions, rules, requirements, uniforms and living conditions. Some of them required more dangerous tasks and some less dangerous tasks. One thing, however, binds them together. All these organisations and armed services provided women with the opportunity to make a difference and offered them functions that made them believe in themselves.

⁶¹ Taylor, *Front-line Nurse*, 25-35.

⁶² Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It*, 11.

⁶³ Taylor, *Front-line Nurse*, 36.

⁶⁴ Taylor, *Front-line Nurse*, 25-105.

⁶⁵ Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It*, 20.

⁶⁶ Taylor, *Front-line Nurse*, 28.

3.2.1 Auxiliary Territorial Service

In the first years of the war, the Auxiliary Territorial Service did not have much of an admirable reputation. Women volunteering in the ATS were often compared to prostitutes or whores, and they were condemned for crossing the line that was defining the distribution of gender roles. Moreover, it was believed that as they often intermixed with men and took over their positions, they had also adopted their habits including drinking and rough language. Due to these beliefs, the ATS was regarded as an organisation for a lower class women with poor standards of moral behaviour, and therefore, it was the least popular service of all the other services where women could participate. Additionally, women serving in ATS were complaining about the types of jobs they were assigned to. They were not satisfied with only “peeling potatoes and doing dirty work for everybody.”⁶⁷ It is a fact that at the beginning of the war, the jobs offered by ATS were not of high importance. Women could have been assigned to only five different tasks, containing “drivers, clerks, cooks, orderlies and storekeepers.”⁶⁸

Because of these circumstances, the number of volunteers was not sufficient. The ATS needed 100,000 women recruits and tried to achieve it through propaganda that focused not only on women but also on their parents. However, it was not until the year 1941 that they reached this goal. “The National Service (No. 2) Act passed in December 1941 enabled all young unmarried women, aged between 20 and 30, to be called up.”⁶⁹ This conscription ensured a large number of recruits not only for ATS but also for other services. It, however, also unleashed disputes in Parliament about what roles the women should be allowed to play, and most importantly, if they should be allowed to hold a weapon. The verdict was that women’s duties should be strictly non-combatant. Nevertheless, as time went by, women’s responsibilities in the ATS were expanding, and they eventually acquired positions where they faced the enemy directly and were exposed to great danger. One of them was a position in the anti-aircraft batteries which was also the most wanted one, because of the heroic opportunities if offered. Even though their work in the batteries did not include shooting aircraft directly, they were able to assist the men who did that. The women’s work consisted of radar operating, spotting the aircraft and determining the height, predicting and locating.⁷⁰ As the war was coming to an end, women in ATS could have participated in over 100 tasks.

⁶⁷ Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, 115-117, Kindle.

⁶⁸ Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It*, 119.

⁶⁹ Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, 115, Kindle.

⁷⁰ Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, 117-120, Kindle.

Apart from their service in the anti-aircraft batteries, they carried out many technical duties such as “working like mechanics, tank repairs, as armourers repairing small arms and machine guns and working as technicians testing compasses, telescopes and other apparatus.”⁷¹

Even though women were not allowed to hold weapons, the Auxiliary Territorial Service offered them the opportunity to do their bit. Letters from the ATS women workers proved that women were “proud of the fact that they were at least allowed to rough it with the men.”⁷² Moreover, the reversion of initial assumptions about ATS and women serving there together with the extension of women’s duties is portraying the impact that war had on the change of perception of women.⁷³

3.2.2 Women’s Auxiliary Air Force and Air Transport Auxiliary

With the outburst of the Second World War, the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force became an integral part of the Royal Air Force, however, it became an official part of the Armed Forces of the Crown in the year 1941. This service provided women with several opportunities and tasks associated with air forces except flying. The WAAFs, as the women were referred to, at first held positions such as “station commanders and advisory specialists.”⁷⁴ Later, however, they were trained to do jobs that were initially strictly masculine. They maintained and tested the planes and its equipment. They worked as mechanics or electricians, and they were repairing instruments or inspecting, packing and testing the parachutes. The more honourable position was being an airwoman whose responsibility was to maintain and inspect gunnery equipment of Spitfires or Armourer who mounted guns on these aircraft, which acquired a lot of physical strength and excellent education. At the end of the war, over 182, 000 women served in the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force.⁷⁵

The actual flying part, however, was the domain of women of a different organisation called the Air Transport Auxiliary. This initially private organisation was created to transport planes from factories to airports and to transport the VIPs. At first, they recruited only women who had flying experience. Later, however, they were forced by the shortage of pilots to take women who had never flown before. Regardless of that fact, their selection

⁷¹ Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It*, 123.

⁷² Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, 122, Kindle.

⁷³ Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, 120, Kindle.

⁷⁴ Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It*, 130.

⁷⁵ Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It*, 129-130.

process was still profound. Many WAAFs were translocated to ATA because of their at least theoretical knowledge of flying.⁷⁶

The number of women in this service started at eight, and over time it grew to over 100 women pilots who were able to handle 121 types of aircraft. They were trained to fly single-engine fighters, two-engine or twin-engine aircraft, and even four-engine bombers. Nevertheless, they had to deal with many issues and complications. Some of them were, for example, the prejudices that women were not suitable to fly planes and the fact and fear that if they failed and destroyed a plane, they would insure that other women would not be allowed to fly planes because the prejudices would be fulfilled. Nevertheless, these women never failed in their duties, and by that, they proved what difficult tasks they are capable of managing.⁷⁷ Moreover, the job women did in ATA was even more appreciated than the job of more popular Women Airforce Service Pilots in America called WASP. ATA women were offered equal pay for equal work as well as the same or even higher status, rank, and privileges as men.⁷⁸ On the other hand, WASP women were not given the same recognition as men pilots, and their work was doubted even after the end of the war. Additionally, WASP women who died while fulfilling their duties did not even receive military funerals as the ATA women did.⁷⁹

However, transferring planes and VIPs were not the only duties of the ATA women. They participated in saving lives, too. As a part of an ATA ambulance service, they could provide quick help to ones in need, by bringing them medical specialists.⁸⁰ They were also trying the planes in question that had some defects, or they flew an aircraft while the anti-aircraft gunners staff practiced the shooting on them.⁸¹ Without taking into account how dangerous tasks they were assigned to do, the fact that they were allowed to fly a plane and even transport important people is an unquestionable proof of the shift of women's roles triggered by the war situation.

3.2.3 Women's Royal Naval Service

Women's Royal Naval Service was a notably smaller organisation than ATS or WAAF, but their value and contribution should not be overlooked. Additionally, this organisation

⁷⁶ Schrader, *Sisters in Arms*, 27.

⁷⁷ Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It*, 134.

⁷⁸ Schrader, *Sisters in Arms*, 2.

⁷⁹ Jill Sherman, *Eyewitness to the Role of Women in World War II* (North Mankato, MN: Childs World, 2016), 23-24.

⁸⁰ Schrader, *Sisters in Arms*, 67.

⁸¹ Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It*, 133.

was from the beginning considered as prestigious, and the selection process was thorough. The focus was put on good moral behaviour and social status. Relatives and descendants of Naval families were preferred. The duties of Wrens, how the women serving in this service were called, were initially to release men from the shore-based work.⁸² Typical positions were, for example, secretaries, coders, cyphers, signallers, typists, cooks or car drivers.⁸³ However, from the year 1941, Wrens started to be sent overseas, their tasks expanded and were no longer only supplementary and feminine.⁸⁴ They acquired positions such as ships, cars or radio mechanics, boat crew members, and torpedo assessors. Wrens were sent, for instance, to Singapore, the Mediterranean, Australia, South and East Africa, India or North West Europe. During their travels, plenty of their ships were torpedoed and sunk.⁸⁵

In 1942 the WRNS which was initially only a civil establishment became a legitimate part of Naval Personal Service, and Wrens duties expanded once again. They became radar detection finders, submarine attack teacher operators, cine gun assessors and they also began to learn submarine tactics. There was a group of women who belonged to the category of Special Duties in Naval Intelligence. These women were called Freddie's Fairies and were trained and educated in the Royal Naval College. Some of these women formed the largest group that worked on decryption of enemy codes including Enigma. "Wrens were the only people actually in charge of the machines, and responsible for their efficiency."⁸⁶ Women serving in the Navy not only faced the enemy during attacks but also became the target of the attacks. Moreover, they were given responsibilities some of which were even higher and more significant than men were entrusted with.

3.2.4 Other Important Military Duties Held by Women

Apart from the most significant services discussed above, women also held important positions in less profound organisations like for example in the Auxiliary Fire Service. However, women's duties in this service did not include firefighting. The most common task was "taking responsibility for assessing messages about fires and ordering out the appropriate units and equipment."⁸⁷ Many of these so-called Mobilising Officers were given

⁸² Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It*, 115.

⁸³ Ursulla Stuart Mason, *Britannia's Daughters: The Story of the WRNS* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Aviation, 2011), 157, Kindle.

⁸⁴ Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It*, 115.

⁸⁵ Mason, *Britannia's Daughters*, 160-175, Kindle.

⁸⁶ Mason, *Britannia's Daughters*, 188-190, Kindle.

⁸⁷ Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It*, 38.

medals for bravery when they kept taking messages during an air raid even when the fire station itself was on fire.⁸⁸

Other significant positions were held by women of the Women's Land Army. These land girls, as they were referred to, ensured that Great Britain did not suffer much from hunger during the war period. They took up the jobs farmers left when they had gone to war. From dusk till dawn, women performed tasks that required great physical strength. Therefore, their feminine sides were often left behind. Their bodies, for example, changed when the muscles grew. One of the land girls, Mrs. Proctor, claimed, that she could lift her husband by the time she was getting married.⁸⁹

Women demonstrated their dexterity in Civil Defence and Air Raid Precautions duties, too. They, for example worked as wardens, whose work was to help people in the street to find the nearest shelter, to report the fall of bombs, to report fires, to examine the extent of bomb damage caused, to assist people in damaged buildings, to guide the police, fireman, ambulances and to prevent panic in every way possible.⁹⁰

All these women, who worked in the military services, presented great courage, self-reliance, and toughness. Even though they were not allowed in combat, many faced the enemy from the front line and assisted the men who could, in fact, hold the weapons. Apart from that, they did a valuable job in releasing men into battles. The war effort done by women will probably always be overshadowed by the bravery men expressed during the encounters with the enemy, but women too formed an irreplaceable part of the Armed Forces. The major difference in contrast to the First World War was that women's participation in forces was not only voluntary but they could have been conscripted too, the numbers were higher and their duties were broader.⁹¹ Women proved not only themselves that they are capable of performing the same duties as men, but they proved that also to men and to everyone who considered them as weak and inferior. What had been done could not have been undone and women who did their bid to win the war ensured the transformation of women's roles in Great Britain.⁹²

⁸⁸ Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It*, 115.

⁸⁹ Julia Llewellyn Smith, "Land girls: disquiet on the home front," *The Telegraph*, February 27, 2010, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/7332317/Land-girls-disquiet-on-the-home-front.html>.

⁹⁰ Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It*, 32-35.

⁹¹ Bette Anderson, *We Just Got On With It*, 8-11.

⁹² Ward, "Women in Britain," 570.

4 FAMILY AND SOCIAL LIFE OF WOMEN IN GREAT BRITAIN DURING WORLD WAR II

Women's family life, social life, and relationships during the war period were closely associated with their participation in the war effort. Women who joined the Armed Forces did not usually have children and household to care for, but in many cases, they were young girls, who had to leave their home behind and change their lives completely. On the other hand, women who joined the workforce in their location were often married, with children and with domestic responsibilities. Not only the domestic lives of these women were suddenly upside down, but also their social lives and relationships. They had to cope with the absence of men, food shortage, long working hours and therefore with no or only a little time for cooking and shopping. These circumstances were the source of great changes in terms of the perception of women in Great Britain.

4.1 Housewifery

Women and especially married women were associated with domestic work for many centuries. These associations continued to prevail also during the Second World War. Women trying to fulfil their obsolete duties while getting used to their new obligations often faced many obstacles. They generally had difficulties with maintaining the household, which involved activities like shopping, cooking and cleaning. The cooperation of men with doing domestic chores did not increase along with the employment of women because men commonly shared the opinion that they should not participate in domestic tasks. A survey uncovered the fact that in households, where the men and women both worked full-time, only one in five of them shared the domestic work equally. Therefore, 72% of women who worked full time were responsible for maintaining the household on their own.⁹³

The most crucial difficulty women faced was shopping as a part of the preparation for cooking. Even though the government arranged new factory canteens and school meals, there was still not enough of them, and moreover, they were only little attended by the employees or schoolchildren. The main reason for the poor attendance of male workers was that most of them preferred home cooked meals. Therefore, the reason for women not attending the canteens was that they used their lunch break for shopping so they could cook the home meal for their husbands and children. Besides, to eat at home together was notably cheaper than to pay for a meal in canteens separately for every family member. Many women

⁹³ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 149-161.

also felt that if they did not cook, they would lose an important connection with their husbands and children.⁹⁴

The reason for women using their break for lunch to shop was because their working hours did not give them any other option. The work in factories usually started at 7:30 in the morning when all the shops were still closed and the shift ended at 5:00 in the afternoon when a majority of the shops were already closed.⁹⁵ Moreover, in order to get what they needed to make a meal, they had to visit several shops separately from butchery and greengrocery to bakery. Also, due to the food rationing they had to stand in long queues for hours which made the process of shopping highly time-consuming.⁹⁶

However, the slow arrival of new technologies made the lives of housewives less difficult. Even though the most life-changing gadgets like vacuum cleaners or washing machines became widely used in Britain after the Second World War ended, there were some changes in this area even during the war period. The majority of households were not wired for electricity before the war but according to Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 90% of households were provided with gas and electricity during the war or shortly after its end. Gas or electricity cookers made cooking less time demanding and a lot easier. As a result of that, women found it a lot more accessible to join in the war effort.⁹⁷

4.2 Childcare

In many cases, the participation in the war effort also meant less time for women to take care of their children. Childcare is closely associated with the housekeeping activities, however, many women consider taking care of their children as the most important task they are given in their lives. Besides the time that taking care of a little children requires in order to wash them, clean after them and cook for them, it also requires giving them attention to keep them away from everything dangerous and listening to their needs and wants . However, not only had women never been fully appreciated for doing all these things, but moreover, the war situation either took this phase of their life away from women completely or made it considerably harder to manage.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 99-105.

⁹⁵ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 103.

⁹⁶ "What You Need to Know About Rationing in the Second World War," Imperial War Museum, accessed March 3, 2019, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/what-you-need-to-know-about-rationing-in-the-second-world-war>.

⁹⁷ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 159.

⁹⁸ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 134-135.

The Government evacuation scheme sent many children away from their families to places considered safer than where they lived. Even though the evacuation was voluntary, the fear of bombing and the need to protect the children was bigger than the fear of separation, and therefore, over 1.5 million children were evacuated.⁹⁹ Women were profoundly affected by this new situation. In many cases, they were deprived of up to six years of life with their own children, and of all the joy these years would bring to them. They had to live with the imagination of their child living hopefully happily with another family. Additionally, when the children were reunited with their families, they very often soon found out that they liked the life in the countryside better and that the ties that they had with the foster family were stronger than the ties with their real family. Frequently, the relationships were tremendously damaged which meant a hard struggle for women as mothers, but it also made them stronger humans, enriched them with a new perspective and freed them from long-lasting stereotypes and expectations.¹⁰⁰

Even when the families decided not to evacuate their children, they experienced many problems. Before the beginning of the war, the care for children was primarily the mother's responsibility. However, when women started working, part of this responsibility transferred to the government, too. Women workers started to call for help because they were not able to manage both working full-time and taking care of their children. These women would appreciate the availability of part-time jobs which were not a common thing during the first years of war. The Ministry of Labour was worried that it would be hard to organize and that it would also attract women who would not need to be working part-time. As a result of that, in 1943 the Ministry of Labour arranged provision of part-time jobs for women, however, only to those who were in lack of other alternatives.¹⁰¹ Even so, the number of part-time jobs grew to 1.5 million during the year 1943.¹⁰²

Also, many women who were spared from the war work, because their children were too young, felt they should also do something and participate in the war effort. To do so, they needed someone else to take care of their children. Some families hired so-called child-minders, who would look after their children while they were working. However, these kinds of services were mainly used by middle and upper class families as they were financially

⁹⁹ Laura Clouting, "The Evacuated Children of the Second World War," Imperial War Museum, accessed March 3, 2019, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/the-evacuated-children-of-the-second-world-war>.

¹⁰⁰ Julie Summers, "Children of the wartime evacuation," *The Guardian*, March 12, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/mar/12/children-evacuation-london-second-world-war>.

¹⁰¹ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 141-143.

¹⁰² Sokoloff, "How are they at Home?," 30.

demanding. Lower class families would appreciate help from the government in the form of provision of day nurseries. The Ministry of Health was at first reluctant to provide any childcare facilities, however, the situation changed when the Ministry of Labour was included in the matter. The Ministry of Labour had research showing that the need for women to join the workforce will be growing rapidly which meant that also women with young children would be needed. The Ministry of Health, therefore, had to provide some additional aid for childcare. The number of 14 nurseries that were in Britain in the year 1940 grew to 1,345 in three years.¹⁰³

4.3 Marriage and Relationships

Married couples were for many centuries following the strictly prescribed marriage model, but with the men's departure to war, this model started to fall apart. Women were left alone to keep their homes together.¹⁰⁴ The government provided some support for the wives of soldiers in the form of higher wages, however, these women very often suffered rather emotionally than financially. The government had only a small power to provide support in this area. It could only provide the so-called compassionate leave for men so they could visit their wives and families. This leave could last up to 28 days or men could ask for compassionate release which was for a longer period. However, this opportunity was given more or less only to servicemen serving in Great Britain, but even the men who applied were not always successful. The applicants who were released mainly used this free time to comfort their wives in time of a crisis, for example, when the bombs destroyed their houses, in time of illness or when the birth of another child was expected.¹⁰⁵

Nevertheless, for the vast majority of time, married women were alone to face the struggles brought by war. Therefore, many of them started to seek comfort elsewhere, especially with men who could provide it immediately. "Fidelity was talked up into a major problem for the forces and the nation."¹⁰⁶ Moreover, birth control became acceptable, which meant that women did not have to rely on abstinence or abortion which was illegal. As a result of that, women started to be more socially and sexually active.¹⁰⁷ British soldiers serving overseas were particularly concerned about the US soldiers who resided in the UK. The government and the armed forces even organized a campaign to let the wives know that

¹⁰³ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 93-94.

¹⁰⁴ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 76.

¹⁰⁵ Sokoloff, "How Are They at Home?," 37-38.

¹⁰⁶ Sokoloff, "How Are They at Home?," 38.

¹⁰⁷ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 8.

for the men in the army, the loyalty of their wives is extremely important. They suggested to the Queen to pay a tribute to all the wives who were at home while their men were fighting the enemy abroad. Also, they convinced the managers of women's magazines to include instructions and recommendations on how and in what tone women should write the letters to their husbands in order to let them know that they do not have to worry about their infidelity. Despite all this effort, many women did not wait loyally for their husbands to return. With all the men gone, they acquired a new type of freedom which often resulted in women having relationships outside their marriage.¹⁰⁸ This fact might also have led to the increased number of divorces in the after-war period.¹⁰⁹

This was, however, not the case with all the women. The vast majority of wives stayed faithful to their husbands despite all temptations. There were also wives who had their husbands at home. These marriages were becoming equal, and women started to take it more like a fulfilment than the necessity to survive.¹¹⁰

4.4 Changes in Beauty and Fashion

Women magazines and advertisements for clothes and cosmetics in the war period kept constantly reminding women that “the maintenance of beauty was as much a part of their war duty as any officially recognised war service.”¹¹¹ They were encouraged to take care of themselves in order to look good while representing the Home Front. Therefore, 90% of women in their thirties started wearing distinctive make-up and the proportion of older women wearing make-up increased, too. Before the war started, using decorative cosmetics was assigned only to higher class women or prostitutes. However, over some time, make-up evolved into a symbol of femininity and women who did not beautify their faces were considered as unfeminine and outsiders.¹¹²

Significant changes began to appear in fashion, too. Even though the spending on clothes decreased immediately when the war started and clothing was moreover a subject of rationing, the styles of individual pieces of clothes in women wardrobes transformed. The military style became popular, and skirts started to be slowly replaced by trousers even in public. This replacement was influenced by the wide use of the siren suit during the war. It

¹⁰⁸ Sokoloff, “How Are They at Home?,” 38-40.

¹⁰⁹ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 72.

¹¹⁰ Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, 277.

¹¹¹ Noakes, *Women in the British Army*, 104, Kindle.

¹¹² Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 187.

looked like a long overall and was easy to pull on even over nightwear clothes when the bombing started, and women had to relocate to a shelter quickly.¹¹³

In terms of women's appearance, the war did not influence only the use of cosmetics and fashion, but also the ideals of the female body. Skinny and healthy looking women became the model for others. Women who wanted to achieve this look started to exercise and do activities like swimming, dancing or hiking which kick-started the expansion of slimming industry and diets but most importantly, by participating in these activities, women became more active in public life.¹¹⁴ "The transformation of women's appearance during the interwar years reflected the emergence of an assertive femininity which arguably was more liberal than nineteenth-century constructions."¹¹⁵

4.5 Women as a Subjects of Social Change

As mentioned above, women started to participate more in the public sphere, however, not only in terms of physical activities but also in another leisure time entertainment and even in more serious matters. Moreover, all the changes that women went through ensured a shift of the conventional opinions about women that ruled in society. The fact that women were in many cases able to meet the ends alone and take care of the families without men or husbands "offended the patriarchal construct of the family."¹¹⁶ Subsequently, the community was forced to admit that women could be the breadwinners too, which, for example, opened the eyes of employers, who were no longer as reluctant to hire women as they were before and at the beginning of the war.

The war period certainly provided women with more freedom and independence in many areas of their lives. As a result of that, the Second World War is often tagged as a period that lifted the curtain or opened the door which kept women at home and released them into the world. The question that hung in the air as the war was coming to an end was whether women will try to keep the door open or they if they will shut it again and return to their domestic lives.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Kathryn Hughes, "The line of duty: how the British followed fashion during the second world war," *The Guardian*, February 20, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2015/feb/20/in-the-line-of-duty-fashion-during-second-world-war>.

¹¹⁴ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 188.

¹¹⁵ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 188.

¹¹⁶ Sokoloff, "How Are They at Home?," 28.

¹¹⁷ Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, 256.

5 PRESSURE TO RESTORE THE PRE-WAR GENDER RELATIONS

The women's imagination of their lives in post-war Britain was often starry-eyed. They expected to "gain full economic equality with men, receive equal pay for equal work, enjoy the same opportunities of training and apprenticeship, and be debarred from no work on account of marriage."¹¹⁸ Furthermore, they expected that the emancipation of their roles as housewives would continue and eventually provide them with even more time and opportunities to be socially active than they had during the war. The reality, however, was not that idyllic.¹¹⁹ The women's fight for freedom did not end together with the war. They had to face the pressure by society and government to restore the pre-war practices which was "a response to fears that the process of war would blur 'traditional' boundaries of gender roles."¹²⁰ Nevertheless, this pressure was not entirely successful in acquiring its goals. For example, the marriage life did not reverse back as well as women's expanded presence in the public sphere, nor all women left the workplaces. Moreover, even if the pressure was successful, the experiences women gained could not have been erased. It all contributed to further pressure from the women's side to keep fighting for their equality.¹²¹

5.1 Demobilisation of Women from War Work

Even though the end of the war was not yet on the horizon, the government and society already started to integrate certain methods that should have returned the practices after the war ends to the way they were before the war started mainly in the area of work. The Restoration of the Pre-War Practices Act of 1942 was established besides other things to assure that women who took the men's jobs during the war will willingly resign and let them men return to their old positions. It, however, concerned the Women Power Committee, which insisted on some reassurance that women will not lose the status they acquired during the Second World War like the women after the First World War did. Some of the requirements contained, for example, "a declaration of the government's policy on the position of women in the post-war world or recognition of women to a place in the machinery involved in planning reconstruction."¹²² Moreover, they wanted the government to ensure the women that they will not lose the work opportunities which the government could not have done because of the Restoration of the Pre-War Practices Act. In fact, the Minister of

¹¹⁸ Ward, "Women in Britain," 564.

¹¹⁹ Ward, "Women in Britain," 563-565.

¹²⁰ Sokoloff, "How Are They at Home?," 29.

¹²¹ Ward, "Women in Britain," 570.

¹²² Smith, "The Womanpower Problem in Britain During the Second World War," 938.

Work Ernest Bevin did not provide any reassurance because he was confident that the majority of women would eventually welcome the fact that they can return to their domestic roles. This was, nevertheless, the case of only a certain proportion of women workers.¹²³ It was believed that older women would return willingly to their home responsibilities, whereas younger women who tasted the freedom of having their own money for their own purposes would not be satisfied with the roles of oppressed housewives.¹²⁴

When the war ended, women who occupied the men's positions were forced to leave and vacate the place for men. Moreover, the Minister of Labour stated that "the question of the future employment of women on jobs other than women's work would be left for the industries to decide for themselves."¹²⁵ As a result of that, the number of women made redundant was significant mostly in the engineering industry, where the number of women workers fell almost by 50%. Another significant decline was in war production factories and in other industries too.¹²⁶

However, even though there was this demobilisation process going on, the numbers of women workers in industrial work remained still higher than before the war. Moreover, based on the research of Penny Summerfield, the numbers of women workers started to rise once again as the demobilisation began to backtrack in the period of 3 to 5 years after the end of the war. For example, 5 years after the war ended, the number of women in the engineering industry represented 21% in contrast with 10% at the beginning of the war. Workers in the metal manufacturing industry consisted of 12% women in 1950 in contrast to 6% in 1939, and in the transport industry, it was 13% in contrast to 5% before the war.¹²⁷ Moreover, the development of industry after the war created new spheres of employment and new opportunities for women. For example, the expanding health service promised a growing need for nurses as well as educational service for women teachers. The economy of Great Britain was moving from the secondary sector to tertiary sector which includes services and production of retail items. This means that the industry shifted from working with heavy materials like iron or steel to lighter materials such as plastic. Therefore, the number of women workers kept rising because women were regarded as more suitable for work with light materials or for work behind the counter. Although in many cases, the process of demobilisation removed women from the wartime positions, based on these facts,

¹²³ Smith, "The Womanpower Problem in Britain During the Second World War," 938-239.

¹²⁴ Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, 254-257.

¹²⁵ Smith, "The Womanpower Problem in Britain During the Second World War," 239.

¹²⁶ Smith, "The Womanpower Problem in Britain During the Second World War," 239.

¹²⁷ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 187.

the pressure to restore the pre-war practices was not successful, because many women eventually stayed in the workforce.¹²⁸ Moreover, the adoption of part-time jobs meant that the employers accepted working women and their obligations to mingle the work with their home responsibilities.¹²⁹

5.2 Restoration of Family Life and Women's Relationships

When the men were sent home in 1945, they expected the happy and emotional reunion with their families. They also expected to find their homes in the same order as they left it and continue with their lives in the same way as before the war. Therefore, the women who took care of the family financially during the war and found a new power were scheduled to step back and let the men be the breadwinners of the household again. The government also encouraged the need to restore the family and gender relations because if the families as the essence of the nation can be rebuilt, then the nation itself can be rebuilt too.¹³⁰ "Rebuilding family life was a public and a private priority after years of disruption and pain" and some of the families, indeed, got back into the groove of things.¹³¹

However, there was also a different chain of events, other than that promoted one with the happy reunions and forever lasting marriages. A great number of men who returned from the war were deeply affected and transformed by the terror they saw and encountered. As a result of that, many families faced great difficulties restoring the relationships, and in many cases, they had to get to know each other like they never even were a family. Husbands did not recognize their wives, because they were stronger and more independent and wives did not recognize their husbands because the war changed their ideas as well as behaviour and appearance. Some war veterans were so mentally sick that they had difficulties with basic activities like eating or driving. Many women took these circumstances as a challenge and as a mission to fix their husbands. Other women, however, lost hope and asked for a divorce or started new relationships outside their marriage.¹³² This and also other factors like, for example, infidelity during the war discussed in the previous chapter lead to adjustment and high rates of divorces in the post-war period. It can also be proved by the fact that "there

¹²⁸ Ward, "Women in Britain," 567.

¹²⁹ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 141.

¹³⁰ Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, 257.

¹³¹ Jenni Murray, *The Woman's Hour: 50 Years of Women in Britain* (London: BBC Books, 1996), 234.

¹³² Geoffrey Wansell, "How the return of Britain's troops from WWII sparked a battle of emotional and sexual turmoil for women," Daily Mail, accessed March 23, 2019, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1056396/How-return-Britains-troops-WWII-sparked-emotional-sexual-turmoil-women.html>.

were twice as many women applicants as men.”¹³³ According to the research of Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska the divorces in the early 1950s accelerated to 55% of all cases who came to court in contrast to 7% at the beginning of the century. Moreover, there were circumstances when the husbands did not return from the war and women were left alone to take care of their families. These women, together with the divorced ones had to continue in their independent lives and the pressure to restore the pre-war gender relations did not have any profound impact on their lives.¹³⁴

Nevertheless, even the women who stayed married or became married in the post-war period did not get entirely back to their traditional roles as mothers and housewives. Many continued in their work in the industry, and they tried to maintain the pattern of combining work with home responsibilities they established during the war. Many new emerging gadgets made their housekeeping activities easier, but there still was their responsibility to take care of their children, which remained the greatest obstacle on their way to accomplishing equality and independence.¹³⁵ Moreover, as a part of the pressure to restore the pre-war gender practices, the government decided that the provision of nurseries that increased enormously during the war period was supposed to be only temporary. As a result of that, from 1450 nurseries running in the year 1943, only 879 remained in 1947.¹³⁶ This number was, however, still significantly higher than the number of 14 nurseries in 1940.¹³⁷ Therefore, although the number of nurseries declined, many women were able to keep the opportunity for more free time and participation in workforce even when they had little children. In this area, the pressure to restore pre-war practices was not entirely successful either.

Additionally, women started to gain some other privileges with the end of the war. For example, in 1946 the House of Commons decided that the Family Allowances should be paid to women as the primary guardians of the children instead to men. That meant great acknowledgement for women because, before the war, the fathers were regarded as the guardians of the children.¹³⁸ Also, in the post-war period, the birth control pill was introduced and abortion legalized, which meant an essential turning-point in female sexuality. Since they were able to control their own fertility, they were able to control their

¹³³ Jenni Murray, *The Woman's Hour*, 237.

¹³⁴ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 72-73.

¹³⁵ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 13.

¹³⁶ Smith, “The Womanpower Problem in Britain During the Second World War,” 239.

¹³⁷ Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War*, 94.

¹³⁸ Jenni Murray, *The Woman's Hour*, 23-24.

whole lives.¹³⁹ Despite the temporary rise in the postwar baby boom, the constraint of childcare declined dramatically since 1960 resulting in women's increased ability to go out to work."¹⁴⁰ Moreover, women's access to education expanded, too. The need to educate women in areas of technology and science emerged and women, unlike before the war, were in the year 1948 allowed to graduate also in prestigious universities such as Cambridge.¹⁴¹

Some scientists argue that the impact of the Second World War on women was not exceptionally significant because the restoration of pre-war practices reversed the roles back to where they were before the war. Nevertheless, these facts examined above are proving that since the restoration together with natural instincts forced British society to return to some of the former routines, the reversion was not absolute. Therefore, the women's newly found power and independence did not vanish together with the war. On the contrary, women opportunities kept growing as the nation was recovering from the damage war has inflicted.

¹³⁹ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 59.

¹⁴⁰ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 169.

¹⁴¹ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Women in Twentieth-century Britain*, 122-124.

CONCLUSION

During the Second World War, women in Great Britain were fighting their own battle which did not constitute any military fight as traditionally defined. It was not a hostile encounter, and it did not take place on a particular battlefield. Women, however, had an archenemy on the opposite side. They were supposed to defeat the prejudices held in British society for many centuries. Moreover, by struggling with the challenges brought by the war, women fought their battle of equality and independence in many cases even without being aware of it or admitting it.

The war presented opportunities for women that would only hardly have occurred during peacetime. In the pre-war period, their roles still concentrated on household and childcare. Nevertheless, the Second World War is believed to have lifted the curtain and set British women free. By participating in the war work in factories, they proved to the employers that they were fully competent to perform masculine tasks. Moreover, the need for women labour forced the government to end some restrictions and withdraw from its principles. The women's engagement in the armed forces and their exposure to many dangerous and burdensome situations had undoubtedly a profound impact on their confidence as well as on the way they were perceived. Concerning the subject of women's wartime family and social lives, their participation in the war effort made them more independent in this area, too. Most importantly, many social boundaries were pushed, and women became an important part of the British community. Marriage was no longer seen as obligation for women and married couples became more equal. Women were provided with a high number of nurseries and with means for controlling their fertility, which ensured them more freedom and bigger control over their lives. Moreover, even after the effort made by the government and the society to resurrect the pre-war practices, women were more or less able to maintain their newly acquired statuses.

Nevertheless, the regional and social differences should be taken into account when evaluating the impact of the Second World War on women in Great Britain. This war was different from other events that challenged the women's roles in concerning the extensive amount of women, including women even of higher age or women from remote regions.

Therefore, their battle with an unspoken and often unnoticed aim to defeat the stereotypes that were influencing the perception of women was successful. Not only that the view on gender roles in society changed, but women changed too, which can be proven by a testimony of Ivy Jones who worked as a meteorologist for the WAAF.

I suppose I must have had more confidence, I'd mixed more, I'd got used to dealing with men, because you see at home I had three sisters and I went to an all-girls school and in those days you weren't encouraged to mix...yes, it brought me out, I was a different person at the end, and I felt differently...I'm sure it did me a lot of good.¹⁴²

Ann Tomlinson was another woman who took up the men's job. In her testimony, she also explains how the war changed her attitude.

I felt that it had added a tremendous lot of experience to my life that I wouldn't have had, and may have made quite a difference to my feeling of myself as a woman...It meant really that I felt capable of doing things that I would normally have expected just men to do. I could do it, and I had proven that I could do it, and I had achieved something in that world. And had to compete with men for further promotion and that sort of thing, had done it successfully...It helped me to feel confident and very satisfied really.¹⁴³

Sometimes the participation of British women in the Second World War is overshadowed by the terror and by many other messages of this war. However, their bold approach and their rich benefit that helped to win the war should not be forgotten, and it should always remind society what power women hold. Even though equality is still far from being reached - there is, for example, the consistent issue of the gender pay gap - women have made great progress, which, I would argue, is also a merit of the Second World War.

¹⁴² Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, 261.

¹⁴³ Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, 267.

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