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Maggie Andrews & Anna Muggeridge

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Reading the silences: Trudie Denman and the women's movement in the first half of the twentieth century

Maggie Andrews and Anna Muggeridge 

Department of History, Politics and Sociology, University of Worcester, Worcester, UK

ABSTRACT



This article discusses the challenges of researching a biography of the personal, professional and political life of Lady Gertrude Denman (1884–1954). 'Trudie' as she was familiarly known, took on leading roles in a number of organisations, including the Women's Institute Movement, the National Birth Control Council and the Women's Land Army. She also provided financial support to many organisations, including the Liberal party, to which she was politically affiliated. She was a skilled chair of meetings and conferences, with an acute eye for procedure; an enabler, facilitator and motivator who encouraged co-operation and smoothed ruffled feathers as she cajoled self-righteous firebrands with difficult personalities to work together and ensured ordinary working-class people had a voice. We explore her now largely forgotten role in these organisations and argue that, as the ultimate pragmatist, she favoured and getting things done by co-operation over polemics and grandstanding. We also address the many complexities of her personal life, including her relationship with Margaret Pyke. In navigating the many 'silences' that surround her personal and professional life, we seek to understand the relationship between her personal experiences and her practical, political and professional roles as an activist in the contemporary women's movement.

KEYWORDS

Gertrude Denman; women's institute; birth control; women's land army; biography

Introduction

Lady Gertrude Denman (1884–1954), known to her friends as Trudie, was the daughter of Weetman Pearson, a Liberal MP with global enterprises in engineering, mining and munitions. Brought up to follow in her mother's footsteps to become a political hostess, she married the Liberal peer, Lord Thomas Denman (1874–1954), at the age of nineteen. Eight years later, he became Governor General of Australia, but served for less than three years. His poor health and Trudie's affair with one of his aides, John Arnold Cuthbert Quilter (1875–1915), stalled his political career and they returned to Britain shortly before the outbreak of war; he never again held substantive public

CONTACT Maggie Andrews  maggie.andrews3@emeritus.worc.ac.uk  Department of History, Politics and Sociology, University of Worcester, City Campus, Castle Street, Worcester WR1 3AS, UK

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office. Instead, across two world wars and the tumultuous interwar years it was Lady Denman who gained a national public and political profile through activism in a wide range of women's organisations.¹

Trudie Denman's politics and public roles were varied, and her activities were, like the women's movement, complex, sometimes contradictory. She was a pragmatist, concerned with improving the lives of women and the vulnerable in interwar Britain. She led the Women's Institute movement as Chair of the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) executive from 1917 to 1946; became the honorary director of the Women's Land Army during the Second World War and was Chair of the Birth Control Council (which later became the Family Planning Association) from 1930 to 1954. She gave her time and often financial support to land settlement, rural education, housing reform, hostels for nurses, the League of Nations Union, and appeasement. She was involved with the Women's Section of the Poultry Association and President of the Ladies Golf Union from 1933 to 1938, in addition to sitting on the B.B.C.'s Women's Advisory Committee, and the Boards of Westminster Press and the Carnegie Trust. Most significantly, our research suggests that she was not, like many titled women, merely appointed to take on honorary roles, as a tokenistic indication of her support, but was instead an active member of a number of executive committees.

Yet despite the important role she held in these organisations, many of which have been the subject of serious academic study, Denman has not herself been the focus of historical analysis. Her title, privilege and strong allegiance to the Liberal party perhaps go some way to explaining this. There is, as Veronica Strong-Boag has pointed out, a reticence to embrace the contribution of aristocratic women to the women's movement; 'Ladies and lords are rarely in fashion for critical scholars or democratic activists'.² Her Liberal politics means that she perhaps falls through the gaps of the historiography of the women's movement, in which Labour women feature prominently, while there is now a growing recognition of the role of Conservative women.³ Alternatively, with the Liberal party marginalised from mainstream parliamentary politics by the 1920s, Liberal women, with only a few notable exceptions, have received scant attention from historians.⁴ Political centrists, like Denman, who were inspired by a strong sense of civic responsibility, and focussed on practical action in a wide variety of largely non-partisan or cross party organisations, have perhaps been undervalued.

In 2021, we set out to use Trudie Denman's life as a prism through which to explore the British women's movement between 1914 and 1954, which recent research suggests was multi-faceted and buoyant.⁵ Our research seeks to embrace the diversity of aims and campaigns of the inter-war women's movement, which like the suffrage movement and second wave feminism utilised a variety of methods and tactics to reform a multitude of areas of social, political and economic life. Broadly, campaigns focused on issues of equality (such as campaigns for women police or the right to sit in the House of Lords) and issues of welfare (such as campaigns for improved access to birth control or divorce reform), although as Maria DiCenzo has recently pointed out many activists worked towards a range of goals simultaneously.⁶ Indeed, the range of organisations Denman was involved with offered us the potential to explore networks, connections and pragmatic accommodations made by those seeking to improve the everyday lives of women in this era. The political activism of Trudie Denman we have uncovered indicates that she and other women like her, who worked across, and encouraged co-operation

between, numerous different organisations are the heart of women's movement in the inter-war period. A women's movement that is both identifiable and unified by its commitment to bringing about practical, positive changes in women's lives.

In addition to our academic research, we were committed to writing an accessible biography of her life, which would contribute to the history of the women's movement in the first half of twentieth century and following in the tradition of the early History Workshop Movement and the Women's History Network would appeal to a readership beyond the academic world. We wanted to counter what Jill Lepore has described as the 'general retreat from public life that has taken place across the humanities' and the tendency for historians to 'write for one another rather than a general audience'.⁷ As the research has progressed, it has reminded us that however clear we thought our intentions were at the beginning of the project, historical research has many twists and turns, cul-de-sacs, dead-ends, diversions and by-roads. These have led us to engage with both unexpected and delightfully unpredictable issues and topics, and equally to find silences and absences where archival riches were expected. As a result, we have found ourselves presented with thorny methodological, political, intellectual and epistemological problems, some of which this article will discuss.

As social and cultural historians we adopted a methodology embracing a wide range of archival sources. These included scanning newspapers, examining a range of organisational papers, and seeking out letters, memories and private papers on Lady Denman. We were all too aware that the history of women, even those with a public profile, often relies upon snippets and fragments of archival evidence. Nevertheless, readily accessible materials on Lady Denman have turned out to be particularly sparse, given the many and varied organisations in which she was involved. Even Lady Denman's daughter, who commissioned a popular hagiography of her mother in the 1960s, noted there were hardly any papers available on which to base the work.⁸ As historians of women engaging with the patchiness and paucity of archival records is not unfamiliar.⁹ Consequently we have had to read and interrogate silences for, as Lisa Wynne Smith points out 'silence is also a form of communication, which listeners can begin to hear'.¹⁰

Our research follows the biographical-turn that can be identified in some women's history of recent years and a feminist historiographical methodology which acknowledges the multiplicity of different experiences, types of oppression and access to or exclusions from power which the category 'women' embraces.¹¹ Such an approach has brought into sharp relief both how the personal is political and the importance of the intersectionality of gender, class, national and sexual identity. We have come to see Denman's political activism as shaped by not only her huge personal wealth and her family's allegiance to the Liberal party but also by grief and difficulties in her home life which gave her a genuine feeling for women who were in their financial or personal situation less fortunate than herself. Her activism was also moulded by informal and formal networks of women that led to personal and professional friendships, including the relationship she had with Margaret Pyke, with whom she lived with for the last twenty years of her life. Perhaps just as importantly, the more we looked at Lady Denman's life, the more we struggled with questions about who is valued, remembered and written about in the women's movement and why.

The personal is political: constructing a life history through silence and absence in the archives

The lack of access to any personal papers for Lady Denman has meant that, like Melanie Oppenheimer's study of Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, we faced challenges trying to find an 'inner, private perspective' from 'remnants of a life haphazardly scattered throughout the papers of others in various repositories'.¹² There are notes she made for speeches, scribbled on bits of paper which have survived in the Land Army files.¹³ The print media, largely accessible through the British Library's digitised newspaper archive, also provides reports of her speeches, evidence of the public persona she chose to present in her various roles. However, an understanding of her human qualities relied upon the memories of others. We used sources which some historians might consider 'unreliable' such as informal and unrecorded interviews with members of the family, an unreferenced and problematic hagiography (written more than sixty years ago) and tributes and obituaries written immediately after her death in 1954. The excellent oral history interviews Brian Harrison undertook nearly fifty years ago on suffrage, interwar feminism and the early birth control movement have been equally important.¹⁴ These sources shaped the nuances and inferences we placed on silences in archival material, leading us to see Lady Denman as a woman for whom the personal really was political.

Denman's political activism was shaped by family and friends, and initially her parents Weetman and Annie Pearson, who came from relatively modest beginnings. Her father was an industrialist and global entrepreneur who had started work at sixteen in his father's Bradford building firm before marrying Annie Cass, daughter of a minor Yorkshire landowner. The couple, and their four children (Gertrude, and her three brothers), moved to London as Weetman expanded his engineering and building interests across the globe. As he became one of the wealthiest men in England, he entertained lavishly at his house, i 14 Carlton Terrace, giving a particular welcome to the Liberal political elite. In 1954, Clive Pearson, Gertrude's younger brother, recalled that the family were brought up 'to be anti-Tory'.¹⁵ Weetman Pearson himself served as Liberal MP for Colchester from 1895 to 1910, although he was known, tongue only half in cheek as the 'Member for the Mexico' due to his frequent absences to attend to his extensive business interests in that country.¹⁶ He was elevated to the House of Lords in 1910, and became the First Viscount Cowdray in 1917. He and his wife spent an eye-watering amount of money acquiring county houses, as David Cannadine points out, gobbling up Sussex countryside and large swathes of Aberdeenshire, Scotland—he was made Rector of the University of Aberdeen in 1920.¹⁷

Both Trudie's parents were strong supporters of women's suffrage; her mother for example hosted Mrs Pankhurst at the family's Scottish residence, Dunecht House, in September 1911, when Pankhurst was seeking support for the Conciliation Bill.¹⁸ Annie Pearson was also nicknamed the 'Fairly Godmother of Nursing' for her extensive support of the profession but this was mostly financial as she 'did not care to appear as a speaker' and left the public articulation of their political views to her husband.¹⁹ Weetman Pearson's politics were firmly aligned to Liberal Internationalism, Home Rule in Ireland and the New Liberalism of the social welfare reforms introduced between 1906 and 1914.²⁰ He argued for co-operation between workers and managers, security of employment and workmen's insurance, in the model of the National

Insurance Acts of 1911 and 1946 and stressed the importance of providing greater economic security to workers and their families.²¹

Our research suggests her father's values, efficiency, managerial style and political outlook were significant for Trudie. Like her parents, Trudie's activism incorporated a deep commitment to democracy and what Veronica Strong-Boag has described as the 'liberal politics of conciliation, toleration and inclusion'.²² In 1906, her elder brother became Liberal MP for Eye, holding the seat until 1918, while Trudie followed her mother into the Women's National Liberal Federation (WNLF), joining the executive committee in 1909. Despite the party's electoral decline in the interwar years, her allegiance to them did not falter. However rather than become involved in formal politics or continued activism within the WNLF, she complemented her financial support for the Liberals with practical work in cross-party organisations. She was one of a number of women with a similar political allegiance who sought to see something 'concrete for their efforts'.²³

It may have been her father's influence which ensured Trudie left so few papers; he abhorred untidy desks—to him it denoted an untidy mind.²⁴ Trudie was described by her daughter as a 'tiger for tearing up papers'.²⁵ Paperwork was kept under control, with no scruffy bulging files or piles of papers, just one small filing cabinet in the corner of her study, an approach she encouraged her daughter to adopt by giving her a similar filing cabinet as a wedding present.²⁶ There are of course numerous other possible explanations for Denman not keeping personal papers, including her modesty which her daughter remarked upon.²⁷ Many women did not have the time or conviction of their own importance to write extensive diaries or leave copious personal papers and records for posterity. Private papers which once existed may also be destroyed, pruned or guarded by families protecting a women's privacy and ensuring personal papers do not enter the public domain.

More speculatively, although Trudie Denman read extensively and spoke somewhat haltingly but with conviction and a weight which held the attention of large meetings, she seems to have had an issue with writing. According to her daughter, writing her speech for the NFWI annual conference, (which would later be published in the WI magazine, *Home and Country*) was a trial for her. It used to 'take her two gins and ten cigarettes to draft something and it would be pain and grief to her'.²⁸ Difficulties with writing, a certain diffidence about her own intellectual abilities or her reputed shyness may all have made Trudie reticent to commit her thoughts to paper and in part explain why so few of her personal papers have survived.²⁹ Her great-granddaughter has suggested she was dyslexic, although this would not have been recognised at the time.³⁰ Trudie's formal education was certainly limited, mostly from Governesses with a year or two at a school in Queen's Gate and a year at a finishing school in Dresden. It is unlikely she would have come up against the resistance and prejudice many girls faced at this time had she wanted to continue her education and go to University. Trudie's parents were both forward thinking in their attitude towards women, and her own daughter undertook an engineering degree at Cambridge University in the 1920s, spurred on by the promise of job in one of her grandfathers' companies. Nevertheless, unlike many of those involved in the women's movement, who were the beneficiaries of the increasing opportunities for women in higher education, Trudie did not attend university.

There are indications that she may have felt anxious about her academic limitations, overly impressed by, perhaps in awe of or even a little intimidated by the Oxbridge educated 'new women' who surrounded her in many of the women's organisations in which she participated.³¹ She employed a secretary for many years, whose handwriting and tone of phrase was apparently indistinguishable from her own; without this assistance, funded by Trudie Denman's wealth, carrying out her many public roles would have been much more challenging. A diffidence about writing or a reliance on her secretary could help explain why, in many of the organisations which Trudie supported, she appears only fleetingly as a name in minutes of meetings, or as the supposed author of a brief note accompanying a donation. Further, it may go some way towards understanding her prioritising pragmatic politics over philosophical or ideological discussion. The archival silences around Denman's personal life are also a reminder of the selectivity of historical records, and the need to think critically about representations of the past and how women who may have had dyslexia or somewhat limited education are silenced in history.

The lives, memories and archival footprints of those around Trudie, do provide some avenues into understanding her personal life. They indicate she shared her mother's feminism and liberalism but not her crushing snobbery coupled with a determination to move the family up the social ladder. Annie Pearson sought to marry her children and grandchildren into established titled families. The first of such suitors was the penniless Lord Denman, whose aristocratic lineage went back to his grandfather, a lawyer who represented Queen Caroline in 1820. Lord Denman's short stint as Governor General of Australia appears to have fuelled the vanity of a man who already had a predisposition to this characteristic, but research has unearthed little evidence of anyone who shared Lord Denman's high opinion of himself. Trudie's father provided the couple with a London home and a Sussex country estate, Balcombe Place, and significant financial support, particularly during their time in Australia, yet despite these advantages, Lord Denman was a very marginal figure in both political and social terms in Britain.³² Consequently, the role her mother had mapped out for Trudie as a political hostess, supporting her husband's career was not feasible.

Denman's hypochondria, indecisiveness, marital infidelities, and tendency to take offence made their relationship unfulfilling, demoralising and unrewarding. Instead, Trudie revelled in time with her children and also with her nieces.³³ Yet, whilst her relationship with her daughter blossomed and they became close, her son developed mental health problems in his teens. His unpredictable and difficult behaviour eventually led to him requiring full-time care. She used work as a distraction for her unhappiness and personal disappointments but it was the grief and sorrow in her own private life which shaped Trudie's humanity, kindness and warmth towards others less fortunate than herself and motivated her political activism.³⁴

She was, for example, acutely aware of the personal cost of war and conflict and her commitment to peace was shaped by the loss of her younger brother Francis Geoffrey Pearson (1891–1914) and her lover John Quilter in the battles which took place in the early months of the First World War. According to Australian historian David Headon 'Lady Denman was inconsolable at the terrible news of Quilter's death'.³⁵ He died just as she was completing the first part of divorce proceedings which would have allowed her to escape from a loveless marriage. On hearing of her lover's death, she

wrote to her aunt that 'he has given me so much, everything in life, and that can never be taken away from me'; the letter, together with a wistful album of Trudie's Australian photographs of mainly Quilter, resides at Knepp Castle in West Sussex, in family hands.³⁶ Like many in the inter-war women's movement she becomes a strong proponent of peace campaigns, funding the peace murals painted by Neville Lytton which adorned Balcombe Village Hall from 1923. In them she is depicted, as Keith Grieves has pointed out, alongside villagers in calm restorative activity 'in a far from dominant position' ... 'beneath a sturdy oak tree, which conveys the values of endurance and rootedness'.³⁷ Like many women, she supported both the League of Nations Union and the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom, which she allowed to gather signatures for their peace petition at the NFWI AGM in 1933. She was so desperate to avoid another war, that she fell out with many members of the Liberal Party, due to her continuing to support Chamberlain's peace efforts in the months after the Munich agreement (1938).

With Quilter dead, Trudie did not complete her divorce application; her plans for a second marriage with a partner of her own choosing had been thwarted. She and her husband, however, lived almost totally separate personal and public lives. Their relationship appears to have been cordial, with occasional family Sunday lunches and a joint appearance at their daughter's wedding, but Denman lived largely in hotels and eventually in a house in Hove. Trudie was able to circumnavigate some of the difficulties of a troubled personal life and loveless marriage, to defy or stretch expectations of femininity but was aware privilege and financial resources enabled her to do so. Work also distracted Trudie from her personal grief and may go some way to explaining the growing number of public commitments she took on.

Her war work initially included 'Smokes for Soldiers' and encouraging backyard poultry keeping, but, within months of Quilter's death, increased when she became involved with the Women's Institute Movement, set up under the auspices of the Board of Agriculture to improve the food supply. When the conflict ended, the NFWI under Trudie's leadership, became an independent, radical campaigning organisation.³⁸ It offered social, cultural, educational and economic opportunities to rural women. Trudie who was described as 'full of sympathy with those in trouble' sought, through WI's to make the everyday lives of women a little bit more bearable.³⁹ As she explained to her daughter, WI's were important because of the relief they offered any working-class women who 'was tolerably unhappy in her marriage'. Women for whom everything they did, from washing a 'fellow's socks to cooking his dinner' served as a reminder of how 'tiresome' their husband was, could get out of their 'beastly cottage' and away from their 'horrid husband and think about something else' for a couple of days a month.⁴⁰

Denman's own complex personal life inclined her to be sympathetic rather than judgemental towards others with difficulties and her work for the Birth Control council was perhaps the most important example of this. Financial independence gave her licence to say the unsayable in an era when birth control was far from respectable and abortion positively scandalous.⁴¹ She penned a lengthy article for the *Guardian* under the title 'Women Criminals or Women Victims' in 1935, blaming abortion on the 'conspiracy of secrecy and silence over the question of birth control'.⁴² With a clear understanding that class and financial resources governed many women's access to birth control, she described with sympathy 'a mother of eight living children, who had eleven full - term

pregnancies and six self - confessed abortions.⁴³ The impassioned article criticised a society which branded as criminals poor women and their friends who helped them have abortions, as they were 'really victims of civilization'.⁴⁴

Trudie also benefited from personal and professional networks of friends who supported her and influenced her participation in the women's movement. Her involvement with the Birth Control Movement was instigated by Margery Spring Rice, who knew Trudie and her mother from their contribution to the Women's National Liberal Federation executive. Her relationship with Margaret Pyke, with whom she lived for more than twenty years, first developed when Pyke was appointed Secretary of the National Birth Control Council In 1930. Pyke was separated from her husband, who was apparently a notoriously difficult man; on one occasion, for example, he accused his wife of having a death wish when she forgot to get him a kipper for his breakfast.⁴⁵ Pyke was a committed birth control activist before she took up employment at the NBCC, and the two women developed an extraordinarily close bond, also working together in the Land Army during the Second World War. Denman and Pyke certainly fall into the category of women who Sybil Neville-Rolfe has identified as having a mutually-enriching relationship which provided 'emotional stability' enabling 'them to make larger contributions to the welfare of society'.⁴⁶ The friendship shaped the two women's professional and private lives, and they were described by contemporaries as having 'quite a strong bond' which went well beyond a working relationship, something others in the women's movement were well aware of.⁴⁷

By the mid 1930s Trudie Denman and Margaret Pyke were partners in their working and personal lives. It is clear that the two were extraordinarily close, much closer to each other than either were to their many friends in the women's movement at the time. 'Pykey', as she was known to the family, lived at Balcombe Place, Trudie's country estate, where they had individual bedrooms which shared a Jack-and-Jill bathroom. Nancy Raphael, who became honorary secretary of the Family Planning Association after Margaret Pyke, was a friend and colleague of both women and recalled how their personal and professional interests complemented each other: 'Lady Denman was the low brow of all time her hobby was cutting down trees and golf ... Margaret Pyke was so devoted to her and fell into this as it suited them both.'⁴⁸ They went on holiday together and nursed each other when sick; it was Margaret Pyke who was as Trudie's deathbed in 1954 and subsequently received many kindly letters of condolence on her loss.⁴⁹

Interpreting women's relationships is an increasingly tricky terrain for historians working against a background of ongoing debates about identity politics. In the 1980s Adrienne Rich argued 'women's choice of women as passionate comrades, life partners, co-workers, lovers, tribe, has been crushed, invalidated, forced into hiding and disguise'.⁵⁰ Silences in the archives about the couple's partnership could be read as an indication they had a lesbian relationship.⁵¹ However, Laura Doan's thought provoking work, *Disturbing Practices*, has raised important questions about the problems of constructing histories on the basis of contemporary sexual identities.⁵² This pertinent reminder comes with an admission that in her own previous account of lesbian subculture in modern Britain she had 'believed' she 'knew more about female sexuality in the 1920s than the individuals' she 'was researching'.⁵³

In the absence of any archival evidence to indicate how the couple chose to define themselves, in physical or emotional terms, speculation privileging the sexual may limit the possibilities of understanding the multi-faceted nature of their caring relationship. This is particularly the case as they lived in an era in which, as Lesley Hall has argued, same-sex relationships may need to be understood as more complex, variable and nuanced than contemporary approaches to identity politics suggest.⁵⁴ When interviewed in the 1970s, Nancy Raphael recalled how Denman was gently teased by Pyke and 'they were charming together and this had a great effect on the committees you know. Lady Denman was the chairman and Margaret was the secretary and it pervaded the committees, this rather delightful semi-joking attitude'.⁵⁵ Raphael, who was herself well versed in Freudian psycho-sexual theory, also noted the 'enormous affection they had for each other' but added 'I don't think I should have said there was any more than that'.⁵⁶ Margaret Pyke and Trudie Denman were partners; they undeniably had a very close supportive relationship. However, much of Denman's personal life including her sexuality, as with so many women in history, is inevitably uncertain. The challenge for us is how to acknowledge this when constructing and writing a biography, and how to adopt what Doan refers to as 'queer critical theory' which seeks to acknowledge the known and just as significantly the not known.⁵⁷

What do the silences in organisational archives indicate?

Given the many public roles that she took on, we expected researching the organisational archives for groups such as the Women's Institutes, the Birth Control Movement and the Land Army to contain extensive references to Lady Denman. Yet they were remarkably sparse and particularly in the Family Planning Association (FPA) it is Margaret Pyke, who features far more prominently in both archives and published histories of this movement.⁵⁸ Such silences have raised questions not only about the actual role Trudie Denman had in these organisations, but also whether some political activities, skills and contributions to the women's movement have been undervalued, both in the past and present. Have the funders, the facilitators and those who ensured meetings—and consequently the work of organisations—ran smoothly, and on a practical basis, been forgotten?

On the surface it may seem as if Lady Denman was appointed, for example as chair of the National Federation of Women's Institutes, because of her aristocratic title and links to the British elite. Indeed, Linda Ambrose has suggested Denman's 'affluence and influence' gave the early Women's Institutes a 'level of respectability'.⁵⁹ Certainly, having served as the wife of the Governor General of Australia and rubbed shoulders with the elite in her teens and early twenties gave her the confidence to lobby politicians. However, neither Lady Denman or other titled ladies in the women's organisations are indistinguishable from one another nor did they necessarily epitomise the reactionary politics of the British establishment. Rather, it was Lady Denman's distance from and diffidence towards the British establishment and her radicalism which organisations appear to have valued. She had been a proponent of the Progressive Party in the 1907 London County Council Elections. This alliance of Liberals and leaders of the Labour movement had been established in 1888 and gained support from members of the Fabian Society; Sidney Webb became a London County Council councillor for the

group. Likewise, during the First World War Denman was an advocate for the National Political League, an apolitical group supporting social and political reform, whose membership included suffragettes, suffragists and socialists such as Mary Adelaide Broadhurst, George Lansbury, George Bernard Shaw and Ethel Snowden. Through the formation of the National Land Council they sought to work in co-operation with Trade Unionists to address agricultural problems during the conflict.⁶⁰

Lady Denman was apparently nominated for election to chair the Women's Institutes by Mrs Roland Wilkins.⁶¹ As a founder member of the Women's Farm and Garden Union and a strong proponent of small holding, Mrs Roland Wilkins sought someone to 'run against the country ladies.'⁶² Trudie's daughter recalled in the 1970s that in the early days 'the WI's were frightened of being ruled by the Conservatives.'⁶³ Denman seems to have deliberately crafted the early movement to restrict the potential influence of rural Tory elite in villages.⁶⁴ Thus, presidents of local WIs were elected by secret ballot, at a time when parish councils had not yet introduced such a system. One horrified lady of the manor, on discovering that she would not automatically be elected president declared: 'she had no intention of allowing such a radical movement in their village.'⁶⁵ Helen McCarthy has pointed out that in 1920, a leader in the *Conservative Agents' Journal* reflected with dismay on the growth of these new organisations for women and described WIs as 'Operating under all sorts of disguises, in name non-party, but in very truth, manipulated by socialistically inclined women.'⁶⁶ The editorial went on to note how this was 'to the disadvantage of our own party organisations, in money, membership, in energy and in influence.'⁶⁷ Whilst the Conservative agents association's response may have been a little over-dramatic and individual WIs within the organisation's federal structure were diverse, it is interesting to note that in the 1920s and 1930s the NFWI national executive included influential Liberal women, such as Maggie Wintringham and Meghan Lloyd George.⁶⁸ Denman's position on the rural elite did not soften, and she was frequently exasperated by landowners when honorary director of the Land army and always championed villagers. In 1953, she advised the NFWI to steer well clear of the Country Landowners Association.⁶⁹

Denman was a member of what Helen Jones describes as a 'group of women not personally affected by misfortune', who nonetheless understood the gendered impact of poverty and took action to get women's issues on the political agenda between 1914 and 1950.⁷⁰ As the ultimate pragmatist she co-operated across the political spectrum, to make practical, even if sometimes small, improvements in people's everyday lives. This included for example ensuring local papers were available in braille for those who were blind, when she was on the board of Westminster Press.⁷¹ It also led her to support campaigns to provide housing for single women over thirty and the Children's Minimum Campaign Committee (later referred to as Council - CMC). Denman became a vice-president of the CMC, which Eleanor Rathbone had established in the 1934, with one purpose: 'to ensure that no child was deprived of adequate food and necessities, just because its parents were poor.'⁷²

Her concern for the 'little things' which made a significant difference to the lives and wellbeing of women, ensured that when honorary director of the Land Army, she spent inordinate amounts of time trying to ensure recruits had clothing to protect them from cold, wet and windy conditions when undertaking agricultural work. Drawing upon her social contacts, she repeatedly badgered politicians for supplies of suitable boots and

sought the assistance of London fashion designers to create a greatcoat with pleats in the back so it would not rub or restrain the wearer when doing physical labour.⁷³ She used a variety of tactics to campaign for improvements in the wages of women in the Land Army, although technically her role forbade her from doing so. She worked with Maggie Wintringham seeking to establish a minimum wage for women agricultural workers and sent an anonymous letter to the WI magazine *Home and Country* in support of wage increases. Likewise, she nudged, cajoled and made deputations to Conservative MPs Mavis Tate and Thelma Cazelet over wages and conditions for women agricultural workers.⁷⁴

Her involvement in the Birth Control Movement was perhaps the most significant example of her 'politics of little people'. She was totally in step with what Caroline Rusteroltz has defined as the goal of the movement to 'reduce the suffering to working-class women and improve their health and living conditions through the provision of efficient female—controlled birth control methods via welfare centres.'⁷⁵ In the early 1920s she donated funds to assist clinics set up by the Malthusian League in working-class areas of London, such as the Walworth's Women's Welfare Centre.⁷⁶ She put her name to a letter to *The Spectator* seeking funding for Birth Control Clinics in Rotherham, utilised by desperately poor miners' wives and she helped fund a clinic in Durham.⁷⁷ When writing in support of birth control she drew attention to maternal deaths and women's health problems which were exacerbated by multiple unplanned pregnancies.⁷⁸ Consequently, a number of eminent leaders in the field of birth control sought Lady Denman's support, at what came to be referred to as a 'celebrated dinner party' arranged on the 22 November 1928. It was hosted by Sir Arthur Ellis, who was a founding member of the Birth Control Investigation Committee (BCIC) and attendees included Professor Winifred Cullis, the Sophia Jex Blake Professor of Physiology at the University of London.⁷⁹ Prominent members of the eugenics society such as the psychiatrist C. P. Barker and Julian Huxley, author of an article 'Birth Control and Hypocrisy', were also present.⁸⁰ Lady Denman was persuaded to guarantee the BCIC a donation of £250 a year (the equivalent of £19,585.32 in 2023).

When in 1930 the National Birth Control Council (NBCC) was set up to bring together numerous ad hoc birth control groups with different ideological motivations and political affiliations from across the country including the BCIC, Lady Denman was asked to chair their executive committee.⁸¹ Their aim was to enable married people to space or limit their families, and thereby mitigate problems of ill health and poverty.⁸² Some of those involved, when later interviewed by Brian Harrison, mention the centrality of Denman's role.⁸³ Dr Helena Wright, a member of the first executive group and an influential family planning doctor with an extensive private practice, who was a friend and colleague of Marie Stopes suggested: 'Lady Denman was the important person socially, she was the important person financially.'⁸⁴ Denman's deep pockets were repeatedly used to support the Birth Control Council and the Family Planning Association which she rescued in moments of financial crisis more than once.⁸⁵ The extent of her financial commitment to the movement is well hidden in the accounts and only became clear to her daughter, Lady Burrell, after her mother died when she took over the role of treasurer of the FPA.

Lady Denman had a large independent income, estimated to have been £50,000 a year in the interwar period (the equivalent of £4–5 million in 2023) which many organisations

benefited from. Although she maintained a large household and financially supported her husband, she thought it was absolutely immoral to spend such money on herself and described the rare indulgence of purchasing a cine-camera in the 1930s as ‘vey naughty’.⁸⁶ Instead, she donated significant funds to a number of organisations. These included the Liberal Party at a local and national level, giving for example in excess of £1000 in 1938 (the equivalent of approximately £85,000 in 2023).⁸⁷ Similarly, in 1936 she gave the NFWI £3000 (the equivalent (£261,465 in 2023)).⁸⁸ Organisations Lady Denman supported unquestionably benefitted from her financial resources and the connections her title and wealth provided. If this was the extent of her contribution, it would explain why references to her are often fleeting in the archives.

Oral histories and memories, however, suggest a more complex picture of her as very active in organisations where she could get something practical done. For example, she worked in the NFWI headquarters almost every day in the early days of the movement, and her commitment to Land Army and the birth control movement was equally impressive.⁸⁹ Many expected Denman only to provide ‘financial support and passive encouragement’ to the NBCC and this was clearly the limit of many people’s contribution.⁹⁰ As Margaret Pyke remarked. ‘We had several notable people on the Committee and soon we had Lord Horder as our President. That was all fine as far as it went but in practice it did not go very far’.⁹¹ In discussions with Margery Spring Rice in 1928, Denman made it clear she did not want to be involved ‘only with the financial side of what may be a most important movement’.⁹² Instead, she supplied an office, held meetings in her house, and travelled the country to try to persuade groups of people, however small and belligerent, to co-operate to improve working class women’s lives. Denman’s ‘fundamental sense of values, her acute sympathy with overburdened mothers and her courage’ resulted in her leading and driving the movement forward.⁹³

She was particularly skilled at establishing organisations, putting systems in place; which Margaret Pyke, described as a ‘genius for setting a new organisation on its right course—because she had vision, she could foresee the broad lines of development and which principles were fundamental, so that the new body would be able to govern itself and grow with its main purpose clear but not hidebound by detailed restricting regulations’.⁹⁴ In the NBCC, Denman drew upon systems, organisation, and kindly administration she had established within the NFWI. Margaret Pyke noted, ‘she set a high value on procedure, not for its own sake but because it enabled meetings, big or small, to reach a decision and avoided waste of time or muddle’.⁹⁵ A determination to ensure organisations avoided getting in a muddle was one of the motivations behind Denman’s work in the women’s movement. This and a desire to really make a difference, as she explained to a friend in the 1930s: ‘I wish I could retire and just waste all my time pleasantly, I would only there are so many things that are so untidy and I get fussy and feel something should be done about them’.⁹⁶

She was known for the proficient way she chaired committees and apparently wrote a little book on how to chair meeting.⁹⁷ Hence she was chosen to chair the Interdepartmental Committee on Practical Education of Women for Rural Life set up by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and Board of Education which reported in 1928. The academic Grace Hadow, vice—chair of the NFWI, described her as a wise and just chairman whilst Tessa Stone in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography refers to her ‘administrative drive ... penetrating eye in committee ... gloriously caustic comment, intolerance of

dishonesty, pomposity, and pretension'.⁹⁸ Others remember her wit, kindness, lightness of tone and humour even if they found her a little frightening. Margaret Ransome of the Norfolk Federation of Women's Institutes recalled how as a junior subcommittee member she had 'trembling dared to disagree with her' and when her views won the argument, received an unforgettable smile of encouragement'.⁹⁹

All of Denman's 'tact and skill at chairing' and negotiation were needed to construct the alliances the Birth Control movement needed.¹⁰⁰ She had to persuade scientists, doctors, political groups including the Eugenics society, Workers' Birth Control Group, the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship and the Women's National Liberal Federation to work together. In chairing the NBCC she required a leadership style which embodied maternalism, some elements of a procedural housekeeper, and to be a peacekeeper between warring factions, including the infamous Marie Stopes with whom Margaret Pyke recalled she had unending patience. Denman apparently 'admired Dr Stopes and what she had achieved so much that Dr S was allowed to get away with far more than I've seen allowed to anyone else ... Pioneers are usually rebels and so, ipso facto, they are rarely good co-operators.'¹⁰¹ Despite her best efforts Marie Stopes withdrew from the Birth Control Council within a few years. Luckily, Denman did not know 'how to take umbrage. ... She neither tried to win popularity nor feared to lose it.'¹⁰² These were commendable and important attributes for at least some people to have to ensure organisations run smoothly.

'As a Chairman, whether of the committee or at the Albert Hall, Lady D was generally admitted to be the best, man or woman, of her day.'¹⁰³ A skill, although valued by a multitude of organisations, if done well, leave little trace in the records. It was her commitment to democratic, self-governing and politically inclusive organisations, which was her key contribution to the women's movement, although it consumed much of her time and energy.¹⁰⁴ Apparently 'she prepared diligently for chairing her first NFWI AGM, sleeping with May's book of Parliamentary procedure under her pillow'.¹⁰⁵ Erskine May's tome, first published in 1844 and repeatedly updated is 'a description of how procedure in the House of Commons and House of Lords has evolved and the conventions that apply'.¹⁰⁶ Its basic rules, which she drew on when managing meetings included: a commitment to every item looked at being given a full and free debate, only one person could speak and one topic be discussed at a time and perhaps most importantly, that all members had equal rights. At the very moment when women were finally winning the right to take part in parliamentary elections, she wanted women in the NFWI and other organisations she worked with to operate according to parliamentary rules and be democratic. Evidence this was a successful endeavour, can be found in the press references in the 1930s to the NFWI's AGM as the Countrywoman's parliament.¹⁰⁷

Democracy and inclusivity meant not just working to improve the lives of ordinary women but giving ordinary women a voice in the organisations which she ran. One of the first working-class members of the Women's Institute National Executive, Mrs Alice Freeman whose husband was a gardener, remembered feeling very uncomfortable when first attending national executive meetings. Freeman was active in her County Committee, a Voluntary County Organiser, cycling miles to help to start new or support established institutes in the 1920s but found the educated members of the national executive committee intimidating. Lady Denman, seeing how frightened she

was, took her to one side at lunchtime and pointed out how they needed to hear from her because,

We go down the village streets and see all the nice doorways but we don't know what goes on behind them. This is what we need to know: what sort of life the village people have got because we want to do as much as we can.¹⁰⁸

At the National Federation of Women's Institute Annual General Meetings held in the Royal Albert Hall, in an era before microphones, the process of ensuring the member's voice was heard was even more challenging. Lady Denman's low-pitched voice carried well and apparently, she 'could be heard easily'.¹⁰⁹ As her daughter explained:

If a very frightened member from little puddle duck got up from the hall and asked a question or put a point my mother would say, the delegate from little puddle duck has just said and say in her voice which could be heard all over the place whether she agreed with it or not. You see she would be very, very kind and encouraging to the women from little puddle duck and rather shutting up and perhaps scathing if Lady so and so from the county of so and so took too long.¹¹⁰

Such an intervention would not appear in the archival record of the movement which would merely summarise the motion put to the meeting, and possibly note key speakers and the decision the meeting reached, leaving the practical support she gave through such reinforcement lost, except in memories.

There are however, snippets of evidence in newspaper reports of meetings which suggest Denman's commitment to procedures, systems and democracy gained some traction in the Birth Control Movement. There was for example a lively exchange of views by many working-class mothers at meeting of the Sheffield Branch of the NBBC in 1936. During the discussion one mother of eighteen children pointed out 'only a poor mother knows what it is to be without knowledge' of birth control.¹¹¹ A mother of fourteen children expressed the wish that she had known about birth control earlier and a mother of eight explained how her health had improved since she had started attending a birth control clinic. Notwithstanding such examples, the silences in archives about Lady Denman speak volumes; they suggest that maybe the women who kept the wheels of organisations turning, who steadily built alliances which enabled action, did the house-keeping, ensuring procedure was followed and facilitated democracy and inclusivity were often unrecorded and were perhaps then and now undervalued. Those who prioritised getting something done over shouting and calling attention to themselves are perhaps less visible in the history of the women's movement.

Writing a biography despite the silences

Researching Lady Trudie Denman, interrogating the silences in archival materials and using a range of ad hoc, informal sources has provided evidence that Trudie Denman's participation in the women's movement was shaped by her personal life and friendships. It has begun to illuminate her unrecognised and undervalued contribution to a number of organisations which sought to pragmatically improve women's lives in the first half of the twentieth century. The challenge we now face is how to produce a popular biography for a general audience, which not only uses the research we have unearthed but also acknowledges what we do not know about her life. In

doing so we are mindful of a number of groups who lay claim to the ownership of Lady Denman's memory; each with their own myths and narratives of her life.¹¹² Living relatives and perhaps just as significantly past or present members of the Women's Institute Movement or the Women's Land Army have what Francesco Alberoni describes as a, 'connected knowingness' of our subject.¹¹³ Members of both these organisations, even those who have never actually met Lady Denman, recount anecdotes about her as if she was a colleague or friend. These anecdotes are circulated within and as part of the organisation's own histories and identities. Our interpretations will perhaps, and maybe should, challenge, stretch or dislodge their perception of Lady Trudie Denman.

There are also commercial pressures and generic conventions which shape many popular history texts, and do not necessarily lend themselves to acknowledging the uncertainties of historical imagination, critical theory and post-structuralism. We will employ 'literary devices such as narrative, metaphor and plot ... speculation and imagination'.¹¹⁴ After all, as critical and post-structuralist theorists have pointed out, both popular and academic historians often craft the past into selective narratives.¹¹⁵ However, imagination and speculation, given the limited sources historians often have to work with, have often had a place in women's history.¹¹⁶ As Kathryn Hunter suggests 'feminist historians have long struggled with the blurred line between interpretation and imagination'.¹¹⁷ The tricky questions are: where limits should be placed on the use of imagination and speculation; how dominant should plot and narrative be allowed to be, and is it possible to really write an academically rigorous popular women's history text which ensures the process of history making is laid bare to the reader?

Proponents of speculative biography, which Kiera Lindsey describes as, 'a hybrid form ... fiction and history' have suggested it offers one way forward.¹¹⁸ Such an approach involves piecing 'together porous and problematic sources with contextually informed imagination' and using conjecture, intuition 'even guesswork' to mould 'the past into narratives,' with gaps in historical knowledge about relationships, dialogues, and personal motivations filled in by authors.¹¹⁹ This genre offers scope to produce more readable texts and to help prevent the 'slow-motion suicide of our discipline'.¹²⁰ There are however dangers that in engaging the general public, such texts blur the boundaries between fact and fiction, as so much television and film history does. Aware of these tensions and debates, we have erred on the side of caution and like many others have chosen to structure our biography so that each chapter advances the narrative of Lady Trudie Denman's life whilst also exploring a particular theme of her political activism. Each theme will be introduced by the interrogation of a particular historical source, for example: a letter, the transcript of her divorce proceedings, a speech reported in a newspaper or an oral history interview. The sources' limitations, fallibility, conflicting interpretations and polysemic potential will be discussed.

We acknowledge the themes we are focusing on, and the historical imagination and speculation we inevitably employ, are a product of intellectual, political and cultural gestalt in which we are writing. Recent years have seen increasing political turmoil, with polemical warring tribes abdicating their responsibility to engage in dialogue, seek compromises or workable practical solutions to economic and social problems. In the complex interplay of past and present that all historians engage in, we have come to ask isn't there a better way, and to question who is valued, remembered and written about in the women's movement and why? Arguably, the efforts of pragmatic women

who favoured getting things done over polemics have too long been overshadowed in comparison to those who engaged in grandstanding, posturing and attention seeking shouty politics.¹²¹ In our biography of Trudie Denman, we will be making a case for the significance of the numerous, but often forgotten women who oil the cogs of many the women's movement's organisations in both the past and the present. These are the pragmatists who funded, administered, managed, enabled, facilitated, supported and co-operated with others, who smoothed ruffled feathers as they tried to cajole self-righteous firebrands to work together and sought to ensure women's everyday lives were made that little bit better.

Notes

1. Gervas Huxley, *Lady Denman, GBE: 1884–1954* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961); David Headon, 'Peace, Love and World War: The Denmans, Empire and Australia 1910–1917' (Exhibition Catalogue, CMAG Marketing, 2017).
2. Veronica Strong-Boag, *Liberal Hearts and Coronets: The Lives and Times of Ishbel Marjoribanks Gordon and John Campbell Gordon, the Aberdeens* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 3.
3. The historiography is vast but see for example June Hannam and Karen Hunt, *Socialist Women: Britain, 1880s to 1920s* (London: Routledge, 2002) or Julie V. Gottlieb and Clarisse Berthenzène, *Rethinking Right-Wing Women: Gender and the Conservative Party, 1880s to the Present* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).
4. Much work tends to focus on the earlier, pre-First World War period: see for example, Ursula Masson, *For Women, For Wales and For Liberalism: Women in Liberal Politics in Wales 1880–1914* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010). Megan Lloyd George, who remained a committed Liberal in the interwar years, is one of the few exceptions after 1918; see for example: Mervyn Jones, *A Radical Life: The Biography of Megan Lloyd George, 1902–66* (London: Random House, 1991).
5. See for example Esther Breitenbach, and Pat Thane, eds. *Women and Citizenship in Britain and Ireland in the 20th Century: What Difference Did the Vote Make?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010); Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Toye, *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918–1945* (London: Palgrave, 2013).
6. Maria DiCenzo, 'Our Freedom and its Results': Measuring Progress in the Aftermath of Suffrage', *Women's History Review* 23, no. 3 (2017): 421–40.
7. Jill Lepore, interviewed by Evan Goldstein, 'The Academy Is Largely Itself Responsible for Its Own Peril,' *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 13 November 2018 <<https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-academy-is-largely-itself-responsible-for-its-own-peril/>> (accessed December 17, 2023).
8. Interview with Lady Burrell by Brian Harrison, 4 October 1977, via The Women's Library at the London School of Economics, Ref. No: 8SUF/B/173. (Henceforward 'Lady Burrell, Harrison suffrage interviews'). Harrison conducted a range of interviews with activists from the women's suffrage movement between 1974 and 1981 which have been made digitally available via the Women's Library website. Several individual interviews were drawn upon in the course of this research. We have written about Huxley's commemorative hagiography, see: Maggie Andrews and Anna Muggeridge, 'Tensions and Contradictions in Commemorative Hagiography: A Case Study of Gervas Huxley's *Lady Denman* (1961)', *Women's History Today* 3, no. 8 (2023): 37–40.
9. More than 30 years ago June Purvis raised some of these issues around sources for women's history this journal, see June Purvis, 'Using Primary Sources When Researching Women's History from a Feminist Perspective', *Women's History Review* 1, no. 2 (1992): 273–306.
10. Lisa Wynne Smith, 'Resisting Silences: Gender and Family Trauma in the Eighteenth Century', *Gender and History* 32, no. 1 (2020): 30–53.

11. See for example L. D. Ginzberg, 'The Pleasures (and Dangers) of Biography', *Journal of Women's History* 19, no. 3 (2007): 205–12; Roundtable, 'Why Biography?' *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (2009): 625–30.
12. Melanie Oppenheimer, 'In the Service of Others Her Life Was Spent': Re-Creating the Humanitarian Life of Lady Helen Munro Ferguson,' *Cultural and Social History* 20, no. 3 (2023): 385–403, 386.
13. Lady Denman files relating to the Land Army at West Sussex Archive. The Barrell Manuscripts. Burrell/4/1.
14. For details of and access to these interviews see <https://www.lse.ac.uk/library/collection-highlights/the-suffrage-interviews>.
15. Letter from Clive Pearson to A.L Samuel 25 January 1950. West Sussex Archives, File LCO 13/22 (Parham Collection (Box 259). Political Papers.
16. Desmond Young, *Member for Mexico: A Biography of Weetman Pearson, First Viscount Cowdray* (London: Cassell, 1966); Keith Middlemas, *Robert Keith, Sir John Aird, Thomas Brassey, Asa Briggs, Sir John Norton-Griffiths, and Lord Cowdray, The Master Builders* (London: Hutchinson, 1963).
17. David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
18. *Aberdeen Daily Journal*. 11 September 1911.
19. *Midhurst Times* 10 January 1909.
20. See for example Michael Freedon, *The New Liberalism: An Ideology Of Social Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); David Dutton, *A History of the Liberal Party Since 1900* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).
21. For example, in his Rector's Speech at the University of Aberdeen, reported in *The Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 23 October 1920.
22. Strong-Boag, *Liberal Hearts and Coronets*, 3.
23. Dame Margery Corbett Ashby, interview with Brian Harrison, 7 May 1974, via The Women's Library, Ref. 8SUF/B/003.
24. Lady Burrell, Harrison suffrage interviews.
25. Letter from Lady Burrell 29 July 1957, in The Women's Library, 5FWI/B/2/1/115.
26. Lady Burrell, Harrison suffrage interviews.
27. Lady Burrell letter written on 11 September 1961, in The Women's Library, 5FWI/B/2/1/115.
28. Lady Burrell, Harrison suffrage interviews.
29. There are a number of references to her shyness both in Huxley's *Lady Denman* and Lady Burrell, Harrison suffrage interviews.
30. Informal and unrecorded discussion with Lady Denman's granddaughter and great-granddaughter took place in Autumn 2022 at Balcombe Place.
31. For discussion of some of this generation of new women, see for example Eve Colpus, *Female Philanthropy in the Interwar World: Between Self and Other* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).
32. He seems to be looked upon slightly more favourably in Australia see for example Headon, *Peace, Love and World War*.
33. Lavinia Smiley, *A Nice Clean Plate; Recollections 1919–31*. (Michael Russell Publishing 1981, Fifth Impression 1995).
34. Lady Burrell, Harrison suffrage interviews.
35. Headon, *Peace, Love and World War*, 33.
36. *Ibid.*, 33.
37. Keith Grieves, 'Neville Lytton, the Balcombe frescoes and the experience of war, 1908–1923 in Sussex Archaeological Collections. 132 (1996), P 19 7-2 11. P204; Keith Grieves, 'Common Meeting Places and the Brightening of Rural Life: Local Debates on Village Halls in Sussex after the First World War', *Rural History* 10, no. 2 (1999): 171–92.
38. For further discussion of the Women's Institute Movement see Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Institute as a Social Movement* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2015).

39. *Home and Country*, Volume 28, Number 6, June 1946.
40. Lady Burrell, Harrison suffrage interviews.
41. Clare Debenham, *Birth Control and the Rights of Women: Post-Suffrage Feminism in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014).
42. *The Guardian* 20 December 1935.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*
45. Mrs Nancy Raphael, interview with Brian Harrison, 7 February 1978, LSE Women's Library, Ref 8SUF/B/173.
46. Sybil Neville-Rolfe, *Why Marry?* (London: Faber & Faber, 1935), 95, cited in Lesley Hall, "'Sentimental Follies' or 'Instruments of Tremendous Uplift'?: Reconsidering Women's Same-Sex Relationships in interwar Britain', *Women's History Review* 25, no. 1 (2016): 124–42.
47. Mrs Nancy Raphael, interview with Brian Harrison.
48. *Ibid.*
49. Wellcome Collection, Margaret Pyke Papers, Ref PP/PYK, 1940s–1966 (pre-cataloguing).
50. Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society* 5, no. 4 (1980): 631–60, 632.
51. See for example Andy Medhurst and Sally Munt, *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction* (Cassell, 1997). Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (NYU Press, 2003). Joan Scott, 'Finding Critical History', in *Becoming Historians*, eds. James M. Banner Jr and John R. Gillis (University of Chicago Press, 2009).
52. Laura Doan, *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women's Experience of Modern War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).
53. Doan, *Disturbing practices*, xi.
54. Lesley Hall, 'Sentimental Follies' or 'Instruments of Tremendous Uplift'?: Reconsidering Women's Same-Sex Relationships in Interwar Britain, *Women's History Review* 25, no. 1 (2016): 124–42. She is in many ways arguing against the ideas expressed in Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and her Enemies: Feminism And Sexuality, 1880–1930* (Spinifex Press, 1997).
55. Mrs Nancy Raphael, interview with Brian Harrison.
56. *Ibid.*
57. Doan, *Disturbing Practices*.
58. See for example Audrey Leathard, *The Fight for Family Planning: The Development of Family Planning Services in Britain, 1921–74* (London: Macmillan, 1980); Debenham, *Birth Control and the Rights of Women*.
59. Linda M. Ambrose, *A Great Rural Sisterhood: Madge Robertson Watt and the ACWW* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 109.
60. *The Herald* 31 July 1915; *The Western Mail* 22 July 1915. For further discussion of First World War Agriculture see Alun Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside Since 1900* (London: Routledge, 2003); P.E. Dewey, *British Agriculture and the First World War* (London: Routledge 1989).
61. Mrs Rolland Wilkins was born Louise Jebb and was the sister of the humanitarian campaigners Eglantyne and Dorothy Jebb who set up the Save the Children Fund.
62. Letter from Barbara Bliss 8 June 1959. Women's Library 5/FWI/B/2/1/115.
63. Lady Denman File LSE. Women's Library 5/FWI/B/2/1/115.
64. See Keith Grieves, 'Neville Lytton, the Balcombe frescoes and the experience of war, 1908–1923 in Sussex Archaeological Collections. 132 (1996), p 19 7-2 11 on her approach to the villagers in Balcombe where she lived, and Lady Denman's commitment to being an improving landowner.
65. *Home and Country*, April 1922, 6. Lady Olivier, *Jubilee Book* (London: NFWI Publications, 1965).
66. Helen McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations and Democratic Politics in Inter-war Britain,' *The Historical Journal* 50 (2007): 891–912, 910.

67. McCarthy, 'Parties, Voluntary Associations', 910.
68. This challenges the views put forward by David Thackeray: 'Home and Politics: Women and Conservative Activism in Early Twentieth-Century Britain', *Journal of British Studies* 49, no. 4 (2010): 826–48.
69. Letter from Lady Denman to Frances Farrer, 13 September 1953 in LSE Women's Library 5/FWI/B/2/1/115.
70. Helen Jones, *Women in British Public Life, 1914-50: Gender, Power and Social Policy* (London: Routledge, 2014), 84.
71. Lady Burrell, Harrison suffrage interviews.
72. Susan Pedersen, *Eleanor Rathbone and the politics of conscience* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2004), 234–5.
73. Lady Burrell, Harrison suffrage interviews. KCL Papers on Land Army. De la Haye, Amy, and Judith Clark, 'One object: Multiple interpretations,' *Fashion Theory* 12, no. 2 (2008): 137–69.
74. Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London, Ref: DENMAN, Lady Gertrude Mary Denman File, 1939–1945.
75. Caroline Rusterholz, *Women's Medicine: Sex, Family Planning and British Female Doctors in Transnational Perspective, 1920–7*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 43.
76. Audrey Leathard, *Fight for Family Planning* (London: Springer, 1980).
77. *The Spectator*, 3 November 1928.
78. See for example *The Guardian* 20 December 1935.
79. The Wellcome Collection, records of the Family Planning Association, Ref: SA/FPA/A14/88, Margery Spring Rice papers.
80. *The Spectator* 19 April 1924.
81. David Lampe, Pyke, *the Unknown Genius*, Evans Brothers, 1959, 35–36, and 51–53.
82. Rusterholz, *Women's medicine*.
83. See <https://www.lse.ac.uk/library/collection-highlights/the-suffrage-interviews>.
84. Dr Helena Wright. LSE Women's Library 8 SUF/B/130
85. Leathard, *Fight for Family Planning*.
86. Lady Burrell, Harrison suffrage interviews.
87. West Sussex Archives, File LCO 13/22 (Parham Collection (Box 259). Political Papers.
88. LSE Women's Library 5/FWI/B/2/1/115.
89. The First Five Years – recollections from Margaret Hitchcock, LSE Women's Library 5/FWI/B/2/1/29
90. LSE Women's Library 5/FWI/B/2/1/115.
91. From Copy of speech given to Denman college conference attendees in 1963 by Margaret Pyke: 2391 – Box 9 GD file Wellcome Library.
92. Letter from Margery Spring Rice July 12 1928 – Spring Rice folders – Wellcome Library.
93. LSE Women's Library 5/FWI/B/2/1/115.
94. From a copy of a speech given to Denman college conference attendees in 1963 by Margaret Pyke, in: Wellcome Library, PP/PYK, Pyke Papers, GD file (pre-cataloguing).
95. Ibid.
96. Huxley, *Lady Denman*.
97. Lady Burrell, Harrison suffrage interviews.
98. LSE Women's Library, 5/FWI/B/2/1/29, Grace Hadow collection; Tessa Stone, 'Denman [nee Pearson] Gertrude, Mary Lady Denman', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2011.
99. *Home and Country* July 1954.
100. Rusterholz, *Women's Medicine*; Stone, 'Lady Denman'.
101. From a copy of a speech given to Denman college conference attendees in 1963 by Margaret Pyke, in: Wellcome Library, PP/PYK, Pyke Papers, GD file (pre-cataloguing).
102. Ibid.
103. Ibid.
104. Huxley, *Lady Denman*.

105. *Home and Country*, June 1946.
106. <https://erskinemay.parliament.uk/> accessed 1 June 2023.
107. See for example *The Women's Leader*, 29 May, 1931.
108. History File in NFWI archive, accessed at the NFWI headquarters, Eccleston Square, London 1998. Now in NFWI Collections at LSE, Women's Library.
109. LSE, The Women's Library, NFWI file, 'The First Five Years – recollections from Margaret Hitchcock'.
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Notes on contributors

Maggie Andrews is Emeritus Professor of Cultural History, Department of History, Politics and Sociology, University of Worcester, UK. She is the author of a range of publications exploring domesticity, housewives, wartime and political activism in twentieth century Britain, including *Women and Evacuation in the Second World War: Domesticity and Motherhood* (Bloomsbury 2019). *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Institute Movement 1915–1960*, (Lawrence and Wishart 2019) and *Domesticating the Airwaves: Broadcasting, Domesticity and Femininity*, (Continuum 2012).

Anna Muggeridge is Lecturer in History in the Department of History, Politics and Sociology, University of Worcester, UK. Her work explores women's political activism at the local level. Her doctorate examined women's activism in the Black Country and she is currently researching a history of women in local government in interwar England and Wales. She has published articles in *Women's History Review* and *Midland History* and is currently co-editing *Women, Power and Politics: 1945–1997* for Oxford University Press.

ORCID

Anna Muggeridge  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9722-649X>