Gender, Identity and the Legacy of the First World War: an analysis of the female Old Comrades Associations as emotional communities, 1920 – 1945

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Abbreviations

QMAAC – Queen Mary’s Army Auxiliary Corps

WRAF – Women’s Royal Air Force

WRNS – Women’s Royal Naval Service

OCA – Old Comrades Association

LNU – League of Nations Union

WAC – Women’s Advisory Council

WVS – Women’s Voluntary Service

ATS – Auxiliary Territorial Service

WAAF – Women’s Auxiliary Air Force
Abstract

This PhD thesis explores the multiple and complex ways in which women’s experience of serving in the auxiliary corps in the First World War shaped their lives after 1918. It uses the journals of the Old Comrades Associations (OCAs), organisations established for former members of the Queen Mary Army Auxiliary Corps, the Women’s Royal Naval Service and the Women’s Royal Air Force, to explore the ways in which female veteran associations gave expression to a gendered, emotional memory of the First World War. The thesis works with Barbara Rosenwein’s concept of the ‘emotional community’ to highlight the enduring importance of emotional norms and discourses in shaping the culture of female veteran associations in the inter-war period and the Second World War. Chapter 1 offers an assessment of the emotional values and vocabularies that defined the OCAs. It looks at the social and discursive spaces in which members constructed and fostered an emotional legacy of the war that was built around shared expressions of nostalgia and a collective investment in the enduring significance of military service. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the diverse ways in which women’s ‘service’ identities flowed through different political arenas in the inter-war period. These chapters explore the ways in which leading women in the OCAs appealed to a shared emotional legacy of wartime service to promote political engagement with the inter-war feminist movement and the pacifist movement mobilized through the League of Nations Union. Chapter 4 investigates the ways in which ex-servicewomen negotiated the gendered and emotional landscapes of the commemoration of World War One in London and the regions between 1921 and 1936. It discusses the formation of a unique culture of remembrance within the emotional community of the OCAs and shows how the emotional norms promoted in these veteran associations led to the re-configuration of dominant cultural discourses related to Armistice Day celebrations. Chapter 5 considers the significance of the emotional responses of OCA members to the arrival of a new generation of servicewomen after 1939. It argues that feelings of loss, pride and nostalgia were crucial in defining the experiences of many ex-servicewomen on the home front whose age or responsibilities prevented them from enlisting once more with the women’s auxiliary services. Overall, the thesis offers new insights into the dynamic relationship between war memory, emotion and politics in the lives of female veterans between 1919 and 1945.
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Notes

All footnotes [ ] refer to incomplete references that were unable to be checked due to the coronavirus pandemic and subsequent lockdown.
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Introduction

I believe they are few indeed who, on looking back at their Service life, cannot feel that they are the better for it. Fine qualities that many did not know they possessed were called out by it. Personally, I am prouder of my connection with the Force than any artistic success I have ever had. As a branch of the Service, the WRAF has now come to an end, but, without a break, it enters on a new era. The recently formed Old Comrades Association, with its leading principles of preparedness to help the country, and comradeship towards each other, carries on still the fine spirit that animated all ranks in times of war. Let us see to it that the present is worthy of a continuation of the past.1

Writing in 1920, two years after the end of the First World War, former servicewoman Gertrude George reflected on the role of female veteran organisations in post-war Britain. She made clear the pride she felt looking back on her time with the Women’s Royal Air Force (WRAF) and acknowledged the lasting, positive impact of her military service on her post-war life. George praised the WRAF Old Comrades Association (OCA) for fostering the martial values of duty and ‘comradeship’ and for enabling demobilised women to maintain a connection to their former military force. George’s testimony here – marked by her willingness to reflect on her personal feelings in relation to her wartime service – provides a key example of the type of reflection that will be the focus of this thesis, which uses the journals published by female veteran associations to explore the emotional and political legacies of women’s military service in the First World War. By 1920, ex-servicewomen had established Old Comrades Associations to support the needs of former servicewomen in each of the women’s auxiliary forces from the First World War – namely, Queen Mary’s Army Auxiliary Corps (QMAAC), the Women’s Royal Naval Service (WRNS) and the Women’s Royal Air Force.2 As George reflected in 1920, the Old Comrades

1 [Gertrude A. George, Eight Months with the Women’s Royal Air Force (London: Heath Cranton, 1920).]
2 The QMAAC was known initially as the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps – the WAAC – but the name of the force was changed in 1918 as part of a broader campaign to protect the force against the largely
Associations celebrated the qualities of duty, service, and comradeship. Members within the OCAs remained determined that these values should not be forgotten; it was hoped the ‘fine spirit’ that had proved so influential for women in wartime would continue into a ‘new era’ of peacetime.³

This thesis works with Barbara Rosenwein’s theory of ‘emotional communities’ to explore the numerous and diverse ways in which the emotional legacy of wartime service, promoted within the OCAs, shaped the post-war lives of former servicewomen. Although Rosenwein’s work focuses on social and religious communities in the early Middle Ages, she has argued that social communities including ‘families’ and ‘neighbourhoods’ can be classified as ‘emotional communities.’⁴ They can be defined as groups ‘in which people have a common stake’ and shared ‘interests, values and goals.’⁵ I argue that the OCAs operated in this fashion – as groups ‘in which people adhere to the same norms of expression and value – or devalue – the same or related emotions.’⁶ Former servicewomen joined these organisations because they shared a willingness to celebrate their military service and wished to retain a connection to their former corps following demobilisation. The letters, articles, and reports within the publications of the OCAs make clear a collective investment amongst the membership in a narrative of gendered wartime service that celebrated the sense of joy, freedom, and adventure that this experience had offered women. I argue that one can identify a distinct emotional culture within female veteran associations which makes it possible to further explore how they functioned as emotional communities into and beyond the inter-war period. Rosenwein highlights the fact that emotional communities are ‘not constituted by one or two emotions but rather by constellations – or sets – of emotions.’⁷ The thesis argues that the complex legacy of wartime service for women engendered a ‘constellation’ of emotions ranging from nostalgia and happiness to envy and frustration. By focusing on these diverse emotional expressions – what Rosenwein calls ‘systems

false rumours about the ‘immoral’ behaviour of servicewomen in Army camps. The thesis uses QMAAC instead of WAAC throughout.

³ [George, Eight Months with the Women’s Royal Air Force].
⁷ Rosenwein, Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages, p. 24.
of feeling’ – the thesis advances a new approach that links the emotional legacy of wartime service to the emergence of new social and political gendered subjectivities between 1918 and 1945.8

The thesis aims to interrogate the dynamic relationship between war, memory, emotion, and politics in female veteran associations in the inter-war period and beyond into the Second World War. I argue that in the journals of the OCAs, leading figures articulated and shared a vision of a civic-minded and politicised community of female veterans. These women harnessed the shared emotional legacy of military service to encourage their former comrades to take an active role in the reconstruction of post-war society. They stressed the broader social and political value of the military qualities learnt during the war, hoping that female veterans would understand the unique opportunities that the uncertainties of post-war life offered to them. Between 1920 and 1945, the editors and contributors to all three of the OCA journals discussed and promoted various political campaigns. Articles that dealt with feminist debates, the pacifist movement and commemorative politics utilised military rhetoric and were rooted in appeals to women’s ‘service’ identities. The politicisation of these associations was based upon a shared emotional investment in a positive collective memory of wartime service. Debates about contemporary politics and civic activism were re-framed to reflect the unique emotional culture of these veteran associations. This introduction will firstly describe in more detail the nature and function of the OCAs and their membership. I will then discuss the key historiographical debates that the thesis engages with before explaining how the thesis further develops Rosenwein’s theory of emotional communities. The concluding section will detail the source material on which this thesis is based. This thesis uses, for the first time, the rich material found within the journals of all three of the Old Comrades Associations and uses this evidence to make new claims about the emotional impact of wartime military service for women’s lives in the inter-war period.

*The women’s auxiliary services and the Old Comrades Associations*

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Queen Mary’s Army Auxiliary Corps was the first of the women’s forces established during the First World War. Created in January 1917 under the orders of General Sir Nevil Macready in the War Office, the QMAAC was set up to reduce labour shortages in the Army and to free up men to join the front line. Women were recruited from the middle- and working-classes to work in domestic, clerical, and mechanical roles in Army camps in both Britain and France. The War Office appointed Mona Chalmers-Watson as Chief Controller of the QMAAC in Britain (see Fig. 1). Born in 1872, Chalmers-Watson trained as a doctor and was the sister of Sir Eric Geddes, who in his role as First Lord of the Admiralty was responsible for the formation of the Women’s Royal Naval Service in November 1917. Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, born in 1879, was appointed Controller of Overseas QMAAC units based in France. The QMAAC had over 50,000 recruits prior to official demobilisation in 1920.9 Florence Simpson, who had replaced Chalmers-Watson as Chief Controller in 1918, set up the QMAAC Old Comrades Association in 1919, with the first edition of the journal published in July 1920. The OCA formed a Headquarters office and various local branches existed throughout Britain. The OCA held reunion dinners each year in London, and organised sports tournaments, co-ordinated Armistice Day celebrations and published a journal, the QMAAC Old Comrades Association Gazette each month (see Fig. 2.) which publicised the social activities of local branches and printed correspondence from members.10 From 1920 to 1945 the journal cost three shillings and sixpence for a yearly subscription, a price which was relatively inexpensive compared to other contemporary periodicals, such as Woman’s Weekly priced at one and a half shillings per issue in 1920 and Woman’s Own which cost two shillings per issue in 1933.11

9 There were still some smaller units that remained in existence in 1920, including one at Maresfield Park camp in East Sussex, a camp in St. Pol-Sur-Ternoise in France and some QMAAC administrators working in Cologne, Germany.
10 Hereafter I will refer to the QMAAC Old Comrades Association Gazette as the QMAAC Gazette.
Regular features in the QMAAC Gazette included updates from ‘Headquarters Office’, minutes of the Annual General Meeting and the ‘News of Members’ section alongside the ‘Births’, ‘Marriages’ and ‘Deaths’ sections. The ‘Correspondence’ page printed letters from members whilst a section entitled ‘Old Comrades Overseas’ contained reports from former servicewomen who had emigrated after the war, usually to one of the former colonies of the British Empire, including Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. As well as facilitating continued contact between members of the QMAAC, the Gazette also functioned in practical sense through its features designed to help members find employment. Regular sections entitled ‘Appointments Vacant’ and ‘Posts Wanted’ advertised job vacancies. The front page of the QMAAC Gazette often featured a more detailed article that would provide commentary on a contemporary event or issue. The March 1922 edition of the Gazette opened with a report of the royal wedding between Mary, the Princess Royal and Viscount Lascelles. Other topical issues covered by the Gazette

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12 Mona Chalmers Watson, Chief Controller of the Queen Mary Army Auxiliary Corps [http://womenofscotland.org.uk/sites/default/files/2015/06/monaportrait.jpg](http://womenofscotland.org.uk/sites/default/files/2015/06/monaportrait.jpg) [accessed 26/5/2020].
included the employment of female police officers and the involvement of women in the Freemasons. Feature articles promoted relevant social movements or organisations, such as in June 1923 when the Gazette opened with a long article on ‘The Girl Guide Movement.’ In this way, the Gazette functioned as more than the mouthpiece of the OCA’s headquarters and local branches; articles discussing contemporary socio-political events reflected the vision of the QMAAC OCA leadership who, as this thesis argues, were determined to inculcate their former comrades with a sense of civic and political responsibility.

Established in November 1917 under the orders of Sir Eric Geddes, First Lord of the Admiralty, the Women’s Royal Naval Service was the smallest of the women’s corps. With around 9000 recruits, members of the WRNS – or ‘Wrens’ as they were commonly known – helped alleviate labour shortages in the Navy. Born in 1875, Katharine Furse (see Fig. 3) was Commandant of the Voluntary Aid Detachments in France before being appointed Director of the WRNS in 1917. In units of around 25 members, the Wrens were based in port towns throughout Britain including London, Plymouth and Chatham and worked as ‘coders and decoders … writers, telegraphists or signallers’ and ‘storekeepers and draughtsmen.’ After demobilisation, former members of the WRNS formed the ‘Association of Wrens’ in 1920, with the first edition of The Wren published in February 1921. Following the establishment of the Association of Wrens Katharine Furse was appointed President. The Association of Wrens published their own journal entitled The Wren (see Fig. 4) from February 1921. Although initially the journal was published quarterly and priced at five shillings, by October 1921 the Association of Wrens decided to publish The Wren each month, with annual subscription fees set at three shillings and sixpence. The Wren also adopted a similar presentational format to the QMAAC Gazette and shared many of the same features. The ‘Association of Wrens Annual Report’ carried details of the financial expenditure of the association and contained the minutes of the Annual General Meeting.

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18 I refer to the Wren Association throughout in reference to this female veteran association, but references to Old Comrades Associations – both in the body of the thesis and in the title of the PhD – refer to the Wren Association as well as the QMAAC Old Comrades Association and WRAF Old Comrades Association.
Like the QMAAC Gazette, The Wren had a regular ‘Local Branches’ section along with a ‘Correspondence’ page and contained sections entitled ‘Notes and News’ and ‘News of Ex-WRNS members’. An ‘advertisements’ section also published employment opportunities. Like the QMAAC Gazette, the front page of The Wren often contained a longer article devoted to a contemporary political or cultural topic. In May 1921, former Wren Muriel Currey published an article entitled ‘To Seek Peace and Ensue it’ which set out the main arguments in favour of the League of Nations and the pacifist movement more generally, whilst the front page of a later issue published in June 1923 contained an article entitled ‘From Air to Brussels’ which outlined the latest developments in aviation and travel.¹⁹ The varied content of the journal ensured that, like the QMAAC Gazette, The Wren allowed readers to foster friendships forged during the war, whilst also offering discussion of topical issues and providing practical help with employment. In this way, as we will see, the journal became a crucial site on which women’s martial identities were celebrated and new political subjectivities were forged.

Formed alongside the Royal Air Force in April 1918, the Women’s Royal Air Force was the last of the women’s auxiliary services to be formed. Many former members of the WRNS working with the Naval Air Arm transferred to the WRAF and as a result, the WRAF became the second largest women’s service with over 30,000 recruits working in administrative, mechanical and transport roles in air bases throughout Britain. Women worked as ‘acetylene welders, vulcanisers, electricians, carpenters’ and ‘painters and sign writers’. Lady Gertrude Crawford, a

21 The first edition of The Wren, February 1921.
former munitions worker became the first Commandant of the WRAF before she was replaced by Violet Douglas-Pennant in May 1918. After Douglas-Pennant’s dismissal, Helen Gwynne-Vaughan (see Fig. 5) became the next Commandant of the WRAF in September 1918. Created in 1919, the WRAF Old Comrades Association published the WRAF Old Comrades Association journal which cost six pence and three shillings for an annual subscription (see Fig. 6). First published in May 1920, the journal came out monthly. Despite the eventual emergence of the WRAF as the second largest of the women’s forces during the war, the WRAF Old Comrades Association journal was usually only a few pages in length and contained significantly less content than the QMAAC Gazette or The Wren.

The survival of the journal into the Second World War and its regular publication suggest that it was popular and financially viable; its short length and lack of detailed content may have simply reflected the short-lived life of the WRAF itself. Although it is clear from the regular local branch reports and well-attended reunion dinners that the WRAF OCA was a lively organisation with a committed membership, the fact that the WRAF had only been in existence for eight months during the war may have rendered inevitable the formation of a veteran organisation that functioned on a smaller scale compared to the more established forces of the QMAAC and the WRNS. The journal did contain a regular ‘Editorial’ feature which supplied updates on OCA news or important upcoming events whilst articles on developments within the RAF were common, reflecting the close relationship between the WRAF and RAF. The journal published articles entitled ‘Our Air Force’ and ‘Royal Air Force of Today’ in October 1924 and September 1927 respectively which provided detailed accounts of current developments in the RAF. As well as sections entitled ‘Branch News’, ‘Correspondence from Near and Far’ and a ‘Posts Vacant’ containing job advertisements, the journal – like the QMAAC Gazette and The Wren – published political articles that offered analysis on contemporary issues. In May 1926, as Britain faced a General Strike called by the Trades Union Congress, an editorial in the WRAF Old Comrades

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23 The circumstances under which Douglas-Pennant was dismissed are unclear but it seems from evidence given at a parliamentary inquiry that one of the key issues was Douglas-Pennant’s unpopularity with the other officers of the Royal Air Force. See https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1919/may/29/the-case-of-miss-douglas-pennant, [accessed 25/3/2020].
Association questioned the value of the nine-day lockout and critiqued the arguments of those in support of industrial action.24

The leaders of the women’s auxiliary forces and the OCAs – Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, Katharine Furse and Vera Laughton-Mathews – were all, as Alison Fell has argued ‘highly educated professional women’.27 Helen Gwynne-Vaughan attended Cheltenham Ladies College and King’s College London, graduating from the latter with a degree in Botany in 1904.28 Katharine Furse was born into an intellectual and artistic family and attended finishing school in Switzerland.29 Vera Laughton-Mathews – Deputy Director of the WRNS and editor of The Wren

26 WRAF Old Comrades Association, April 1924.
almost continuously from 1921 to 1939 – was born into a military family and was raised a Catholic.\textsuperscript{30} She was educated at King’s College London before pursuing a career in journalism, working as sub-editor of \textit{The Suffragette}, the publication of the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) and then sub-editor of \textit{Ladies’ Field}, a popular journal for women before the war.\textsuperscript{31} Given the fact that women represented 16 per cent of the student population in Britain in 1900, and only 0.5\% of all women born before 1910 in England and Wales attended university, the educational and professional achievements of these women are impressive.\textsuperscript{32} These women were also openly critical of the flaws in the social and political systems of pre-war life. Laughton-Mathews became an active member of the WSPU, and whilst Gwynne-Vaughan and Furse did not lead overtly political lives before the war, both women did display an awareness of the limitations of politics before 1914. Although according to her biographer Gwynne-Vaughan was ‘tepid about women’s political rights’ she was ‘interested in their economic rights, their right to earn, to be financially independent of men.’\textsuperscript{33} Similarly, although Katharine Furse was not an active participant in political campaigns prior to her appointment as Director of the WRNS, she credited her experience working as a VAD in a Red Cross Hospital in Le Havre, France as the determining factor that convinced her to ‘devote’ herself ‘to working for the maintenance of peace as soon as war should end.’\textsuperscript{34} All three of these key figures were educated, politically-minded women who emerged from the war armed with different ideas of what post-war life should look like. This thesis argues that these ideas, promoted within the OCA journals, show clearly how the emotional legacy of the war was harnessed to encourage ex-servicewomen to take an active role in post-war reconstruction.

Whereas the key figureheads within the OCAs came from the social elite, the membership of these associations was more socially heterogeneous, a product of the fact that the women’s auxiliary forces had recruited from across the social spectrum.\textsuperscript{35} The variety of employment

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{30} Her father, Sir John Knox Laughton, served with the Royal Navy before his career as a Naval historian.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} Izzard, \textit{A heroine in her time}, p. 126.
  \item \textsuperscript{34} Furse, \textit{Hearts and Pomegranates}, p. 304.
  \item \textsuperscript{35} The WRNS did attract more middle-class women as the Navy was widely assumed to the most respectable of the three forces. For more on the social status of WRNS recruits see Hannah Roberts, \textit{The
opportunities advertised in the journals underscores the social diversity of the OCAs. The job vacancies printed in the December 1920 edition of the QMAAC Gazette included advertisements for a ‘cook general’ an ‘experienced typist’ and ‘two women carpenters’. In June 1920 the WRAF Old Comrades Association reported that work had been found for twelve members of the OCA. One member had found employment as a ‘short-hand typist’, ten had found work as clerks and one had secured work as a cook. In August 1926 The Wren chose to advertise a more unusual career option for women, with the publication of a feature promoting decorating for women. The advertisements promoting job opportunities can therefore tell us much about the diverse social composition of the membership of female veteran associations. Elsewhere in the journals, features celebrating the employment of ex-servicewomen in the OCAs also tell us that the associations were both conscious of and proud of the social heterogeneity amongst their members.

Local branch reports reveal the existence of a lively and diverse social culture within the Old Comrades Associations. The social activities organised by local branches included ‘a brain-wracking Advertisement Guessing Competition’ arranged by the London branch of the QMAAC OCA in 1921 and a social evening during which members of one branch of the Association of Wrens danced a number of dances including ‘the latest fox-trot’ and ‘the old-fashioned Sir Roger de Coverley’ – a traditional English and Scottish country dance – in May 1921. Members of the WRAF OCA were similarly inventive in their choice of recreational activities. In February 1922, the secretary of the West Middlesex branch reported that members had formed a ‘roller skating club’. Sports too were an important part of the associational life of the OCAs. Members built networks across the three OCAs with the formation of an ‘inter-service women’s swimming sports’ league which was organised by the Association of Wrens’ Swimming Club. Other inter-service sports included tennis and hockey. In October 1921 the WRAF Old Comrades Association reported that former members of the WRAF had played the QMAAC Hockey Team.

38 ‘A Fresh Career for Women’, The Wren, August 1926.
40 ‘West Middlesex Branch’, WRAF Old Comrades Association, February 1922.
in Finsbury Park. The WRAF OCA advertised an ‘OCA Tennis Tournament’ in March 1922. The existence of these sports teams reveals that the OCAs provided opportunities for women to pursue sports and leisure activities whilst still maintaining the sense of comradeship with those they had served alongside during the war.

Membership of the OCAs in the inter-war period therefore provided women with opportunities for dancing, roller-skating and sports competitions whilst providing vital practical assistance related to employment. The OCAs also functioned as social spaces in which women could re-unite to share and celebrate memories of their wartime service, and this became crucial in uniting the community of ex-servicewomen. In the first edition of the QMAAC Gazette in July 1920 the editor Edith Thompson outlined to readers what they could expect from their membership of the OCA. She made clear that the association aimed to ‘administer to the best possible advantage any funds which may be forthcoming’ as part of a broader campaign to ‘secure benefits for ex-servicewomen’. These benefits included access to ‘training, clubs, hostels and convalescent homes’ but crucially these more pragmatic founding aims were accompanied by the editor’s insistence that the OCA would aim to ‘unite all ex-servicewomen and to safeguard and foster their interests.’ As this claim makes clear, leading figures within the OCAs hoped that the associations would become communities that would actively champion the needs and interests of female veterans. Similar motivations were stressed in the first edition of The Wren, in which the ‘Constitution of the Association of Wrens’ was published. The ‘Constitution’ outlined the Association’s commitment to helping former Wrens ‘find suitable employment’ and secure ‘sick relief’ whilst also providing members with ‘a share in the Clubs, Hostels’ and ‘convalescent homes’ made available through the Service Women’s Association, set up in 1919 to provide assistance for all former members of the women’s corps. As well as this, the ‘Constitution’ also included the Association’s aim to ‘encourage comradeship among all who served in the Women’s Royal Naval Service, and to foster ideals of Citizenship’.

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41 ‘Hockey’, WRAF Old Comrades Association, October 1921.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
Within the WRAF OCA, one member also communicated to members her wish that the OCA would become a social space for women to re-connect with each other. In the first edition of the WRAF Old Comrades Association she encouraged members to send in their news and correspondence, noting ‘we want to hear more of each other, and, when possible, to see more of each other. We want to know what our old comrades are doing in civil life, and to talk the old shop again.’ Later in her article this former servicewoman also reminded readers of the RAF and WRAF motto, ‘Per Ardua Ad Astra’ (‘through adversity to the stars’), hoping that this reminder would serve as inspiration for women as they returned to their pre-war lives. She stressed to her readers that the WRAF motto was ‘appropriate not only to aeroplanes’ but to society more broadly. The OCAs were therefore lively social spaces designed to support women financially and emotionally as they adjusted to their civilian lives. Crucially, the social bonds between old comrades were sustained by a shared awareness amongst the membership in the continued importance of their military veteran identities. This thesis provides a comprehensive analysis of the collective investment in an emotional legacy of wartime service.

This emphasis on the emotional dynamics within female veteran associations represents an important original perspective that goes beyond an assessment of the social or practical functions of the OCAs. Instead, the thesis sheds light on the significance of these spaces as crucibles in which new social, political and gendered subjectivities were forged.

Veterans, Emotions and Political Culture: Historiographical Approaches

The thesis advances an approach which draws connections between emotions, memory, and politics within the OCAs to offer a deeper insight into the construction of a unique emotional culture within female veteran organisations after 1918. The thesis contributes to our understanding of the legacy of women’s wartime military service firstly by moving beyond the more traditional emphasis on the lives of munitions workers and nurses. Beyond this, the thesis

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49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 For work on munitions workers see Gail Braybon, Women workers in the First World War: the British experience (London: Croom Helm, 1981); Gail Braybon and Penny Summerfield, Out of the cage:
draws new conclusions about the political and cultural significance of female veteran associations in post-war society. Lucy Noakes’ work on women in the British Army provided one of the first studies of the QMAAC OCA, the activities of which she argued tended to focus on the ‘more traditionally female areas of philanthropic work’ which, she claims, demonstrates that the OCA was ‘part of an essentially conservative wider inter-war movement which was re-asserting the importance of traditional gender roles’. According to Noakes, the QMAAC OCA survived into the 1920s by ‘refocusing their energies and activities back towards the traditionally female sphere’ and asserting that ‘female participation in public life’ should be shaped ‘by a


53 Lucy Noakes, Women in the British Army, p. 93.
domestic, nurturing ideology of femininity.’ Whilst Noakes’ work does much to integrate the OCAs within broader narratives of women’s role in the Army, her interpretation, based on scrutiny of the more traditionally feminine work of the QMAAC OCA alone, obscures the radical role played by female veteran associations in allowing women to retain their military veteran identities long after demobilisation. Similarly, Alison Fell’s recent comparative study of female veterans in Britain and France draws on the experiences of servicewomen, nurses, authors and resistance fighters to explore how and why women laid claim to a ‘veteran’ identity in post-war society, yet she does not explore the radical political implications of this. Fell argues that in asserting their veteran identities women were able ‘to draw upon the positive connotations of active war service’ in order to ‘intervene in public debates and participate in public life’. Fell’s chapter on the OCAs provides one of the first sustained examinations of the importance of female veteran associations and their broader significance in post-war Britain, yet her emphasis remains firmly on the practical function of these organisations and their role in providing financial assistance to members.

The relationship between emotional legacies of gendered military service and women’s political involvement therefore remains largely unexplored. In a recent exploratory chapter Krisztina Robert has focused on the ways in which leading figures in the OCAs aimed to encourage members to take an active role in political campaigns, yet her emphasis on the importance of the ‘corporatist’ organisational model of these associations in facilitating their political engagement ignores the importance of nostalgia and other emotional expressions in bringing together communities of ex-servicewomen. Robert’s analysis – the first to look at all three of the OCAs comparatively – argues that female veteran associations were essentially ‘corporatist groups’ led by women who ‘developed a commitment to promoting national and imperial regeneration through women’s militant agency.’ Robert cites evidence of the involvement of former servicewomen in pacifist politics, the General Strike and the Girl Guiding movement to argue

54 Ibid., p. 93.
55 See Fell, Women asVeterans in Britain and France after the First World War.
56 Ibid., p. 8.
that the OCAs fostered a unique brand of ‘gendered political activism’ within a ‘cross-class social movement held together by the memory of shared war service.’ Robert’s work highlights the relationship between wartime memory and political activism in the context of female veteran associations. However, her argument that the OCAs were able to develop ‘an effective framework for women’s political activism’ by ‘modelling’ themselves on the ‘regimental OCAs of the post-Boer war period’ and ‘post-war ex-service networks’ obscures the ways in which the unique experiences of servicewomen were drawn on in the construction of a distinct, collective memory of wartime service in the journals of the OCAs. To claim that the OCAs were simply replicating the existing cultures of male veteran organisations downplays the agency ex-servicewomen displayed as they built their own unique emotional and political culture within the OCAs.

Viewing female veteran organisations as emotional communities with their own norms, values and expressions represents an original approach to studies of ex-servicewomen in the inter-war period that moves beyond existing emphases on the functional or ‘corporatist’ identities of the OCAs. The thesis argues that the ‘systems of feeling’ in the OCAs – defined by the repeated references to nostalgia, military pride, and envy in the journals – give us an insight into the emotional community constructed and fostered within the pages of the OCA journals. From this, we can better understand how gendered legacies of wartime service intersected with contemporary political and cultural debates in the creation of new martial subjectivities for women. Existing work that has considered the significance of emotion within veteran associations has focused on ex-servicemen’s organisations, with emphasis on the importance of nostalgia and comradeship within these groups. George Mosse has argued that ‘many veterans considered the war years in retrospect as the happiest years of their lives’ and has shown that for ex-servicemen, the process of recounting these more positive narratives of wartime service made it possible for the ‘horror’ of war to be ‘transcended and the meaning which the war had given to individual lives retained.’ Similarly, in her study of the journal of the Comrades of the Great

58 Ibid., p. 134.
59 Ibid., p. 127.
War association, Sarah Cole claims that the publication adopted ‘a tone of conservative nostalgia’ and sought to ‘appreciate and resuscitate the values and virtues of the war, most centrally comradeship’.\textsuperscript{62} Eleanor K. O’Keefe has similarly argued that in veteran associations in Glasgow, comradeship ‘sustained branch life’ and found expression in ‘lively programme[s] of social events and recreational pursuits’.\textsuperscript{63} Dan Todman has also stressed the emotional significance of ‘hot pot suppers’ and other social occasions within ex-servicemen’s associations in creating an ‘atmosphere of increasing nostalgia’ in which men felt able to ‘commemorate other aspects of the wartime experience, including comradeship, laughter and belonging.’\textsuperscript{64} In this way, Todman has emphasised the function of veteran groups in providing men with spaces in which they ‘felt most comfortable recalling their experiences outside the public sphere’.\textsuperscript{65}

These existing narratives have highlighted how veteran associations functioned as emotional spaces for ex-servicemen, yet they provide limited commentary on the broader political impact of enduring expressions of comradeship and nostalgia.\textsuperscript{66} Studies that have drawn connections between the emotional legacy of war and political culture have tended to concentrate on evidence of trauma amongst returning servicemen and the brutality and violence veteran organisations were believed to encourage and facilitate in the aftermath of demobilisation. Jon Lawrence’s examination of the role of ex-servicemen in the post-war riots between 1919 and 1921 scrutinised the popular claim that male veterans returned from the Western Front ‘irrevocably brutalised’ and traumatised by the horrors of trench warfare.\textsuperscript{67} His conclusion – that much of this rhetoric was ‘mere froth’ and based more on fear than reality – showed how public perceptions

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{ibid} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 24.
\end{thebibliography}
surrounding the emotional states of returning ex-servicemen inflated fears of a brutalised mob of veterans determined to threaten public order. With a different focus on victims of shell-shock, Susan Kingsley-Kent argues that the ‘traumatised psyche’ identified in soldiers was more than individual, psychological phenomenon – it can also be used to explain the fractured nature of politics and society after 1918. Kent argues that ‘the enormous loss and devastating grief’ enacted by the war ‘resulted in a new understanding of the shattered self’ that ‘played out on a national level, producing a particular set of politics’. Kent claims that a ‘shell shocked society’ emerged in the aftermath of the war which explains the pursuit by political parties of ‘certain political actions which sought to repair the collective psyche.’ In Kent’s analysis, the fractured condition of the collective consciousness provided the necessary foundations for the political triumph of Conservatism in the inter-war period. Stanley Baldwin’s brand of Conservative politics drew on pastoral ideals of British life in the construction of a political discourse that championed a ‘peaceable flight to domesticity’. Kent’s attempt to illustrate how the psychic trauma inflicted by the war defined not only shell-shocked individuals but the body politic more broadly shows how cultural narratives of the inter-war period can be enriched by an awareness of the relationship between emotional states – both individual and collective – and political culture.

Many other key contributors to the cultural and emotional histories of the First World War have similarly focused on suffering and pain as the dominant emotional experience and legacy of the war. Joanna Bourke has examined the relationships between male soldiers and argued that the realities of trench warfare exposed the ‘fragility of brotherhood’. Whilst men in the trenches experienced an ‘intimacy’ that was both ‘physical and personal’ Bourke claims that the ‘crises of war proved too traumatic’ for the sustenance of ‘male friendships’. Whilst men formed close emotional bonds with each other in the trenches, these friendships rarely survived into peacetime. Michael Roper’s investigation into the impact of the war on the relationships between

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68 Ibid., pp. 560 – 561.
70 Ibid., pp. 3 – 4.
71 Ibid., p. 5.
72 Ibid., p. 8.
74 [Ibid.]
mothers and sons similarly frames trauma as the defining emotional experience of conflict for servicemen. Utilising the insights of psychoanalysis, Roper explores the ‘unconscious effects of extreme emotional experience’ amongst soldiers, with a focus on the ‘misunderstandings, tensions’ and ‘outright hostility’ that frequently came to define the relationships between servicemen and their mothers during the war.\textsuperscript{75} Roper’s innovative use of psychoanalytical frameworks made possible an exploration of the ‘states of mind that emerge within human relationships’ whilst advancing a ‘less linguistically driven way of thinking about emotions and how they are expressed.’\textsuperscript{76}

Both Bourke and Roper have further stressed the need to fully integrate studies of emotion into histories of the First World War. Yet the overriding emphasis in their work on fear, anxiety, and trauma assumes that these were the only emotional responses to warfare that merit attention. Although Roper argues that the war ‘gave rise to contradictory emotional states’ he concludes that ‘anxiety’ was the ‘dominant emotion during war’.\textsuperscript{77} Despite claiming that ‘horror and dread’ were ‘not the only emotions that soldiers experienced’ Roper maintains that the ‘pleasures’ of war ‘were rarely unalloyed.’\textsuperscript{78} Rather than stress the traumatic and brutalising legacies of trench warfare, this thesis highlights the emotional vocabularies found within the multiple letters and articles in the OCA journals to show how a more positive narrative of wartime service was given a platform within the publications of ex-servicewomen’s associations. In these narratives, military life was remembered as a time of adventure, excitement and fun; the more distressing and painful aspects of wartime service – including homesickness, disease, danger and discomfort – were rarely acknowledged in the pages of the journals. Editors were keen to promote nostalgic memories of military service in a way that displays their unwillingness to acknowledge the broader spectrum of emotional responses to wartime service amongst women who had served with the QMAAC, the WRNS or the WRAF.

\textsuperscript{75} [Michael Roper, \textit{The Secret Battle: emotional survival in the Great War} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 15.]
\textsuperscript{76} [Ibid.]
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., p. 15.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., p. 18.
By revealing the centrality of emotion within gendered narratives of wartime service, the thesis departs from more traditional studies of commemoration and cultural memory, which have tended to take the form of broad surveys that seek to map cultural shifts in how individuals, communities and nations remember the war in various discursive, spatial, and literary contexts.\(^7^9\) Jay Winter’s examination of mourning in the aftermath of war found that ‘traditional motifs’ within ‘classical, romantic, or religious images and ideas’ endured after 1918, reflected in the physical and cultural memorials to the First World War.\(^8^0\) In a later study Winter again focused on the cultural landscape of commemoration with an exploration of ‘collective remembrance’ and the processes by which individuals – the ‘social agents’ of remembrance – shape the cultural memory of the war by incorporating their own ‘feelings’, ‘beliefs’ and experiences into their own narratives of war.\(^8^1\) Adrian Gregory’s work has also argued that after 1918 ‘the broad discursive parameters for talking about the war’ were ‘continually contested’ and that this evidence underscores the ‘complex reality’ of the commemorative landscape of inter-war Britain.\(^8^2\) These studies have illustrated the complexities of the relationship between the cultural and social landscapes of post-war Britain and the evolution of commemorative discourses. However, these key scholars have under-conceptualised the role of gender and emotion more broadly and have thus overlooked the development of the collective memory of wartime service fostered within female veteran associations. The lack of attention given to the unique gendered legacy of military service has led to the dominance of overly simplistic narratives that assume women’s responses to the war were conditioned by their maternal identities and domestic lives. Winter in particular has claimed that an exploration of women’s

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\(^8^0\) Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning, p. 5.

\(^8^1\) Winter, Remembering War, p. 35; p. 136; p. 4.

participation in the construction of ‘sites of mourning and sites of memory’ is now possible only ‘because war has moved out of the battlefield and into every corner of civilian life.’ This limited understanding of the multiple roles women played in post-war commemoration obscures the active ways in which ex-servicewomen used the OCA journals to narrate their own legacies of the war and conceals the importance of the relationship between female veteran associations, memory, and political culture after 1918.

I argue that within the OCA journals, former servicewomen constructed an emotional community that foregrounded discussion and debate related to various issues within the socio-cultural and political landscapes of post-war Britain. The appearance of articles that celebrated the martial values of women’s wartime service helped promote a positive emotional legacy of the First World War. Leading figures within the OCAs including Gwynne-Vaughan, Furse and Laughton-Mathews build on this emotional attachment to the qualities of duty, service and comradeship articulated by contributors to the journals to make a case for a politically-engaged and civic minded veteran community. An awareness of a culture of political activism within the OCAs allows us to shed new light on the ways in which the legacy of the war shaped female associational culture after 1918. Narratives of women’s political involvement after the war have long been limited by a preoccupation with the idea of the war as a ‘watershed’ moment which either liberated or restricted the nature of women’s activism in the inter-war period. Scholars such as Harold Smith have argued forcefully that the war ‘unleashed a powerful current of cultural conservatism which helped shape the direction of post-war feminism.’ Echoing this claim, Kingsley-Kent’s analysis of the ‘dominant discourses on sexuality’ led her to conclude

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83 Winter, Remembering war, pp. 6 – 7.
that the inter-war period saw a ‘fundamental abandonment of pre-war feminist ideology’.\textsuperscript{86} Evidence of renewed campaigns for women’s rights as mothers and housewives after 1918 led Kent to conclude that the pursuit of gender equality which had so animated the pre-war suffrage campaigners had now been fully abandoned in favour of a more conservative approach that did not challenge the re-imposition of traditional gender norms.

Work by Caitriona Beaumont, Maggie Andrews, Sue Innes and others has shown how, following the passage of the 1918 Representation of the People Act, women’s associations such as the Women’s Institute and the Young Women’s Christian Association worked to educate their members in the practice of democratic citizenship and sought to encourage women to take an active role in civic life.\textsuperscript{87} By illuminating the work of these organisations in the name of ‘democratic citizenship’ Beaumont and others have demonstrated that a ‘women’s movement’ in the inter-war period existed beyond the more overtly political, feminist organisations including the Six Point Group and the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship. These organisations explicitly shunned the label ‘feminist’ yet in their educational and civic activities they succeeded in promoting various campaigns that aimed to improve the lives of their members. As Beaumont has shown, these campaigns centred on issues including state pensions, employment of women police officers, family allowances and housing and maternity rights. Women within these organisations adopted the concept of ‘active citizenship’ as a way of promoting the need for women to engage in politics. In many ways, the OCAs shared much in common with these ‘mainstream’ and ‘conservative’ organisations in terms of their social activities and ostensible apolitical identities.\textsuperscript{88} But a closer look at the OCAs and their evolution

between 1920 and 1945 reveals a deeper and more overt political engagement than is evident in other more conservative women’s organisations. I argue that women’s experience of serving as military auxiliaries was crucial in structuring a unique type of political engagement that drew strength from their emotional investment in martial values.

Rather than avoid affiliation with any specific political ideology or movement, the editors of the three OCA journals offered their publications as platforms for the dissemination and promotion of various political campaigns. Articles appeared from other more overtly political publications such as *Time and Tide* and the *League of Nations Union Journal*, but ex-servicewomen themselves also wrote features and responded to published articles. The OCA journals were therefore part of a broader network of political periodicals, whilst the editors also encouraged members to contribute articles themselves. Ex-servicewomen chose not to infuse their articles with a language of ‘active citizenship’ however – instead, they composed features that engaged with political debates via an awareness of their readers’ emotional attachment to military service. It therefore does not make sense to group the OCAs alongside the Women’s Institute, the Townswomen’s Guild, and other similar women’s organisations. To do so would be to underestimate the confidence with which ex-servicewomen sought to politicise the OCA journals and create a community of female veterans united in their determination to bring forward the values and skills learnt during the war.

Whilst the organisations studied by Beaumont, Innes and others attempted to accommodate an enduring emphasis on women’s domestic obligations with new opportunities for political engagement, women in the OCAs were not overly concerned with bridging this gap. The OCAs created an alternative associational world in women could lay claim to identities beyond their roles as mothers or housewives. Members of the OCAs were never afraid to take an overt political stance, or encourage participation in alternative, even radical, political causes. This shaped the political role of the OCAs and facilitated the evolution of these organisations into spaces for debate, discussion and reflection. Former servicewomen did not limit their political engagement to maternal or domestic issues, but contributed to debates related to feminism,

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89 Fell, *Women as Veterans in Britain and France*, p. 56.
pacifism, commemorative politics and later, during the Second World War, members were invited to comment on their roles as civilian volunteers. The thesis therefore argues that the OCAs occupied a distinct space within the associational landscape of inter-war Britain. They were emotional communities founded upon a shared legacy of wartime service, but the OCAs also encouraged the emergence of a new political identity for women rooted in their military experience. Whilst many OCA members sought to stress their equivalence with male veterans, it is also clear that ex-servicewomen celebrated their own unique experiences of gendered military service. The thesis will explore the relationship between emotional values and political discourses and will argue that the collective memory of the First World War was crucial in framing how political campaigns were communicated within the discursive spaces of the OCA journals.

*Theory and Method*

Emotions and emotional vocabularies are central to the methodological framework adopted within this thesis. Whilst former servicewomen frequently spoke of their emotions and feelings in different contexts, the gap between these discursive formulations and ‘real’ or ‘felt’ emotions poses difficulties when making claims about the role of these emotional expressions in forging collective subjectivities. Furthermore, when ex-servicewomen spoke of the pride and joy they felt remembering their military service, we cannot know how these emotions were experienced, or the extent to which they were shared within the OCA community. Such issues point to the ongoing debate amongst scholars of emotion, who continue to wrestle with the methodological problems raised by a focus on feelings and sentiments. William Reddy’s attempt to use insights from psychology and anthropology to inform historical investigations of emotional norms provides an example of how historians can explore the physiological and evolutionary components of emotional behaviour as part of wider discussions of the historical contexts that shape socio-cultural responses to emotions and their expressions. However, this thesis – with its emphasis on the OCA journals and their content – relies more on the linguistic expression of emotion and considers the discursive significance of the journals in relation to memory, identity and politics.
As Rob Boddice has argued, historians of emotion should ‘aim . . . not to understand emotions. . . . but rather how they were experienced, what aroused them, in what form, and with what effects.’ Julie Livingston has offered similar conclusions, arguing that the ‘history of emotions’ is not about ‘getting inside the hearts . . . of persons in the past.’ Instead, she claims that thinking of ‘text as process’ allows us to view ‘some of the complex work of self-making amid purposefully cultivated emotional communities’. This thesis does not attempt to resolve what is in effect, as Nicole Eustace has claimed, a ‘false binary’ between the argument that emotions are ‘biological in basis and universal in nature’ and the claim that emotions exist solely through discursive formulations and within cultural contexts. As Peter Stearns has argued, there is ‘no definitive resolution’ to a debate that attempts to define what an ‘emotion’ is. Rather, as Susan J. Matt has stated, historians should be content knowing that ‘feelings cannot exist completely independently of language, and that words give shape to emotion’. In other words, ‘by choosing to identify and name one’s feelings in one way rather than another, individuals define their emotions in the process of expressing them’. In its reading of emotions, this thesis concurs with Matt’s assessment. Without claiming to make judgements about the realities of felt emotions, this thesis will place emphasis on the importance of constructed emotional discourses in the creation of a shared cultural memory of the war and the formation of a collective veteran identity within the OCAs.

William Reddy’s model of ‘emotional regimes’ and ‘emotional refuges’ was the product of one of the first sustained examinations of the ‘central role’ of emotions in the construction of a ‘unity
of purpose’ and ‘ethos’ in ‘social life’.\textsuperscript{97} In an analysis which acknowledged that ‘any enduring political regime must establish as an essential element a normative order for emotions, an “emotional regime”’ Reddy forwarded an approach grounded in an ‘anthropology of emotions’ and applied this to a study of nineteenth-century France.\textsuperscript{98} Reddy’s claim that emotions are ‘central to the life of individuals, open to deep social influence’ led him to conclude that ‘emotions are of the highest political significance’ and in doing so, his work highlighted the potential of the history of emotions to shed new light on the evolution of political regimes.\textsuperscript{99} Arguing that ‘emotions play a central role’ in the ‘maintenance’ and stability of social communities, Reddy posited the existence of ‘emotional regimes’ within societies.\textsuperscript{100} Because in any given community there were ‘strict limits to the range of possible emotional “cultures”’ Reddy justifies labelling these specific communities as ‘regimes’ in which, due to the levels of ‘emotional control’ that individuals were expected to abide by, ‘emotional freedom’ was constrained.\textsuperscript{101} The strict emotional rules from which social communities derived stability led in turn to the formation of ‘emotional refuges’ – spaces which provided ‘safe release from prevailing emotional norms’.\textsuperscript{102} The value of Reddy’s work lies in the recognition of the significance and power of emotions in structuring social and political life. This thesis too claims that emotional expressions of nostalgia and pride played a crucial role in shaping the discursive political campaigns within the journals.

Yet whilst Reddy’s work retains its importance in wider emotions scholarship, the thesis works more closely with Rosenwein’s theory of emotional communities as this model lends itself well to an investigation that aims to trace the dynamic interaction between contemporary socio-political discourses and communities of female veterans in the OCAs. The reliance of the editors of the OCA journals on alternative publications and the clear overlap between the commemorative discourses in the journals and those found in the popular press underscores the need for an approach which acknowledges the fluid interaction between the emotional norms of a

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., p. 55.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., p. 124.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., p. 55.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., p. 56; p. 127.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., p. 129.
distinct community and the wider public and political spheres. The ‘emotional culture’ and 
‘emotionology’ methodologies developed by Peter N. Stearns are similarly rooted in an 
awareness of the fluidity of emotional norms. Stearns has argued that ‘emotional culture’ can 
defined as ‘those deeply held beliefs that are sometimes summed up in the word “mentality.”’ 
‘Emotionology’ in this context refers to ‘emotional goals in family settings, in childrearing, in 
work relationships, in codes of politeness. It affects the way people describe their own emotional 
standards and, often, the way they actually evaluate aspects of their emotional experience.’ Categorising ‘emotional goals’ as ‘emotionology’ facilitates the exploration of specific 
emotional standards in different historical contexts and helps us understand how these standards 
evolve and change over time. Stearns’ approach here has much in common with Rosenwein’s 
method; Stearns claims that specific social groups create and foster their own ‘emotional goals’ 
whilst Rosenwein recognises that emotional communities have ‘common’ ‘goals’. The need to 
promote and defend positive narratives of wartime service amongst OCA members could be read 
as an ‘emotional goal’ that helped regulate the ‘emotional experience’ of ex-servicewomen. 
Stearns’ approach reminds us of the importance of understanding how and in what contexts 
individuals express their emotions. The fact that former servicewomen chose to articulate their 
nostalgic yearnings for wartime service and their sense of pride in their military veteran identities 
in the OCA journals identifies these discursive spaces as important sites on which a distinct 
‘emotional culture’ was constructed.

Stearns’ approach is therefore valuable in making it possible to identify changes over time in 
emotional standards. Yet this thesis, with its specific focus on the importance of the friendships 
between former servicewomen, benefits from Rosenwein’s emphasis on communities and the 
role of social bonds in shaping the type of emotional norms that define these distinct 
communities. Building on Rosenwein’s existing model, I aim to be more ambitious in my use of 
emotional communities as a methodological framework. I explore the ways in which the 
construction of this emotional community promoted new possibilities for the social and

103 Stearns, American Cool, p. 2.
104 Ibid. p. 2.
105 Ibid., p. 2.
106 Ibid., p. 2; Rosenwein, Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages, p. 24.
political lives of female veterans after 1918. Investigating the promotion of new political identities within the emotional communities of the OCAs is possible given the richness of the source material I consult in this thesis. Whilst Rosenwein’s medieval subjects left only traces of their emotional expressions in scant textual and material sources, the detailed and self-reflective content of the OCA journals has allowed me to map emotional expressions whilst also exploring the influence of emotional values on collective identities, political debate, and civic engagement. In contrast to Rob Boddice’s claim that the strength of Rosenwein’s approach comes from her ability to open up ‘the study of emotional expression in ways not linked to politics’ this thesis argues that the emotions that defined the communities of the OCAs were linked inextricably to the type of political discourse promoted in the journals.107

I argue that the emotional expressions found in the journals helped construct a collective female veteran identity. Ute Frevert has argued that emotions help us understand ‘the construction and framing of subjectivity’.108 This thesis explores the political significance of shared emotional vocabularies to argue that emotions should become a key source of enquiry for historians studying the impact of the First World War on not only individual but also collective subjectivities. The chapters that follow seek to illuminate the ways in which communities of ex-servicewomen engaged in a collective ‘emotional self-shaping’ by contributing to and reading the journals of their organisations.109 The women who served with the QMAAC, the WRNS and the WRAF were the first women to serve in an official capacity as auxiliaries – as a result, they were also the first women who could lay claim to the title of female veteran after 1918.110 This identity was therefore under construction in the years after the war, but it was also under threat, as the battles to gain war pensions and official recognition at Armistice Day parades indicate.111 Because of this, the construction of a shared memory of gendered military service took on a new

111 See Alison S. Fell, Women as Veterans in Britain and France after the First World War.
significance in the inter-war period. Rosenwein has argued that the ‘shared vocabularies’ that can be found within emotional communities are similar to the ‘common discourse’ found within society which Foucault claimed contributed to the formation of power relations and subjectivities.¹¹² Yet whilst Rosenwein echoes Foucault’s claim that discourses have a ‘controlling’ or ‘disciplining’ function, I argue that the emotional discourses found in the OCA journals were instead constructive; articles, letters and news updates were part of a conscious effort on behalf of editors and other leading figures in the OCAs to build a narrative of gendered military service that emphasised nostalgia, comradeship and the significance of military tradition.¹¹³

Sources

This thesis is the product of a Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) between the University of Manchester and the Imperial War Museums (IWM). The aim of the CDA was to explore the journals of the Old Comrades Associations held in the archives at IWM and to discover their significance in relation to broader debates about the impact of the First World War on women’s lives. The thesis also draws on other primary source collections, including the archives of the League of Nations Union, published autobiographies of leading ex-servicewomen and contemporary press reports to enrich the analysis of the journals as well to provide necessary contextual background. Overall however, the thesis takes the journals as the primary focus of investigation. This focus informed my research practice; rather than employ sampling techniques in my reading of the journals, I read each edition of the QMAAC Gazette, The Wren, and the WRAF Old Comrades Association between 1920 and 1945. This enabled me to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content of the journals as well as an awareness of both the subtle and the more prominent discursive shifts within these publications over time. This approach also allowed me to explore the shifts in women’s emotional responses in different social, cultural, and political contexts. A desire to understand how women’s contributions to the journals changed as they grew older and were confronted with a new generation of servicewomen in 1939 influenced my decision to study the journals through the duration of the

¹¹² Rosenwein, Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages, p. 25.
¹¹³ Ibid., p. 25.
Second World War. Researching all three journals concurrently also allowed me to approach the key questions of the thesis from a tri-service perspective and offer a detailed assessment of the veteran experience across the three branches of the Old Comrades Associations. This in turn has allowed me to look at the three OCAs both as individual emotional communities and as components of a larger emotional community defined by a shared understanding of the specific experiences of gendered military service.

As sources, the journals of the OCAs represent a unique opportunity to explore the emotional impact of military service for women. The content of these journals is the central focus of this thesis, but in making connections between emotional discourses and political and civic movements, an assessment of broader political movements and intellectual debates will accompany close textual analysis of articles and letters. The aim of this approach has been to illuminate the dynamic relationship between female veteran associations and wider debates occurring within the political sphere. It is also hoped that this approach goes some way in heeding Jessica Meyer’s call for a more ‘interdisciplinary’ approach to cultural studies of the First World War and its aftermath, a goal which Meyer sees as vital if we are to challenge and avoid ‘monolithic understandings of war’s meaning both for particular groups and for the nation as a whole’. In order to further demonstrate the ways in which the OCAs positioned themselves as key contributors to wider social and political debates, I argue that the journals continually participated in ‘discursive exchanges’ with other key periodicals of the inter-war period, including *Time and Tide*, the *League of Nations Union Journal* and *Outlook*.

**Structure**

Overall, the thesis argues that the OCAs fostered positive shared memories of wartime service. This collective memory of the war, defined by specific types of emotional expression, can help

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us understand why and how political campaigns were promoted by leading figures within the OCAs. Understanding the emotional investment in certain values such as ‘duty’ and ‘service’ explains why ex-servicewomen infused political rhetoric with military language and promoted campaigns via appeals to the veteran identities of OCA members. Chapter One explores the multiplicity of emotional expressions found within the OCA journals. It engages with notions of ‘nostalgia’ and ‘comradeship’ and underscores the centrality of shared emotional values and collective emotional vocabularies in the construction of the community of female veterans in the post-war period. The middle chapters of the thesis focus more explicitly on the various political campaigns that ex-servicewomen promoted through the OCAs during the 1920s and 1930s and explore the diverse ways in which women’s ‘service’ identities flowed through different political arenas in the inter-war period. Chapter Two draws new connections between the legacy of women’s wartime service and political engagement by looking first at the ways in which leading figures within the OCAs articulated a specific conceptualisation of the legacy of wartime service. I interrogate the links between dominant emotional values of the OCAs and political discourse and argue that the powerful emotional legacy of the war, nurtured by the OCAs, that bound members together provided fertile soil in which ideas about citizenship and political involvement could be promoted. Chapter Three investigates the relationship between the Association of Wrens and the League of Nations Union between 1921 and 1937. It argues that OCA members resolved the tensions presented by the co-existence of pacifist and militarist discourses in The Wren by re-formulating existing pacifist rhetoric to reflect the emotional culture of the Association of Wrens.

Chapter Four shows how OCA members engaged with the politics of remembrance in the 1920s via a shared commitment to a memory of wartime service defined by nostalgia and pride in military service. Looking at the reports of Armistice Day within the OCA journals, which detailed the role of ex-servicewomen in commemorative events in London and across other cities and regions, the chapter explores the active way in which women shaped their own discourses of commemoration. Women drew on existing cultural discourses while reflecting on the memory of the war, whilst at the same time promoting their own unique gendered memory of wartime service based on a collective, shared emotional response to the war. Chapter Five argues that the outbreak of war in September 1939 was significant in posing a fundamental challenge to the
existence of the emotional communities of the OCAs. Members were still determined to protect their traditions and attempted to bridge the gap between older veterans and the emergence of a new generation of servicewomen, but this proved difficult. The OCAs had been built upon a shared memory of the First World War and a collective emotional investment in martial values unique to this earlier conflict— the generational divide and the exclusion of many OCA members from the new women’s auxiliary services led to a breakdown in the cohesion of the communities and witnessed a new evolution of the OCAs after 1945 as new emotional values and norms came to the fore. Overall, the thesis explores the multiple and complex ways in which women’s experience of serving in the auxiliary corps in the First World War shaped their lives after 1918. It offers new insights into the dynamic relationship between war memory, emotion and politics in the lives of female veterans between 1919 and 1945.
Chapter 1 – ‘The very happiest hours of my life’: gendered memories of military service in the emotional communities of the Old Comrades Associations

November 1918 heralded the end of the First World War and the mass demobilisation of the thousands of servicewomen who had served with the QMAAC, the WRNS and the WRAF. Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, the former Controller of the QMAAC in France and the Commandant of the WRAF, had consistently agitated for the establishment of a permanent women’s military reserve. Yet despite her efforts, the War Office refused to accede to Gwynne-Vaughan’s demands and ordered the disbandment of all the women’s services.¹ For many former servicewomen, demobilisation presaged a period defined by uncertainty and loss. The transition to peacetime conditions and the return to civilian life proved challenging for those for whom military service had been a time of fun, adventure, and comradeship. In this context, the Old Comrades Associations became important refuges in which women could retain a connection to their former military corps and re-ignite some of their old friendships. In joining the OCAs, women formed a community of veterans whose aim was to foster positive memories of wartime service through social events, reunions, local branch meetings, and monthly journals. These publications were spaces in which individual reflections and collective reminiscences on the gendered experience of military service found expression. Nostalgic yearnings for the fun, adventure and comradeship of military life appeared alongside letters that communicated the disappointment, loss, and boredom of civilian life in comparison to the excitement of the war years. The speeches given at OCA reunion dinners and reported in the OCA journals saw women express the pride they felt towards military service and their enduring sentimental attachment to the values and traditions of their former corps.

This chapter argues that collectively, across the three journals, it is possible to identify common emotional values and shared emotional vocabularies that illustrate the significance of feelings and personal reflections within female veteran associations. With an in-depth focus on the emotional languages found within individual letters and reports

¹ Some QMAAC units were kept on in France until 1921 including units stationed at St. Pol in France working with the Imperial War Graves Commission – which would later be renamed the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.
of reunion dinners, I show how nostalgia and military pride were ‘fundamental’ to the ‘styles of expression’ adopted by female veterans in the emotional communities of the OCAs in the inter-war period.\(^2\) Alison Fell has argued that ‘veteran organisations provided spaces in which men and women could return to what was generally understood as a positive shared past as a member of the armed services, sometimes with a degree of affectionate nostalgia.’\(^3\) Indeed, Fell’s assessment of the QMAAC OCA led her to conclude that ‘the degree of nostalgia evident in the letters written to the Gazette during the 1920s’ was ‘striking’.\(^4\) This chapter focuses in more depth on the evidence of nostalgia within the letters of all three of the OCA journals to shed new light on the enduring emotional impact of gendered military service on women’s post-war lives. By underscoring the centrality of emotional expressions in reflections on the legacy of the war, the chapter offers new perspectives on the construction of emotional communities within the pages of the OCA journals and the consequent impact on narratives of gendered military service in the First World War.

Rosenwein has argued that emotional communities can be defined as ‘groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value – or devalue – the same or related emotions.’\(^5\) Examining all three of the OCAs concurrently, the chapter argues that each of these associations elevated nostalgic narratives of wartime service and promoted collective expressions of military pride by publishing letters and reporting on reflective and sentimental speeches made at reunion dinners by ex-servicewomen. The chapter also explores the broader implications of these shared emotional vocabularies. I argue that an analysis sensitive to the importance of emotion can help us understand the role played by female veteran associations in the construction of a distinct memory of the First World War. Each of the OCAs – including the leaders and the members – used the journals to construct and foster an emotional legacy of wartime service. Within the OCAs, this shared legacy helped unite ex-servicewomen and shaped

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 120.
what the identity of the female veteran in the inter-war period. An analysis that uses emotional expressions to gain insights into the complexities of war memory has previously only been attempted in relation to male veteran associations. These studies have largely focused on the tensions faced by ex-servicemen as they sought to adjust to civilian life. As Brian Bond has argued, male veterans had to reconcile the death and suffering witnessed in the trenches with the pride they felt in ‘their regiments and personal achievements’ and the gratitude many felt ‘for the unique experience of comradeship.’ Similarly, George Mosse has claimed that veterans were ‘often torn between their memory of the horror of the war and its glory: it had been a time when their lives had taken on a new meaning as they performed the sacred task of defending the nation.’ Dan Todman has drawn specific attention to the important role played by veteran associations in this context. In their social gatherings and reunion dinners, these associations ‘encouraged veterans to rehearse more positive memories of the war’ but often simultaneously triggered memories of ‘the awfulness of the trenches’.

However, as Todman argues, within ex-servicemen’s associations ‘in the company of friends and alcohol’ the more traumatic memories of male veterans were ‘tempered by a concentration on the better times.’ By encouraging recollections of the ‘humour, victories and friendships’ that had also defined life in the trenches, men were able to obscure their ‘more problematic memories’ of their wartime service. Work by Bond, Mosse and Todman has therefore highlighted the ongoing emotional tensions that were experienced by male veterans as they sought to make sense of the complex legacy of trench warfare. Male veteran associations were vital refuges which mitigated the psychological traumas of the war whilst also offering a space in which the ‘better times’ could also be remembered. In these existing narratives, it is argued that ex-servicemen’s organisations functioned in a unique capacity, providing emotional relief and a safe space for members to confront the complex and contradictory emotional aftermath of the war.

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9 Ibid., p. 163.
10 Ibid., p. 163.
11 Ibid., p. 163.
Ex-servicewomen’s associations played an equally vital role for their members in giving expression to providing spaces in which the emotional legacies of the war could be shared. Yet the absence of any reference to trauma, pain or suffering in relation to wartime service within the journals underscores the singularity of the OCAs within the wider associational landscape of veteran organisations in inter-war Britain. The overwhelming emphasis on the positive elements of gendered military service at the expense of other more negative experiences defined the emotional legacy of wartime service as communicated in the QMAAC Gazette, The Wren and the WRAF Old Comrades Association. As Rosenwein has argued, the ‘characteristic styles’ within emotional communities ‘depend not only on the emotions that they emphasize – and how and in what contexts they do so – but also by the ones that they demote to the tangential or do not recognize at all.’ This chapter argues that the consistent promotion of nostalgia and military pride ensured that military service was framed as an overwhelmingly positive experience that had enriched the lives of servicewomen, equipping them with new and valuable skills and qualities. By elevating certain emotional responses – particularly those that expressed nostalgia and military pride – the editors of all three OCA journals used the contributions of fellow members to curate a distinct narrative of the war which emphasised the enduring attachment members felt towards their former services.

Work by Ashplant, Dawson and Roper on the ‘politics of war memory and commemoration’ has focused on ‘the processes whereby individuals and social groups articulate their war memories into narratives’ and has identified ‘the arenas within which they seek recognition for those memories’. ‘Gatherings of old comrades’ are key spaces in which ‘individuals can express and compare their memories with the experience of contemporaries’ and through doing so ‘begin to formulate a shared language and identify common themes’. Their analysis does not include female veteran associations, but this chapter argues that the journals of the OCAs also functioned as important sites that allowed ex-servicewomen to articulate their memories through a ‘shared

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14 Ibid., p. 18.
language’ of emotional expressions that eventually led to the construction of a distinct cultural memory of wartime service.\textsuperscript{15} Overall, the chapter will demonstrate the agency ex-servicewomen demonstrated in the formulation of their own cultural memory of the war, as the complex emotional legacies of the war were drawn on in the construction of their new identities as female veterans.

‘The very happiest hours of my life’: nostalgia in the letters of ex-servicewomen

Nostalgia has long been considered problematic within studies of memory, dismissed by some as a ‘perversion of the past as historical fact.’\textsuperscript{16} Yet ‘nostalgia’ defined in its most simplistic terms as a ‘longing for times past’ has more recently been used to shed light on reasons why individuals choose to reframe their memories in specific contexts.\textsuperscript{17} As Susan J. Matt has claimed, ‘longings for lost places, peoples, and times represent a desire to bridge past experiences and present conditions.’\textsuperscript{18} Once we view nostalgic expressions as more than a ‘distortion of “true” memory’ we can more readily appreciate the ‘critical potential’ of nostalgia in historical contexts.\textsuperscript{19} Nadia Atia and Jeremy Davies have argued that nostalgia can often work in a dynamic and ‘active’ way for individuals and social groups and in fact ‘has the potential to function as a kind of critical self-consciousness.’\textsuperscript{20} For individuals and social groups, nostalgic expressions are often utilised as part of a broader strategy to strengthen their claims to an older identity that they imagine to be under threat. In her study of working-class men in the 1930s, Vik Loveday has claimed that nostalgia functioned as a ‘critical arena in which identification takes place – or a type of retroactive strategy – as opposed to mere regression.’\textsuperscript{21} This chapter builds on this work on the critical function of nostalgia as an emotional expression by focusing on the letters published in the OCA journals. I argue that these letters represent attempts by ex-

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 18.
\textsuperscript{17} Susannah Radstone, ‘Nostalgia: Home-comings and departures’, \textit{Memory Studies}, 3 (2010), p. 188.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 184.
\textsuperscript{21} Loveday, “‘Flat-capping it’”, p. 726.
servicewomen to retain a connection to their military service whilst simultaneously emphasising the significance of their wartime experiences. By elevating this type of reflection in the journals, the editors facilitated the construction of a positive narrative of wartime service, founded upon a shared language of nostalgia that was crucial within the emotional communities of the OCAs.

In December 1920, Norah Atkinson wrote a letter to the QMAAC Gazette in which she reminisced about her wartime service in a QMAAC camp in Étaples, France. Atkinson reflected on the social aspects of her time in the camp, describing in poetic terms how on returning from duty ‘in the evenings, perhaps the sun would be going down and we would take our rugs outside the hut onto the grass – let down our hair for a sun bath, get the old gramophone from the next hut, or perhaps a book’. Military service had offered Atkinson opportunities to enjoy leisure activities, but it had also led to the formation of friendships with other servicewomen. She believed that ‘all the girls I met in France were simply splendid’ and expressed her desire to ‘write the most beautiful book about our old camp at Étaples.’ The absence of any sense of fear, trauma or suffering is evident in an account which is markedly romanticised in its illustration of military service. Atkinson retroactively presented her wartime service as an experience that was beautiful in its simplicity. She reflected ‘we were all happy, really’ as she recalled the emotional experience of her time as a member of the QMAAC. Atkinson’s nostalgic narrative promoted a memory of wartime service defined by happiness, freedom, and a sense of openness. She remembered the camp at Étaples not as a place of military discipline or a potential site of danger, but a space in which friendships could flourish and QMAAC members could enjoy leisure pursuits in calm tranquillity. Atkinson’s nostalgic reflection on camp life and evocative account of the social elements of life in the QMAAC underscored the meaningful impact of her experience during the war. Her desire to relive her life at Étaples – both in this letter and in a ‘beautiful book’ yet to be written – shed light on the enduring significance of military service on Atkinson’s selfhood.

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
A letter from Edith Curtis in the same edition of the QMAAC Gazette communicated a similar nostalgia for camp life – a life which in Curtis’ view had been ‘open, free and healthy.’25 Like Atkinson, Curtis reflected on the simplicity of life with the QMAAC which she claimed had offered a much more ‘natural’ existence ‘than that which civilian life offers.’ 26 Letters such as this show how for many ex-servicewomen, the emotional suffering that accompanied their transition into peacetime was caused by the disappointments of civilian life, and the lack of purpose and meaning that this new reality brought. Unlike ex-servicemen, whose memories of comradeship and adventure were frequently mitigated by their recollections of trauma and suffering, the emotional conflict experienced by many OCA members stemmed from their regret at being unable to continue their lives as servicewomen. In her letter, Curtis stated that the war had ‘brought to the surface the highest and best ideals’ and in doing so, she presented the conflict not, as many public commentators argued, as a ‘stupid, tragic and futile’ endeavour but as a worthy venture that had given women the opportunity to work towards ‘something that was really worth while’.27 Curtis wrote that during her time with the QMAAC she had enjoyed feeling ‘really up against things’ and this sense of working as part of a collective effort had given her ‘something to hold on to, that was true and real’.28 Now confronted with a life devoid of comradeship and common purpose, Curtis was forced to accept that ‘the days of peace’ that had been ‘prayed for for so long’ had, in reality, ‘fallen very short of expectations.’29 Curtis attempted to mitigate the disappointment she felt with her optimistic acknowledgement that ‘things have hardly had time to shake down to their proper course’ whilst she also noted that the return to peacetime life entailed a period of ‘careful nursing’30. But ultimately, her reflections on life in the QMAAC camp prompted Curtis to admit, ‘I feel certain that the very happiest hours of my life were spent there.’31 Curtis’ acknowledgement that she wished ‘the dear old corps’ – of which she remained ‘proud’ to have been a member – was still in existence, suggests that she had

26 Ibid.
27 Adrian Gregory, The last Great War: British society and the First World War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 3; Curtis, ‘Correspondence’.
28 Curtis, ‘Correspondence’.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
yet to fully reconcile herself to the end of her military life and the emotional consequences of demobilisation.\textsuperscript{32}

As both Atkinson and Curtis sought to adjust to their new lives after the war, they struggled to come to terms with the loss of an existence that had offered so much happiness as well as a sense of purpose. Gendered military service was presented in these letters as a formative period in which friendships were forged and women were given new opportunities to assert their skills in meaningful ways. The nostalgia which both these letters communicate should not therefore be dismissed as evidence of ‘distortion’ or untruth but should be understood as a product of the emotional impact of wartime service upon the lives of OCA members. These nostalgic narratives provided a medium through which Atkinson and Curtis could relay their sense of disappointment in civilian life as they looked back on a period of happiness and freedom. Nostalgia in this context became a source of strength for ex-servicewomen as they emphasised the enduring legacy of the war. In turn, by printing these letters, Edith Thompson – the editor of the QMAAC Gazette – helped elevate these nostalgic memories of wartime service to readers whilst ensuring that these types of emotional reflection became part of the collective memory of the war promoted within the discursive space of the journal.

Nostalgic memories of wartime service can also be found in the WRAF Old Comrades Association journal. In September 1931 Rene L. Jefferson wrote to this journal stating how ‘beautiful’ her time in the WRAF had been and describing how ‘the spirit that existed among the girls at home and abroad was real comradeship and happiness.’\textsuperscript{33} Again, Jefferson stressed the importance of community and ‘comradeship’ in her remembrances of wartime service. She wrote ‘I still wear my “old” rainproof, and absolutely would not possess any other – from a sentimental point of view I’ve treasured it. I have made one or two alterations, which I’ve regretted!’\textsuperscript{34} Jefferson’s declaration here regarding the significance attributed to this material reminder of her wartime service underscores her enduring emotional attachment to her former military identity. As Sasha Handley has argued, ‘objects and materials’ occupy a ‘special place’ in ‘emotional

\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Ibid.}\textsuperscript{33}\textquote{From one who has just found us’}, \textit{WRAF Old Comrades Association}, September 1931, LBY E. J. 5380, Imperial War Museum, London.\textsuperscript{34}\textit{Ibid.}
landscapes’ – they can ‘summon, mediate, and direct affective states of mind’ and generate ‘a sequence of emotional states’ whilst ‘triggering memories’ of certain times past. In this case, the ‘rainproof’ held profound emotional significance for Jefferson; her regret at altering the garment and her continued willingness to wear it was precisely because the raincoat provided a material reminder of her time in the WRAF. Like the letters written by Norah Atkinson and Edith Curtis in the QMAAC Gazette, this account shows clearly how nostalgic expressions for the ‘real comradeship and happiness’ that defined women’s military service served to reinforce the importance of the war as an emotional experience. Jefferson had been inspired to write this letter after recently joining the WRAF OCA, a decision which she described as a ‘a real thrill’ which meant she was ‘at last again in touch with the “old firm”’. Jefferson’s letter provides another key example of the centrality of emotional expressions within reflective accounts of wartime service. There is again a melancholic undertone in Jefferson’s letter that stemmed from the nostalgia that defined her reminiscence, yet she also communicated the profound significance of her time in the WRAF and expressed her joy and relief at the prospect of being part of the ‘old firm’ once more.

The letters examined so far show that nostalgia for wartime service allowed women to communicate disappointment that their military lives had ended, whilst simultaneously harnessing this nostalgia to underscore the emotional impact of their time in the women’s forces. We can therefore see how nostalgic narratives allowed women to assert the enduring importance of their experiences during the war. The letters written from former servicewomen who had emigrated overseas were particularly meaningful in this context, as these accounts communicated a more acute nostalgia than their former comrades who had remained in Britain after the war. The formation of the Society for the Overseas Settlement of British Women (SOSBW) in July 1919 saw the establishment of state-sponsored emigration schemes that provided funding and support for women who wished to relocate to the former British colonies including Australia,

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36 ‘From one who has just found us’, WRAF Old Comrades Association, September 1931.
37 For more on the experiences of female migrants to the former British colonies see Lisa Chilton, Agents of Empire: British Female Migration to Canada and Australia, 1860s – 1930 (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2007).
Canada and New Zealand. 38 Lucy Noakes has argued that ‘given the backlash against women in uniform, and the contraction of employment opportunities immediately after the war, it is perhaps unsurprising that emigration began to appeal to some ex-servicewomen.’ 39 It is unclear exactly how many OCA members emigrated overseas after the war, but the evidence from the correspondence pages of the journals does suggest that the geographical relocation emigration entailed only served to heighten the nostalgia for wartime life. For these women, the desire to retain a connection to their wartime lives could not be satiated by local branch gatherings or reunion dinners. As one former servicewomen living in Kimberley, South Africa put it, ‘90 per cent of ex-WAACs feel a longing for the Corps whenever they hear of it’ but as she explained, this feeling was experienced particularly acutely by those ‘who are overseas’. 40 Letters such as these contributed to the construction of a positive, nostalgic narrative of wartime service and thus helped shape the emotional communities of the OCAs. The emotional intensity of these letters also draws attention to the variances in the nostalgic expressions found in the correspondences from across the trans-national community of the OCAs and the ways in which migration shaped the process of recollection and the formation of a collective memory of wartime service.

Nostalgic reminiscences in letters frequently prefaced appeals for information about ex-servicewomen with whom the author had served alongside. Winifred Speechley wrote to the QMAAC Gazette in January 1922 from Victoria, British Columbia to inform readers of her desire ‘to meet a “Comrade”’ to ‘talk over the times when we LIVED’. 41 For Speechley, civilian life had clearly been a disappointment. In the absence of any former QMAACs living near in Victoria, she described how she had to be content ‘chuckling to the wall at the many incidents that will return to my mind of the days in camp and at the hostels.’ 42 As romantic images of camp life had dominated the letters written by Curtis and Atkinson, Speechley’s letter makes clear that humour had also characterised camp life. Whilst many male veterans grappled with psychological injuries, Speechley wrote about how her memories of war had provoked

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40 ‘Correspondence’, Old Comrades Association Gazette, April 1923.
41 Winifred Speechley, ‘From Victoria, British Columbia’, Old Comrades Association, January 1922.
42 Ibid.
‘chuckling’ as she remembered comedic incidents that had occurred in the QMAAC camp. Whilst Speechley’s new life in Canada prevented her from meeting her former comrades in person, she nonetheless sought to use the journal to appeal for ‘news of Comrades from the Imperial Hotel, Bristol’ where she had been primarily based during the war.\textsuperscript{43} In her letter, she wondered ‘what happened to all those good souls?’ and in another light-hearted and nostalgic re-imagining of service with the QMAAC, she wondered whether her fellow servicewomen could still be found ‘scrubbing billets and marching over the Downs’.\textsuperscript{44} Speechley’s determination to make contact with any of her former comrades coupled with her powerful and evocative expression of her military service as a ‘time when we LIVED’ is a reminder again of the pain – felt more acutely by those overseas – that underpinned these nostalgic expressions. But the continued absence of any reference to suffering as an emotional legacy of the war further promoted life with the women’s forces as an enlivening and joyful period. The presence of these letters in the journals further contributed to the construction of a collective memory of wartime service built on nostalgic narratives.

Other letters from overseas OCA members expressed a longing for the friendships forged during the war. Mrs. McDonald wrote to the QMAAC Gazette in March 1923 from her new home in San Francisco to urge any ex-servicewomen planning to move to California to ‘please get in touch’.\textsuperscript{45} She wrote how she felt that the community of OCA members represented ‘one big family’ and suggested that any other former comrades who had emigrated to the United States should ‘meet each other’.\textsuperscript{46} This appeal underlined her determination to establish contact with one of her former servicewomen, whilst McDonald’s claim that QMAAC OCA were a ‘family’ highlights the emotional ties she believed still existed between former servicewomen. Former QMAAC member Belle Thomson also attempted to use the journal to find news of her former comrades who she had worked alongside. Thomson had emigrated to New York following the end of the war but clearly felt a strong and enduring attachment to the community of the QMAAC. She reflected how ‘sad’ she felt when, after receiving the QMAAC Gazette, she

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{45} Correspondence’, \textit{Old Comrades Association Gazette}, March 1923. \\
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
‘thought of all the girls and the happy times we had, and how we were all scattered now’.\textsuperscript{47} Crucially though, she sought to alleviate the sadness she felt by communicating with her former comrades. Thomson asked if her letter could be published in the QMAAC \textit{Gazette}, specifically for the benefit of all Rouxmesnilities’, a nickname for those based at the QMAAC camp in Rouen, France during the war.\textsuperscript{48} Both Speechley and Thomson felt nostalgic when reflecting on their time in the QMAAC and this emotion was heightened given their geographical separation from their fellow OCA members. Yet as both women realised, the journal provided a link with their former corps and facilitated the communication of news and information pertaining to fellow old comrades.

The desire to reach out to former comrades and reflect on the happiness of wartime life was also experienced by members of the Wren Association. In April 1926 one ex-servicewoman wrote to \textit{The Wren} to report that she had taken on a new role as the conductress on board a ship. Although she had not officially emigrated, her life at sea meant that participation in ‘the socials, rambles, etc.,’ organised by local branches of the Association of Wrens was ‘out of the question.’\textsuperscript{49} Yet despite this, the former Wren wrote that being able ‘to trace old pals in the Magazine from time to time’ was ‘very nice’ and noted that it gave her a ‘“homey” feeling when read in mid-Atlantic!’\textsuperscript{50} The fact that this new career precluded her from enjoying the everyday associational life of the OCA was, her letter implies, alleviated by the presence of the journal and the ‘News of Our Members’ section. Whilst clearly enjoying her career at sea, this letter highlights the enduring connection this ex-servicewoman felt towards her former comrades. She continued by asking that her contact details be included in \textit{The Wren}, noting that she would be ‘very glad for old friends to hear where I am, through a line in your personal column, for much as one loves keeping up with old friends, to write to all seems to be impossible.’\textsuperscript{51} Imagined both as a physical and metaphorical link sustaining the friendships between old comrades, here the Wren Association was presented as a community in which female veterans, regardless of their geographical location, could find emotional support.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
George Mosse has argued that within male veteran communities, ex-servicemen reflected on the ‘contradictory’ legacy of the war. Mosse claims that the positive wartime memories recalled in these spaces were more than ‘mere nostalgia’; they allowed ‘the horror’ of war to be ‘transcended’ and the ‘meaning which the war had given to individual lives’ to be retained.

Although seemingly reluctant to label memories as ‘nostalgia’ Mosse nonetheless identifies the critical role of positive memories of wartime service in allowing men to navigate the tensions and complexities of post-war life. This section has sought to reclaim nostalgia as a critical site on which female veterans made sense of their wartime service and their new lives as civilians. By reflecting on the importance of camp life, comradeship and adventure, women helped construct a gendered cultural memory of wartime service. As Matt Houlbrook has claimed, letters provide opportunities for individuals to engage ‘in a process of self-fashioning’.

In writing letters to the OCA journals, women were able to give expression to their feelings of nostalgia whilst also expressing their appreciation for the OCAs in alleviating the difficulties they had faced during the transition to peacetime. The OCAs were communities united by a shared memory of wartime service in one of the women’s military forces. By promoting nostalgic reflections on wartime service, the editors of the OCAs helped unite women behind a collective investment in a positive memory of the past.

Military pride and the gendered legacy of wartime service at the Reunion Dinners of the OCAs

The annual reunion dinners of the OCAs were opportunities for members to re-unite and share their memories of the war. In speeches made at these dinners, ex-servicewomen expressed the pride they felt remembering their military service. The following section looks at these speeches and explores the language of emotion found within them. The dinners themselves were a crucial component of the associational culture of the OCAs. They were grand occasions, usually held at a restaurant in London and included speeches and dancing following dinner. Representatives

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53 Ibid., p. 494.
from the other OCAs as well as distinguished military figures were invited to attend as guests. Reports of these dinners and the speeches given at them were detailed in the OCA journals, with a significant amount of space devoted to reports and reflections on the evening by attendees. These reflections show that OCA members cherished and celebrated these dinners as occasions which provided welcome opportunities to re-connect with old comrades and reminisce on their wartime service. But, as this section argues, the significance of these dinners went beyond facilitating the renewal of friendships. The speeches given by OCA members saw women consolidate their identities as female military veterans. That they often reflected upon these identities via a language of emotion again demonstrates the link between identity, memory, and emotion in the OCAs. This section focuses on expressions of friendship, affection and sisterhood between ex-servicewomen and argues that these sentiments were, alongside references to nostalgia, crucial to the construction of the emotional community of the OCAs.

Reunion dinners were frequently presented as events which re-affirmed the emotional bonds between women who had served together in the same military corps during the war. One former member of the QMAAC described the joy she had witnessed amongst attendees at the reunion dinner of the QMAAC OCA in January 1926. She wrote how she had observed a ‘half-smothered exclamation of joyful surprise at the unexpected meeting of two friends’ and ‘two faces beaming’ as women met with former comrades.\(^{55}\) The emphasis on the joy and happiness experienced by members at the dinners continued with the author’s description of a ‘handshake’ which she claimed communicated to her the ‘rich store of affection’ that existed between two attendees.\(^{56}\) Whilst the ability of the author to discern intimate emotional states from these greetings is perhaps questionable, what is striking is her use of emotional language to stress the depth of the bonds between ex-servicewomen – bonds which were renewed through attendance at the OCA reunion dinners. The report continued with a broader reflection on the value of the reunions in bringing ex-servicewomen together. She wrote that ‘between the cessation of Army life and this reunion, we had thought of faces we wished once more to see, of voices we wanted to hear, and of hands we desired to touch. The warm hands of comradeship and unwavering

\(^{56}\) Ibid.
friendliness. The report re-affirmed the closeness of the relationships between members of the QMAAC and emphasised the enduring strength of the community of ex-servicewomen. Central here was an emphasis on friendship and the significance of these reunion dinners as spaces in which the spirit of ‘comradeship’ could be reclaimed amongst former members of the QMAAC.

Once again we can therefore see how emotional vocabularies were deployed in reports that utilised a language of joy and comradeship to reflect on the relationships between ex-servicewomen that were one of the legacies of the war. They therefore contributed to the construction of an emotional discourse within the journals related to the legacy of gendered wartime service. Utilising a language of emotion, the author of the report of the 1926 QMAAC reunion dinner further emphasised the distinctive nature of the OCA community. She described how the reunions facilitated the ‘re-uniting of a big happy family, every one of which was glad to see the other.’ Familial imagery served to further highlight the ‘joy’ and ‘affection’ she claimed were evident in the individual reunions between former members of the corps. Moreover, the conclusion to her article noted that the friendships between women, forged during wartime service and re-ignited through OCA reunions, were long-lasting. Reflecting on the dinner, she wrote how ex-servicewomen had found themselves ‘together going over old times, and together looking forward to new ones.’ This account was typical of reunion dinner reports found in the QMAAC Gazette. The author described the community of ex-servicewomen in familial terms and used powerful emotive language to emphasise the strength and resilience of the relationships between former comrades.

Alongside letters from individual members, these reports of reunion dinners helped define the OCAs as emotional communities. They re-affirmed the emotional value of military pride and comradeship amongst female veterans and in doing so, the authors of these reports helped build a collective identity amongst ex-servicewomen based around a shared emotional investment in martial values. As well as communicating the emotional relationships between ex-servicewomen, the reports of the reunion dinners also stressed the emotional attachment women felt towards

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57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
their former military corps. In the Association of Wrens, reports of reunion dinners often emphasised the importance of the values and traditions of the Royal Navy to former Wrens. At the Association of Wrens reunion dinner in December 1928, one speech celebrated the fact that during their wartime service Wrens had adopted the culture and traditions of the Royal Navy. The speaker expressed her pride in the fact that whilst ‘the blue and gold, the oak leaves and the anchor’ of the naval uniform were lent for the war’s “duration” only, the ‘tradition of the Navy, embodying the noblest ideals of service and sacrifice is ours for ever’. She continued with the claim that the ‘ideals of service and sacrifice’ inherent in naval traditions continued to be ‘an abiding joy, guiding and inspiring’ former Wrens. Her reference to the ‘joy’ and inspiration that women felt towards the ‘tradition of the Navy’ highlighted the emotional investment that the author claimed members of the Association of Wrens shared in the naval values of ‘service and sacrifice’. The author presented the community of former Wrens as individuals who together shared a collective emotional attachment to the traditions of the Royal Navy. She then went further in her speech with an emotive and sentimental statement that underscored the Naval qualities possessed by those in attendance at the dinner:

It is nearly ten years now since the Paying Off Pennant floated from the mast-head, and our ship’s company is scattered to the four winds and the seven seas . . . for this one evening we are ship-mates and mess-mates once again, renewing our allegiance to the beloved Old White Ensign and all that it stands for to us.

The naval terminology employed here – the ‘Paying Off Pennant’, ‘ship’s company’, ‘Old White Ensign’ and ‘ship-mates and mess-mates’ – highlights the emotional investment that former members of the WRNS were, in this speech, believed to share in naval values. Imagined in naval terms as ‘ship-mates and mess-mates’ this community, the speech claimed, was united by a collective willingness to renew ‘allegiance’ to the ‘beloved’ naval flag.

62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
Muriel Currey’s report of the 1929 Association of Wrens reunion dinner provides a further example of how emotional language was used to celebrate women’s identities as naval veterans. Describing the flurry of excitement she witnessed at the beginning of the reunion dinner Currey wrote, ‘everyone is trying to tell the story of her life for the last twelve months, and discuss her job and exchange reminiscences and hear news of absent friends – all at the rate of knots’. The affection and familiarity which Currey’s description of these encounters emphasised was further enhanced by the addition of a naval reference in the form of ‘knots’ – a measurement used to calculate the speed of naval vessels. As seen in the report of the 1928 reunion dinner of the Wren Association, naval language was used here to further signal the continued attachment ex-service women felt to their former corps. Currey continued by writing how members in attendance had ‘spoken of old ties and new ties, they made those jests that are so dear to the heart of ex-service women which would be Greek to the outsider but are links in the chain of a common tradition which binds us together.’ In Currey’s report, she claimed that close friendships, humour and a shared, ‘common tradition’ defined the community of the Association of Wrens. The ‘jests’ which Currey claimed would be ‘Greek to the outsider’ were a product women’s shared experience of wartime service in the Royal Navy. The ‘chain of common tradition’ which Currey argued bound OCA members together highlighted the enduring legacy of wartime service. Loyalty to the naval service, commitment to shared values, nostalgia for the wartime experience and a common sense of humour were all presented in these reports – with naval language and imagery – as characteristics unique to the Wrens. In this way, emotional expressions in the reports conveyed a collective sense of pride in the Navy, but they also celebrated the memories of gendered military service that members of the WRNS could lay claim to.

Within the QMAAC OCA too, reports of reunion dinners stressed the close relationship between the QMAAC and the Army. Leaders within the OCAs such as Helen Gwynne-Vaughan seized on the opportunity presented by reunion to encourage members to celebrate this relationship. In the January 1931 edition of the QMAAC Gazette, the report of the reunion dinner included a

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66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
detailed description of the speech made by Helen Gwynne-Vaughan as she proposed a toast to Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice who had been invited to attend as a guest representative of the armed forces. Gwynne-Vaughan spoke to attendees about Maurice’s recently published book – *British Strategy: A Study of the Application of the Principles of War* – and stressed the ‘strong military spirit’ that still existed within the OCA.\(^6^8\) The close relationship forged between members of the QMAAC and the Army during the war was also emphasised during the speeches at the annual reunion dinner in January 1936. Florence Simpson, former Controller-in-Chief of the QMAAC toasted the ‘Old Comrades’ and reflected that in 1917, shortly after the formation of the force, ‘we had very little to go on; we had no precedent. Our precedent was the Army. We were taught by the soldiers; we learned courage, and patience, and sense of humour, and the astounding simplicity of kindness’.\(^6^9\) Simpson further stressed that ‘we learned a lot of other things from the Army; we learned to win, and we learned to scrounge, and we learned that noble art of grousing.’\(^7^0\) Like members of the Wren Association, women in the QMAAC OCA remained determined to continue their relationship with their male counterparts in the forces. Even when Simpson admitted to ‘grousing’ she adopted a light-hearted and even humorous tone that framed an ostensibly negative element of wartime service in a positive way. Reunion dinners provided an opportunity for members to express their admiration and pride in this relationship. Published reports of these dinners in the journals helped to further reinforce the identity of the OCAs as spaces in which these emotional relationships could be celebrated.

Within the WRAF OCA too, emotional language found within the reports of reunion dinners functioned as a way of cementing the bonds between ex-servicewomen, as well as helping to shape the emotional community of the WRAF OCA. At a reunion dinner in April 1922 Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, President of the WRAF OCA, made a speech in which she highlighted the special relationship between the WRAF and the RAF. In this speech, she reflected on the fact that it had been ‘four years since the birth of those very interesting twins, the RAF and the


\(^6^9\) ‘Speeches at the 16\(^{th}\) Annual Dinner’, *Old Comrades Association Gazette*, January 1936.

\(^7^0\) *Ibid.*
WRAF’ and, prior to offering updates on the development of the post-war RAF, hoped that members of the OCA gathered at the dinner would ‘all be glad to know of the good work that the surviving twin was doing’.71 As with the references to the ‘family’ of ex-servicewomen mentioned in reports of QMAAC OCA reunion dinners, Gwynne-Vaughan’s decision to refer to the relationship between the WRAF and the RAF in familial terms as ‘twins’ was both a nominal reminder of the joint birth date of the two forces and an acknowledgment of the close relationship between them. Gwynne-Vaughan went on to describe the bond between the RAF and the WRAF as defined by affection but more importantly, mutual respect. She illustrated this through her celebration of the treatment of ex-servicewomen by the administrators of the RAF Memorial Fund. This fund was established after 1918 to support ex-members of the force. The importance of this equal treatment was highlighted by the President, as she reflected that ‘here the recognition of the WRAF as part and parcel of the Air Force was still being maintained’.72

Gwynne-Vaughan was keen to stress that the WRAF was still an active component of the RAF even after servicewomen had been demobilised, showing the active and dynamic relationship between the two forces after 1918.

The letters and reports of reunion dinners show how ex-servicewomen used emotional language to describe the relationships that flourished within the OCAs. This use of emotional vocabularies can similarly be found in references to the relationships between each of the OCAs that were also expressed in the speeches at the reunion dinners. In December 1926, one former WRAF who had attended the QMAAC OCA dinner in Edinburgh referred to the existence of a collective ‘service’ identity that united ex-servicewomen. Reflecting on her enjoyment of the evening in a report for the WRAF Old Comrades Association, the author wrote ‘what must have appealed to the “ex-Service” mind was the spirit of loyalty and good comradeship which prevailed.’73 The martial qualities of ‘loyalty’ and ‘good comradeship’ were framed here as a collective qualities that could be found across the different branches of the OCA. These emotional values were positioned as collective attributes that could be found in all ‘ex-Service’ women. This shows

71 ‘Annual General Meeting’, WRAF Old Comrades Association, April 1922.
72 Ibid.
73 ‘Glasgow Branch’, WRAF Old Comrades Association, December 1926.
how key emotional values became central to the construction of a broader female veteran identity whilst also helping to forge links between the individual emotional communities of the OCAs.

Similarly, in May 1930 one former Wren reported on her attendance at the WRAF OCA reunion dinner. She noted how ‘the evening proved to be a most cheery and exhilarating one’ and stated how the ‘wonderful Service spirit was well to the fore.’  

74 The author defined this ‘spirit’ as:

a sense of trust and confidence and comradeship, with all the memories of good and bad times shared together – when we of the Navy stood shoulder to shoulder and the WRAFs “wing-tip to wing-tip” as they say, in the days of England’s peril, in the most terrible and vital days in the history of the world.  

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The report made clear that the bond between the Wrens and the WRAFs was based upon a shared understanding of their mutual service during the war. Although the author referred to the war as ‘England’s peril’ this more negative assessment of the conflict was included in order to further emphasise the pride members of the WRNS felt in the duty and service they had shown during those ‘vital days’ of wartime.  

76 The author’s claim that war was a ‘terrible’ experience was mitigated by her focus on the emotional bonds between two women’s forces, the WRAF and the WRNS, although her more equivocal claim that members of both corps shared ‘memories of good and bad times’ does suggest a greater acknowledgement of the adverse emotional legacies of the war.  

77 This could in turn be explained by the period in which the dinner had taken place. By 1930, the proliferation of war poetry and memoirs triggered shifts in societal attitudes to the war away from celebrations of Britain’s ‘glorious’ victory and towards a greater awareness of the scale of suffering caused by the conflict and its ultimate futility.  

78 As Chapter Four will explain in greater detail, the relationship between the emotional legacy of the war promoted within the OCAs and the cultural discourses of war memory was fluid and complex. It is clear in this

75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
reunion report that whilst the author was willing to emphasise the exposure of the WRNS and the WRAF to the ‘bad times’ of war, the overall focus of the report remained on the significance of collective, unified ‘service spirit’ that existed between ex-servicewomen.79

OCA members often adopted a language of ‘sisterhood’ to further stress the emotional significance of the close relationships between ex-servicewomen. Here again we can see how ex-servicewomen actively stressed the gendered significance of their wartime service by commending their female veteran identities. Following her attendance at the WRAF Annual Dinner in April 1928, one former Wren reported ‘the WRAF OCA were kind enough to invite representatives of the sister Service to share in their good time, and it was a great honour and pleasure to represent the Association of Wrens on such an occasion.’80 She concluded by acknowledging that ‘the Service spirit is as strong as ever.’81 In December 1923, The Wren reported on the Annual Dinner of the Association of Wrens which had been attended by members of the QMAAC and the WRAF.82 The report detailed the speech made by Miss d’Avigdor, the current Chair of the Association of Wrens. Miss d’Avigdor described the relationship between the three branches of the women’s auxiliary corps in familial terms, reflecting that ‘during the war, the WAACs had been the elder and the WRAFs the younger sister of the Wrens.’83 For d’Avigdor, it was the specifically gendered nature of their wartime experience which had made possible the formation of strong friendships and close bonds between ex-servicewomen. Referring to the collective difficulties faced by servicewomen during the war, she stated that ‘when women first began to replace men, there had been a good deal of prejudice to overcome.’84 D’Avigdor believed that women’s shared experience of gender prejudice during wartime service formed the basis of a group identity which she expressed via a language of sisterhood and family. She concluded her speech by stating that ‘as ex-servicewomen, the three services were now a united family, sharing games, entertainments, and clubs, and working together on the Committee of the United Services Benevolent Fund’.85

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81 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
use of this familial language offers an insight into how ex-servicewomen understood their relationships with one another. As d’Avigdor highlighted, the Old Comrades Associations made possible the continuation of these relationships in the post-war period, providing a crucial space for the ‘united family’ of ex-servicewomen to exist.

Furthermore, a report of the Annual QMAAC dinner in December 1924 by one former Wren was entitled ‘Sister Services’.86 The author noted how the speeches had made her think ‘about the three sisters of our ex-Service family, and filled me with a glow of admiring affection’.87 The language of sisterhood was again deployed: the writer referred to the WRAF as ‘our younger sister’ and the QMAAC as ‘our big elder sister’.88 The QMAAC were especially celebrated for the fact that they had ‘pioneered and prepared the way’ for the emergence of the WRAF and the WRNS.89 Reflecting on her experiences at the dinner, the author articulated the ‘pride which in this Season of the Big Family Feeling we Wrens justly feel in our large Sisters, QMAAC and WRAF.’90 Similarly, in May 1929 the report of the Annual General Meeting of the WRAF Association included a quote from G. A. George, who was in charge of the administration of the OCA, in which she celebrated ‘the growing friendliness between our OCA and that of our sister Service the QMAAC.91 This relationship had, according to George, ‘added much to the pleasantness of the year’.92 Describing the relationship between the WRAF and the QMAAC George celebrated the fact that the friendship between the two associations had led to an ‘exchange of hospitality and exchange of views which have added a great deal to our knowledge of each other.’93 Utilising a language of ‘sisterhood’ allowed ex-servicewomen to communicate the emotional bonds that existed between those who had shared the experience of gendered military service. These reports alert us to the fact that the emotional values that were so crucial to individual OCA communities – nostalgia and military pride – also united members across the OCAs. Emotional communities overlapped as ex-servicewomen sought to share their

87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
experiences with women from other OCAs and in doing so, they discovered a shared investment in the qualities of duty, service and comradeship. The reports of the reunion dinners therefore helped strengthen the collective narrative of wartime service that would become so crucial – and so unique – to female veteran associations in this period. Joyful reminiscences on wartime life combined with assertions of the enduring impact of military service were expressed in letters, in speeches at reunion dinners and in articles reflecting on these occasions; together, they helped construct emotional discourses within all three of the OCA journals that can shed new light on the relationship between memory and emotion in female veteran associations.

Conclusion

Working with Rosenwein’s theory of emotional communities has shown how an analysis which prioritises ‘systems of feeling’ and ‘constellations of emotions’ can offer new perspectives on the significance of women’s wartime service after 1918. Understanding how the emotional landscape of the OCAs was constructed through the promotion of certain modes of expression illustrates how these communities were supported and sustained through the creation of a shared cultural memory of the war. The need to develop a more nuanced appreciation of women’s diverse experiences during the war has been acknowledged by Lucy Noakes, who has drawn attention to the ‘privileging’ of the ‘male veteran over other types of war experience and other forms of identity’ and the ways in which this emphasis on the lives of servicemen ‘is part of wider patterns in Britain of the cultural memory of the war years’. As Noakes has elaborated, ‘while there is a large body of research on the gendered history and experience of the First World War, the impact of this work on cultural memory of the conflict has been marginal’. Even when the relationship between gender and cultural memory has been considered, the focus has tended to be on the lives of nurses or women as mourners, with ‘the memoirs of Vera Brittain apparently functioning as a satisfactory representation of all female experience.’ This chapter, with its focus on the ways in which ex-servicewomen articulated their emotional responses to wartime

94 Rosenwein, Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages, p. 24.
96 Ibid., p. 612.
97 Ibid., p. 612.
service, has shed light on the importance of nostalgia and military pride in constructing a collective memory of the First World War within female veteran communities.

Nostalgic remembrances for comradeship and friendships existed alongside pride in women’s veteran status and both these expressions became central to the emotional communities of the OCAs. The chapter has argued that the articulation of a shared memory of wartime service found in both letters and in the reports of reunion dinners was crucial in forging bonds between former servicewomen. When women joined the OCAs, they became part of an emotional, even transnational community that elevated positive memories of wartime service and emphasised the enduring significance of the martial value of comradeship. The OCAs performed a vital function for many women in helping them to gain employment and providing charitable help when needed. But the rhetoric found within correspondence and reports published in the journals shows how the editors and contributors to these publications were crucial in curating a unique cultural memory of the war shaped by the emotional reflections of members. As the next chapter will show, the emotional communities of the OCAs were also, surprisingly, crucibles of political consciousness. As will become clear, the leaders of the OCAs – including Helen Gwynne-Vaughan and Katharine Furse – harness the enduring emotional attachment members felt towards their former military identities to articulate their vision for a politically-engaged community of female veterans.
Chapter 2 – Comradeship and Politics in Peacetime: political campaigns and the emotional legacy of wartime service

This chapter explores how the Old Comrades Associations evolved to become political spaces in the aftermath of the First World War. It shows how leading figures within the OCAs such as Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, Katharine Furse and Vera Laughton-Mathews articulated a vision for a civic-minded, politically engaged community of ex-servicewomen that would harness the skills and qualities learnt during military service. In promoting this vision, Gwynne-Vaughan, Furse and Laughton-Mathews drew on the shared emotional legacies of wartime service promoted within the OCA journals to encourage ex-servicewomen to take part in and actively re-shape the political landscape of the inter-war period. The chapter argues that the OCAs were much more than social or even charitable institutions; through the journals, the OCAs became politicised following the editorial interventions of leading ex-servicewomen. These women used the OCA journals as additional platforms for debates related to the British Legion, local election campaigns and equal rights feminism. As we have seen in Chapter One, the emotional community of the OCAs was built on a shared investment in a positive narrative of wartime service that championed the martial values of duty, service, and comradeship. This chapter looks in more depth at the ways in which the emotional communities of the OCAs were politicised. Leading OCA figures authored articles that stressed the value of women’s military experience in the political sphere. The emotional legacy of the war was drawn on by these leading figures to encourage political engagement. I argue that the inter-weaving of political and emotional discourses within the OCA journals led to the emergence of new political subjectivities for women centred not on their maternal or domestic identities but based on their distinct experience of gendered military service.

By drawing new connections between the emotional legacy of the First World War and women’s political identities after 1920, the chapter complicates existing narratives of women and politics in the inter-war period. Beyond more specific studies of women’s involvement with political parties, much of this literature has focused on mapping developments within the feminist
movement after 1918. Work by Harold Smith, Johanna Alberti and Susan Kingsley-Kent claims that the feminist campaign for equal rights lost momentum following the passage of the Representation of the People Act in 1918. In these studies, the Act is viewed as a watershed moment in which ‘old’ feminism – characterised by the suffrage campaign and demands for equal rights – was replaced with a ‘new’ brand of feminist activism more concerned with women’s rights as mothers and homemakers. This a priori schema of ‘old’ and ‘new’ feminisms has been challenged elsewhere by historians who have also argued that we need to look beyond ‘feminist’ or political organisations in order to fully appreciate the evolution of the women’s movement in this period. Sue Innes’ work on the Edinburgh Women Citizens’ Association (EWCA) has shown how important ‘citizenship’ became as a mobilising concept within women’s organisations. Groups such as the EWCA aimed to educate and support women as newly enfranchised citizens and sought to encourage their members ‘to move from legal inclusion as citizens to active participation’ in public and political life. The fact that these organisations urged women to view themselves as ‘political actors’ undermines the framework of ‘old’ and ‘new’ feminisms by showing how women’s groups constructed educational programmes based around women’s identities as citizens rather than mothers and housewives.

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Esther Breitenbach and Valerie Wright have also highlighted the existence of a ‘pluralistic perspective among women activists’ in the feminist movement. These women embraced ‘both equal rights and women’s welfare’ as key tenets of a multi-faceted feminism that reflected a variety of ideological positions. Caitriona Beaumont’s work too has revealed the significance of the concept of ‘active citizenship’ within ‘mainstream, conservative, middle-class women’s societies’. Yet whilst the OCAs shared many common characteristics with associations such as the EWCA and the YWCA, the collective emotional values that were championed within the OCA journals make clear that female veteran associations occupied a more distinct space within the associational landscape of inter-war Britain. The shared investment in the enduring military qualities of duty and comradeship meant that the editors and contributors to the journals were not afraid of promoting equal rights feminism and other radical political views. They formulated new political languages which infused debates about citizenship and electoral politics with ideas about ‘service’ and the role of ex-servicewomen more generally in the post-war world.

As Adrian Bingham, Helen McCarthy and Natti Golubov have shown, broader debates about the role of women in post-war reconstruction became an increasing feature of the cultural landscape in the years following the end of the First World War. Bingham’s survey of the popular press in the inter-war period shows that by the end of war the ‘papers turned to the question of “reconstruction”’. A ‘major theme’ of this coverage was ‘the reorganisation of the domestic sphere to reduce drudgery but also to give “modern women” the opportunity to engage more fully in public life’. The tensions that Bingham identifies as a key feature of gendered debates about post-war reconstruction have also been recognised by Helen McCarthy, whose study of middle-class associations such as the Rotary International argues that in this period ‘female subjectivities were in flux and that women were experiencing the world anew and re-imagining their place in it’. McCarthy has also claimed that these specific associations became key spaces

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7 Ibid., p. 413.
10 Ibid., pp. 93 – 94.
in which women moved beyond emulation of male forms of association and began to develop a distinctly feminine conception of citizenship.’

McCarthy’s contribution here offers new perspectives on the role of middle-class associations in offering women the space to assert new political identities. Whilst this chapter builds on McCarthy’s approach, it differs in its emphasis on the role of the emotional communities of the OCAs in shaping new political subjectivities for women.

This chapter argues that the OCAs promoted a new model of female citizenship that was rooted in the military values female veterans had learnt during their wartime service. Contributors to the OCA journals encouraged their readers to think about how their experiences with the women’s auxiliary forces could be drawn on to provide useful contributions to political debates. The diverse ways in which women sought to involve themselves in discussions about reconstruction and citizenship has been explored by Nattie Golubov, whose study of the novels of Naomi Mitchison, Storm Jameson, Winifred Holtby and Rebecca West revealed how women reflected on their positions as ‘witnesses and survivors of a generation shaped by the war’ as they sought to make sense of the social, political and cultural changes re-shaping the post-war landscape.

Golubov argues that the impact of the war on the writings of these women led to an emphasis in their writings on ‘class’ rather than ‘gender as the preponderant factor shaping subjectivity’.

With a more specific focus on the political discourses in the journals of female veteran associations, this chapter argues that gender – or more specifically the experience of gendered wartime service – and the emotional legacy of the war were the crucial factors that shaped the emergence of new political subjectivities in the OCAs.

An approach that considers the impact of emotional values and war memory on political discourse can shed new light on the complex ways in which female veteran associations became politicised. Alison Fell has recently argued that ex-servicewomen ‘used their war experience to construct public identities as war veterans’ before asserting their new identities to ‘make inroads

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12 Ibid., p. 543.
14 Ibid., p. 54.
into different fields of public life in the post-war years.’\textsuperscript{15} Krisztina Robert has gone further by arguing that the OCAs ‘provided an effective framework for women’s political activism’ in the aftermath of the war.\textsuperscript{16} Indeed, Robert claims that the determination amongst former leaders of the women’s corps to implement their ‘shared political agenda’ drove the foundation of the OCAs.\textsuperscript{17} Yet whilst both Fell and Robert have highlighted the role of the OCAs in the wider political culture of the inter-war period, neither has fully considered the role of emotional culture in shaping the specific ways in which ex-servicewomen were encouraged to think about their potential as newly-enfranchised citizens with experience of military service. By highlighting the relationship between the emotional communities of the OCAs and post-war politics, the chapter draws on existing work that has sought to use emotions history to gain new insights into various political cultures of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{18} In particular, Stephanie Ward’s study of the emotional culture of the inter-war Labour Party’s women’s sections suggests that the specific ‘emotional environment of the sections gave women the confidence to perform a political self both within and outside the section.’\textsuperscript{19} So too this chapter will illuminate the ways in which the emotional legacies of the First World War promoted in the OCAs shaped political discourses in the journals. From this, we can better understand why and how specific political discourses found expressions within the publications of the OCAs.

\textit{Comradeship and Politics in Peacetime}

Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, Katharine Furse and other leading figures within the OCAs felt strongly that female veteran associations were capable of more than the facilitation of social

\textsuperscript{15} Alison S. Fell, \textit{Women as Veterans in Britain and France after the First World War} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 19; p. 5.


\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 124.


activities. Central to their vision of a civic-minded and politically engaged veteran community was their belief that experience of military service had equipped women with valuable skills and qualities that could help re-build the social and political fabric of the nation. Articles in the OCA journals sought to guide readers on how they could harness their nostalgia for wartime service for the greater good of a society in the process of recovering from the chaos of conflict. In August 1920 Lila Davy, who had been promoted to Chief Controller of the QMAAC during the war, wrote to her former comrades in QMAAC Gazette. She acknowledged that after the ‘strenuous days’ of wartime ‘the routine of ordinary life’ seemed ‘trivial and uninteresting in comparison.’ She wrote how servicewomen had felt they were ‘pioneers’ and believed that it was up to them to ‘prove what women could do.’ Yet far from simply lamenting the end of the QMAAC she wrote ‘I am sure that the discipline, pluck and grit learnt then will help us in whatever the future has in store.’ Emphasising the enduring value of the skills and qualities learnt during wartime service, Davy further stressed that ‘we have learnt what comradeship means in the widest sense’ before expressing her hope that women would ‘join the Old Comrades Association, and take in the QMAAC Gazette.’ In an attempt to alleviate the dissatisfaction felt by members struggling to adjust to ‘trivial’ life in peacetime – which, as we have seen in Chapter One, was a common complaint amongst ex-servicewomen – Davy aimed to encourage veterans to think about how the new skills they had acquired during the war could help them navigate the uncertainties of the future. The claim that women had learnt about ‘comradeship’ in its ‘widest sense’ similarly suggests that Davy hoped that the ‘pioneers’ of the QMAAC would continue to draw on their military service in their new civilian lives.

In July 1920 one member of the WRAF OCA also acknowledged the yearning for military service many of her fellow ex-servicewomen felt in peacetime. She acknowledged the power of certain sights and sounds in provoking memories of the war, noting how ‘the hum of an aeroplane’ and a ‘glimpse of the old uniform’ were enough to transport ex-servicewomen back to

21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
their former lives in the WRAF.\textsuperscript{24} The affection for ‘sunlit spaces’, ‘good fellowship’, ‘steady discipline’ and the ‘fine traditions of the Service’ that many ex-servicewomen experienced explained why ‘so many chafe under the conditions of civilian life.’\textsuperscript{25} However, the author made clear that those who continually mourned the loss of military life risked wasting their lives ‘marking time and waiting for the next war’.\textsuperscript{26} Rather than being content to exclaim that “I would be one of the first to go again” the author urged her readers to recognise the fact that during their ‘Service life’ they had ‘gained much that it would be a thousand pities to relinquish.’\textsuperscript{27} This lay at the core of her vision for the OCA. She believed that ‘service’ life could ‘be continued by those who are banded together in the OCA’ albeit ‘under altered conditions’ and stressed that ‘the possibilities of a movement of this kind are endless’.\textsuperscript{28} As the author reminded her readers,

\begin{quote}
    a definite responsibility rests upon each member . . . it was the Air Force in which we had the honour of serving. A trifle more of this commodity in the present will surely alter the desire for “As you were!” into “Forward! Quick March!”\textsuperscript{29}
\end{quote}

Ex-servicewomen were reminded of the values and traditions of the RAF as the author sought to convince her former comrades that joining the OCAs meant both a continuation of ‘service’ life and at the same time, an opportunity to use these military skills in public life. Moreover, the author made clear that her former comrades had a ‘responsibility’ to take forward their wartime experience, armed with the ‘commodity’ of their skills as former members of the WRAF.\textsuperscript{30} Here, the author seized upon the nostalgia and sense of loss that many women expressed in the journals after the war and sought to transform these melancholic emotional responses into a more proactive approach to post-war life.

\textsuperscript{24} “As You Were”, \textit{WRAF Old Comrades Association}, July 1920, LBY E. J. 5380, Imperial War Museum, London.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
The attempt here to motivate former members of the WRAF to harness their skills as ex-
servicewomen within the OCAs and beyond in everyday life shows how these associations
articulated a vision of the female veteran as an engaged citizen willing to actively participate in
public life. Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, former Deputy Controller of the QMAAC in France and
later Commandant of the WRAF communicated a more specific vision of the role of
servicewomen in post-war reconstruction. In the December 1920 edition of the WRAF Old
Comrades Association she spoke to those women who had struggled to adjust to life after
demobilisation and who mourned the loss of a ‘common effort’ that had united women during
their wartime service.\(^\text{31}\) Whilst she acknowledged the difficulties inherent in the transition to
peacetime conditions, Gwynne-Vaughan stated that the altruism and patriotism that ex-
servicewomen had shown by offering ‘to help the country’ and ‘help the world’ during the war
were far from redundant and were needed once more.\(^\text{32}\) Gwynne-Vaughan urged women ‘to
carry on in civil life’ applying the skills they had first acquired during the war.\(^\text{33}\) In making this
appeal, she aimed to inspire former members of the WRAF to become more involved in civil
society.

Drawing further parallels between the war and the state of post-war society, she argued ‘our
comrades are still there in civilian clothing, they and others, and the country needs our help.’\(^\text{34}\) In
Gwynne-Vaughan’s view, the apparent collective difficulties faced by Britain after 1918
demanded the intervention of former servicewomen, either in politics or civic life more
generally. As she conceded, national politics offered few opportunities for women under the age
of 30, given the partial enfranchisement of women enacted by the Representation of the People
Act in 1918. In a comic remark Gwynne-Vaughan acknowledged that only ‘those decrepit fossils
over thirty who are voters’ could ‘keep an eye on politics’ and choose ‘a representative for
Parliament’.\(^\text{35}\) But as Gwynne-Vaughan then reminded her readers, former servicewomen could
also ‘be of value as members of trade unions or of organisations for local government’ or could

\(^{32}\) Ibid.
\(^{33}\) Ibid.
\(^{34}\) Ibid.
\(^{35}\) Ibid.
volunteer with the ‘Guides or Scouts’. Informal charitable work that would ‘help our neighbours’ was also suggested as an additional way in which former servicewomen could aid the recovery of the country in the aftermath of the war. Here, Gwynne-Vaughan directed her readers to specific areas of political and civic life in which she felt female veterans could make a contribution. In what reads as an ambitious list of potential areas of volunteer work and employment, Gwynne-Vaughan hoped to inspire her fellow ex-servicewomen to consider roles – such as those in trade unions and local government – that had not traditionally been open to women. Despite her light-hearted tone, Gwynne-Vaughan’s article was aspirational in its vision for the role of female veterans in public life. She re-framed the difficulties of post-war life as opportunities for former members of the WRAF to stake a claim in the new political landscape.

Gwynne-Vaughan’s article provides an example of the type of rhetorical appeal constructed by leaders of the OCAs in this period. It utilised a language of ‘duty’ and ‘service’ to encourage ex-servicewomen to become more actively involved in post-war society. In February 1921 Katharine Furse, who had been the Director of the WRNS during the war, made a similar argument in *The Wren*. She urged her readers to see beyond the ‘fog of present conditions’ and think through the contribution they could make to society as veterans of the war. Furse argued that ‘somehow or other’ ex-servicewomen ‘ought to help’ as Britain transitioned into peacetime, and reminded former Wrens that the ‘responsibility in doing this work for the Empire is very great.’ Furse’s claim here sought to prompt OCA members to reflect on their responsibility to society as veterans. Like Gwynne-Vaughan, Furse offered some practical suggestions as to how her readers could ‘work for the Empire’ which included helping with ‘something near to home’ or engaging in ‘schemes for bigger doings in wider fields’. Crucially, she underlined her belief that ‘women’s institutions’ would play a key role here. She urged former Wrens to ‘combine with other people’ including ‘the Old Comrade organisations of the QMAAC and the WRAF’.

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This uniting of ex-servicewomen ‘for the strength and support of the nation’ would, according to Furse, create a real ‘power for good’.  

In an appeal littered with patriotic and imperial language, Furse aimed to seize on the pride many OCA members felt in their service identities as part of a broader attempt to convince readers of the important contribution veteran organisations could make to post-war society. The parallels drawn here by Furse between the war and the uncertainties of post-war society echo Gwynne-Vaughan’s attempt to harness the legacy of women’s wartime service to encourage greater political involvement.

As the following sections will show, these appeals – defined by an emphasis on the continuing importance of ‘duty’ and ‘service’ – led to the promotion of political arguments that similarly drew on martial values and military rhetoric. In the journals, wartime memories were mobilised in new political contexts in ways that encouraged women to see the political value of their status as female veterans. The emergence of political discourses shaped by an awareness of women’s emotional attachment to their veteran identities will shed light on the formation of new political subjectivities for women within female veteran associations. Gwynne-Vaughan, Furse and Davy all used the OCA journals as platforms to communicate their vision for a politically engaged community of female veterans. They understood the power and significance of the emotional legacy of wartime service and harnessed this to promote public and political activism in the journals. The type of political campaign that was given a platform in the OCA journals can help us understand the relationship between political activism and war memory within the emotional communities of female veteran associations. As the next sections illustrate, these campaigns ranged from specific issues within the veteran community, to local electoral politics and debates within the feminist movement.

The British Legion campaign

The British Legion was founded in 1921 after existing ex-servicemen’s associations – the Comrades of the Great War, the National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers and the National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers – merged. The Legion

43 Ibid.
aimed to provide practical and financial aid to its members, but as a veteran organisation it was primarily sustained by the ‘main ideal’ of ‘comradeship’. The Legion shared the vision articulated within ex-servicewomen’s associations of a civic-minded veteran community who could draw on their military experience to serve the nation in peacetime. Beyond this shared vision, all three of the OCAs cultivated links with the British Legion. Indeed, at the annual reunion dinner of the QMAAC OCA in December 1928 Helen Gwynne-Vaughan proposed a toast to the Legion referring to the organisation as ‘our other OCA’. In July 1923, The Wren published in detail the events of the annual British Legion conference, whilst later in February 1927 it was reported in the QMAAC Gazette that eight former servicewomen had participated in a ‘novel concert entertainment’ in Stoke Newington, London ‘on behalf of the local branch of the British Legion.’ All three of the OCAs also advertised the Battlefield Tours arranged by the British Legion, whilst in September 1928 D. I. Smart, a former member of the WRAF provided a detailed report of her trip to the Menin Gate with the British Legion for the WRAF Old Comrades Association journal.

The OCAs enjoyed a close relationship with the British Legion with both organisations keen to encourage their members to mix in social settings. However, in 1921 the amiable relationship between the two associations was threatened by a decision taken at the annual conference of the British Legion to prevent the full entry of ex-servicewomen as members and instead create a separate women’s section open to female veterans as well as the wives and daughters of former servicemen. The implication that lay behind this decision— that ex-servicewomen did not have the same status as male veterans – provoked outrage in the OCAs and triggered protests in the pages of the journals. As they articulated their demands for full entry to the Legion on the same basis as men, women asserted their identities as veterans and weaponised their wartime experience to challenge the Legion’s gendered organizational model. Within all three of the

45 ‘Report of Speeches at the Ninth Annual Reunion Dinner of the Queen Mary’s Army Auxiliary Corps Old Comrades Association, 8th December, 1928’, Old Comrades Association Gazette, January 1929.
48 Barr, The Lion and the Poppy p. 48.
OCAs, leading figures called on members to boycott the Legion on the grounds that their policy to refuse full admission to ex-servicewomen belied their lack of appreciation for the contribution made by the women’s services during the war. In a speech made at the WRAF OCA Annual General Meeting, Helen Gwynne-Vaughan reminded members that on joining the Women’s Section of the British Legion, they would not ‘carry voting power or full representation.’\(^{49}\) The marginal power of ex-servicewomen here was thrown into sharp relief by Gwynne-Vaughan’s remark that whilst women were relegated to a separate organisation, ‘men who had served at least seven days with the colours’ could be admitted as ‘ordinary members’.\(^{50}\) She continued by stating how she ‘thought that ex-Service women had done as much as that’ – a comment which was met with the full support of those in attendance, who greeted Gwynne-Vaughan’s remarks with ‘cheers’.\(^{51}\)

A similar rejection of the membership terms offered to ex-servicewomen can be found in the ‘Notes and News’ section of the July 1922 edition of *The Wren*, which detailed the ongoing negotiations between the British Legion and the Service Women’s Association, who were also advocating for full membership for ex-servicewomen. The author stated that members of the Association of Wrens should only consider joining once ‘the Legion decides to admit ex-service women to full terms of membership’.\(^{52}\) The present situation, in which ‘ex-service women are only eligible for the Women’s Section’ was deemed unacceptable, primarily because the section was ‘composed of the dependents of ex-service men’.\(^{53}\) As such, the author stated that it was ‘not advisable’ for members of the Association of Wrens to join.\(^{54}\) Central to these objections was the Legion’s refusal to see beyond gender and acknowledge women’s identities as veterans. The ‘Notes and News’ feature on the Legion concluded with a reminder that ex-servicewomen had not ‘asked for special representation’ within the Legion – on the contrary, they understood that ‘among all who served during the War, we, the ex-servicewomen are only a small fraction’.\(^{55}\) Yet despite this qualifier, the author’s inclusion of ex-servicewomen as part of the population

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\(^{49}\) ‘Annual General Meeting’, *WRAF Old Comrades Association*, April 1922.

\(^{50}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{51}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{52}\) ‘Notes and News’, *The Wren*, May 1922.


\(^{54}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{55}\) *Ibid.*
‘who served during the War’ underscored what OCA members felt to be the justification for their fight to be admitted as ‘full members of the Legion’.

Here, the gendered assumptions inherent in the Legion’s conceptualisation of ‘service’ were challenged. Unwilling to concede that there were any differences between male and female veterans, the author argued that both groups had ‘served in the war’ and on this basis, ex-servicewomen were deserving of full membership on the same terms as men.

The battle over membership rights to the British Legion therefore provided a context in which women could articulate their rights as veterans. The arguments forwarded by OCA members in defence of their right to full membership provided an opportunity for these women to push back against gendered categorisations and make clear the value of their contribution to the war effort which, they argued, was equal to that of male combatants. In January 1922, the editor of the QMAAC Gazette Edith Thompson printed extracts from two alternative publications in response to a ‘number of letters’ from ‘correspondents’ who remained ‘puzzled’ over the ‘exact status of the ex-Service woman with regard to the British Legion’.

The authors of the two articles re-published here launched vehement attacks against the Legion’s decision to discriminate on gendered grounds and in doing so, they politicised this issue by framing it as a question of gender politics. The first article, taken from the feminist periodical Time and Tide, claimed that the Legion – ‘that otherwise apparently excellent body’ – was ‘marred and hampered by its attitude towards women’ and argued that the leadership would be ‘well-advised to think the matter over and make up its mind, first, as to what it means by “Ex-Service women”’.

Created by Lady Rhondda, the founder of the feminist organisation the Six Point Group, Time and Tide was ‘the leading feminist periodical of the post-war period.’ Time and Tide’s belief that the Legion’s policy was a feminist issue was clearly echoed by Thompson, whose editorial decision to re-print this article makes clear her agreement with the notion that the exclusion of ex-servicewomen from full membership was a broader issue related to gender politics.

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56 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
In the *Time and Tide* article, the author’s critique focused on the broader implications of the Legion’s decision to treat women as a monolithic group. The Legion’s behaviour, the author argued, invited comparisons with the pre-war era, in which women’s interests were frequently marginalised and dismissed. The Legion’s apparent refusal to ‘cast off the pre-enfranchisement classification of “women” together with “criminals” and “lunatics”’ meant that, according to the author, the leadership of the British Legion were complicit in reasserting a regressive attitude which advocated the classification of women as a group as ‘something apart and requiring peculiar treatment.’\(^{60}\) The author urged the Legion to adopt a recruitment strategy less focused on gender and more on the military status of potential members, advocating a change of approach that could be defined as ‘more “Ex-Service” and less “women.”’\(^{61}\) The fact that *Time and Tide* existed in order to provide a platform for an equalitarian brand of feminist politics makes clear why the author of this article was so ready to defend the rights of ex-servicewomen as veterans in this context. Framing the Legion’s decision as a manifestation of older ‘pre-enfranchisement’ attitudes towards women provided the foundation for a hostile critique of the leadership couched in feminist rhetoric. Through this article, OCA members were encouraged to see their campaign against the Legion as part of a much larger battle for women’s rights. In agitating for full membership ex-servicewomen were challenging a narrow conceptualisation of ‘service’ that was reserved for male combatants, but as this article made clear, this treatment of women was not new. The introduction of these political and even radical viewpoints succeeded in politicising a debate that had previously only been waged within the veteran community.

The second article selected for re-publication by Thompson in the *Gazette* was taken from the *Woman’s Leader*, a journal associated with the National Union of Women’s Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC) and the Townswomen’s Guilds.\(^{62}\) The NUSEC’s ideological propensity towards the new brand of ‘welfare feminism’ moved beyond the emphasis on equal rights in organisations such as the Six Point Group and its affiliated publication, *Time and Tide*. Instead, led by Eleanor Rathbone, the NUSEC fought for women’s rights as mothers and homemakers.

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\(^{60}\) The British Legion’, *Old Comrades Association Gazette*, January 1922.

\(^{61}\) Ibid.

\(^{62}\) Ibid.
Yet despite these ideological differences, both the articles found in the QMAAC Gazette explicitly stated their opposition to the membership policies of the British Legion and the gendered prejudice such policies reflected. The article from the Woman’s Leader argued that the Legion’s refusal to grant full membership to women exposed the flaws in the organisation’s democratic structures. The author stressed that an individual in the Women’s Section of the Legion was ‘classified as an ordinary member’ and was not ‘entitled to vote, or hold office, or be a member of any Council or Committee of the Legion.’⁶³ The result meant that women were rendered powerless and left ‘without voice or representation in the Legion’.⁶⁴ The marginalisation of ex-servicewomen – who were ‘outnumbered in the Women’s Auxiliary Section by the woman relatives of ex-Service men’ – left these women isolated within a system that refused to acknowledge the ‘service’ identities of female veterans. Printed alongside each other, both this article and the Time and Tide feature provided a powerful critique of the Legion – a critique that drew on evidence of endemic societal prejudices against women to highlight the damaging implications of the Legion’s membership policies. The refusal of the Legion to acknowledge the veteran status of ex-servicewomen therefore politicised the issue of women’s wartime service and drew attention to the relationship between public recognition of their former military identities and wider issues within gender politics.

The campaign for full membership of the Legion provided an opportunity for women to fully realise the political implications of their new identities as female veterans. After the clear opposition directed at the Legion’s membership policies from feminist periodicals as well as members of the OCAs, the British Legion officially revoked their decision to prevent ex-servicewomen from applying for full membership at their 1922 annual conference. The reflections on this triumph in the OCA journals make clear the symbolic significance of this victory. One former member of the QMAAC claimed that the revision of the Legion’s admittance policy represented a broader shift in attitudes towards members of the women’s auxiliary forces and their service during the war. Echoing the claims made in the Woman’s Leader article published in the same edition of the QMAAC Gazette, the author argued that the decision to admit ex-servicewomen as full members was evidence of the Legion fulfilling their

⁶³ Ibid.
⁶⁴ Ibid.
‘democratic policy’. However she wrote that more generally it was ‘no doubt a distinct win so far as status is concerned for the ex-Service women, who, even during the war, never knew whether the country regarded her as a soldier or a civilian.’ Here, the author communicated her disappointment that the Legion’s initial decision to relegate female veterans to the auxiliary section confirmed the uncertainties ex-servicewomen had felt during the war. The frustration at the Legion’s refusal to recognise their status as veterans served as a painful reminder of the struggles members of the QMAAC had faced during the war to be taken seriously as army auxiliaries. In addition, this OCA member also chose to see the reversal of the Legion’s decision as an acknowledgement of the potential power of a united ex-service community of veterans. She expressed her belief that ‘organisation is strength, and by organisation and combined effort the interests of ex-Service men and women in the world to-day can be better safeguarded.’ The campaign to gain full membership to the Legion was fuelled by the determination on behalf of ex-servicewomen to be acknowledged as veterans on the same terms as men, but as this member made clear, the campaign was also motivated by an understanding that female veterans could act as a powerful political force within the veteran community. In making this claim, the author stated her belief that veteran organisations had the potential to act as political pressure groups that could agitate for the – distinct and singular – interests of their members, whose military experience rendered provision of dedicated political representatives necessary.

The claim forwarded by this former member of the QMAAC that the legacy of military service for both men and women necessitated the politicisation of veteran associations was also made by Helen Gwynne-Vaughan in a December 1922 edition of the WRAF Old Comrades Association. In her article, she urged readers to reflect on the ‘action of the British Legion last Whitsun in including ex-service women as full members on the same footing as ex-service men.’ Whilst equal membership seemed ‘obvious’ to OCA members, Gwynne-Vaughan asked ‘how many trade or non-service organisations have taken corresponding action?’ Like the Time and Tide article published in an earlier edition of the QMAAC Gazette, Gwynne-Vaughan chose to frame

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65 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 ‘From Our President’, WRAF Old Comrades Association, December 1922.
69 Ibid.
this campaign as an example of gendered prejudice. Her article served both as a celebration of the success of the campaign and a reminder of its exceptionalism. She made clear that it was their shared service identities that had convinced the Legion to concede to their demands. Gwynne-Vaughan then took the opportunity to remind readers of how ‘impressed’ she had been ‘by the good comradeship shown between ex-service people.’ This further underscored Gwynne-Vaughan’s reluctance to acknowledge gendered divisions within the veteran community. The reversal of the decision to prevent ex-servicewomen from joining the Legion as full members led Gwynne-Vaughan to reflect that ‘common service is one of the biggest bonds, not only in the imagination of the newly-demobilised, but in the events of everyday life’. As in 1920, when Gwynne-Vaughan urged former members of the WRAF to harness their military skills and ‘carry on in civil life’ here the President of the WRAF OCA encouraged her readers to recognise the value of their service experience in ‘everyday life’. In this way, Gwynne-Vaughan aimed to further inspire her fellow ex-servicewomen to see the potential their veteran status offered to effect change in civic life.

The campaign for full membership in the British Legion helped politicise the journals in new and significant ways. Between articles by ex-servicewomen and features from alternative publications, the editors constructed a political, gendered discourse within the journals. This discourse points to the existence of a growing political consciousness amongst the OCA membership – the arguments presented in opposition to the Legion’s membership policy show how women began to assert their identities as female veterans in the public sphere. Although many of these arguments were rooted in critiques of the Legion’s democratic structures, the viewpoints expressed in these articles also drew strength from more overtly feminist thinking. The authors read the marginalisation of ex-servicewomen as indicative of a broader refusal amongst the Legion’s leadership to acknowledge women’s contribution to the war as military auxiliaries and thus as a further example of the retrenchment of gender prejudices in the aftermath of the war. In the Time and Tide article in particular, the Legion was condemned for displaying archaic and outmoded attitudes towards women in an article which was forthright in

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70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
its defence of ex-servicewomen who, they claimed, had a right to an identity beyond that of ‘woman’. Taken collectively these articles therefore highlight the determination of OCA members to proclaim their right to an associational membership based not on their gender alone, but on their status as ‘veterans’. This campaign allowed women to articulate the importance of their veteran identities and push back against those who refused to acknowledge them.

**Helen Gwynne-Vaughan’s Election Campaigns**

During the 1922, 1923 and 1924 elections Helen Gwynne-Vaughan stood as the MP for the Conservative and Unionist Party for North Camberwell, London. Although she failed to secure the majority of votes in each successive electoral contest, the ways in which Gwynne-Vaughan promoted her campaign across the journals of the QMAAC and WRAF OCAs show clearly how the emotional legacy of wartime service was mobilised in a political context. In pledging their support for Gwynne-Vaughan’s campaign, OCA members made clear that their endorsement of her political ambitions was based on their shared service identities rather than a willingness to promote the political agenda of the Conservative Party. In offering a platform to Helen Gwynne-Vaughan and her electoral ambitions, the OCA journals were further politicised in ways which show how women’s service identities were drawn on to influence developments within the wider political landscape. The emotional communities of both the QMAAC and WRAF OCAs became ideal spaces in which Helen Gwynne-Vaughan and her supporters could mobilise the collective attachment to shared service identities amongst the membership to promote her electoral campaigns. As this section will illustrate, the discursive elements of Gwynne-Vaughan’s campaign in the OCA journals further built on the idea of ex-servicewomen as a distinct political group, whose wartime service had rendered them in need of specific representation in local government.

During the 1922 election campaign, the QMAAC *Gazette* ran an article that declared support for Helen Gwynne-Vaughan on behalf of all members. Gwynne-Vaughan was presented to readers as “our candidate” for Parliament in a way that erased any potential political differences amongst OCA members and Gwynne-Vaughan whilst stressing the shared bonds between former
servicewomen and their former Chief Controller.\textsuperscript{73} The relative unimportance of Gwynne-Vaughan’s political affiliations was further emphasised by the author, who claimed ‘even those of us of a different way of thinking politically would rejoice to see Dame Helen adding “M.P.” . . . after her name.’\textsuperscript{74} The sense of pride in seeing a fellow female veteran aim for a position of such political power and influence highlights how, by 1922, OCA members were increasingly aware of the link between their military and political identities. Far from attempting to showcase Gwynne-Vaughan’s manifesto or political aims, the emphasis in this 1922 article underscored the ways in which the emotional bonds between ex-servicewomen – which, as we have seen, were continually re-affirmed and celebrated in both the journals and at the re-union dinners – were drawn on in this context to construct a collective political identity that drew on the military experience that Gwynne-Vaughan and former members of the QMAAC shared.

This sense of united pride in seeing a former comrade stand for Parliament continued during the 1924 election. In the November 1924 edition of the QMAAC \textit{Gazette}, one article reported that Gwynne-Vaughan was once more ‘contesting North Camberwell’ in the upcoming election whilst also informing readers that Dr. Laura Sandeman who had served in a medical capacity alongside the QMAAC ‘was standing in the Unionist interest in Aberdeen.’\textsuperscript{75} Echoing the report of the 1922 campaign, this author made a statement on behalf of all members, claiming that ‘all ex-QMAAC felt proud that the Corps was able to send into the political fight two such splendid champions.’\textsuperscript{76} Here, both Gwynne-Vaughan and Sandeman were presented as the candidates of the ‘Corps’ despite the fact that Sandeman had never been a member of the QMAAC. Nonetheless, the author’s determination here to highlight the military credentials of both candidates shows again how legacy of the First World War was harnessed to construct new political discourses in the OCA journals. The ability of the shared ‘service’ identity of OCA members to override potential political divisions was made clear in the author’s claim that ‘people of all shades of opinion are agreed in thinking that all-round representative women such

\textsuperscript{73} ‘Our Contemporaries’, \textit{Old Comrades Association}, November 1922.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{76} ‘The General Election’, \textit{Old Comrades Association Gazette}, November 1924.
as these would have been of real value in Parliament’.\textsuperscript{77} Once more, potential ideological or political divisions were marginalised in a statement that again gave primacy to the service identities of the two candidates.

The article ended on a note of disappointment given that both Gwynne-Vaughan and Sandeman lost their electoral contests, which meant, as the author reflected, ‘the QMAAC and the ex-Service women are still unrepresented in the House of Commons.’\textsuperscript{78} Again the belief that ex-servicewomen were in need of a specific representative in parliament to represent their distinct interests was articulated, showing how women’s military and political identities intersected in this period to forge new political subjectivities. This was also the central theme of an appeal published in the \textit{WRAF Old Comrades Association} journal in the run up to the 1924 General Election. Referencing, but quickly dismissing Gwynne-Vaughan’s party affiliations, the author argued that support should be derived ‘not only’ from ‘Conservative Old Comrades but also those who without taking much interest in Politics would be proud to see our late Commandant take her place in the House of Commons’.\textsuperscript{79} The article continued with the author’s claim that ‘Old Comrades should be particularly keen to fight on Dame Helen’s behalf, not only for the love and pride we have for her, but also in order that we should have an ex-Service woman in Parliament.’\textsuperscript{80} The call was made more urgent by the author’s revelation that Gwynne-Vaughan’s opponent Mr. Charles Ammon, was ‘a well-known pacifist’.\textsuperscript{81} This reference to Ammon’s pacifism highlights how the legacies of wartime service shaped political culture. Here, the importance of preventing a ‘pacifist’ from securing victory was used to further promote Gwynne-Vaughan’s credentials as a candidate. As the article implied, unlike Ammon, Gwynne-Vaughan was a veteran whose military service with the QMAAC and WRAF rendered her a much more suitable candidate.

The ways in which Gwynne-Vaughan’s identity as an ex-servicewoman came to dominate her electoral appeals in the OCAs further politicised the content of the OCA journals whilst also

\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{79} ‘The Coming General Election’, \textit{WRAF Old Comrades Association}, October 1924.
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Ibid.}
underscoring the importance of a shared ‘service’ identity in shaping political loyalties. Again, we can see how military service was drawn on in the OCA journals to promote a distinct and unique political identity for women. In December 1922 in the QMAAC Gazette, one article reflected on Gwynne-Vaughan’s recent electoral defeat. The author drew connections between Gwynne-Vaughan’s time in the QMAAC and her political identity as a potential Member of Parliament. Looking back at her time as Chief-Controller of the QMAAC, the author remembered how Gwynne-Vaughan ‘always revelled in hard work and strenuous days’ and argued that ‘the words non-combatant still seem singularly inappropriate when applied to her.’\(^{82}\)

The respect and admiration for Gwynne-Vaughan as a servicewoman were carried forward into her political campaigns. The author’s claim that ‘Old Comrades of every kind of political opinion all wanted her to succeed’ was further illustrated in a quote from a fellow ex-servicewoman who, despite making clear that she was “‘a keen supporter of the Labour Party’” still stated that she believed “‘Dame Helen is just the sort we want in Parliament.’”\(^{83}\)

Following this, Gwynne-Vaughan herself thanked members of the OCAs for their support during her recent campaign. She mentioned the gratitude she felt towards ‘the senders of a very encouraging telegram signed “Ex-Signallers 2, WAAC OCA”’ and also expressed her thanks to “‘A May 1917 WAAC’” who had sent ‘good wishes’.\(^{84}\) Gwynne-Vaughan clearly felt that she could rely on the votes and support of her former comrades, even if they were not supporters of the Conservative Party. But more than this, they also show how the emotional legacy of wartime service – made clear in the statements of loyalty and solidarity from ex-servicewomen – structured the nature of women’s political engagement in the 1920s.

The language used in these articles underlined the possibility of female veterans asserting their ‘service’ identities in the political sphere. As such, the OCAs offered their members the possibility of embracing their status as both veterans and political citizens. At the 1923 Annual General Meeting of the WRAF OCA, Gwynne-Vaughan herself reflected upon the broader implications of the involvement of the OCAs in her political campaigns. She used the example to illustrate the success of her attempt to encourage ex-servicewomen to become more involved in

\(^{82}\) ‘The General Election’, *Old Comrades Association Gazette*, December 1922.
\(^{83}\) *Ibid.*
\(^{84}\) *Ibid.*
public life. She reminded readers of how she had previously encouraged her fellow comrades to ‘take part in whatever way they could in the life of the nation’ and to view this as their ‘duty’.  

Although she made reference to her failure to be elected as an MP at the 1922 election, she nonetheless focused on the ‘invaluable help’ she had received from ‘a great many Old Comrades’. The ‘pleasure and pride’ that this had afforded her stemmed not only from ‘the help they had given’ but also the fact that this united effort had ‘brought home to so many outside people the solidarity of ex-Service women’. Again, the ability of her political campaigns to unite women in pursuit of a common goal was emphasised. In a final comic remark Gwynne-Vaughan told readers how one man who had attended one of her meetings had commented, “What I say is, it is better to have a soldier even if she is in petticoats.”

Redeploying his sentiments, Gwynne-Vaughan stated how she believed that this should apply to those present, remarking that ‘when a job came along and something wanted sensibly fixing up it was better to have a soldier, even if in petticoats’. This anecdote was intended to communicate the public sympathy for a ‘soldier’ candidate, even if she was a woman. It also made the assertion that women too could be soldiers. Yet when read alongside this and the other political appeals in the OCA journals, it is clear that OCA members were not only proud of Gwynne-Vaughan’s political ambitions. They believed strongly that female veterans deserved a political representative in parliament.

The continual references to memories of the war, the ‘service’ identity of Gwynne-Vaughan and the solidarity of ex-servicewomen contributed to the formation of a political discourse that drew strength from the collective emotional investment in the legacy of wartime service within the OCAs. Helen Gwynne-Vaughan’s electoral campaigns therefore shed light on the ways in which she utilised her service identity as part of her political strategy. This serves as a reminder of how the legacy of military service was utilised by women as a means of asserting their political credentials. The appeals and the letters and articles that appeared in the OCA journals in support

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86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
of Gwynne-Vaughan also helped further promote the notion of a politically-engaged community of female veterans whose involvement in electoral politics was shaped by the norms and values within the emotional community of the OCAs. Within the discursive spaces of the WRAF Old Comrades Association journal and the QMAAC Gazette, articles related to Gwynne-Vaughan’s campaign stressed the centrality of her ‘service’ experience and her identity as a former servicewoman to her political role. As a result, a new political subjectivity centred on the value of military service was both constructed and promoted in the OCA journals specifically for women.

Feminist Politics

This section focuses on the promotion of feminist discourses in both the QMAAC Gazette and The Wren. Under former QMAAC member Cecil A. Eastgate – editor of the QMAAC Gazette – and former member of the WRNS Vera Laughton Mathews – editor of The Wren – both journals functioned as platforms for the promotion of feminist politics. The feminist arguments and debates introduced distinctly gendered political discourses into the journals and in doing so, the journals were politicised in new ways. Whilst the previous campaigns on British Legion membership and local election battles had harnessed women’s service identities to forge a new type of political consciousness and encourage new forms of political activism amongst the OCA membership, the promotion of feminism within the QMAAC Gazette and The Wren raises different questions about the relationship between the emotional legacy of the war and inter-war politics in the context of the OCAs. The gender politics that Eastgate and Laughton-Mathews introduced to the journals was allied more closely to the contemporary debates regarding the evolution of the women’s movement after 1918 and they drew less on the notions of ‘duty’ and ‘service’ as rallying calls to action. However, an exploration of these articles supporting equal rights feminism in the OCA journals does show that Eastgate and Laughton-Mathews supported the vision articulated by Gwynne-Vaughan, Furse and Davy and acknowledged the value of encouraging female veterans to think about politics and in this case, feminist issues in particular.

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91 This section is a re-drafted version of my article: Jane Clarke, ‘Feminism and the legacy of the First World War in the journals of the Old Comrades Associations, 1919 – 1935’, Women’s History Review, 28 (2019), 1177 – 1199.
Therefore, whilst the following section raises a distinct set of questions about the politicisation of the OCA journals, the feminist articles that will be explored can shed light on the different ways in which the emotional communities of the OCAs became important spaces for the dissemination of equal rights feminism.

Cecil A. Eastgate had been an enthusiastic member of the QMAAC OCA before she became editor of the QMAAC Gazette in November 1926. Eastgate had been a Unit Administrator based at the Connaught Club in London during the war and following demobilisation she became an active member of the QMAAC OCA. Eastgate understood that the value of the OCAs lay in their potential to encourage members to assert their identities as veterans in public life. In an editorial in January 1927, Eastgate remarked ‘one is very struck on reading through the various Branch Reports, by the fact that so many of the ex-Service women are not ex-Service – that is to say, they are still serving and helping a large number of people worse off than they are’. Members were congratulated for their civic-minded activities, and Eastgate applauded the fact that women attending local branch meetings were not ‘merely gathering together socially to “have a good time”’ but were instead also dedicating themselves to worthy causes. This endorsement of the philanthropy of members and their willingness to see beyond the social function of the OCAs influenced Eastgate’s tenure as editor of the QMAAC Gazette. Her decision to print various articles dealing with a range of key feminist issues underscored her belief that OCA members should be politically engaged. Eastgate’s contribution to this broader aim was to print several articles originally published in alternative periodicals to educate readers on key debates within contemporary feminism, which began with the publication of two articles that dealt with the ongoing campaign for equal suffrage.

Eastgate’s approach involved selecting articles from a variety of periodicals for re-publication in the QMAAC Gazette. This strategy was common within ‘feminist publishing’ more broadly with periodicals acting as mediators of a ‘wider sphere of print media’ in a way that allowed for greater communication of views and debates. As Maria DiCenzo and others have argued,

93 Ibid.
94 Catherine Clay, Maria DiCenzo, Barbara Green and Fiona Hackney, ‘General Introduction: Re-Mediating Women and the Interwar Period’ in Catherine Clay, Maria DiCenzo, Barbara Green and Fiona
feminist periodicals in the interwar period ‘were ambitious in their attempts to provide platforms for different tendencies in the movement and to advocate for change’. Although the QMAAC Gazette was not ostensibly a feminist periodical, the adoption of editorial strategies used within feminist publishing suggests that Eastgate was aware of the efficacy of this approach, and wished to present her fellow old comrades with a variety of critical viewpoints. By exploring the articles published under Eastgate’s editorial tenure, I argue that the introduction of feminist arguments to the QMAAC Gazette helped further encourage female veterans to see themselves as political citizens who, as women who had served in the war, should concern themselves with the ideological debates shaping the contemporary feminist movement. Eastgate’s actions as editor not only contributed to the politicisation of the journals, but they also aligned the QMAAC Gazette with other more explicitly political periodicals, accelerating the ‘pluralisation and diversification of interwar feminist discourses’ that occurred within the print media during this period.

In June 1926, Eastgate published an article in the QMAAC Gazette originally printed in Time and Tide that provided a rigorous defence of the equal franchise campaign. From 1926 onwards, the campaign for equal franchise in Britain gained momentum. Emboldened by the promise made in Parliament by the Conservative Home Secretary William Joynson-Hicks that equal franchise would soon be granted, feminist campaigners doubled their efforts to push for the expansion of the electorate to include all women under the age of 30, thus ensuring that women were enfranchised on the same terms as men. In response, opponents of equal franchise stoked fears about the consequences of the ‘flapper vote’ in the popular press. These critics argued that the demographic shifts caused by the war meant that granting the vote to women would

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95 Ibid., p. 313.


98 For a more in-depth exploration of the reasons behind Rothermere’s hostility to the equal franchise campaign, see Adrian Bingham, “Stop the Flapper Vote Folly”: Lord Rothermere, the Daily Mail and the equalization of the franchise 1927 – 28’, Twentieth Century British History, 13 (2002) 17 – 37.
leave male voters in the minority. As Adrian Bingham has shown, ‘fears about “invasions” of women and the “swamping” of men’ in the ‘labour market’ and ‘the political sphere’ were common in this period, fuelled by the real evidence of the ‘numerical disparity between the sexes’ at the end of the First World War.\(^9^9\) The debate surrounding equal franchise played out in the pages of feminist publications such as \textit{Time and Tide}, the mainstream press – particularly in the \textit{Daily Mail}, whose proprietor Lord Rothermere was fiercely opposed to equal suffrage – and in the QMAAC \textit{Gazette}.\(^1^0^0\)

Eastgate made the decision to print a \textit{Time and Tide} article in the QMAAC \textit{Gazette} that was overtly supportive of the equal franchise campaign. The author – who was unnamed – sought to expose as false many of the common misconceptions that hampered the feminist cause. One of the key misapprehensions cited by the author was the accusation directed at feminist activists that the goal of the women’s movement was the subjugation of men rather than the attainment of equal rights for both genders. The author quoted one woman who stated that she was ‘opposed to Feminism . . . because there is no more reason for women’s dominating than for man’s doing it.’\(^1^0^1\) The destructive potential of this misunderstanding was laid bare by the author, who argued that ‘the illusion of the Dominant Female’ invoked by this woman had evolved to become a more common critique directed at the women’s movement.\(^1^0^2\) Fears about ‘the Dominant Female’ were, according to the author, fuelling the concerns of ‘those who fear the predominant voting power of women if equal franchise should be granted now in England.’\(^1^0^3\) The author stated that such claims, peddled by the ‘timid deprecators of a Feminism which they visualise as a demand, not for equal but for unequal rights’ – were false.\(^1^0^4\) Feminism instead simply amounted to ‘the theory, cult or practice of those that hold that the present laws, conventions and conditions of society, should admit of and further the free and full development of women’.\(^1^0^5\) In allowing this article to be re-published in the QMAAC \textit{Gazette} Eastgate provided an additional platform for the author’s equalitarian principles and exposed her readers to an article that was

\(^9^9\) Bingham, ““Stop the Flapper Vote Folly””, p. 22.
\(^1^0^0\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 26.
\(^1^0^1\) ‘What is Feminism?’, \textit{Old Comrades Association Gazette}, June 1927.
\(^1^0^2\) \textit{Ibid.}
\(^1^0^3\) \textit{Ibid.}
\(^1^0^4\) \textit{Ibid.}
\(^1^0^5\) \textit{Ibid.}
both overtly political and radical in its dismissal of anti-feminist arguments. Eastgate’s rationale for printing this article is unclear; whilst she may have been seeking to counter any similar objections to equal franchise amongst the membership, it is more likely that she hoped this article would draw attention to one of the key debates within the women’s movement and in doing so, Eastgate also made sure the her former comrades were made aware of the commitment to equal rights that defined feminist politics.

The appearance of a similar article in the October 1927 edition of the QMAAC Gazette further illustrates how Eastgate politicised the content of the journal via the introduction of radical feminist discourses. Like the Time and Tide article printed four months earlier, this article – which was originally published in the political periodical The Outlook – took aim at critics who claimed that equal franchise would herald the emergence of a female-dominated legislature or, as critics deemed it, a ‘petticoat government’. Firstly, the idea that women should be excluded from the electorate on the basis that they would ‘vote entirely for their own interests’ was challenged. The (again unnamed) author pointed out that the voting behaviour of enfranchised women disproved this claim. It was futile, the author argued, to scorn the extension of the franchise on a gendered basis. Apart from the obvious ‘illogicality’ of ‘giving men the vote at twenty-one and refusing it to women till thirty’ the author argued that any objections to equal franchise that relied upon spurious claims about the intrinsic weaknesses of women as a gender were rendered meaningless following the successful passage of the Representation of the People Act in 1918. The author moved on to target the leading critics of the equal franchise campaign, with a particular emphasis on Lord Rothermere, the proprietor of the Daily Mail and Lord Birkenhead, Secretary of State for India. Having exposed the falsities of their claims against equal franchise – which in Rothermere’s case involved casting the ‘flappers’ as irresponsible and immature – the author addressed both directly, assuring them in a sarcastic barb that they should be able to ‘sleep quietly in their beds, undisturbed by any nightmare of this “monstrous regiment of women” controlling their future political activities.’

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107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
Bingham has argued that the ‘the overriding concern of the “flapper vote” crusade was anti-socialism, not anti-feminism.’\textsuperscript{111} Rothermere’s ‘extra enthusiasm in the anti-socialist battle’ was the key factor that ensured that the \textit{Mail} was so determined to undermine this campaign.\textsuperscript{112} Yet whilst Rothermere may not have been motivated by anti-feminist principles given his willingness to promote alternative ‘constructions’ of femininity in the \textit{Mail}, it is significant that this is not how his actions were perceived elsewhere. The fact that Rothermere was presented in the \textit{Outlook} article as a key proponent of the myth of the ‘monstrous regiment of women’ waiting to emerge after the passage of equal franchise to ‘control’ politics suggest that whilst Rothermere himself may not have been explicitly anti-feminist, his views were framed this way by his opponents. Eastgate’s selection of this article meant that the QMAAC \textit{Gazette} became an additional platform for a radical critique of one of Britain’s leading newspaper proprietors as well as the Secretary of State for India. Beyond these targeted attacks, the equal rights agenda at the heart of the women’s movement was once more highlighted in this article, offering further insight into the specific ways Eastgate sought to politicise the content of the journals in her role as editor.

Both these articles offered correctives to the claims made by opponents of the equal franchise campaign. They underscore Eastgate’s determination to encourage her fellow ex-servicewomen to engage with feminist politics and fight back against those who sought to denigrate the women’s movement by promulgating fears of the ‘dominant female’.\textsuperscript{113} Eastgate’s decision to re-publish these articles in the QMAAC \textit{Gazette} meant that the journal became part of a broader network of political periodicals that provided counter-arguments to the claims espoused by critics – particularly Lord Rothermere in the \textit{Daily Mail} – that were hostile to the potential arrival of a ‘petticoat government’.\textsuperscript{114} The key components of the OCA’s associational culture remained, reflected in the branch reports and correspondence that testify to the membership’s enduring commitment to sharing memories of wartime service. However, following the publication of these articles, the QMAAC \textit{Gazette} became an alternative platform for the

\textsuperscript{111} Bingham, ““Stop the Flapper Vote Folly””, p. 23
\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{113} Petticoat Government’, \textit{Old Comrades Association Gazette}, October 1927.
\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Ibid.}
promotion of the equal franchise campaign. As we have seen, Eastgate herself expressed her delight in discovering that ex-servicewomen were ‘still serving’ and not simply using the associations as social spaces.\textsuperscript{115} Her introduction of these explicitly feminist – even radical – articles in the QMAAC Gazette suggests that she hoped that female veteran associations could be used to encourage ex-servicewomen to recognise the importance of contemporary feminist debates and acknowledge the significance of the issues preventing women’s equality.

As editor of The Wren Vera Laughton-Mathews sought to introduce her readers to the international dimensions of contemporary feminist politics. An active member of pre-war and post-war feminist groups, Laughton-Mathews utilized her role as editor to ensure that the journal became an additional platform for the promotion of the international campaigns she was actively involved with. Born in 1888, Laughton-Mathews was the daughter of a naval historian and was educated at King’s College London before she joined the WRNS in 1917, serving as Unit Officer of HMS Victory VI.\textsuperscript{116} She joined the Association of Wrens in 1921 and was appointed as its first Chairman. Laughton-Mathews also acted as editor of The Wren from its creation in 1921 until December 1924, before recommencing her editorship in December 1930.\textsuperscript{117} A former member of the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) Laughton-Mathews had ‘flung herself’ into suffrage campaigning ‘with all the fervour and enthusiasm of which I was capable’.\textsuperscript{118} This enthusiasm for feminist campaigning continued into the inter-war period. Laughton-Mathews acted briefly as editor of the feminist periodical Time and Tide in 1920 before focusing on her involvement with St Joan’s Social and Political Alliance (SJSPA), a Catholic feminist organisation that admitted both sexes and aimed ‘to establish political, social and economic equality between men and women and to further the work and usefulness of Catholic women as citizens.’\textsuperscript{119} It was through her membership of SJSPA that Laughton-Mathews became part of the international feminist sphere, attending and speaking at conferences

\textsuperscript{117} Miss V. M. Waldy replaced Vera Laughton-Mathews as editor of The Wren in December 1924 until April 1929 when D. A. Wallace became editor until December 1930, when Laughton-Mathews was re-appointed. She worked as editor of The Wren until July 1939.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., p. 28.
of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) – whose aim was to forge a ‘liberal, progressive vision of female solidarity across borders’ – as the SJSPA delegate.¹²⁰

Laughton-Mathews frequently attended the conferences held by the IWSA, which were designed to help further the Alliance’s aim to ‘secure the enfranchisement of the women of all nations’.¹²¹ The publication of reports written by Laughton-Mathews of these international conferences ensured that The Wren evolved to become a platform for the debates shaping international feminist politics. Whilst the articles in The Wren were similar in thematic terms to those published in the other OCA journals, sharing an emphasis on the importance of the franchise for women, the fact that Laughton-Mathews wrote her own reports meant that she could tailor her contributions for her readers, sharing her own personal insights into the debates and issues raised. Her commitment to describing and analysing these conferences within The Wren illustrates Laughton-Mathews’ determination to politicise the journals and offer her former servicewomen a way of engaging with developments within the international sphere of feminist politics. Like Eastgate, Laughton-Mathews believed that the OCAs had the potential to function as more than social spaces for reminiscence. Reflecting on her involvement with the OCA in her autobiography, Laughton-Mathews stated her belief ‘that a wider objective than maintaining Service comradeship was necessary for the Association.’¹²² From this, we can see how Laughton-Mathews sought to mobilise ex-servicewomen – whose membership of the OCAs gave them strong emotional ties – for political purposes.

As Leila Rupp has argued, the inter-war period represented ‘the high tide of internationalism’ within feminist activism, whilst Maria DiCenzo and Claire Eustance have stressed that feminist activists in Britain during this period believed that ‘engaging with the struggles of women in other countries’ was ‘as important as attempts to improve conditions for those at home’.¹²³

Laughton-Mathews’ decision to use *The Wren* as an additional platform to further the cause of feminism in the international sphere aligns this journal with broader developments within feminist activism. By reflecting on her own involvement with international politics in articles in *The Wren* Laughton-Mathews was able to offer former members of the WRNS insights into the unique benefits and challenges posed by this type of trans-national political activism, given that many readers would not themselves have been able to become active campaigners on the international stage. The type of feminist discourse that appeared in *The Wren* was therefore the product of Laughton-Mathews’ own associational ties and her own commitment to the promotion of a brand of feminist politics that placed faith firmly in the ability of nations to join together and learn from one another.

In a September 1929 article for *The Wren*, Laughton-Mathews reflected on her attendance at the Jubilee Congress of the International Alliance for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (IASEC) held in Berlin.¹²⁴ For Laughton-Mathews, the value of international feminist conferences stemmed from their ability to unite women of all nationalities and backgrounds. She described her delight at having met ‘women of forty-five countries’ all of whom she argued ‘really care for social and political life’.¹²⁵ Her experience of mixing with women ‘in the vanguard of progressive thought’ confirmed to Laughton-Mathews that ‘the value of international contacts cannot be overstressed’.¹²⁶ The importance of debate amongst delegates was further highlighted as a vital component of these conferences. At the July 1935 conference of the IASEC in Istanbul Laughton-Mathews reported that ‘Turkish women, Indian women, Egyptians, Persians, Arab women from Syria and from Palestine’ had spent time ‘discussing vital problems with the women of the West.’¹²⁷ Sharing experiences was even more crucial given the diversity of delegates in attendance at the conferences. Laughton-Mathews gave one example of a speech made by a Jamaican delegate at the July 1935 conference, whose ‘impassioned appeal’ reminded

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¹²⁴ The International Woman Suffrage Alliance was later renamed the International Alliance for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship.
her fellow attendees ‘not to leave the black people behind in their work for progress’. The common emphasis in these reports on the importance of international co-operation as part of feminist campaigning highlighted to ex-servicewomen the wider sphere of feminist activism, whilst the ability to break down boundaries of race and nationality was stressed as a fundamental and necessary step in the fight for women’s rights. What is also evident in these reports is an understanding that a shared awareness of women’s collective gendered identity amongst delegates was crucial to the success of international collaboration.

Laughton-Mathews’ insistence that these conferences made clear that national identities were less important than ‘bonds of sisterhood’ did not however extend to the promotion of a feminist agenda that stressed the singular importance of women’s issues over the fight for equal rights. The aims of the IASEC were varied, including the nationality and property rights of married women, widow’s pensions and equal pay. Yet despite the wide-ranging nature of these reforms, Laughton-Mathews – the international delegate from the ‘strongly equalitarian’ St Joan’s Social and Political Alliance – unsurprisingly focused on the progress of international equal rights campaigns. Laughton-Mathews’ focus on equality comes through in her report of the 1929 IASEC conference in Berlin, in which she told her readers that the alliance had reaffirmed its commitment to ‘Woman Suffrage’. Yet as Laughton-Mathews reminded readers, whilst women in Britain, Finland and elsewhere were now enfranchised, the global fight for women’s suffrage had yet to be won. She wrote that ‘whilst we of the enfranchised countries are apt to forget sometimes that the women of a large portion of the globe are still voteless, and that work for Woman Suffrage was, and still is, the primary object of the Alliance’.

This restatement of suffrage as the ‘primary object’ of the IASEC underscored Laughton-Mathews’ own belief in the need for an enduring focus on legal equality for women – a belief she wanted to promote to her fellow Wrens. Laughton-Mathews reaffirmed the IASEC’s

128 Ibid.
129 Rupp, Worlds of Women, p. 83.
130 Ibid., p. 131.
131 Ibid., p. 131.
132 Laughton-Mathews, ‘Women in Congress at Istanbul’.
133 Ibid.
commitment to equality for women, which was embodied in speeches which highlighted the ‘twenty-five years of work and progress towards Legal, Economic and Moral Equality’ undertaken through the IASEC.\textsuperscript{134} Details were also given of a conference held by the ‘British Open Door Council’ an organisation committed to the ‘industrial equality of men and women’ which, according to Laughton-Mathews had been ‘highly successful’ and had resulted in the formation of ‘the Open Door International for the Economic Emancipation of the Woman Worker’.\textsuperscript{135} These reports served to remind readers of \textit{The Wren} of the vitality of equalitarian feminism in the international sphere. They also provided insights into the ideas and debates that were shaping the evolution of trans-national feminist organisations like the IASEC.

Occasionally Laughton-Mathews’ articles intervened more directly in feminist debates related to women’s employment. In her report of her attendance at the 1929 conference of the IWSA in Berlin Laughton-Mathews made reference to the discussions held amongst delegates in relation to protective legislation. The question of whether there should be ‘like conditions of work for men and women in industry’ was, according to Laughton-Mathews, ‘the most controversial question discussed in the Congress’.\textsuperscript{136} Equal rights feminists such as Laughton-Mathews remained firmly against the notion that women employees required protective measures in the workplace. This defence of the right of women workers to equal treatment in the workplace had, prior to the conference, led to a split in the NUSEC as ‘new’ feminists refused to concede the need for protective legislation.\textsuperscript{137} As Laughton-Mathews reported to her readers in \textit{The Wren}, the issue continued to provoke division in the international feminist movement. She wrote that many delegates at the Berlin conference remained ‘acutely opposed’ on the issue. Laughton-Mathews endorsed ‘the view that legislation should be based on the nature of work and not on the sex of the worker’.\textsuperscript{138} Again, by outlining what was at stake in this debate Laughton-Mathews ensured that her readers were exposed to what remained a significant and controversial issue. By stating

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{134}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{135}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{136} Laughton-Mathews, ‘The International Woman Suffrage Congress’.
\textsuperscript{138} Laughton-Mathews, ‘The International Woman Suffrage Congress’.
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her objections to the imposition of protective legislation, Laughton-Mathews made clear to her fellow ex-Wrens her commitment to the tenets of equal rights feminism.

**Conclusion**

Within the emotional community of the OCAs, expressions of nostalgia and military pride helped construct a memory of the war that defined what it meant to be a female veteran after 1920. As this chapter has shown, the emotional legacy of the war fostered within the OCAs that promoted gendered military service as a positive, empowering and transformative experience paved the way for the politicisation of these associations. The vision of leaders such as Katharine Furse and Helen Gwynne-Vaughan saw them put forward a case for the ways in which ex-servicewomen could harness the empowering legacy of wartime service to help construct a new and improved society in the aftermath of war. The challenge to the British Legion’s membership policy from the OCAs and Helen Gwynne-Vaughan’s election campaigns, combined with the promotion of equal rights feminism embodied this vision. The British Legion campaign saw the veteran identities of OCA members become politicised – not just by ex-servicewomen, but by feminist campaigners who claimed that the exclusionary policies of the Legion further exposed the gendered prejudices within post-war society. In pushing back against the decision to prevent ex-servicewomen from joining as full members, OCA members publicly asserted their status as veterans and in doing so, ensured that ex-servicewomen’s associations became crucibles for the formation of a new gendered political consciousness that drew strength from women’s martial subjectivities. The way in which the tropes of duty and service were allied to political arguments in the context of Helen Gwynne-Vaughan’s election campaigns again shows how the collective emotional attachment to these military values amongst OCA members paved the way for the creation of new political identities for female veterans. Party political affiliations were frequently dismissed in appeals published in the journals in favour of a new political discourse which championed Gwynne-Vaughan’s service status and her willingness to represent the distinct interests of ex-servicewomen. Crucial to these appeals was this continued assertion that ex-servicewomen needed their own parliamentary representative; this argument reveals the significance and transformative impact of military service for women as they continually
stressed the importance of bypassing previous party loyalties in order to ensure their own interests as a distinct political group were fully represented.

Finally, the roles of Eastgate and Laughton-Mathews in introducing feminist politics into the journals offers different perspectives on this process of politicisation within the journals. Whilst the emphasis on the equal franchise and international feminist politics within the QMAAC Gazette and The Wren respectively is less obviously a direct product of the women’s emotional investment in their veteran identities and the notions of duty and service, the appearance of feminist debates in these journals does tell us something new about the role of the OCAs as emotional communities in fostering a distinct brand of equal rights feminism. Both Eastgate and Laughton-Mathews believed that the politicisation of the OCAs should extend beyond issues that directly affected women as veterans and should entail a more specific engagement with the campaign for equal franchise and developments within international feminism. Both these editors offered a more specific vision of the politicisation of the OCAs, showing how radical critiques of dominant political discourses and detailed reports of feminist debates on the international stage could exist within the emotional communities of the OCAs. Eastgate and Laughton-Mathews were ambitious editors whose determination to introduce feminist debates into the pages of the OCA journals offered a radical interpretation of the visions of Gwynne-Vaughan and Furse whose emphasis on the wider potential of female veterans in civic life paved the way for the more overt political interventions of Eastgate and Laughton-Mathews. Overall, by understanding the role of emotional values in structuring political engagement, we can offer a complex and nuanced analysis of the nature of women’s activism in the inter-war period. The promotion of political debate – a self-conscious strategy adopted by each of their editors – in the journals shows how the female veteran identity came to embody more than a social, charitable role. The journals of the OCAs offer a more continuous story about how the legacy of women’s military service in the First World War shaped ideas about feminism and the nature of women’s political engagement after 1918. As the next chapter will demonstrate, the emotional community helped re-frame political discourses in other contexts, including the pacifist campaigns that flourished in the inter-war period.
Chapter 3 – ‘The Great and New Ideal’: militarism, emotion, and pacifist politics in the WRNS Old Comrades Association, 1921 – 1937

In the January 1922 edition of The Wren, Katharine Furse – President of the Association of Wrens and former Director of the WRNS – laid out her vision for the future of British society. In her view, the social and political ‘turmoil’ that was ‘seething in most countries of the world’ in the aftermath of the war presented a unique opportunity for a re-configuration of social norms and civic values.¹ According to Furse, ‘the war and strikes and general upheaval’ that had defined the landscape of post-war Britain had cast doubt on many of the received assumptions that had governed social relations and shaped political culture before 1914.² Furse’s reference to ‘strikes’ is unsurprising given the ‘massive post-war wave of workers’ militancy and political radicalisation’ that occurred in the immediate years following the Armistice.³ Strikes occurred within the police force, the mining industry and amongst soldiers who by 1919 had yet to be officially demobilised.⁴ With over 2.4 million workers on strike in 1919 alone, it was clear, as Furse acknowledged, that industrial militancy had the potential to re-shape British post-war life.⁵ Values that had previously been assumed to be ‘solid and eternal’ in ‘pre-war life’ were, according to Furse, threatened by the emergence of new ideologies which presented radical alternatives to the political status quo.⁶ Furse’s decision to share her vision in the pages of The

² Ibid.
⁶ Furse, ‘A Happy and Peaceful New Year’.
Wren was part of her broader attempt to encourage ex-servicewomen to understand the contribution they could make to the process of social reconstruction. According to Furse, a society ‘in flux’ presented women with unique opportunities to apply their military skills in peacetime. They should agitate for the development of new, more enlightened ways of thinking that learnt from the lessons of the war and focused on the maintenance of peace.

In The Wren, female veterans were encouraged by Furse to see beyond the uncertainties of post-war life and instead were told to look for the ‘great light drawing us all on willy-nilly to a better future’. This ‘better future’ Furse argued would only be realised if a more collectivist response to social and political problems would be embraced. The construction of a more co-operative society in which ‘every individual’ aimed to ‘think out the near future in relation to the future of others’ would lead, in Furse’s view, to a body politic more aware of ‘humanity as a whole’. Her article made clear that the transition to peacetime conditions meant more than enduring swift demobilisation of the armed forces and a dismantling of the wartime state; it held the potential for the creation of a new, communitarian society in which individuals would feel able to transcend their ‘narrow circle of family, friends and nation’ and work towards ‘the great and new ideal’. Given her emphasis on utopian collectivism, it is tempting to read Furse’s article as evidence of her political – or more specifically socialist – sympathies. Yet her rejection of narrow individualism and her yearning for a more altruistic society were in fact indicative of Furse’s strong pacifist principles. Furse imagined the ‘great and new ideal’ as a new world order that would ensure ‘peace in this tired world’.

The appearance of this appeal in The Wren is striking in its seeming incongruity. Furse was espousing pacifist rhetoric in a journal whose purpose was to elevate positive narratives of wartime service. Yet despite this, Furse aimed to inspire women in the Association of Wrens – whose membership demonstrated their enduring attachment to their service identities – to not only support pacifism as an ideological cause, but to become active members in the pacifist

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
movement. Furse’s decision to use *The Wren* to promote pacifist politics in 1922 marked the beginning of a dynamic relationship between the Association of Wrens and the wider pacifist movement in the inter-war period, specifically the League of Nations Union (LNU). This relationship, and its implications for our understanding of pacifism and the political identities of female veterans, is the focus of this chapter. It argues that ex-servicewomen resolved the tensions presented by the co-existence of pacifist and militarist discourses in *The Wren* by constructing a new pacifist discourse that reflected the norms and values of the emotional community of the Association of Wrens. In this way, this chapter builds on the claims made in Chapter Two – the promotion of pacifist politics in *The Wren* acts as an additional case study that clearly demonstrates the relationship between the emotional legacy of the war and political discourses within the emotional community of the OCAs. An investigation into this process will highlight the complex interaction between the military – or more specifically naval – identities of former Wrens, the pacifist principles of some of the Association of Wrens’ leading members and the emotional culture of the Association in general. The need to protect the emotional legacy of the war that lay at heart of the organisation led to the emergence of a novel kind of pacifist rhetoric in *The Wren*, the existence of which sheds new light on the interactions between the LNU and female veterans after 1918.

In 1924, the Association of Wrens became officially affiliated to the Women’s Advisory Council (WAC) of the League of Nations Union (LNU). From 1925, delegates represented the WRNS on a permanent basis on the Council, with at least one member from the in attendance at each of the WAC meetings. Beyond this institutional affiliation, between 1921 and 1937 several articles were published in *The Wren* that dealt directly with aspects of League policy. Some of these articles were written by members of the Association of Wrens who had become involved with the LNU, others were written by League activists working to disseminate the pacifist principles of the movement to a wider audience. Founded in October 1918, the LNU sought to promote the aims and ideals of the League of Nations, an international network of states bound together by commitments laid out in the League Covenant in 1919. Ostensibly formed to ensure the prevention of future conflicts, the League relied on ‘national League of Nations societies’ like the LNU in Britain, whose members ‘signed petitions or protested when their governments
violated its norms’ and ‘studied the Covenant text or went to lectures about its work’.¹²

Eventually establishing itself as ‘the largest and most influential society in the British peace movement’ the LNU, led and directed by classicist and intellectual Gilbert Murray, aimed to ‘popularise the League and the new principles of international relations that came with it’.¹³

Made up of local and regional branches coordinated by a national headquarters, the LNU was ‘one of the largest voluntary organisations of the period’ with links to many existing social, religious and political associations.¹⁴ The LNU evolved to become a key component of ‘a rich and participatory culture of political protest, popular education and civic ritual’ that emerged in the inter-war period and acted as a ‘vehicle for the development of interplay of new dynamics in associational life’ after 1918.¹⁵ The LNU also functioned in an educational capacity, promoting the aims of the League of Nations to the general public and emphasising the values of ‘world citizenship’.¹⁶ These aims included military disarmament in addition to humanitarian concerns including maternal and child welfare.

The involvement of the Association of Wrens and the LNU was to some extent a product of Furse’s friendship with Rachel Crowdy, who was appointed as head of the ‘Social Questions and Opium Trafficking Section’ at the League of Nations.¹⁷ Prior to her appointment as Director of the WRNS in 1917, Furse had worked alongside Crowdy leading the Voluntary Aid Detachments in France.¹⁸ Furse and Crowdy remained close friends after the war and Crowdy was a frequent guest at the reunion dinners and social events held by the Association of Wrens.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 6.
¹⁶ Ibid., p. 104.
¹⁸ See Hebe Spaull, Women Peace-Makers (London: G. G. Harrap & Co., 1924) for further insight into the impact of this experience on both Furse and Crowdy in their post-war lives.
Rachel Crowdy’s two sisters had also served alongside Furse in the WRNS, and after the war became active members of the Wren Association. Isabel Crowdy had transferred from the Voluntary Aid Detachments to the WRNS during the war to become Assistant Director of Training and Inspection and took a leading role in the administration of the Association in 1921. Edith Frances Crowdy had been Deputy Director of the WRNS during the war and became one of the official delegates from the Association of Wrens to attend meetings of the Women’s Advisory Council. Yet it was Rachel Crowdy’s influence that Katharine Furse cited as the reason she became involved in pacifism.

In her autobiography, Furse explained how after the war, ‘I decided once again to dedicate myself to working for understanding and goodwill among peoples, and the way seemed to be opened by the League of Nations . . . Rachel had joined the Secretariat, so I felt in touch with the reality of the League ideal’. Furse went on to represent the ‘Boy Scouts and Girl Guides’ on the Child Welfare Committee of the League of Nations. In 1925, she was also named as an official representative of ‘Women’s Organisations’ on the General Council of the LNU, although it is not clear if she was present as a representative of the Association of Wrens. Furse and Crowdy’s relationship goes some way in explaining the origins of the Association of Wrens’ connection to the LNU, yet it is also clear that Furse, leading ex-servicewomen and LNU activists hoped to use the platform offered by The Wren to wage a concerted recruitment campaign on behalf of the League targeted at former Wrens. The existence of this campaign, and the specific discursive strategies employed by its supporters, shed new light on the gendered dynamics of LNU appeals in the inter-war period. Helen McCarthy has argued that the LNU appealed to women primarily via the promulgation of a ‘maternalist-pacifist’ discourse that argued women had inherent pacifist sympathies due to their maternal identities. However, the articles printed in The Wren related to League politics appealed primarily to the military sensibilities of former servicewomen. Rather than view The Wren as an additional space that served to foster ‘the

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20 Ibid., p. 396.
notion of a distinctive tradition of female peace activism’ the chapter argues instead that the relationship between the Association of Wrens and the LNU complicates McCarthy’s claim that the latter ‘conceptualised women in homogenous terms’ and pursued ‘gendered’ recruitment strategies.23 These arguments, as the chapter will argue, underestimate the agency displayed by women in organisations such as the Association of Wrens. Former servicewomen engaged critically in political debate within the pages of The Wren and in letters and articles they reflected on political debates via a consideration of their own emotional values.

Martin Ceadel has argued that a new brand of pacifist thought emerged within the peace campaign during the in the inter-war period. ‘Pacificism’ as an ideological stance prioritised ‘the abolition of war’ but did not ‘deny that participation in certain defensive wars’ could be ‘justified’.24 Amongst supporters of the League of Nations in particular, pacifism was embraced as a pragmatic approach that could unite nations, ‘secure disarmament’ and ‘ensure peace’.25 The League of Nations Union too was more ‘pacifist’ than ‘pacifist’; the organization did accept that ‘military interventions’ were occasionally necessary.26 Given the Association of Wrens’ affiliation with the LNU and the association’s emphasis on the enduring emotional legacy of wartime service, it is tempting to focus on the ways in which the Association – alongside the League of Nations and LNU – contributed to the flourishing of pacifism that Ceadel claims was so crucial to the evolution of the peace movement after 1918.27 However, as this chapter will argue, to simply categorise The Wren as an additional platform for the dissemination of existing conceptual approaches to pacifist politics undermines the singularity of the type of pacifist argument that found expression in The Wren. The ways in which supporters of pacifism amongst former Wrens sought to promote their political arguments will show clearly the role of memory and emotion in shaping discourses that were tailored specifically to appeal to

23 Ibid., p. 188.
26 McCarthy, The British People and the League of Nations, p. 3.
the legacy of military service at the heart of the emotional community of the Association of Wrens.

In her 1922 appeal, Furse announced to her readers that ‘without peace there cannot be happiness, and happiness is necessary to the keeping of peace’. Yet as we have seen in Chapter One, many members viewed the OCAs as spaces in which their nostalgic lamentations for wartime military service could be shared and understood. Furse’s claim here that ‘peace’ was essential for ‘happiness’ – combined with her attempt to use the journal as a platform for the promotion of pacifist ideology – initially appears to contradict the emphasis on military pride found elsewhere in the pages of The Wren. To allow these two contradictory discourses to co-exist within the journal, leading figures within the OCAs re-configured key LNU appeals to reconcile the OCA’s celebration of military service with the anti-war rhetoric propounded by League activists. The result, as this chapter argues, was the formation of a unique pacifist political discourse that championed the work of the LNU whilst acknowledging the veteran identities of ex-servicewomen and their continued emotional attachment to the WRNS and the Royal Navy. We have already seen in Chapter Two how individuals such as Vera Laughton-Mathews and Cecil Eastgate built on the ideas of Gwynne-Vaughan and others in politicising the OCAs through the promotion of equal rights feminism. As this chapter too will highlight, the promotion of political ideas depended on the ability of these individuals to harness the emotional commitment of OCA members to their military veteran identities. The importance of upholding a legacy of military service defined by certain emotional norms meant Furse and other key individuals within the WRNS had to modify existing political discourses and construct new discursive appeals that corresponded with the emotional community of the OCAs.

Women and Pacifist Politics in the Inter-War Period

Elaborating on her claims regarding the gendered nature of LNU propaganda and the ‘salience’ of maternalist-pacifist discourses, Helen McCarthy has argued that the ‘discursive strategies’ adopted by the LNU ‘drew on the traditional identification of femininity with pacifism and masculinity with militarism’. The result was the reproduction of ‘gendered symbolism’ in ‘League-themed rallies, processions and pageants’ with ‘Peace’ often ‘embodied in female form’. The traditional gendered assumptions that governed the LNU shaped its organisational structure; women were encouraged to join the separate Women’s Advisory Council which, McCarthy claims, largely focused on ‘humanitarian issues’ such as ‘the suppression of the “Mui Tsai” system in Hong Kong’ and the ‘welfare of native populations in the mandated territories’. As McCarthy argues, these gendered divisions within the LNU were replicated in the institutional structures of the League itself. Female delegates appointed to the League Assembly ‘invariably found themselves appointed to the Fifth Commission, which dealt with “social” issues such as trafficking in women and children, refugees, the opium trade and famine relief’. As a result, ‘the League helped to re-constitute [a] social-maternalist tradition on a global level and ensure its survival beyond 1918.’

The ‘distinctive tradition’ of maternalist-pacifism which McCarthy suggests dominated the gendered culture of the League of Nations and the LNU also shaped pacifist campaigns within other international organisations. As Leila Rupp has argued in relation to international women’s movements, the type of pacifist rhetoric found in these spaces reflected the ‘still great consensus’ that ‘women’s difference from men – whether biologically or socially grounded – formed the basis for international organising among women.’ In international feminist organisations such as the International Council of Women, the International Alliance of Women and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, pacifism formed ‘a strong

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component’ but ‘maternalist appeals served as a staple of the propaganda’ of campaign strategies.\textsuperscript{36} As these narratives highlight, pacifist organisations welcomed the involvement of women and contributed to a broader trend in the inter-war period that saw an increase in ‘women’s cross-border social and political activism’.\textsuperscript{37} Yet as McCarthy, Rupp and Taylor all stress, the participation of women in international campaigns was fundamentally shaped by traditional and conservative gendered ideologies that conceptualised women’s activism largely in terms of their identities as mothers.

Evidence from contemporary literature written by women suggests that some female activists did embrace maternalist-pacifism. They utilised this discourse as a means of justifying and promoting women’s involvement in international peace campaigns. In 1929 Florence Brewer Boeckel authored an article in the academic journal \textit{The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science} in which she discussed the role of women in peace campaigns. Boeckel was the associate secretary of the National Council for the Prevention of War, an American organisation set up in 1921 to promote the pacifist cause.\textsuperscript{38} Boeckel was clearly a prominent figure within the American pacifist movement; her arguments therefore offer an interesting insight into the ways in which maternalist-pacifism was conceptualised by leading female members of the pacifist campaign. Often, claims based on women’s innate pacifist sympathies were harnessed precisely to champion the potential role women could play in post-war reconstruction. In her vision for the creation of a new society after the war, Boeckel shared much in common with Katharine Furse. Her conviction that women represented ‘the greatest present factor in educating public opinion for a new world order’ and as such, were of ‘primary


\textsuperscript{38} She was also the author of key texts in pacifist politics, including \textit{Between War and Peace: a handbook for peace workers} (New York: Macmillan, 1928) and \textit{The Turn Toward Peace} (Friendship press: 1930).
importance in international affairs’ echoed Furse’s own belief that a ‘better future’ would only be realised with the full co-operation of women’s organisations.  

However, whilst Furse’s appeal aimed to inspire former servicewomen to join with other OCAs and women’s groups to work together for the ‘new and better ideal’ Boeckel’s article relied on older conceptualisations of women’s role in peace activism. She stated that the maternalist impulse was the primary motivator for women’s behaviour both during war and in peacetime. The only difference between these two contexts, Boeckel argued, was the type of maternal identity women assumed. Now that the war was over, Boeckel urged women to turn ‘away from the role of the Spartan mother with its vicariously won heroism’ and instead implored them ‘to assume the more heroic one of attacking war itself in the defense of their children’.  

Here, maternalism was presented not as a barrier to women’s entry into the political sphere – instead, Boeckel believed that by embracing a more ‘heroic’ and defensive maternal identity women would be well-equipped to contribute to the process of post-war reconstruction. She drew a direct link between the maternal impulse she believed dominated women’s actions and the achievement of peace, writing ‘women’s instinct to consider before all other things the protection of their children cannot be denied, and today the protection of children makes necessary the abolition of war.’ As McCarthy has highlighted with reference to LNU propaganda, the effect of this type of gendered, rhetorical appeal was to conceptualise women as a ‘homogenous group’ united by a primal need to protect their families. Again, the primacy of women’s maternal roles was presented not as an obstacle to the construction of a more equal and progressive politics, but instead was celebrated as a way of securing more diverse perspectives on issues within international politics. Boeckel argued:

because women are concerning themselves with international affairs, social and humanitarian problems in which are involved the welfare, the education, the freedom and happiness of children and of men and

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42 McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations*, p. 188.
women, will receive an emphasis they would not in the new world order.\textsuperscript{43}

Boeckel’s article provides an example of how campaigners utilised ideas around maternalist-pacifism to justify a role for women in international politics. It makes clear the complexities of the arguments communicated by activists who understood that by asserting the uniqueness of their maternal perspectives, women could stake a claim in the political world of international peace campaigns.

An article by Florence B. Low in the \textit{League of Nations Union Journal} further confirms McCarthy’s claim about the dominance of maternalist-pacifism within the LNU. Low’s article sought to educate housewives and mothers on the vital role they could play in the fight for international peace. She wrote that out of ‘all women it is the mother who wields the most influence’ due to the fact that she had the potential to ‘train up a generation to seek peace and ensue it.’\textsuperscript{44} Pre-empting the arguments made later by Boeckel, Low enforced the idea that not only could women play a significant role in pacifist campaigns, their participation was essential to the success of the cause. She warned that if mothers did not accept their ‘mighty responsibility’ in this area, ‘only chaos lies before us.’\textsuperscript{45} In the hands of mothers, Boeckel claimed, lay ‘the destiny of the world.’\textsuperscript{46} In less grandiose terms, Low proceeded to set out how women could begin to involve themselves in the LNU by reinvigorating the idea of ‘“Mother’s Meetings”’.\textsuperscript{47} Although she acknowledged that this idea had ‘an old-fashioned ring’ she reminded her readers that ‘in their day they did a good work’ and posited the idea of a new, ‘modernised version of such conferences where mothers meet together and discuss, in an informal fashion, practical ways and means of creating a “League of Nations atmosphere” in the home’.\textsuperscript{48} These suggestions were imbued again with the assumption that in order to appeal to

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., pp. 247 – 248.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
women, political rhetoric had to be rooted in an awareness of women’s maternal identities and domestic lives.

However, Low also referenced the ‘radical’ aspects of this maternalist-pacifist discourse. Like Furse and Boeckel, Low believed that women had a key part to play in the reconstruction of post-war society. She argued that women were uniquely placed ‘to inculcate principles of peace and Christian ethics which are the basis of the League, and to prepare a newer and better world for the generation now growing up.’ This reference to ‘a newer and better world’ along with Boeckel’s later mention of a ‘new world order’ shed light on the discursive parallels between Furse’s message in *The Wren* and arguments made both within the LNU and elsewhere in academic journals. Whilst both these articles point initially to a degree of discursive overlap between the rhetoric communicated in *The Wren* and that found both in international, academic literature and LNU journals, a closer look at the political appeals made by members of the WRNS will challenge the apparent dominance of maternalist-pacifism as an ideological construct within pacifist politics. Having illustrated the degree to which women such as Boeckel and Low – who whilst clearly unified in their politics were writing in distinctly different spaces – bought into the radical potential of maternalist-pacifism, the singularity of the claims made by former servicewomen can be fully appreciated. By illuminating the linguistic and thematic differences between articles written by former servicewomen in *The Wren* and more official LNU literature, what follows will challenge the arguments made by McCarthy and others that women’s involvement in and support for League policies was primarily due to their receptiveness to maternalist-pacifist appeals.

Muriel Currey had been Assistant Director of Recruiting in the WRNS during the First World War. She was an enthusiastic member of the Association of Wrens, often appearing as the representative of the organisation during the Armistice Day celebrations at the Cenotaph in London. She also drafted detailed reports of reunion dinners – the content of which make clear her investment in the emotional community of the Association of Wrens. Reflecting on the annual reunion dinner in December 1929, Currey described how former Wrens in attendance

\[49\text{Ibid.}\]
‘spoke of old ties and new ties’ and ‘made those jests that are so dear to the heart of ex-service women which would be Greek to the outsider, but are links in the chain of a common tradition which binds us together.’\(^{50}\) As her emotional reflection here makes clear, Currey believed strongly that women’s experience of military service had forged unique and long-lasting bonds between female veterans. Currey was also an active member of alternative associations such as the All Peoples’ Association, ‘a world service non-party association to promote by every means in its power a good understanding between the peoples of the world’ that sought to ‘make the peoples of the world better known to one another by personal contact, by the printed word, by radio, by correspondence, by the interchange of university’.\(^{51}\) Clearly civic-minded and committed to the reconstruction of post-war society, Currey was also attracted to the emerging Fascist movement. She was one of several individuals in Britain ‘who admired Fascist Italy’ and became particularly interested in the condition of ‘women under Italian Fascism’ and contributed to the periodicals of the British fascist movement including *The English Review* and the *Blackshirt*.\(^{52}\) In 1934, she co-authored with Harold E. Goad, Director of the British Institute in Florence, *The Working of the Corporate State*.\(^{53}\) But Currey’s primary associational affiliation alongside her membership of the OCA was the League of Nations Union. Currey was one of the most prolific speakers for the LNU and travelled across Britain giving lectures on the aims of the League. In September 1921, *The Wren* reported proudly that ‘Miss Currey . . . is an indefatigable speaker on behalf of the League of Nations Union and has attended both Assemblies of the League in Geneva.’\(^{54}\) Evidence from the LNU’s journal *Headway* tells us that Currey spoke on over seventeen occasions between January and April 1921 giving lectures and talks in Portsmouth, Aberystwyth, Bromley and Birmingham amongst others.\(^{55}\)

In October 1921, the *Western Daily Press* reported in full the speech given by Currey at Mansion House, the headquarters of the Mayor of London, as part of a large gathering of LNU members. Currey gave a brief history of the League, before highlighting some of its current campaigns in

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\(^{54}\) ‘News of Ex-WRNS Members’, *The Wren*, September 1921.

\(^{55}\) See ‘Forthcoming Meetings’ in Jan, Feb, March, April 1921 editions of *Headway*. 
relation to unemployment and disarmament before making a final appeal to attendees to join the LNU. Similarly, in November 1924, a report in the *Hull Daily Mail* mentioned Currey and her attendance at a meeting of the Beverley Branch of the LNU. Currey, who was listed as one of the principal speakers ‘from headquarters’ who had ‘attended every one of the five meetings of the Assembly at Geneva as an observer’ and had ‘spoke on the growth and development of the League, and explained in detail the new protocol which had been proposed for the purpose of effecting a reduction in armaments’. Again in October 1928 the *Dundee Courier* reported on a speech made by Currey at a LNU gathering in Dunblane, in which she made clear that ‘the League was stronger, more vital, and the delegates more courageous than formerly. They could not imagine a world now without a League of Nations.’ In addition to her speaking role, Currey also helped to organise and run ‘The National Pilgrimage and Hyde Park Demonstration’ – a procession and demonstration that passed through major towns throughout Britain, seeking to recruit members and gain support for the LNU. As well as being one of the most prolific speakers for the LNU, Currey often wrote articles for the LNU journal *Headway* and its companion publication, *Headway: The Monthly Progress of the LNU*.

In May 1921, Muriel Currey authored an article in *The Wren* entitled ‘To Seek Peace and Ensue It’. The phrase within this title – taken from a quotation from the Bible’s New Testament – was originally found in Low’s article, in her argument highlighting the role mothers could play in training their children ‘to seek peace and ensue it’. The discursive overlap here, combined with the fact Currey’s article appeared only 6 months after the publication of Low’s feature in the *League of Nations Union Journal* suggests that the repetition of this phrase in these two different contexts was more than a coincidence. Given the extent of Currey’s involvement with the LNU, it is fair to assume that she had read Low’s article and taken the phrase ‘to seek peace and ensue it’ from the piece for use in her own article published in *The Wren*. Whilst she does not directly reference Low in her article the singularity of the phrase ‘to seek peace and ensue it’ and its

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60 Low, ‘The Mother’s Role in the League of Nations’.
apparent absence elsewhere in the journals of the LNU further suggests that Currey had encountered Low’s article. Both authors aimed to secure support for the League of Nations through their articles, yet beyond this mutual aim and their shared use of a specific biblical phrase, the articles differ significantly in their approach. In her 1921 article, Currey outlined what the League was, and detailed its key aims and principles. But beyond this, Currey constructed an appeal based on the reasons why former Wrens in particular should support the LNU and crucially, her arguments were based on the fact that ex-servicewomen had experienced conflict ‘first-hand’.\(^{61}\) She claimed that former Wrens would fully appreciate the campaign to secure world peace, precisely because of their wartime service, which had exposed women to the realities and horrors of warfare. She spoke of the ‘lessons’ ex-servicewomen had ‘learnt by bitter experience of the war’ which included an understanding of the importance ‘of the interdependence of the nations’.\(^{62}\) Appealing to the patriotism of her readers, Currey further reminded former Wrens ‘if we wish for the happiness and prosperity of our country, we must work for the happiness and prosperity of the world.’\(^{63}\)

Currey highlighted the distinct characteristics possessed by the Wrens as a product of their wartime service and drew connections between these naval qualities and the values promoted by the LNU. She wrote,

> It is not selfishness nor laziness nor cowardice which will safeguard the future of the League of Nations, but a love of justice and fair dealing, a desire to protect the weak and the helpless and a readiness to embark on difficult and arduous enterprises, characteristics which we believe to be peculiarly the property of the British Navy. Therefore it is continuing the traditions of our Service if we support the League of Nations.\(^{64}\)

In her appeal, Currey forged links between the Navy and the League of Nations, overriding any potential contradiction here by referring to the more universal qualities of ‘justice’, hard work

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\(^{63}\) *Ibid.*
\(^{64}\) *Ibid.*
and endurance which she claimed were applicable in both the military and in pacifist campaigns. The explicit attempt to establish continuity between wartime service and League activism makes clear here how Currey adapted existing political discourses to more accurately reflect the emotional values that defined the Association of Wrens. Whilst Currey had read Low’s article, her own feature in *The Wren* is marked by the absence of any mention of a maternalist-pacifist discourse. Instead, an awareness of the enduring emotional attachment members of the Association of Wrens felt towards the Navy was fundamental in determining the rhetoric within this appeal.

These articles – Boeckel’s appeal for a heroic maternalism, Low’s attempt to re-imagine ‘mother’s meetings’ as sites of pacifist activism and Currey’s determination to infuse existing rhetoric with the gendered militarism of the OCAs – all aimed in different ways to encourage women to take an active role in pacifist politics. Each article demonstrated a commitment to the promotion of women’s politics in the international sphere, yet the divergence in discursive strategies adopted by these authors is clear. An active member of both the Association of Wrens and the LNU, Currey was determined to build on Furse’s message and further introduce pacifist politics into *The Wren*. But it is also apparent that she was aware of the unique emotional culture of the Association of Wrens; she understood that an appeal grounded in assumptions about the primacy of women’s maternal identities would be less effective than one which celebrated the continued connection members felt to the Royal Navy. Her article therefore provides a key example of the ways in which dominant pacifist discourses were re-framed within the emotional community of the female veteran associations. Currey – whose own emotional investment in the legacy of war was displayed in her belief in the ‘common tradition’ that bound ex-servicewomen together – was clearly cognizant of the need to tailor an appeal that could resolve any tensions between the militarist culture of the Association of Wrens and the pacifist message of the LNU.65 Currey presented her readers with a model of gendered pacifist activism that was rooted in an acknowledgement of the value of women’s military service. Refuting the idea that support for the pacifist movement entailed a rejection of military values, Currey constructed an effective...

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appeal which presented peace activism as a means of ‘continuing the traditions’ of Naval service – an ambition which, as we have seen, was central to the culture of the Association of Wrens.\footnote{Muriel Currey, ‘To Seek Peace and Ensuie It’, \textit{The Wren}, May 1921.}

Beyond its dismissal of maternalist-pacifism, Currey’s article is also significant in the way in which it tentatively sought to re-frame wartime service as an ambiguous experience that engendered a more complex legacy. Her reference to the ‘bitter experience’ of war points to a more negative appraisal of wartime service in \textit{The Wren}, yet her determination to emphasise the fact that ‘justice and fair dealing, a desire to protect the weak and the helpless and a readiness to embark on difficult and arduous enterprises’ were qualities shared by the LNU and the Navy underscore her determination to present the positive legacy of military service.\footnote{Ibid.} In reference to the recruitment strategies directed at former servicemen, McCarthy has shown how LNU activists were forced to negotiate the reality of the fact that ‘Britain remained a martial nation’.\footnote{McCarthy, \textit{The British People and the League of Nations}, pp. 133 – 134.} They did so by ‘weaving a narrative of mutuality between the nation’s military past and future contribution to collective security.’\footnote{Ibid., pp. 133 – 134.} Currey’s article, with her reference to war as a ‘bitter experience’ and claims about pacifism as a continuation of military tradition could therefore be read as an example of a ‘narrative of mutuality’ which acknowledged the pride felt in the military services whilst condemning warfare more generally.

The centrality of military pride within the emotional culture of the Association of Wrens rendered this acknowledgment of the importance of Naval traditions paramount in any pacifist appeal. Yet Vera Laughton-Mathews deemed it necessary to broadly dismiss the conflict and horror that warfare entailed. In December 1922 Laughton-Mathews – who, as we have seen in Chapter Two, was also involved with the international feminist movement – published an article entitled ‘Peace on Earth’ in \textit{The Wren}. In this article, Laughton-Mathews launched a scathing attack on those who continued to celebrate ‘the pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war’ and still rejoiced in the ‘struggle against the odds’ and the ‘heroism’ and ‘sacrifice’ supposedly...
experienced by combatants.\textsuperscript{70} As with Furse’s appeal published at the beginning of 1922, Laughton-Mathews’ condemnation of the proponents of a heroic narrative of wartime service is striking in the context of \textit{The Wren}. Laughton-Mathews’ article is initially notable for its attack on the notion of a ‘‘glorious war’’ to which many of her fellow servicewomen remained attached.\textsuperscript{71} However closer examination also illustrates that, like Currey, she sought to resolve the tensions inherent in promoting pacifist ideals in the context of the Association of Wrens. Addressing her readers, Laughton-Mathews wrote ‘we know better’, claiming that ex-Wrens were less willing than others to champion the ‘‘pride” and “pomp” of war.\textsuperscript{72} On behalf of the WRNS OCA, Laughton-Mathews stated that former Wrens knew the reality of war, given the ‘sights we have seen’ and ‘the tales that we have listened to.’\textsuperscript{73} The emphasis on the Wrens’ first-hand experience of the horrors of war was not a wholesale repudiation of the positive legacy of wartime service promoted elsewhere in \textit{The Wren}. Rather it was an attempt on Laughton-Mathews’ behalf to claim ‘the authority of direct experience.’\textsuperscript{74} As Alison Fell has argued, many of the women who had served in the war consciously adopted certain narrative techniques as a means of seeking validation for their own experiences of wartime in the inter-war period.

Crucially, often these narratives forced women ‘to emphasise their proximity to the front and to outline the connection between their own stories and the culturally and politically dominant male combat narrative.’\textsuperscript{75} This may not have been a solely discursive strategy; although the Wrens were based in Britain throughout the war, their location in port towns meant that women would have met soldiers both leaving and returning to the front as well as sailors with naval warfare experience. It is also plausible that the encounters between members of the WRNS and the Royal Navy would have exposed women to various ‘sights’ and ‘tales’ that would have offered insights into the full horrors of active combat. However, Laughton-Mathews’ deployment of these claims in this context suggests that her narrative had a specific rhetorical purpose. Referring to the first-

\textsuperscript{70} Vera S. Laughton, ‘Peace on Earth’, \textit{The Wren}, December 1922. Vera is known by her maiden name here as she was not yet married.
\textsuperscript{71} Laughton, ‘Peace on Earth’.
\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{74} Alison S. Fell, \textit{Women as Veterans in Britain and France after the First World War} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 160.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Ibid}. , p. 160.
hand experience of warfare amongst members of the WRNS – even if this experience was negative – did in fact complement the existing emotional culture of the Association of Wrens. In making this claim, Laughton-Mathews stressed the authenticity of the Wrens’ military service. The consistent attempts made at reunion dinners and in the journal to stress the influence of Naval values on former Wrens make clear the determination of OCA members to stress their identities as naval veterans. By highlighting the insights former servicewomen possessed regarding the realities of warfare, Laughton-Mathews appealed to a collective desire amongst the membership to assert their legitimate claims to veteran status. In this way, we can see how this type of pacifist appeal became attuned to the associational dynamics and emotional culture of the Association of Wrens.

Laughton-Mathews’ attempt to draw on the realities of women’s wartime service in her pacifist appeal was a strategy adopted elsewhere by LNU activists. In a pamphlet published in 1918 Irene McArthur, a member of the LNU, reflected on the role of women in League politics. In many ways her article echoed the claims made by Laughton-Mathews; McArthur too urged women to look back on the realities of their wartime service and acknowledge the hardship and ultimate brutality of warfare. She wrote:

During the last four years women have worked together on committees, and in offices and munitions works, and on the land, and we have suffered and mourned together, but in the strain of work and the loneliness of grief we have been sustained by the thought that we were working, not only to help our country win this particular war, but to bring nearer the ideal of peace between nations.76

Yet whilst McArthur’s appeal is similar to Laughton-Mathews’ article in highlighting the connection between the emotional legacy of women’s war work and the peace campaign, her emphasis on women as mourners and sufferers stands in direct contrast to Laughton-Mathews’ presentation of Wrens as active witnesses to the horrors of combat. McArthur’s rallying cry to

her readers – ‘we must put our backs into this movement for the sake of our children even more than for our own’ – again suggested that women’s entry into the pacifist movement was via their maternalism rather than their military or service identities.\textsuperscript{77} When read alongside McArthur’s article, the differences in Laughton-Mathews’ appeal become clear. Whilst Laughton-Mathews’ rejection of war initially posed a challenge to the dominant emotional norms of the Association of Wrens, her argument that the Wrens possessed direct knowledge of warfare in fact further validated their claims to veteran status.

Like Currey, Laughton-Mathews critiqued ‘war’ in general terms, rather than the specific Naval traditions cherished by her readers. This was a distinction she made elsewhere in her contributions to \textit{The Wren}. Speaking at the annual dinner of the Association of Wrens in December 1929, Laughton-Mathews stated ‘we are not commemorating war . . . we are commemorating the spirit of comradeship and the spirit of service – two of the finest things in the world.’\textsuperscript{78} At a later reunion dinner in January 1934, Laughton-Mathews celebrated the ‘once a year opportunity of testifying to our love and admiration for the greatest Sea Service in the world.’\textsuperscript{79} The author of the report noted that Laughton-Mathews had spoken ‘of the romance and beauty of the sea and shipping, and said that this feeling for the sea was peculiarly British, part of our national heritage and something that we did well to foster’.\textsuperscript{80} It is evident that Laughton-Mathews was committed to upholding the emotional values of the Association of Wrens; her refusal to celebrate war did not prevent her from applauding the ‘spirit of comradeship’, ‘the spirit of service’ and the ‘the greatest Sea Service in the world.’\textsuperscript{81} Like Currey, Laughton-Mathews demonstrated in her appeal an awareness of the importance of military pride to her readers, but she still sought to inculcate in her fellow Wrens the need to support the pacifist cause. Her attempt to negotiate both these demands saw Laughton-Mathews make bigger claims about the need for citizens to move beyond the pursuit of conflict and instead to ‘battle against any of the great evils of civilisation which are as deep-rooted as the spirit of war itself –

\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{76} ‘The Annual Dinner’, \textit{The Wren}, December 1929.
\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Ibid.}
immorality, destitution, intemperance’. Instead of blindly pursuing alternative opportunities for military combat, Laughton-Mathews urged her readers to think through the possibility of introducing ‘a spirit of adventure into the fight of peace-time.’ In doing so, she utilised military language to construct what was essentially a rallying cry for the maintenance of peace, appealing to the sense of boredom, frustration, and loss that many ex-servicewomen reported to have felt after their demobilisation. As we saw in Chapter One, women like Edith Curtis and Norah Atkinson articulated the disappointment they felt on embarking on new civilian lives that lacked the common purpose and comradeship that military service had offered. By framing pacifist politics as ‘the fight of peace-time’ Laughton-Mathews harnessed these feelings of dislocation and dissatisfaction to strengthen the rhetorical appeal of her message.

In Chapter Two, we saw how political discourses related to electoral campaigns, British Legion membership controversies and equal rights feminism were all shaped by an awareness of the need to create a new political subjectivity amongst members of the OCAs, one that acknowledged the political significance of their military service. In many ways, the promotion of pacifism within The Wren was also part of this wider strategy. Leading figures such as Katharine Furse and Vera Laughton-Mathews were once more encouraging female veterans to think about ways in which their experience of military service could be put to effective use in the broader project of post-war reconstruction. Viewing the arguments made by former Wrens alongside the writings of other female pacifist campaigners allows us to see the emergence of a distinct pacifist discourse within the pages of The Wren. Laughton-Mathews and Currey knew that in order to promote peace politics to members of the Association of Wrens, a new political language had to be adopted that could effectively incorporate women’s naval identities into a defence of disarmament and international peace. Currey sought to present pacifist activism as an extension of naval service, whilst Laughton-Mathews sought to validate the first-hand military experience of the Wrens. As the next section illustrates, writers working for the League of Nations Union also adopted the key tenets of this pacifist discourse. These articles will further highlight the ways in which pacifist rhetoric was re-configured within the emotional community of the OCAs.

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82 Vera S. Laughton, ‘Peace on Earth’.
83 Ibid.
**Promoting the League: LNU writers in The Wren**

The contributions made by Muriel Currey and Vera Laughton-Mathews in *The Wren* helped construct a pacifist discourse that acknowledged the emotional investment of OCA members in their Naval identities whilst also condemning war as a brutal and ‘bitter’ experience from which society needed to be protected. Contrary to the appeals devised elsewhere by pacifist campaigners, ideas about maternalism were side-lined in arguments that were rooted firmly in the emotional culture of the Association of Wrens. The articles by Currey and Laughton-Mathews therefore shaped the discursive boundaries of the pacifist campaign waged in the pages of *The Wren*. The following section further illustrates the process by which ex-servicewomen promoted a unique pacifist campaign in *The Wren* through an investigation into articles written by LNU activists and which were published in *The Wren*. The content of these articles worked within the boundaries established by Currey and Laughton-Mathews; a distinct absence of maternalist appeals further highlights the variety of rhetorical strategies adopted by writers working for the LNU. However, the debate that ensued after one author discredited the reputation of the Royal Navy will highlight the fragility of the relationship between the LNU and the Association of Wrens, a relationship that was predicated on the former’s acceptance of the emotional values that defined the associational culture of the Association of Wrens.

In June 1924, Lucy P. Mair published an article in *The Wren* entitled ‘What the League Has Done’ that set out the key achievements of the international organisation since 1919. Mair was a lecturer in Colonial Administration at the London School of Economics but worked with the LNU, publishing frequently in *Headway*. In her article, Mair focused not on the strident anti-war message promoted elsewhere in League propaganda, but instead emphasised the humanitarian work of the League, stressing the key role of the international organisation in aiding the process of reconstruction in the aftermath of the war. The role of the ‘Humanitarian Section’ in tackling drug trafficking and preventing international health epidemics was underlined in an article which sought to communicate to readers the communitarian ideals that underpinned the League of
Nations. Mair reminded readers that the League was ‘responsible for most of the successful reconstruction work that has been done in Europe since the war’. She made clear her belief that in ‘the friendly work’ of the organisation, ‘side by side with men and women from all over the world’ lay ‘the best hopes for the future of international goodwill’. Here, the League was presented not as a powerful international pressure group seeking unilateral disarmament, but a charitable organisation working on an international level whose ‘friendly work’ was rooted in its humanitarian mission to aid the process of post-war reconstruction.

Mair’s presentation of the League here echoed Katharine Furse’s own promotion of pacifism in January 1922. Mair’s emphasis on the importance of men and women working together in a trans-national partnership in the name of ‘international goodwill’ shared much in common with Furse’s vision of a more co-operative and less individualist society united in the name of peace. In her article, Mair upheld the long-established link between femininity and charity work. The lack of any political discussion of the mandates system or League intervention in foreign policy could be read as further confirmation of McCarthy’s claim that the LNU conceptualised women ‘in homogenous terms’ via ‘the generalised and undifferentiated category of woman’. The promotion of the League of Nations via an endorsement of humanitarian work in this article could be given as evidence of the dominance of the ‘maternalist-pacifist’ discourse within LNU recruitment strategies. Yet the clear discursive links between this article and Furse’s earlier New Year’s message suggest that rather than entrench conservative assumptions about the nature of women’s political activism, Mair was in fact constructing an appeal tailored more to the norms and values that defined the emotional community of the OCAs. In this light, the lack of any overt engagement with disarmament policies or conflict resolution in the article indicates an awareness on the part of Mair that such strident anti-war rhetoric would not be welcomed in a veteran organisation that remained wedded to nostalgic narratives of wartime service.

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84 Lucy P. Mair, ‘What the League Has Done’, The Wren, June 1924.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 McCarthy, The British People and the League of Nations, p. 188.
Mair’s article suggests that the LNU actively targeted female veterans as potential recruits to the pacifist cause. Moreover, the emphasis in her article on reconstruction and ‘goodwill’ suggests that Mair deliberately constructed this message to conform to existing pacifist discourses within the journal. Two further articles published in *The Wren* by Leslie R. Aldous similarly suggest that the LNU was adapting its rhetoric for appeals directed at ex-servicewomen. Aldous was a staff member at the LNU Headquarters in London and published in *Headway* and the national press on League issues and international politics. Both Aldous’ articles provided detailed analysis of specific League policies and organisations in a way that made clear his intention to educate ex-servicewomen. His first article, published in *The Wren* in March 1926, described the work of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), a component body of the League of Nations. The success of the ILO in championing the ‘fight against the traffic in women and children’ was stressed before Aldous went on to discuss the role of the organisation in coordinating the ‘development of international labour legislation’. The specific conventions adopted as a result of ILO campaigning were detailed, which included policies that dealt with ‘Hours of Work, Unemployment, Women’s Employment before and after childbirth . . . Minimum Age of Employment, Night Work for Young Persons . . . and various agricultural and maritime conventions’. The conventions detailed here were varied and suggest that Aldous did not feel the need to focus specifically on ‘maternalist’ policies.

Aldous’ second article, published in November 1926, focused more narrowly on the results of the League’s Seventh Assembly in 1926. Avoiding any real engagement with the controversial decision of the Assembly to admit Germany to the League, Aldous briefly conceded that the event had ‘not unnaturally, rather disturbed the balance of the Assembly’ before moving swiftly on to a discussion of the Slavery Convention adopted by the same Assembly. This, he argued ‘must be regarded with satisfaction as the Convention’s adoption heralded the commencement of ‘a grand attack . . . on slavery and disguised forms of slavery in countries where the evil still exists’. The decision taken by both Mair and Aldous to avoid any discussion of the League’s

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ongoing disarmament campaigns is striking, particularly given the prominence of this issue in the LNU. In January 1921 at the meeting of the General Council of the LNU, a motion was carried intended to express on behalf of members a ‘hearty appreciation’ of the League’s continued commitment to ‘international co-operation and peace’ whilst also communicating ‘a strong hope that more definite proposals will be adopted in the immediate future in regard to the reduction of armaments’ – an issue they believed demanded ‘practical and urgent action’. The year prior to the publication of the articles by Mair and Aldous, the General Council of the LNU also moved motions on ‘Armaments and Arbitration’ and ‘Security and Disarmament’.

Again, whilst the emphasis in Aldous’ articles on the charitable and humanitarian campaigns may appear initially to be an endorsement of conservative models of gendered activism, Aldous’ concluding remark in his first article makes clear that his aim was to present former servicewomen with a view of the League as an ambitious, transformative organisation driven by dreams of a new, collaborative world order. Following his overview of League policies, Aldous wrote:

> all this is only a beginning. But the experience of the past six years has made it clear that only by co-operation of this description along international lines, both in the industrial and in the political spheres, can the world’s problems be solved.

Both Mair and Aldous offered former Wrens a detailed introduction to some of the League’s campaigns and affiliated organisations whilst also articulating aspirational visions for a new future in which the League of Nations would play a pivotal role. The avoidance of an antimilitarist discourse related to the motions endorsed by the LNU complicates our understanding of the ways in which the LNU sought to recruit women. Neither Mair nor Aldous directly refer to women as ‘mothers’ or make any mention of ‘pacifism’ as an ideology that advocated the permanent cessation of all forms of conflict. As we have seen, writers including Florence Low

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94 Minutes of the 10th Meeting of the General Council, January 1925.
and Florence Brewer Boeckel adopted this type of gendered recruitment strategy. The absence of maternalism-pacifism in the articles written by LNU activists in *The Wren* suggests that these writers were aware of the culture of female veteran associations and adjusted their rhetoric accordingly to generate support for the League. The astuteness demonstrated by Mair and Aldous in constructing appeals that would merge with the existing pacifist discourse shaped by Furse, Currey and Laughton-Mathews is highlighted in the response to articles published by Alec Wilson, another LNU official, in June and July 1929 in *The Wren*.

Wilson was a prolific writer and speaker for the LNU. As well as publishing numerous articles on a range of issues related to current League policies, it was reported in *Headway* that in May 1930 Wilson had spoken to ‘over 2000 people’ in Grimsby and had attended ‘26 gatherings in five days.’

In June 1929, Wilson published an article in *The Wren* that critiqued the international disarmament programme coordinated by the League of Nations. Wilson claimed that progress in relation to full disarmament – the League’s ‘first and most important task’ – had been ‘thoroughly unsatisfactory’. For Wilson, the fact that ‘the world is still spending, on killing machines, out of its depleted resources, at much the same rate as in 1913’ was evidence that ‘all the talk for ten years had led nowhere’. Yet despite his claims here, Wilson warned his readers against defeatism and outlined to former Wrens the aspects of the latest disarmament policy produced by the League that he believed gave cause for optimism. The resolutions adopted at the 1926 League Commission on Disarmament now made it possible, Wilson argued, ‘to make a real beginning to the debate on International Disarmament’.

The shift in tone from the earlier articles written by Mair and Aldous to Wilson’s overtly critical articles is marked. In a departure from the idealistic visions that had defined the earlier LNU articles, Wilson continued his discussion of the progress of the disarmament campaign in his second article, published in July 1929 in *The Wren*. Here, Wilson focused more on the diplomatic relations between Britain and the USA and blamed the obstinacy and intransigence of two nations for impeding the progression of the League’s disarmament strategy. According to

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98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
Wilson, ‘the main issue of International Disarmament is narrowed down to-day to one question: on what terms can Great Britain and America agree?’ The refusal of either nation to commit to a significant reduction in their naval forces had convinced Wilson of the urgency with which ‘a workable arrangement with America’ needed to be agreed. The importance of achieving this agreement lay in the fact that the reduction of both British and American ‘naval establishments’ was a necessary step in order to ‘prevent successful resort to war’. It was this argument about international disarmament – and naval disarmament in particular – that led to the outbreak of serious debate within the correspondence pages of *The Wren*.

The correspondence pages of *The Wren* in 1924 and 1929 contain no reference to the articles written by Mair and Aldous. Whilst the appearance of any appeal from a well-known pacifist organisation may have confused those members who had joined the OCAs to maintain a connection to their former military identities, the specific issues raised were clearly not contentious enough to lead former Wrens to protest. As the chapter so far has argued, the similarities in tone and rhetoric between the LNU articles and the pacifist message constructed by Furse, Currey and others may have assuaged fears that affiliation with the LNU signalled the OCA’s rejection of the more positive narratives of wartime service shared by the membership. By contrast, in 1929 individuals within the Association of Wrens interpreted Wilson’s call for an urgent decrease in naval spending as a precondition to peace as a direct attack on the value and integrity of the Royal Navy. Other pacifist arguments published in *The Wren* had avoided overt condemnation of war and instead argued that a more peaceable future would be achieved through the structures and mechanisms of the League of Nations. Here, however, it was felt that Wilson had gone too far by directly equating the Royal Navy with the forces of militarism, undermining the emotional attachment that members of the Association of Wrens felt towards their former service. The debate that ensued in the correspondence pages of *The Wren* highlights the fact that pacifist discourses went unchallenged only when LNU writers critiqued war in general terms in ways that did not violate the distinction drawn by Currey and Laughton-Mathews between the horrors of conflict and the pride women felt having served in the WRNS.

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101 *Ibid*.
102 *Ibid*.
Former Wren Mrs. D. A. Wallace emerged as one of the most avid defenders of the Royal Navy as Wilson’s arguments were challenged within the pages of *The Wren*. Wallace was an active member of the Wren Association and published a report of her attendance at a lecture given at Central Hall, Westminster entitled ‘The British Empire and the World – Is It Peace?’ in December 1929 edition of *The Wren*. Wallace quoted in detail from a lecture that was profuse in its praise for the Navy which, the lecturer stated was ‘not merely a branch of the fighting services to us. It is not just the Army or the Air Force, of both of which we are proud. The sea is our romance, it is our poetry, it is our national history.’ Wallace added her own reflections on the lecture, concurring with the speaker that ‘the deep love of the sea is indeed firmly welded into our national character and it has for countless ages coloured our very thoughts.’ Wallace further communicated her deep emotional attachment to the Navy at the annual Association of Wrens reunion dinner in November 1929. Wallace’s speech at the dinner saw her reflect on ‘the burning question of Naval Disarmament’ and state her belief that the ‘Empire is the greatest the world has ever seen, and the farthest flung; it was founded by and on sea-power, and the sea is the connecting link’. Continuing, Wallace warned her fellow Wrens to not ‘be misled by those people who talk as though England’s Navy were the chief obstacle to the peace of the world’. Wallace had articulated her defence of the Royal Navy and its significance to Britain’s international standing prior to the publication of Alec Wilson’s report.

As someone clearly informed of the issues surrounding Naval Disarmament and the threats posed to Royal Navy by the League’s standing on this issue, Wallace responded to the claims made by Wilson by restating her belief that the Royal Navy was crucial to the maintenance of international peace in an article entitled ‘Sea Power and The League of Nations’ published in the January 1930 edition of *The Wren*. Echoing these earlier arguments, Wallace’s response to Wilson made clear that her opposition to the League of Nations was founded on their naval disarmament policy. Her belief in the continued importance of the Navy in protecting the Empire

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104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
prevented her from joining the LNU. She wrote that the British Empire ‘welded and guarded by our Navy, has already secured for nearly a quarter of the globe those ideals of peace for which the League is working’. 108 Wallace condemned League policy precisely because she felt the campaign to reduce Naval armaments would threaten international peace. Wallace’s article demonstrates the complex ways in which ex-servicewomen interacted with League politics. Although reflecting an engagement with disarmament policy on an intellectual level, Wallace’s arguments – based on a determination to protect the power and influence of the Royal Navy – were undoubtedly a product of her wartime service. Loyalty to the Navy was clearly a priority for Wallace, who unapologetically stated that if her defence of the Navy constituted a ‘challenge to the League of Nations, then I am afraid I am not sufficiently in sympathy with the League to join it’. 109

Wallace’s article provides an insight into how individual feelings of loyalty to the Naval force and pacifist sympathies interacted. Wallace’s identity as a former Wren was crucial in structuring her response to the League. However, other Wrens were not content to let Wallace’s arguments go unchallenged. Responding to Wallace’s critique of League policy, Muriel Currey offered further explanation of the reasoning behind the campaign for Naval disarmament. Currey contested Wallace’s claim that a decreased Naval force would harm the international peace process, referring to Alec Wilson’s articles on disarmament published in The Wren in June and July 1929. Following this, Currey quoted from a speech made by the King at the recent Naval Conference held by the League of Nations. 110 The King, Currey highlighted, understood the importance of the League’s ‘object of eliminating the evil results of wasteful competition in Naval armaments’. 111 The policy of disarmament was, Currey stressed, about efficiency as well as a reduction in Naval armaments. But Currey was not afraid of declaring her support for general disarmament, including in her article a further quotation from the King in which he stated ‘in the edifice of peace which we are seeking to build, one of its most important columns is agreement between maritime nations in the limitation of naval strength to a point consistent

109 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
with national security’. Unlike Wallace, Currey did not allow her clear emotional attachment for the Royal Navy prevent her from supporting disarmament. But despite the differences in priorities evident in the articles published by Wallace and Currey, they both demonstrate that the nature of debate and discussion surrounding League policy in the pages of The Wren was not structured around these women’s identities as mothers. Both expressed their support for pacifist aims but differed in the extent to which they believed the policy of Naval disarmament would succeed in achieving these aims.

Debate broke out again in The Wren in August and September 1930 in relation to the League’s attempt to impose a new Naval treaty that would hasten the process of disarmament. In July 1930, the journal printed an article that detailed the recent parliamentary debate on the key features of the treaty. The article described how Lord Beatty and Lord Jellicoe had ‘impeached the Government for signing away the sea power from which the Empire derives its very existence’. Both Lord Beatty and Lord Jellicoe argued that any reduction in Naval power would result in a drastic curtailment of Britain’s power in the international sphere. Former Wren Hilda Buckmaster wrote to The Wren in August 1930 to protest against the article given its overt anti-League sentiment. Given the strong associational ties between the OCA and the LNU, Buckmaster expressed her dismay that the article had been ‘given pride of place in the July number of The Wren’ particularly as the ‘Association of Wrens . . . is represented on the Women’s Advisory Council of the League of Nations Union’. For Buckmaster, defence of the Naval treaty and opposition to disarmament was less important than the campaign for international peace. Buckmaster argued that Wrens, ‘following the example of our Director, should surely be foremost in advocating “the promotion of international co-operation and the achievement of international peace and Security”’. Unconvinced by Buckmaster’s attempts to advocate the prioritisation of international disarmament, D. A. Wallace once again wrote to The Wren to express her support for the Navy. Wallace disagreed with Buckmaster’s objection to the publication of an article expressing anti-League views, critiquing her view that articles detailing the ‘speeches of two of our most famous Admirals must be excluded from The Wren on the

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112 Ibid.
114 Hilda Buckmaster, ‘Correspondence’, The Wren, August & September 1930.
115 Ibid.
ground that they are “party political views”.\textsuperscript{116} In response, Wallace wrote ‘I myself have never thought of Naval problems in that narrow spirit, and neither, I am confident, do the majority of the people of this Empire’.\textsuperscript{117}

The nature of the debate between Buckmaster and Wallace in \textit{The Wren} once again demonstrates the complex ways in which ex-servicewomen interacted with League politics in this period. Buckmaster’s affiliation to the Association of Wrens was crucial in structuring her response to the article that challenged the imposition of the Naval treaty. The links established between the Association of Wrens and the LNU meant that Buckmaster felt compelled to protest against an article that expressed values contrary to the ideals promoted within the pacifist associational culture of the Association of Wrens and the LNU. Similarly, her loyalty to Katharine Furse drove Buckmaster to remind her fellow Wrens in her letter of the message of international peace promoted by the former Director of the WRNS. But for Wallace, her determination to defend the Navy led her to condemn Buckmaster’s ‘narrow’ understanding of Naval politics.\textsuperscript{118}

These letters and those previously published in relation to League policy reveal layers of intellectual debate that in turn illuminate the enduring importance of the veteran identities of ex-servicewomen. Opinions surrounding the Empire, the maintenance of international peace and the role of the Navy were shared, debated, and critiqued in \textit{The Wren}, showing how the journal became a space for discussion in relation to pacifist politics. The focus on disarmament within these debates also highlights the absence of traditional ‘feminine’ concerns in relation to the protection of women and children, underlining the continued centrality of military concerns and women’s status as former members of the WRNS in shaping women’s responses to international peace campaigns.

\textit{The WRNS and the Women’s Advisory Council of the LNU}

The discursive elements of the recruitment campaign waged by the LNU in \textit{The Wren} have shed light on the prominence of women’s martial subjectivities in shaping distinct rhetorical appeals

\textsuperscript{116} D. A. Wallace, ‘Correspondence’, \textit{The Wren}, August & September 1930.
\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{118} \textit{Ibid.}
designed to promote pacifist politics. The emotional legacy of wartime service with the Royal Navy fostered within the Association of Wrens rendered any simplistic adoption of maternalist-pacifist discourses by campaigners problematic. The evolution of alternative pacifist discourses within the emotional community of the Association of Wrens has further highlighted the importance of emotion in structuring political engagement within female veteran associations. This last section uses the reports of the meetings of the Women’s Advisory Council (WAC) of the LNU published in *The Wren* to bolster the claim that ex-servicewomen were unwilling to passively accept the overtly gendered aspects of the LNU. From 1925, delegates represented the WRNS on a permanent basis on the Council, with at least one member from the Association in attendance at each of the WAC meetings. From 1925 to 1928, Edith Crowdy was the WRNS representative on the Council, before being replaced in 1929 by Miss J. Day, who reported on Council meetings in *The Wren* until the cessation of OCA involvement with the LNU in 1937. The Annual Report of the Association of Wrens detailed the activities of the Council each year, with a regular slot devoted to a discussion of the issues debated and the progress made during the year. The campaigns that the Women’s Advisory Council pursued centred on what could be considered more traditionally feminine issues. However as this section will argue, the involvement of the Wrens in these campaigns should not be read as evidence of a broad acceptance of the ideology of maternalist-pacifism propounded elsewhere by the LNU. Although Helen McCarthy has argued that the LNU ‘did little to subvert conventional gender norms’ and continually asserted women’s ‘maternal qualities’ the absence of maternalist rhetoric in the appeals written by Currey, Laughton-Mathews and LNU activists suggests that the recruitment strategies adopted by the LNU were not as clearly defined along gendered lines as has previously been argued.  

The involvement of the Association of Wrens with the Women’s Advisory Council provided a direct link between two associations that enhanced the discursive relationship forged between the OCA and the LNU through the publication of articles in *The Wren*. As the official representative of the Association of Wrens on the Women’s Advisory Council, Edith Crowdy continually promoted events organised by the Council to former Wrens and in doing so she made clear her

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awareness of the primacy of the veteran identities of readers of *The Wren*. In April 1926, Crowdy informed her former Wrens that the Women’s Advisory Council of the LNU was planning to arrange ‘a series of open-air meetings in outlying villages in Derbyshire and Suffolk’ and appealed to any readers willing to offer their services as speakers, drivers or hosts who could offer hospitality to members of the LNU traveling to these meetings.¹²⁰ She concluded her appeal with a reminder that participation in this event represented ‘a chance for ex-Wrens to show the same “Zeal and Alacrity” in Peace time as they showed during the War.’¹²¹ Echoing similar attempts made by Currey and Laughton-Mathews to frame pacifist activism as an extension of wartime service, Crowdy’s claim here underlines the OCA’s broader commitment to promote work with the LNU as an opportunity to re-deploy the skills women had learnt during the war. Crowdy aimed to empower former Wrens to become involved with the WAC in an appeal that made clear her understanding of the enduring attachment former Wrens felt towards their service identities and the ongoing significance of the emotional legacy of the war fostered within the Association of Wrens.

In his study of women’s involvement in ‘trans-national political activism’ Daniel Gorman has highlighted the ways in which women’s engagement with international politics was defined by contemporary notions of femininity.¹²² Gorman claims that many prominent women’s international organisations in this period adopted ‘a language of protection that cast women as victims rather than autonomous individuals’.¹²³ Looking at the LNU and the WAC in particular, Gorman argues that women’s ‘lobbying efforts were often characterised by sentimentality’ within issues such as the trafficking of women and girls framed ‘in moral terms.’¹²⁴ According to Gorman, the WAC ‘consecrated women’s piety and sexual purity’ in a way that reflected a broader ‘unease with sexuality itself’ amongst delegates.¹²⁵ A closer exploration of the reports of the WAC published in *The Wren* challenges Gorman’s emphasis on victimhood and sentimentality as defining elements shaping the WAC’s lobbying strategies and political culture.

¹²¹ Ibid.
¹²³ Ibid., p. 58.
¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 58.
¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 58.
The language of these reports written by delegates to the WAC from the Association of Wrens does not reflect a preoccupation with ‘sexual purity’; whilst issues concerning women and children were often the subject of WAC discussion, the way these debates were communicated to readers of The Wren complicates Gorman’s analysis of the work of the WAC. Given the aversion to maternalist-pacifism elsewhere in the journal, here too Association of Wrens delegates were less interested in the moral dynamics of League politics and instead reported on issues of gendered representation within the League of Nations as well as the ongoing issue of disarmament.

An example of the varied nature of the information conveyed in the reports of WAC activity by the Association of Wrens delegate can be found in the December 1930 edition of The Wren. Miss J. Day – the WRNS delegate – reported that members of the WAC had discussed the problem of the ‘Mui Tsai’, ‘the little domestic slaves in China’ as well as ‘the undesirability of young people of both sexes being employed in Bars at the ports.’ 126 Whilst child slavery and child prostitution may have been areas more traditionally associated with women’s political activism, Day went on to list other issues that the WAC had considered. Delegates had agreed on the ‘the need for an enlightened public opinion on the on the subject of Opium and Drug traffic’ and had also examined the ‘place of women and their work in the League’. 127 Day was keen to emphasize the variety of topics debated at the WAC meetings but she also stressed that delegates were cognisant of the need to reflect on the issue of gendered representation within the League of Nations more generally. The impression given by Day of the WAC does not conform to Gorman’s portrayal of a group primarily concerned with the conservation of ‘sexual purity’ who sought to frame political debates in moral terms. 128 Day’s report focused on major problems affecting children, but it also drew attention to the need for education on drug trafficking and the ongoing debate about women’s role in the League. The diversity of the issues raised combined with the lack of ‘sentimentality’ in the language adopted highlights the importance of considering the role of alternative discursive spaces in shaping attitudes towards the WAC and the League more generally.

127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
The report written by Day the following year further stressed the multiple and diverse issues discussed by members of the WAC. Day mentioned one debate concerning ‘the question of cooperation in the Union’s campaign in support of the World Disarmament Conference’ but the report continued with a focus on the resolutions sent from the WAC on a wide range of international problems.129 These included ‘the liquor traffic in West Africa’ for which the WAC sent a resolution recommending a ‘restriction on importation of Gin’ to the British government and the ‘British members of League’s Mandate Committee’, and the ‘Nationality of Married Women’ on which the WAC had again sent a resolution to both the British government and to the ‘International Federation of League of Nations Societies.’130 Day noted that a further two resolutions in relation to the ‘Convention regarding Night Work for Women’ had been ‘adopted but not confirmed by the League of Nations Union Executive, owing to failure to secure support for them from the Union’s Industrial Advisory Committee’.131

The emphasis in these reports on the drafting of resolutions highlighted the role of the WAC in advocating for change within international politics. In her report, Day stressed the central involvement of the WAC as a pressure group within the wider political structures of the LNU and the League, and detailed the politics that hampered the WAC’s efforts to draw attention to important issues that included, but were not confined to problems affecting women and children. This type of report that focused on political and bureaucratic issues also appeared in the 1936 edition of *The Wren*. Day stated that Lord Lytton, the former Viceroy of India and author of the Lytton Report into the Japanese conflict in Manchuria, had spoken at a meeting of the WAC in April 1936 on ‘the situation in the Far East, and the problems arising out of the Sino-Japanese conflict in Manchuria.’132 During the same meeting, Day reported that ‘a resolution was

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proposed and discussed on the subject of disarmament’ with ‘the Council re-affirming its belief that security and peace could only be secured through international disarmament.’\textsuperscript{133}

The WAC was again presented as an organisation that was closely involved with debates surrounding international conflict and the ongoing process of disarmament. That such an important figure such as Lord Lytton addressed the WAC to discuss one of the most crucial aspects of League politics in this period – Japanese control of Manchuria – allowed Day to present the WAC as an principal element within the League, whilst her continued emphasis on the role of the WAC in drafting resolutions further ensured that the organisation was framed as a driving force for change within the structures of the LNU. Day continued to stress this last point in the concluding remarks to her 1936 report. In reference to what would go on to become – like the Japanese invasion of Manchuria – a defining moment within the League of Nations, Day stated that at the July meeting of the WAC ‘the chief business was an urgent resolution dealing with the Italo-Abyssinian dispute’, which included an urgent call to ‘all women’s organisations to support the policy of the League of Nations Union.’\textsuperscript{134} In what reads as a call for an extension of women’s influence within international pacifist politics, Day’s statement here affirmed the critical role of the WAC in shaping the political culture of the LNU.

The specific ways in which representatives of the Association of Wrens reported on campaigns endorsed by the Women’s Advisory Council suggest that former servicewomen were keen to highlight issues of gender equality. As the Association of Wrens representative on the WAC from 1929, Miss J. Day was not afraid to draw attention to the broader problems regarding women’s political representation that became increasingly apparent as the Council intervened in key LNU debates. In January 1932 Day reported that a ‘special meeting of the Women’s Advisory Council’ had been held in March to discuss the question of disarmament during which Professor Gilbert Murray, Vice-President of the LNU and President of the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations had addressed the meeting.\textsuperscript{135} During this meeting, Day stated that ‘a resolution in favour of support for the [disarmament]
campaign unanimously adopted."\textsuperscript{136} Yet as Day elaborated in her report in \textit{The Wren}, continued support for this campaign became increasingly difficult once the limits of women’s influence in the broader organisational structures of international politics were realised. The following year in her January 1933 report Day informed former Wrens that the Women’s Advisory Council continued to express their support for disarmament but were nonetheless campaigning for increased female representation at the upcoming national disarmament Conference. Day wrote that ‘the Council as a whole, besides organising and supporting meetings, and issuing literature, has forwarded various resolutions to the Government urging the representation of women’.\textsuperscript{137} Alongside descriptions of the continuing campaign work undertaken by the Women’s Advisory Council, Day stressed the active way in which the Council were seeking to rectify the limitations of women’s political influence. The report then went further, as Day relayed the fact that ‘the Women’s Advisory Council has also discussed the question of further co-operation of women in the work of the League of Nations’.\textsuperscript{138} But, as Day explained, women in the Council had realised that these attempts to expand the role of women within the League would remain futile if the oppression faced by women in countries represented by the League was not fully addressed. As Day argued, the role of women in the League of Nations was ‘to a large extent conditioned by their status as women in their own countries’.\textsuperscript{139} To address this, Day reported that the Women’s Advisory Council had ‘put forward a resolution to the League inviting an enquiry into the political, legal and economic status of women in the various states, both members and non-members of the League’.\textsuperscript{140}

The WAC reports were a regular feature of the Annual Report of the Association of Wrens and rarely provoked criticism, but occasionally specific issues arose regarding the appropriate responses from Association of Wrens delegates to decisions or resolutions passed within the WAC. The tensions that came to the fore reflect the often uneasy relationship between the Association of Wrens and the LNU (and pacifist politics more generally) which, as we have already seen, was most likely to fracture when the issue of disarmament or militarism was raised

\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Ibid.} \\
\textsuperscript{137} \textit{Ibid.} \\
\textsuperscript{138} \textit{Ibid.} \\
\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Ibid.} \\
\textsuperscript{140} \textit{Ibid.}
– consensus was fragile. In the 1934 report Day noted that a ‘deputation of delegates from various women’s societies was received by Mr. Eden to protest against the Government’s attitude on the subject of aerial bombing.’\footnote{Ibid.} The subject of aerial bombing was raised at the World Disarmament Conference in 1934, as delegates debated the issue of aerial disarmament.\footnote{N. C. Fleming, ‘Cabinet Government, British Imperial Security, and the World Disarmament Conference, 1932 – 1934’, \textit{War in History}, 18 (2011), p. 62.}

In Britain, it divided the government; the Air Ministry, defending the role of the RAF in protecting the nation’s imperial interests overseas, remained vehemently opposed to disarmament whilst delegates such as the future Prime Minister Anthony Eden viewed a reduction in Britain’s air power as a necessary compromise required to ensure unilateral compliance amongst other nations.\footnote{See Fleming, ‘Cabinet Government, British Imperial Security, and the World Disarmament Conference, 1932 – 1934’.} It is clear from Day’s report that Eden’s supporters hoped to recruit ‘women’s societies’ as part of a broader effort to convince the British government to abandon their attempts to placate the Air Ministry and agree to the demands laid out by the Conference in relation to aerial disarmament.\footnote{Association of Wrens, Annual Report 1932 – 33: Women’s Advisory Committee, League of Nations Union’, \textit{The Wren}, January 1934.}

However, Day’s report outlines the sensitivity of this issue within the Association of Wrens. Day noted that ‘it was not possible to call a meeting of the Association of Wrens to consider this matter, but after consultation with the Council of the Association, it was decided that the Association of Wrens should not take part in the deputation.’\footnote{Ibid.} The reasons for this refusal are not set out by Day in the report, but given the issue of aerial bombing was perceived by the Air Ministry in particular as a direct assault on the RAF, the reluctance of the Association of Wrens delegates to participate in this debate may have stemmed from a sense of loyalty to another military force.\footnote{Ibid.} As we saw in Chapter One, members of the Association of Wrens and the WRAF OCA were part of a broader network of ex-servicewomen and attended reunion dinners and sports events held in each of the associations. This refusal on the part of Wren delegates to be part of the deputation supporting Eden’s campaign for aerial disarmament should therefore be
understood in the context of the emotional community of the WRNS, in which loyalty to the Royal Navy and a strong sense of military pride were consistently promoted.

In 1937 *The Wren* reported that ‘it was agreed that the Association of Wrens should no longer be represented on the Women’s Advisory Council.’\(^{147}\) The reasons for this – apparently sudden – decision to withdraw the WRNS representatives from the Women’s Advisory Council were not given here. The issue was not discussed at the Annual General Meeting and therefore we cannot know why the Association of Wrens decided that their presence on a constituent body of the LNU was no longer tenable. By 1937, Spain, Italy, Germany and Japan had left the League of Nations as international tensions increased; the breakdown in international co-operation that these departures from the League signalled suggested that the pacifist ideals underpinning the League of the Nations and the League of Nations Union would never be fully realised. Whether it was a growing sense that the LNU waged diminishing influence within British politics and associational culture, or whether the tensions surrounding the politics within the WAC and the LNU had provoked opposition within the Wren Association had simply become too difficult to assuage, we do not know.

What we can see clearly is that the evidence presented in *The Wren* by the Association of Wrens representatives on the activity of the WAC therefore suggests that the Council was involved in numerous and diverse aspects of League politics, and continually sought to promote the position of women within the organisation more broadly. Discussion of more ‘traditional’ women’s issues concerning the welfare of mothers and children clearly did form part of the WAC’s role within the LNU. Yet as this section has shown, such issues did not dominate WAC debates, and nor did they preclude discussions on disarmament policy or equal pay for men and women. Viewing the WAC through the pages of *The Wren* illuminates the key influence which the Association of Wrens had on the broader activities of the LNU. It highlights the fact that the roles played by women in the League were not simply the product of their acceptance of maternalism-pacifism. Given the efforts made by Currey, Laughton-Mathews and LNU writers in bringing together militarism and pacifism in the construction of new political appeals to *The Wren* readership, the

emphasis on the diversity of issues discussed should be understood as another example of influence of the emotional community of the Association of Wrens in structuring political engagement.

Conclusion

This chapter’s exploration of the interactions between the Association of Wrens and the LNU has challenged McCarthy’s claim that the participation of all women in international politics stemmed from an unproblematic acceptance of a gendered ‘maternalist-pacifist’ discourse. The active engagement of many of the Wrens with the LNU was not a product of their receptiveness to maternalist appeals – it was the result of a specific conceptualisation of the legacy of their wartime service. Having served with the Royal Navy, ex-servicewomen such as Currey, Laughton-Mathews and Furse believed it was their duty and responsibility to work for peace given their direct, personal experience of the realities of warfare. Whilst League propaganda may have promoted maternalist-pacifism as a recruitment strategy, the reality of ex-servicewomen’s involvement and engagement with the LNU makes clear that enduring military veteran identities and the emotional culture of the OCAs were equally important in encouraging women to support the League as well as structuring their intellectual engagement with League politics. Moreover, evidence from *The Wren* demonstrates that women’s interaction with international, pacifist politics in this period did not always succeed in positioning women as ‘victims’ in need of protection.

Leading Wrens such as Vera Laughton-Mathews and Katharine Furse proclaimed the value of women’s military service in elevating them to a position of understanding about the horrors of war which, they believed, meant that ex-servicewomen were uniquely placed to campaign for peace and to shape the post-war world. Wrens debated specific aspects of League policy, particularly those policies that concerned Naval disarmament, and offered critical perspectives based on their understanding of League politics and the arguments forwarded by key LNU officials who published in the Association of Wrens journal. Finally, the representation of the Association of Wrens on the Women’s Advisory Council of the LNU from 1925 to 1937 offered further insight into the range of issues discussed in the all-female space of the Council which
extended beyond social welfare of women and children. The LNU offered ex-servicewomen a
space in which they could not only continue to assert their military veteran identity, but also
participate in a new type of associational culture constructed around trans-national political
networks to fight for and secure peace after 1919. The Association of Wrens functioned as a
space in which ex-servicewomen could engage with international politics in multiple ways, and
the LNU offered these women an opportunity to assert a new, political identity in the public
sphere. It provided a way in which they could work towards the ‘new and great ideal’ envisioned
by Katharine Furse in 1922.

Moreover, an exploration of how the Association of Wrens presented pacifism within *The Wren*
complicates the dichotomy that McCarthy sets up between women and ex-servicemen in her
discussion of League ideology and campaign tactics. We have seen how ex-servicewomen and
LNU activists appropriated military service and its emotional legacy in diverse ways and in
different contexts, highlighting the porous boundaries between the Association and the LNU in
this period. The political appeals promoted by the League of Nations Union were re-worked in
order to mirror the emotional values of the Association of Wrens, but the emotional culture
within this association was re-formulated too, as leading ex-servicewomen sought to draw on
alternative legacies of wartime service as a means of promoting the importance of pacifism as a
political movement. Understanding this process of discursive exchange which occurred between
different associational contexts can help us re-think the role of female veteran associations in
political campaigns in this period. As the next chapter will argue, it can also help us understand
how wider cultural and social trends around remembrance both shaped, and were shaped by, the
engagement of female veterans.
In May 1926, at the Annual General Meeting of the WRAF OCA, Helen Gwynne-Vaughan shared her views on a new memorial in York Minster, entitled the ‘Five Sisters Window’ (see Fig. 7.) The window was originally built in the 1200s, but was restored between 1923 and 1925 and was rededicated to the memory of the women who lost their lives during the First World War. The memorial inscription underneath the Five Sisters Window (see Fig 8.) makes clear its

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2 The Memorial dedicated to women who had died during the war, York Minster https://yorkminster.org/discover/stories/story/the-sisters-window-for-the-sisters/ [accessed 2/4/2020].
purpose to act as a reminder of the sacrifices made by women during the war. Yet despite the acknowledgment of women’s war service that the Window represented, Gwynne-Vaughan’s reflections on the appearance of this gendered memorial were distinctly equivocal. Speaking at a meeting of the WRAF OCA, she paid testament to the Window and celebrated its ability to bring ‘a great deal of pleasure to the next-of-kin of the women whose names appear on the Memorial tablet’ before claiming that she felt no personal emotional investment in this type of commemorative tribute. Instead, Gwynne-Vaughan referred to the collective affiliation members of the WRAF OCA felt towards the more distinctly militarised memorial build to commemorate fallen members of the RAF. Gwynne-Vaughan’s ambivalence could be explained by the distinct lack of any military insignia on a memorial that – given the original date of its creation – depicted women in Medieval dress in poses that were distinctly traditional. Although, as Fell argues, the unveiling ceremony of the Five Sisters Window which took place on the 26 June 1925 was ‘was designed to highlight the similarities between male and female service and sacrifice’ this attempt to elevate women’s service and draw comparisons with the wartime work of ex-servicemen was not deemed successful by Gwynne-Vaughan in her address to former members of the WRAF.⁴

Addressing former servicewomen gathered at the meeting Gwynne-Vaughan stated, ‘I think we all feel the true commemoration of those of our comrades who died on service is the RAF Memorial on the Embankment’ alongside ‘the Cenotaph.’⁵ Given the primacy of this commemorative space amongst the community of WRAF veterans, Gwynne-Vaughan concluded ‘our interest in a special window must be rather secondary.’⁶ She acknowledged the ‘special’ nature of the Five Sisters Window but, in a way that acknowledged the importance of the former military identities of her readers, she argued that the only ‘true’ memorial for members of the WRAF OCA remained the RAF memorial on Victoria Embankment, London.⁷ This memorial (see Fig. 9) is less grandiose in appearance than the Five Sisters Window, but it does bear the

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⁵ ‘WRAF Old Comrades Association, General Meeting – President’s Report’, *WRAF Old Comrades Association*, May 1926.
⁶ *Ibid*.
⁷ *Ibid*.
insignia and the symbols of the RAF. The inscription – ‘Per Ardua Ad Astra’ – is the motto of the RAF and the WRAF and therefore held special significance for Gwynne-Vaughan and her fellow comrades. The more recognisable military aspects of this memorial including the inscription of the RAF motto, clearly rendered this commemorative space significant in a way that the Five Sisters Window was not. Gwynne-Vaughan’s response to the unveiling of the Five Sisters Window raises important questions about the intersection between the gendered, military veteran identities of female veterans and their responses to official commemorations in the inter-war period. Whilst the recognition of women’s military service was clearly important within female veteran communities, Gwynne-Vaughan’s dismissal of the Window as a ‘secondary’ focus for OCA members points to the significance of women’s martial subjectivities in shaping their responses to commemorative sites in the aftermath of the war. This chapter investigates further the relationship between female veteran communities and the cultures of commemoration after 1918. It focuses on the ways in which the emotional and gendered legacies of the war cultivated within the OCAs intersected with dominant cultural discourses related to Armistice Day and the Festival of Remembrance at the Albert Hall.

Fig. 9.8

The chapter argues that within the OCA journals a complex process of negotiation took place in which ex-servicewomen both accepted and challenged popular narratives about the war and its commemoration in the public sphere. OCA members were keen participants in Armistice Day ceremonies both in London and in the localities, and reports of their attendance at these events were a regular feature in the journals. The chapter uses these reports to highlight the influence of dominant cultural discourses surrounding commemoration and war memory in shaping the languages of remembrance found within the OCA journals. I look at the reflections written by ex-servicewomen on the formal ceremonial aspects of Armistice Day both in London and elsewhere, whilst also considering the significance of the lively social and informal elements of remembrance services. These reports describe in detail the practical role ex-servicewomen played in remembrance ceremonies, whilst also containing personal reflections by individuals on the emotional and cultural significance of these ceremonies. They therefore provide new insights into how female veteran associations participated in and reflected on the shifting cultures of commemoration in the decades following the end of the First World War.

The chapter explores how emotional languages related to commemoration evolved from the 1920s to the 1930s within the OCA journals. Whilst existing studies on the performative and ceremonial aspects of Armistice Day have drawn on the importance of emotional expressions, the chapter will emphasise the significance of the emotional community of the OCAs in shaping how female veterans thought about Armistice Day and made sense of their role in official ceremonies. Rosenwein has argued that ‘people move . . . continually’ from one emotional community to another ‘adjusting their emotional displays’ within ‘these different environments’. This chapter acknowledges that the boundaries of the emotional communities of the OCAs were fluid and porous; ex-servicewomen moved between these distinct communities and other societal groups, adapting their emotional styles and vocabularies accordingly. By participating in state-sponsored commemorative ceremonies both in London and elsewhere, women were exposed to other emotional values; as Adrian Gregory has argued, within these

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ceremonies ‘the civilian bereaved always came first’. This chapter examines how ex-servicewomen participated in and reflected on Armistice Day events, and argues that the emotional investment amongst the membership in nostalgic narratives of wartime service and the values of friendship and comradeship shaped the ways in which women responded to formal commemorative ceremonies.

Key contributions made by Jay Winter and Alex King to the historiography of post-war commemoration have drawn attention to the complexity of the commemorative landscape after 1918. Jay Winter’s work on the cultural memory of the war argues that war memorials were inscribed with a variety of political and cultural meanings. His claim that memorials celebrated ‘war as both noble and uplifting and tragic and unendurably sad’ clearly demonstrates the emotional complexity of more formal ‘sites of memory’. Similarly, King has stressed that the diversity of meanings attached to memorials ‘suggests that any correspondence between the structures themselves and people’s emotional and intellectual responses to war should not be taken for granted.’ However, the simplistic treatment of gender in these existing works renders their analysis of women’s roles in remembrance problematic. Winter claims that an exploration of women’s participation in the construction of ‘sites of mourning and sites of memory’ is now possible only ‘because war has moved out of the battlefield and into every corner of civilian life.’ Winter’s recognition of the active role women played in commemorative culture here is underpinned by assumptions that over-simplify the diversity of women’s responses to commemoration in the inter-war period. He argues that the merger of ‘family history and world history’ in studies of war make it possible for women to be classed alongside men as ‘witnesses’ of war or ‘people whose memories are part of the historical record.’ In doing so, Winter further enforces the claim that women’s participation in the construction of war memory stemmed from their role as mothers or wives on the civilian home front. King does acknowledge the

significance of women’s role beyond the family and domestic space, highlighting the significance of women’s ‘organised, often uniformed, presence at ceremonies’. However, his limited engagement with the experiences of female veterans again underscores the need for a more inclusive approach that recognises the distinct contribution OCA members made to the cultural landscape of commemoration – both through their participation in Armistice Day events and in their discursive reflections published in the OCA journals. In providing a sustained and detailed investigation of how female veterans responded to Armistice Day in different spatial locations across two decades, this chapter will argue that women’s participation in formal ceremonies of remembrance was linked closely to the collective ‘emotional and intellectual responses to war’ promoted within the OCA journals.

Alison Fell has more recently argued that women’s relationship to commemoration in the inter-war period was ‘more proactive, more dynamic and more varied than has previously been suggested’. Moreover, as Fell shows, ‘the grieving widow or mother was not the only version of female identity found on war memorials’. Fell’s comparative study of female veterans in Britain and France sheds light on the fact that women were involved in commemoration either as ‘wealthy patrons influencing the aesthetics and ideological messages of memorials, as volunteers or charity workers furthering or publicising philanthropic causes’ or as ‘members of a profession remembering colleagues and promoting their achievements’. From this, Fell makes clear that women were ‘shaping rather than being shaped by interwar commemorative culture.’ This chapter builds on Fell’s argument by moving beyond studies of women’s charitable or philanthropic role in commemoration, and instead investigating how women participated in Armistice Day as military veterans. It focuses on their discursive reflections on Armistice Day as a lens through which the specificities of ex-servicewomen’s experiences can be explored. This emphasis on the reports written by the women who attended remembrance ceremonies differentiates this chapter from other studies that have analysed women’s literary responses to war.

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16 King, Memorials of the Great War, p. 36.
17 Ibid, p. 2.
18 Fell, Women as Veterans in Britain and France after the First World War, p. 22.
19 Ibid., p. 22.
20 Ibid., p. 23.
21 Ibid., p. 22.
Armistice Day in the interwar era. The chapter suggests that through participation in the ceremonials aspects of Armistice Day some ex-servicewomen sought to claim an equivalence with ex-servicemen, the emphasis on the performative and social elements of remembrance ceremonies in reports written in the journals makes clear that OCA members saw these occasions as opportunities to assert their status as female veterans on the public stage.

Focusing on the reports written by former servicewomen on the attendance of OCA members at the Cenotaph and later, at the Festival of Remembrance, the first section of the chapter divides the period 1921 to 1936 into two decades, looking in turn at the discourses of remembrance within the OCAs in the 1920s and the 1930s. The adoption of this structure may initially appear to endorse claims that 1929 was a ‘critical turning point’ in the history of remembrance. This year saw the publication of Erich Maria Remarque’s All Quiet on the Western Front which Brian Bond argues was crucial in shifting public opinion away from an overwhelming acceptance of the war as a ‘glorious victory’ towards a more ambivalent stance regarding the conflict and its legacy. However, the chapter argues that whilst this shift in attitudes is evident in reports of Armistice Day at the Cenotaph in London, this pattern is not evident in accounts written by ex-servicewomen of their attendance at local remembrance ceremonies. The second part of the chapter looks at reflections on local Armistice Day celebrations in the OCA journals. This section will further complicate the idea that 1929 marked a watershed moment in which cultural discourses emphasising ‘disillusionment’ overwhelmed earlier narratives that had elevated the ‘glorious victory’ of the war. Overall, the chapter explores how ex-servicewomen negotiated the gendered and emotional landscapes of inter-war commemoration in both London and various localities in Britain between 1921 and 1936. Looking in turn at the reports of Armistice Day in London and the reports of Armistice Day in local regions, the chapter argues that the distinct emotional legacy of the First World War was crucial in the construction of a unique culture of commemoration within the journals of the OCAs.

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22 See Alison Hennegan, ‘Fighting the Peace: Two women’s accounts of the post-war years’ in Trudi Tate and Kate Kennedy, The silent morning: Culture and memory after the Armistice (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 102.
24 Ibid., p. 37.
Armistice Day at the Cenotaph, London: The 1920s

Adrian Gregory has argued that the language of commemoration in the 1920s ‘drew heavily on pre-war rhetoric of God, Empire, King and Country, on notions of sacrifice and on presenting the war in terms of a crusade for human dignity and liberty.’ In the 1920s, state officials intended Armistice Day to evoke a solemnity that they hoped would offer solace to the ‘civilian bereaved’ in the organisation and arrangement of official commemorations at the Cenotaph in London. Government officials understood that ‘comforting and supporting those suffering from grief’ was the ‘principal rationale’ governing the arrangements of these formal ceremonies. Taken collectively, the ceremonial aspects of Armistice Day – the two-minutes silence, the procession past the Cenotaph and the laying of wreaths – were designed to provide a focus for a bereaved nation. This emphasis on collective grief shaped public discourse, as press reports used Armistice Day as an opportunity to further disseminate a patriotic, imperial narrative that championed the sacrifices of the ‘men who fought and who never came back’. Headlines such as ‘Empire Honours the Glorious Dead’ succeeded in framing the loss of thousands of men as an imperial victory – a ‘high triumph’ – that only served to confirm the valour and bravery of British troops.

In a commemorative landscape shaped by the emotional needs of thousands of grieving families, male veterans occupied an uncertain space. The fact that these men had returned – often accompanied by life-changing physical and psychological injuries – complicated their integration into a formal ceremony whose founding rationale centred on the need to commemorate the men who had lost their lives. Despite this, the press made attempts to celebrate ex-servicemen and the role they had played in securing the Allied victory. A report in 1922 printed in *The Telegraph* stated that Armistice Day should be celebrated as ‘the day of men who served and saved their

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26 Ibid., p. 51.
27 Ibid., p. 24.
29 ‘Empire Honours the Glorious Dead’, *The Telegraph*, November 12, 1921; ‘Remembrance Day’, *The Telegraph*, November 11, 1922; ‘Remembrance Day’, *The Telegraph*, November 11, 1927.
country at the risk of life and all else that was dear to them’. As the gendered language in this article illustrates, whilst the role of male veterans in the official ceremonies was often unclear, the need to honour the sacrifices of male veterans was apparent in public discourse. Female veterans, whose non-combatant status had protected them from the horrors of trench warfare, went unacknowledged in press reports. The liminal status of ex-servicewomen as neither ex-combatants nor civilians was thrown into sharp relief in this cultural context, yet whilst their place in commemoratory events as female veterans was never fully recognised, within the OCA journals ex-servicewomen crafted their own distinct responses to Armistice Day. An exploration of the responses written by OCA members who attended Armistice Day at the Cenotaph in London during the 1920s suggests that female veterans inscribed the ceremonial aspects of Armistice Day with meanings shaped more by the emotional community of the OCAs than the imperial, patriotic discourses circulating within the public sphere. In other words, whilst ex-servicewomen celebrated the opportunity to march with ex-servicemen in full uniform, in the journals they highlighted the ways in which the OCAs ensured that commemorative events also celebrated the distinct social culture within the community of ex-servicewomen.

In the 1920s, OCA members seized upon Armistice Day as an opportunity for reunions with former comrades. With less emphasis on the mournful, solemn aspects of the remembrance service, the reports written by ex-servicewomen of Armistice Day instead stressed the joy and excitement that reunions promised. In 1922 one former member of the QMAAC wrote how a gathering of former servicewomen on Armistice Day had been full of ‘noise and excitement’ – an atmosphere she attributed to ‘the appearance of Khaki once more.’ Former member of the QMAAC L. M. K. Pratt-Barlow expressed similar feelings in her account of Armistice Day in November 1928. She described how, on arriving at the Ex-Service Women’s Club in London on the morning of November 11 1928, she ‘was given an old comrades welcome, a thing that gold cannot buy.’ Another ‘anxious woman’ who arrived declaring ‘I am an ex-WAAC’ was similarly offered a warm welcome by fellow ex-servicewomen at the club. Afterwards, Pratt-

30 ‘Remembrance Day’, *The Telegraph*, November 11, 1922.
Barlow recalled how she later encountered this woman and ‘from her face’ understood that ‘she had also felt the welcome.’ The recollections here, with their emphasis on the joy of reunions and the bonds between ex-servicewomen, were products of the existing emotional culture of the QMAAC OCA. The focus in both these reports on the close relationships that existed between old comrades is redolent of accounts of the annual reunion dinners held by the associations, in which the joy of encountering fellow ex-servicewomen was a prominent and recurring feature. In this way, we can see how former servicewomen ascribed their own meanings to Armistice Day – meanings that derived more from the existing associational culture of female veteran associations than the emphasis on bereavement and patriotic sacrifice within dominant commemorative discourses.

It was not just the social gatherings on Armistice Day that saw ex-servicewomen respond in ways that were at odds with popular attitudes towards memorial events. Descriptions of the involvement of OCA members laying wreaths at the foot of the Cenotaph and other military memorials frequently stressed the cohesion and unity of the wider female veteran community. In 1922, the WRAF Old Comrades Association reported that ‘… a Chaplet of Laurel and Poppies, tied with RAF colours, was placed on the Cenotaph by two ex-members of the WRAF, representing the Old Comrades Association.’ The wreath had been paid for from ‘contributions’ received from branches of WRAF OCA in ‘Doncaster, Surrey, Liverpool, Air Ministry, Sussex, Middlesex, Field Service, N. London, N.W. London, Herts and Glasgow Branches.’ By purchasing this wreath members of the OCA were not only expressing their allegiance to the RAF, they were also asserting their collective identity as an OCA. The symbolic significance of material signifiers such as the ‘Chaplet’ which was ‘tied with RAF colours’ helped align former servicewomen with their comrades in the RAF but also affirmed the legitimacy of their own status as former female auxiliaries and members of the WRAF.

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34 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
Similarly, in November 1929 one member of the WRAF OCA described the spectacle of Helen Gwynne-Vaughan laying a wreath on the RAF memorial. She recounted how Air Marshal Sir John Higgins ‘stood at the salute of the wide-winged tribute of scarlet poppies which he had just laid on behalf of the Royal Air Force’ before ‘other wreaths were laid on behalf of the Air Forces of the Canada and New Zealand’. It was following the laying of these wreaths that the author of the report wrote that Helen Gwynne-Vaughan ‘stepped forward with ours, a simple wreath of laurel, beautifully made and bound, classic fashion, with RAF ribbon’. The emphasis on the integration of members of the WRAF OCA as part of this ceremony distinctly for the RAF demonstrates clearly how ex-servicewomen reflected on the ceremonial aspects of Armistice Day as opportunities that allowed them to lay further claim to their veteran identities. The emotional undertones of a ceremony ostensibly designed to commemorate those who died in service with the RAF were relegated in favour of details that stressed the close relationship between the RAF and the WRAF. The specificities of the material design of the wreath provided by the WRAF OCA – with references to the ‘RAF ribbon’ – further highlight the ways in which these formal ceremonies were inscribed with the emotional values that characterised the WRAF OCA. Rather than reflect on the solemnity of the occasion, both authors provided reports which offered reassurances that the relationship between the WRAF and the RAF endured.

Humour often characterised accounts of Armistice Day that described reunions between former servicewomen and between female and male veterans. Miss H. White’s experience of the 1929 Armistice Day ceremony was marked by an amusing incident that occurred during the two-minutes silence. White – a former member of the WRAF – described in her report how the silence had been ‘broken by the bark of a dog beside us’ who was found to ‘belong to “Old Bill”’. ‘Old Bill’ referred to a popular cartoon soldier created by cartoonist Charles Bruce Bairnsfather during the First World War. With a bushy moustache and a cantankerous temperament, ‘Old Bill’ was a soldier who was frequently depicted making comical or cynical remarks as he endured life in the trenches. White’s reference to ‘Old Bill’ here may have been

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38 Built in 1923, the RAF memorial is located on Victoria Embankment in London, in close proximity to the Cenotaph and was the only one of the three military services to have its own memorial.

39 ‘At the RAF Memorial’, WRAF Old Comrades Association, December 1929.

40 Ibid.

inspired by the similarities in appearance between the owner of the dog and cartoon character, or it may have been a common nickname for soldiers in general. Deploying this comedic reference to a cartoon character ensured her account of Armistice Day and the two-minutes silence took on a light-hearted and humourous tone. She continued by informing readers that on being reunited with his dog, ‘Old Bill’ was ‘delighted to find himself drawn up beside the same WRAF that he had been at Menin Gate!’ Rather than reflect on the solemnity and melancholic aspects of the ceremony, White clearly took pleasure in recounting an amusing incident that culminated in the reunion between a former WRAF and an ex-serviceman.

The light-hearted tone of White’s account, with its comedic undertones and joyful references to reunions between male and female veterans stands in stark contrast to the report of Armistice Day 1929 in the Manchester Guardian. The two-minutes silence was described in vastly different terms:

Big Ben tolled out eleven, and sounds of the multitude were suddenly not there. We were in that strange city of silence that last for the two minutes of every year. The sound of flying leaves, the beating of the flags in the wind, and, towards the end, the keening of boats on the river...the people were alone with their thoughts and memories and their rendezvous with the dead.

The poetic imagery of ‘the people’ coming together as one to ‘rendezvous with the dead’ in the ‘strange city of silence’ emphasised the unifying aspects of a solemn ceremony marked by a collective need to remember the dead. The purpose of the two-minutes silence could not have been made clearer in a report that underscored the importance of this moment of the ceremony in allowing men and women the opportunity for quiet introspection and reflection. The absence of any reference to a dog barking during the two-minutes silence and the overwhelming emphasis on the sombre, contemplative mood of those in attendance at the ceremony is a reminder of the tonal

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42 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
differences between popular press reports and individual accounts written by ex-servicewomen in the OCA journals. Attending as the representative of the WRAF OCA, Miss H. White’s experience of Armistice Day was defined less by formal ceremonial rites such as the two-minutes silence, and more by individual reunions between ex-servicemen and women and comedic incidents that re-affirmed the military status of female veterans. The state-organised aspects of the ceremony, endowed with great emotional significance in the press, did not hold the same significance for ex-servicewomen. For female veterans, Armistice Day was valued as an additional opportunity for women to assert their veteran identities. These occasions did hold emotional significance for the female veterans that attended, but in the reports in the journals it is clear that the emotions experienced were those that had been fostered within the OCA community – namely, nostalgia for wartime service and a sentimental attachment to the friendships and sense of comradeship amongst former servicewomen.

Reports from the 1920s suggest that the more performative aspects of Armistice Day were part of broader attempts by ex-servicewomen to assert their veteran status. The authors of these reports often drew attention to the skill and technique displayed by ex-servicewomen as they marched the past the Cenotaph. In her account of Armistice Day in November 1929, one former Wren informed readers that fifteen members of the Association of Wrens had ‘paraded at Wellington Barracks’ and appeared at ‘the head of the Ex-Service Women’s column of the British Legion Section.’ Not only did she stress the fact that the Wrens had marched ‘at the head’ of the British Legion Section, the author of this report went on to state proudly how her fellow Wrens had marched alongside the ‘Guards Band’. Far from being intimidated by this group of male veterans, who ‘had a reputation for marching’ the author wrote that ‘we had the honour of our training to uphold, and we marched as though the eyes of Captain Jones were upon us!’ Again, the reference to the Wrens’ position alongside the ‘Guards Band’ perhaps points to a certain amount of uncertainty surrounding the marching skills of the ex-servicewomen, yet her following statement highlights the pride the author felt in the way that the Wrens had marched, upholding the ‘honour’ of their training. The public acknowledgment of their presence reported

in the local press further enhanced the sense of pride felt by members of the Association of Wrens. Concluding her report, the author noted that the following day ‘the newspapers reported that the “The Ex-Service women held themselves well and marched splendidly.”’

Female veterans understood that participation in the ceremonial aspects of Armistice Day allowed them to claim a space in the broader landscape of commemoration and legitimise their military veteran identities in the process. This determination to demonstrate the value of their own training suggests that for many ex-servicewomen Armistice Day was viewed as an opportunity for women to assert their martial skills and in the process, further legitimate the status of female veterans.

Marching also allowed ex-servicewomen to proclaim their veteran status as such an occasion permitted the wearing of military uniforms. At the Armistice Day celebrations of November 1922, the QMAAC Gazette reported that OCA members who had taken part in the Cenotaph parade were ‘to be congratulated on their marching and smart appearances’. The author of the report further noted that ‘six members of the Old Comrades Association, in full uniform, attended the service at Westminster Abbey’. Similarly, in a reflection on the November 1926 Armistice Day parade, former QMAAC member M. E. Roach reported that ‘seven officers and twenty-two “other ranks”’ attended ‘nearly all in uniform’. She went on to describe the significance of the re-emergence of the QMAAC uniform for this occasion, noting how ‘coat frocks’ had been ‘cleaned and pressed and cherished through eight long years for this’. The pride with which former servicewomen wore their old uniforms was further heightened by the fact that the ‘majority’ of these women were also ‘wearing the Overseas medals’ which were awarded to servicemen and women who had served outside of Britain. In this context, the wearing of uniform became an additional signifier of women’s military status. The references to uniform and medals within reports of Armistice Day further highlight how, in their reflections,

48 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
ex-servicewomen linked the significance of the occasion to the public assertion of their military veteran identities.

Armistice Day at the Cenotaph, London: The 1930s

In November 1930, the *Manchester Guardian* printed an article that reflected on the legacy of the First World War prior to Armistice Day. In a pessimistic assessment of the state of the post-war world, the author argued, ‘we are largely resigned now to our bitter disillusionment. For the world still groans under its burden of armaments, and Europe is as volcanic as in 1914.’\(^5^4\) As the author stated ‘the lives that were lost, the bodies that were mutilated, the vast wealth that was squandered, the general beastliness that was let loose in all belligerent nations’ had been for nothing given the failure of supra-national organisations such as the League of Nations to enforce disarmament and encourage demilitarisation.\(^5^5\) Armistice Day was presented as an ‘incoherent ceremonial which aptly expresses an incoherent grief’ whilst more broadly, the author reflected on the ‘remarkable output of books about the war’ arguing that ‘these to some extent may be taken as expressing the popular attitude’ towards the war and its legacy.\(^5^6\) In many ways, this article is symptomatic of a broader sense of disillusionment which historians have argued came to define the legacy of the war in the 1930s. Adrian Gregory, Robert Wohl and Brian Bond have all argued that a shift occurred in 1929 in the way the First World War was remembered within cultural discourse.\(^5^7\) The poetry of Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen and others, novels such as Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front* and plays such as R. C. Sheriff’s *Journey’s End* all emphasised the suffering and boredom of life in the trenches on the Western Front. As Gregory has summarised, by the end of the 1920s ‘the memory of the war was being reconstructed.’\(^5^8\)

\(^{5^4}\) ‘Armistice Day’, *Manchester Guardian*, Tuesday November 11, 1930.

\(^{5^5}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{5^6}\) *Ibid.*


\(^{5^8}\) Gregory, *The Silence of Memory*, p. 85.
1929 has been marked as a ‘critical turning point’ in this process.\textsuperscript{59} The popularity of war memoirs that stressed the trauma of conflict both engendered and reflected a movement away from celebrations of the war as a glorious victory within public discourse. However, Bond has warned against overstating the extent of this change. Whilst the cultural impact of the war poets was clearly significant, Bond has questioned whether their influence caused ‘a paradigm shift’ in how the war was remembered; their influence, as Bond reminds us, ‘was more restricted than is generally assumed’.\textsuperscript{60} Men like Sassoon adopted a clear ‘anti-war’ stance, but they were still ‘proud of their regiments and personal achievements, and deeply grateful for the experience of comradeship’.\textsuperscript{61} These two positions – an acknowledgment of the horrors of war and a pride in the comradeship between fellow soldiers – expressed the reality of many ex-servicemen and women whose experience of warfare was often more complex than the literature of the period conveyed. In October 1929 J. R. Clynes, the newly appointed Home Secretary in the Labour government, announced plans for a significant reduction in the numbers of military veterans present at the Cenotaph service in London in a statement claimed to have been made in response to public demands to demilitarise Remembrance Day events. Yet despite this announcement and the popularity of a ‘disillusionment’ narrative within the public sphere in the 1930s, OCA members still spoke of the joyful aspects of Armistice Day and remained committed to the public assertion of their veteran identities during the march past the Cenotaph. What does change is the willingness of ex-servicewomen to acknowledge more fully the death and destruction wrought by the four years of conflict.

The reports of Armistice Day in the 1930s within the OCA journals reflected broader societal tensions between a growing awareness of the futility and trauma of the war and an understanding of the enduring bonds of comradeship between those who had served. Whilst the reports written in the 1920s overwhelmingly emphasised the performative and social aspects of the public ceremony at the Cenotaph, the reports in the 1930s were more equivocal in tone and more ambiguous in terms of their emotional response to the commemorative events. Yet the evidence of continuities in the way ex-servicewomen remembered the war suggests that whilst OCA

\textsuperscript{59} Bond, \textit{The Unquiet Western Front}, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 31.
members responded to wider cultural shifts related to the legacy of the war, they were also
determined to keep alive their own memories of wartime service. The appearance of alternative
emotional vocabularies in reports of Armistice Day in the 1930s show how the emotional
communities of the OCAs did evolve in the inter-war period. However, although ex-
servicewomen were more willing to acknowledge grief and suffering as legacies of the war
following their attendance at Armistice Day ceremonies after 1929, the persistence of the
emotions that remained crucial within the OCAs serves as a reminder of the enduring
significance of the emotional values fostered within female veteran associations since their
foundation.

Evidence of this emotional ambiguity in the reports of the 1930s appears in a report written by
M. E. Roach in the QMAAC Gazette in November 1930. Roach echoed earlier reports of
Armistice Day in her description of the thrill she experienced seeing former comrades once
more. She described how, as OCA members lined up to march past the Cenotaph, Roach stood
‘nodding to old familiar faces to right and left’.62 Yet it is also clear that the happiness she had
found in reuniting with former servicewomen was tempered by the more sombre atmosphere
Roach experienced during the commemorative rituals at the Cenotaph. She described two-minute
silence as ‘perfect and complete’ before offering a more poetic reflection on a ‘Silence that
passed through Time and outdistanced Space.’63 Roach’s reference to the transcendental qualities
of the two-minutes silence is much more in keeping with broader cultural responses to this part
of the memorial ceremony. Whilst the amusing account of the interruption of the silence in 1929
stood in stark contrast to the press report of the same ceremony, in 1930 the account by Roach
echoed the reflections on the silence made in the press. The day after Armistice Day the London
correspondent for the Manchester Guardian reported that ‘the silence has entered into the root of
our lives’ and noted that ‘the scene in the City to-day, with the massed thousands . . . showed no
failing in the desire of the people to maintain their silence’ repeating again the function of the
silence in facilitating a ‘rendezvous with the dead’.64 The idea repeated in the Manchester
Guardian’s report that the ceremony at the Cenotaph encouraged attendees to feel at one with

63 Ibid.
those who died was similarly echoed in Roach’s report. She continued her account by stating how the memorial had made her reflect on the ‘mighty army of the Empire’s dead’ who, as she reminded readers, were ‘all around us . . . one with us and yet beyond’. Whilst Roach’s account still made reference to the joyous reunions with ‘familiar faces’ that had occurred during Armistice Day, her willingness to reflect on the ‘Empire’s dead’ and the ‘perfect’ nature of the two-minutes silence underscore the differences in these later reports in their more solemn tone.

Whilst Roach’s report of November 1926 had seen her emphasise the joy of seeing the ‘lifted hats’ of the public in response to the appearance of marching ex-servicewomen, her account written in 1930 focused on the unique sacrifices made by ex-servicemen. Reflecting on the Festival of Remembrance at the Albert Hall, Roach described to readers the spectacle of ‘thousands and thousands and thousands’ of falling poppies and wrote about how witnessing this event provided her with a stark realisation of the sheer scale of deaths during the war. She reflected that ‘if the Dead were to march once again in a column of four and were to pass the Cenotaph at the rate of 10,000 in an hour, it would take five whole days and four long nights and then the last 12,000 would be still to come.’ The image illustrated here by Roach of the ‘Dead’ marching past the Cenotaph signifies the extent of the departure from reports written in the 1920s. Far from the cheery descriptions of reunions and accounts of the joys of marching alongside ex-servicemen, Roach chose to communicate a haunting image to her readers whilst she also stressed that whilst their collective and unique identities as female veterans were important, they were part of a broader community of both civilians and veterans, brought together by their common experience of the war more generally. In her description of the Festival of Remembrance, Roach told readers how OCA members had sung the old war-time songs, including ““Take me to Dear old Blighty [sic]”’ and ““Land of Hope and Glory”’.

Roach informed readers of how the audience, including OCA members ‘ran the whole gamut of emotion, sentiment, farce, patriotism with a stirring of memory that perhaps only those with

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66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
War-time memories of Overseas can really understand’.\textsuperscript{71} Again, whilst Roach’s earlier reports had laid emphasis on the importance of the public recognition given to female veterans on Armistice Day, her report of 1930 illustrates how the language of commemoration began to shift at the beginning of this decade.

A report in the \textit{WRAF Old Comrades Association} journal of the same events in November 1930 shows again how some of the more positive appraisals of Armistice Day that appeared during the 1930s could also appear in later reports, alongside references to the more troubling legacies of the war. In her report, the author wrote how ‘six ex-WRAFs’ attended the ceremony at the Cenotaph ‘correctly habited in 1918 uniform’ and were stood ‘at the head of a long column comprising WAACs, Wrens, and the Nursing Services’.\textsuperscript{72} Clearly, the material indicators of women’s military status during commemorative ceremonies remained significant even into the 1930s. Similarly, the reference to the spatial position of the former WRAFs ‘at the head of a long column’ makes clear that the act of marching was still viewed as a crucial component of Remembrance Day services; the potential that these ceremonies offered for a visible assertion of women’s veteran identities had clearly not been forgotten.\textsuperscript{73} The ways in which Armistice Day celebrations reaffirmed bonds between male and female veterans – a key trope within reports of the 1920s – also remained within reports written in the 1930s. The author highlighted the gratitude expressed by male veterans during the ‘“March of the Women’s Services”’ at the Festival of Remembrance in the Albert Hall.\textsuperscript{74} As the former servicewomen marched into the Albert Hall, it was reported that ‘the audience in the arena, composed entirely of ex-Service men, rose to its feet with a roar of welcome’.\textsuperscript{75} As the author stressed, it was then that the former servicewomen in attendance ‘realised that our war-time comrades were acclaming the Services to which we were all so proud to belong’.\textsuperscript{76} Here, the author made clear that both ex-servicemen and ex-servicewomen were part of the ‘Services’ – a reminder of the shared, collective experience of wartime service that both groups shared. Yet she also singled out the appearance of

\textsuperscript{71} ‘Armistice Day: At the Cenotaph’, \textit{The Wren}, December 1930.
\textsuperscript{72} ‘British Legion Festival of Empire and Remembrance, Albert Hall, Nov. 11\textsuperscript{th}, \textit{WRAF Old Comrades Association}, December 1930.
\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Ibid}.
OCA members in uniform in what reads as a proud reflection on the martial identities of these women. The report’s dual focus on the distinct role played by female veterans and the reminder of the unified membership of the ‘Services’ shows how some OCA members in the 1930s sought to acknowledge both the singular identities of female veterans whilst also drawing attention to a collective military identity shared by ex-service men and women alike.

However, a more melancholic observance followed the author’s expression of joy in relation to the reaffirmation of the bonds between men and women of the veteran community. Following the entrance of the veterans, the author described the arrival of a ‘group of men . . . holding each other’s shoulders.’ These men – the ‘St Dunstan’s Singers’ – were the choir from the St Dunstan’s Hostel for Blind Soldiers and Sailors which had been set up in 1914 to provide support for ex-servicemen who had been blinded or wounded during the war. The appearance of these injured veterans was described in the report as a ‘sobering’ sight that convinced this ex-servicewoman how ‘right’ it was ‘that one of the results of war should be remembered at this Festival’. This explicit reference to the suffering of these blinded veterans as an important – and often forgotten – legacy of the war again underscores the greater emotional complexity of reports written in the 1930s. This report of the Festival of Remembrance in 1930 began with a proud reminder of the value attributed to ex-servicewomen by male veterans before ending with the more tragic description of the St Dunstan’s singers. Crucially though, both conflicting reflections on the experience of Armistice Day existed side by side. Like Roach’s account of the ceremony at the Cenotaph, a greater willingness to acknowledge the tragic elements of the war in the 1930s did not necessarily prevent reflections on the meanings of Armistice Day for ex-servicewomen. Similarly, in the following edition of the WRAF Old Comrades Association, one former servicewoman’s reflection on the November 1931 Armistice Day service began by stating how the ‘perfect’ marching of the six former WRAFs in attendance prompted her to think about ‘what had happened to the hundred and forty equally straight backs who had marched so many miles behind me over the wet Hampshire roads thirteen years ago.’ Like earlier reports, this author chose to begin her account with a nostalgic musing on the whereabouts of her former

77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
comrades. The report moved on to describe the solemn entrance of former servicemen, despite the author’s earlier emphasis on the sentimental reminiscences that accompanied the reunions of former members of the WRAF. The author described how the ‘slow stumbling’ of the men who ‘fought in Flanders’ was ‘like a tragic dream’.81 As in earlier reports, this account moved from nostalgic reflection to a more abstract consideration of the suffering ‘of the men who fought in Flanders’.82

The accounts written in the 1930s thus enforced the gendered divisions between male and female veterans in new ways. Whilst in the 1920s ex-servicewomen had emphasised the public recognition they had received and used this to argue that they had not been forgotten, in the 1930s the determination to acknowledge the unique experience of servicemen succeeded in drawing boundaries between the wartime experiences of male and female veterans. Continuing her account, this former WRAF described how ‘thousands of poppy petals, one for every man who fell, drifted down from the sky and drifted on to the shoulders of the massed men of the Legion seated there’.83 Again, the poetic imagery served to elevate this visual reminder of sacrifices made by the men ‘who fell’ whilst even the British Legion, whose membership was made up of both servicemen and women, is presented as a group of ‘massed men’.84 The gendered language here provides a clear example of how cultural understandings of the legacy of the war – defined by tragedy but also noble sacrifice on behalf of servicemen – shaped the commemorative discourses within the OCA journals.

Mary Laird’s article published in the December 1933 edition of the QMAAC Gazette provides an additional example of the greater emotional complexity found in reports of Armistice Day in the 1930s. Laird began with a description of the interactions between ex-servicemen and women that could have been included in the reports published a decade earlier. Laird spoke of her enjoyment having encountered ‘my old Rouen women’ and described how ‘touched’ she was by the applause offered by the ‘soldiers . . . watching the procession’ of the ex-servicewomen past

81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
the Cenotaph. For Laird, this was evidence of the soldiers’ ‘kindly appreciation of the days when the women’s services worked side by side with the men’. As in the account in the WRAF Old Comrades Association written in November 1930, the references here to reunions with ‘old Rouen women’ and the ‘kindly appreciation’ demonstrated by the ex-servicemen underscore the continuities within the commemorative discourse from the 1920s. Yet whilst Laird proudly reflected on the enduring links between male and female veterans, she acknowledged the crucial difference between them. She described how during the ceremony at the Cenotaph those in attendance had ‘prayed that right might triumph over might’ and significantly, hoped that ‘we might be worthier of the sacrifice that was made in those far off days.’ By referring to the ‘sacrifice’ made by ex-servicemen Laird reminded readers that whilst they had ‘worked side by side with the men’ they had not faced the same dangers or been asked to make the same sacrifices as male combatants. This acknowledgment again marks the divide between this and earlier reports of Armistice Day. Whilst in the 1920s ex-servicewomen continually spoke of public recognition and support offered to them and stressed their skill at marching to validate their presence at such events, here there is less emphasis on the equality of male and female veterans. A greater understanding of the trauma inflicted during the war – conveyed in cultural discourse via the war poets – may have inspired this willingness to acknowledge the gulf between male and female veterans in terms of their wartime experience.

By the middle of the decade, many ex-servicewomen were determined to highlight their endorsement of an understanding of the war marked by tragedy and grief. One report by former Wren ‘MHS’ further demonstrates how former servicewomen sought to actively include themselves in the solemnity of commemorative events during the 1930s. ‘MHS’ began her report with an observation on the ‘lack of enthusiasm in the singing of the old war-time songs’ and used a quotation from Laurence Binyon’s poem, ‘For the Fallen’ – ‘they shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old’ – to further highlight her point. She continued with a description of the

86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
falling of the poppies and reflected on ‘the feeling of reverence that filled the Hall when those tragic 1,104,890 poppy petals fell in a blood red interminable stream’.\textsuperscript{91} Added to this was the image of the ‘war graves’ which ‘shimmered on the screen’.\textsuperscript{92} Combined, these two symbols of the loss and death of the war succeeded in strengthening the bond between those men and women who formed the ‘war generation’.\textsuperscript{93} She stated that these images ‘bound us all in the common experience of something greater than the songs that served their purpose in those days of blood and mud.’\textsuperscript{94} This description of the war appears in stark contrast to earlier reports of Armistice Day, but also to the memory of the war constructed and promoted elsewhere in \textit{The Wren}. Here, the author claimed men and women had been ‘bound’ together having shared the ‘common experience’ of the suffering and trauma of the war.\textsuperscript{95} ‘MHS’ concluded her report with her hope that ‘the great surge of emotion that all of us of the war-time generation must feel on such an occasion, may not evaporate but be utilised and concentrated into the building of a better England for future generations.’\textsuperscript{96} As we have seen, most reports written in the 1930s demonstrated that comradeship and suffering were both legacies of the war. Elsewhere in the journals, reports of reunion dinners and correspondence written by members continued to celebrate positive memories of wartime service, yet within more formal accounts of national commemorative events, key components of more dominant cultural discourse shaped how such events were reflected upon.

\textit{Local Commemorations}

This section focuses on the participation of OCA members in Armistice Day events in cities and regions beyond London. It explores the ways in which reflections on local commemorative events, contained within branch reports, differed from the accounts of OCA involvement in Armistice Day activities in London. Former servicewomen reflected on the national importance of the Cenotaph and the corresponding significance of the parade and memorial services held

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
there in reports published in the OCA journals. An emphasis on marching, uniform and spatial position alongside male veterans, combined with the later reflections on mourning the war dead defined reports that were printed in the journals as part of the Annual Report of each of the OCAs, often alongside financial reports and minutes of committee meetings. Both of these factors ensured reports of Armistice Day at the Cenotaph in London had a formality that marked them out from the informality of local branch reports, which were written by branch secretaries and were thus subject to less editorial control than the reports from the cenotaph in London that were published as part of the OCA’s official Annual Reports.

Moreover, civic authorities in the regions gave ex-servicewoman more freedom to arrange their own commemorations through the branches of the OCAs. The absence of any strict formality and overt state interference in local remembrance activities meant that ex-servicewomen did not have to confront the same tensions and uncertainties that had preoccupied veterans attending the ceremony at the Cenotaph in London. Branch reports highlight the fact that OCA members saw local commemorations as added opportunities for social reunions. This desire to come together and celebrate their friendships in social settings (often restaurants) was also felt by male veteran organisations, the members of whom often organised ‘regimental reunions’ on Armistice Day that aimed ‘to recreate the camaraderie and social release of the war and remember their comrades in a way that matched their understanding of what the war had meant’.97 As Todman has highlighted, the reunions held on Remembrance Sunday, characterised by the ‘company of friends and alcohol’, were important spaces in which painful memories of death and suffering and ‘the awfulness of the trenches’ could be ‘tempered by a concentration on the better times.’98

For ex-servicemen, the celebration of ‘humour, victories and friendships’ at these more private, localised events was often intended to help suppress ‘more problematic memories.’99 The tension that these events sought to overcome between traumatic recollections of trench warfare and the celebration of comradeship has been highlighted elsewhere as a key component of the experience of male veterans in the aftermath of war. The emotional communities of ex-servicemen’s

98 Ibid., p. 163.
99 Ibid., p. 163.
associations were therefore more complex and unstable, defined by competing emotional legacies of wartime service. Whilst male veterans may have enjoyed reunions for the refuge they provided from the ‘problematic memories’ triggered by participation in memorial events, there is little evidence to suggest that reunions for female veterans were anything other than fun, sociable occasions. Like male veteran organisations, the OCAs were less able to articulate these memories in the more formal spaces of the Cenotaph in London. Local reunions held on Armistice Day reflected the characteristics and values within the emotional community of the OCAs. Reunions of the OCAs were not valued for the opportunity they presented for the suppression of trauma but instead, free from the social and cultural pressures that shaped participation in memorials at the Cenotaph, women viewed local Armistice Day events as a chance to celebrate joyful memories of their wartime service.

Whilst branch reports suggest that OCA members on a local level were still aware of the performative aspects of Armistice Day – and the possibilities these held for public recognition of their ex-service status – the concomitant focus on the value of commemorative events for reunions of old comrades highlights the existence of an alternative discourse of remembrance that found expression in the reports of OCA branches. As we have seen, the language found within the more official reports of Armistice Day in London reflected ongoing tensions between the emotional legacy of the war fostered within the OCAs, and the cultural dictates of an occasion shaped more by the concerns of the bereaved than the survivors of war. The emphasis women placed on maintaining the correct marching drill and, later, evidence of a need to feel part of the ‘war generation’ through music and song belies the collective sense of unease many members felt trying to negotiate their position at such events. In contrast, members enjoyed local commemorations not just because of the opportunity they gave to march in uniform, but the reunions they made possible between local branch members. Members of the OCAs presented Armistice Day in the cities and regions outside of London as an informal event marked just as much by the renewal of bonds of comradeship between ex-servicewomen as it was by the memory of fallen soldiers. It is within the reports of these local events therefore that we can see ex-servicewomen seizing upon a greater sense of freedom and organising events that were more indicative of their own memories of the war. Running alongside accounts of Armistice Day in the capital, these local reports draw attention to the existence of an alternative commemorative
discourse underpinned by the emotions expressed by female veterans in relation to the legacy of war.

Former servicewomen understood that celebrations of Armistice Day in local contexts offered the same opportunities for women to claim public recognition for their veteran status. But whilst reports of OCA attendance in London suggest members were reluctant to challenge the official arrangements at the Cenotaph, local reports suggest that women were keen to actively assert their presence as veterans. Armistice Day in Manchester in November 1924 held significance for those in attendance who witnessed the unveiling of the new Cenotaph. In the subsequent branch report, the secretary of the Manchester branch of the QMAAC OCA spoke proudly of the fact that the local British Legion had asked members to ‘lead their parade’ – but she also expressed her disappointment at the fact that branch members had not been acknowledged as former members of the QMAAC. This lack of recognition of their service status was, the secretary concluded, down to the fact that ex-servicewomen had marched in their civilian clothing. She wrote that ‘people do not recognise us in mufti in spite of our medals’ and expressed the desire to ‘try to go in uniform another year.’ This concern about uniform speaks to a general uncertainty about the role of female veterans in particular that can be found in national reports from those who had attended Armistice Day in London.

Yet the secretary’s marked determination that her members would appear in uniform in a later year points to a more assertive attitude within local branches. She followed her statement about her members’ need for public recognition with a clear plan for how she would secure such validation at future events. The author underscored the central problem here – the public did not recognise women as military veterans – to the secretary after reading reports in the press about women’s attendance at Armistice Day events. She claimed that OCA members had been described as “a small body of women heading the British Legion” who were “widows of the fallen.” It is unclear whether this was a quotation taken from the local or the national press, yet the problem of misidentification it raised was of crucial importance to the secretary of the

100 ‘Manchester’, Old Comrades Association Gazette, December 1924.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
Manchester branch. The result of OCA members appearing in ‘mufti’ was an assumption that they were ‘widows of the fallen’ – an identity which was not only incorrect, but which emphasised the marital relationships of women rather than the qualities of pride, duty and military tradition which OCA members thought they were representing by leading the parade. Fell has argued that ‘the principal female function in commemorative discourse in both Britain and France was as the bereaved wives and mothers of servicemen’. By grouping women together as ‘widows of the fallen’ the press report quoted in the Manchester branch report served to uphold the monolithic view that women’s presence at commemorative events was justified on the grounds that they needed to mourn the loss of loved ones. In challenging this simplified assessment of those in attendance, the secretary of the Manchester branch underscored her claim that women needed to wear uniform to make clear their identities as veterans.

The Blackpool branch of the QMAAC OCA demonstrated a similar willingness to proclaim their military status at local commemorative events in November 1936. Like the members of the Manchester branch in 1924, former servicewomen in the Blackpool branch pushed back against the gendered assumptions governing the arrangements of Armistice Day. The report recorded the dissatisfaction of branch members who had been positioned ‘in front of the women’s section of the British Legion’ rather than alongside male veterans. The frustration of branch members stemmed from the fact that the women’s section of the British Legion was made up of the wives and daughters of male veterans. Members of the OCAs interpreted the Legion’s decision to position ex-servicewomen next to wives and daughters as a deliberate attempt to ignore their veteran identities. As the indignation of the Manchester branch secretary in 1924 had also shown, former servicewomen baulked at the notion that their gender – rather than their military status – should define their role and spatial position in commemorative parades. For members of the Blackpool branch, the Legion’s unwillingness to acknowledge them as veterans was particularly frustrating given the campaign waged – and won – by OCA members in the early 1920s to gain membership of the Legion based on their service status. The initial membership criteria established by the Legion following their formation in 1921 only permitted ex-servicewomen to

103 Fell, *Women as Veterans in Britain and France after the First World War*, p. 22.
join the women’s section. The successful challenge to these criteria led to the admittance of OCA members ‘on the same terms as ex-Service men’ in June 1922.105

Members of the Blackpool OCA were not, however, content to accept the place assigned to them by the Legion for the Armistice Day procession. The secretary of the branch noted in her report that along with her fellow ex-servicewomen, they agreed, “we are walking with the ex-Service men”.106 To subvert the spatial arrangements for the procession, the secretary described how members ‘furtively moved out and changed to higher up in the line.’107 She continued, ‘no one asked us any questions or moved us, so there we remained four women in the middle of the ex-Service men’s ranks.’108 The ‘furtive’ way in which these women moved out of their designated place to stand ‘in the middle’ of marching male veterans should not obscure the broader significance of this act, which illustrates the determination of OCA members to ensure that their military status was acknowledged through their spatial location in local memorial processions. As members of the Manchester branch had resolved to wear uniform in order to avoid misidentification as ‘widows of the fallen’ so the women of the Blackpool branch changed their physical position in the procession to ensure they were seen as veterans, and not as wives or dependents of servicemen. The fact that these four women positioned themselves ‘in the middle’ of the ranks of ex-servicemen rather than behind or alongside them highlights their confidence in their military status and illustrates the agency shown by women to ensure that commemorative occasions acknowledged, rather than obscured their relationship to male veterans and their own military service.

As well as ensuring they were publicly visible and recognisable as military veterans at local commemorative events, many ex-servicewomen spoke of the pride they felt when leading local officials acknowledged the presence of OCA branches during Armistice Day. In December 1927 G. Collins, secretary of the Bristol branch of the QMAAC OCA, wrote to the Gazette stating that ‘it appears we are gradually becoming established locally, amongst other Services, as the Bristol

107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
Old Comrades*. She continued by describing how the branch had been ‘invited by the Chief of the Police’ to participate in the Armistice Day parade and ‘attend the Service at the Cathedral’ and gave this as further proof that the branch was recognised as a women’s veteran organisation by key local officials. The emphasis placed on this recognition suggests limited public awareness of the attendance of female veterans during local commemorative events. Whilst public recognition was clearly important to OCA members, the authors of local branch reports also mentioned the acknowledgment given to them by prominent civic officials. The value attributed to this type of recognition suggests that in cities and regions outside London ex-servicewomen were more dependent on key individuals and their willingness to include OCA members in parades.

Despite Collins’ claims, the local press made no mention of the presence of the OCAs at the Armistice Day parade in Bristol in December 1927. The report of Remembrance Day in the Western Daily Press listed in detail the attendees at the procession which began at the Council Headquarters. The parade was led by the Dean of Bristol who was followed by the Mounted Police, the ‘Lord Mayor . . . the aldermen and councillors in full ceremonial robes, the city officials and members of the Bristol Board of Guardians’. The article further reported that the ‘men and women of the British Legion’ were in attendance along with the ‘4th Battalion Gloucestershire Regiment Territorials’ the ‘“Mons Men”’, the Gloucestershire Regiment and Royal Artillery and finally a ‘detachment from the RNVR’ and ‘the ambulance and nursing units also represented’. The lack of any explicit reference to the ‘Bristol Old Comrades’ in the local press suggests that Collins’ claim that the QMAAC OCA branch were ‘becoming established locally’ was perhaps premature. This discrepancy between Collins’s claim that the ‘Chief of Police’ had recognised her fellow OCA members as a veteran group in their own right and the absence of any reference in local press reports suggests that on a local level in specific regions the status of ex-servicewomen and their role in commemorative ceremonies was more contested than members were willing to admit in their branch reports.

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110 Ibid.
111 ‘Solemn Memories: Tribute in Bristol & the West’, Western Daily Press, 12 November 1927.
112 Ibid.
Similarly, in 1936 the secretary of the Birmingham branch of the QMAAC OCA wrote that branch members ‘stood with the men who had served’ in the procession past the Cenotaph and made clear that this arrangement was ‘much appreciated’ by those who attended.\(^{113}\) The secretary continued her report by referring to the fact that ‘the new chief of police is in direct contrast to the previous one and recognises the ex-Service women’ perhaps attributing the physical location of ex-servicewomen in the parade to the newly appointed Chief of Police who recognised the presence of former QMAAC members.\(^{114}\) The secretary’s reference here to a previous lack of acknowledgment by a former Chief of Police underscores the precariousness of the role of ex-servicewomen in local commemorations. This report also highlights the dependency of local OCAs on civic officials in securing their place in Armistice Day events. However, whilst the secretary of Birmingham branch confidently proclaimed the fact that the Chief of Police had acknowledged ex-servicewomen, as had been the case in Bristol, there is no mention of ex-servicewomen in the planned arrangements for Armistice Day in November 1936. The *Birmingham Daily Gazette* reported that the procession to the Cenotaph would include in order the ‘Town Clerk, the Lord Mayor, the Lady Mayoress, the Deputy Mayor and Lady, the Bishop of Birmingham’ as well as ‘the Admiralty Engineer Overseer’, ‘Colonel O. D. Smallwood’, a ‘Representative of the Royal Air Force’ and ‘Representatives of the British Legion, Mr. A. M. Anderson and Mr. G. H. Edgar.’\(^{115}\) When public recognition as military veterans was considered, local commemorations offered opportunities for some branch members to demonstrate their agency and assert their status as female veterans. Elsewhere however, the need to rely on the recognition of prominent civic officials had the potential to prevent the full participation of ex-servicewomen in local ceremonies. Moreover, the apparent omission of ex-servicewomen in local press reports suggests that achieving this recognition in local contexts could prove challenging.

Beyond public parades and ceremonies, the Armistice Day branch reunions ensured that local commemorative events held different meanings for ex-servicewomen compared to national commemorations. The report of the Oxford branch of the QMAAC OCA in November 1921


\(^{114}\) *Ibid.*

focused not on the solemnity of the memorial service, nor on the performative aspects of the march past the Cenotaph. Instead, the secretary of the branch chose to emphasise the ways in which Armistice Day had brought branch members together and reaffirmed the bonds of comradeship between them. According to the secretary, ‘a very good proportion’ of their ‘small branch’ had attended the memorial service in Oxford and, due to the fact that many of these members had ‘served overseas’ the branch had apparently been able to display ‘a goodly array of medals’. The secretary reflected on this visual reminder of the military status of former servicewomen with pride, writing: ‘without conceit we felt that we made a brave show.’ But as the remainder of the report expressed, the real significance of the memorial in Oxford was in the reuniting of former comrades. The dedication of branch members was highlighted in the secretary’s references to ‘one member’ who had ‘cycled a distance of 11 miles into Oxford’ and ‘another’ who ‘“cut” a lecture so as to be able to join us.’ The implication of the secretary’s claim that this former servicewomen had missed a lecture not to commemorate lost soldiers but to ‘join us’ further highlights how local Armistice Day events were celebrated not solely for outward displays of military status, but also for the reunions between ex-servicewomen that such events facilitated. After reflecting on these examples of loyalty to the local QMAAC OCA branch demonstrated by members, the secretary concluded: ‘this is the genuine spirit of comradeship fostered and shown by our Association.’

As this branch report makes clear, ex-servicewomen often celebrated local commemorations as spaces in which the ‘spirit of comradeship’ could be reignited amongst former comrades. In this way, these memorials became as much about internal relations and the emotional community of the OCA as they were about more public demonstrations of women’s veteran identities. In marches and parades both locally and nationally, the authors of Armistice Day reports placed emphasis on the relationships between male veterans and ex-servicewomen. In these reports, women stressed the physical proximity of OCA members to ex-servicemen in both local and national parades to further verify their status as veterans. Yet the secretaries of OCA branches also laid emphasis on the ways in which local commemorative events strengthened the bonds

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117 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
119 Ibid.
between women who had served as military auxiliaries. In December 1924, E.G. Clark wrote to the QMAAC *Gazette* to inform readers that a month earlier she attended ‘a dinner of the QMAAC OCA, held in Glasgow on Armistice Night’ for the ‘first time’.\(^{120}\) She described how during the evening she had been ‘full of tense excitement’ as she considered the possibility ‘that at some moment the next arrival would be an Old Comrade whom I had worked with, or perhaps spoken with in those past days of war.’\(^{121}\) Here, during the reunion of the Glasgow branch of the QMAAC OCA, the war is reflected upon and remembered fondly as the period in which important friendships had been formed. Armistice Day here was less about the commemoration of those who had died, and was instead viewed as a moment of ‘tense excitement’ which held possibilities for reuniting and reconnecting with former comrades.\(^{122}\) The emotions that defined reports of national commemorations and many local reports – namely, pride in outward displays of veteran status and (after 1929) a more melancholic observance of the mournful aspects of national remembrance services – are here replaced by feelings of excitement and a nostalgia for the relationships that defined wartime service. These were sentiments which sustained the OCAs and their members throughout the inter-war period.

In this way, branch reports that supplied accounts of local remembrance services illustrated the existence of an alternative culture of remembrance within the OCAs that celebrated relationships between members. In her report of the reunion of the Glasgow branch in November 1924, Clark articulated the pride she felt in her identity as a former QMAAC. She spoke of her ‘pleasure’ at reconnecting with women who had passed either through Folkestone or the Connaught Club, and expressed feeling ‘proud and honoured that I had been a unit of such a corps, that could (even at the end of five years’ absence) extend one such a sincere and warm welcome.’\(^{123}\) This focus on the close and enduring friendships between members, realised through Armistice Day reunions, stands in contrast to accounts of national commemorations in which efforts were made to stress the ways in which former servicewomen were part of the ‘war generation’ – both due to their experiences during the war as well as their ability to sing the popular wartime songs.

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\(^{120}\) E. G. Clark, ‘Armistice Day in Glasgow’, *Old Comrades Association Gazette*, December 1924.

\(^{121}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{122}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{123}\) *Ibid.*
Clark emphasised the strength of these friendships, writing ‘what impressed me most during the evening was the feeling of good fellowship that existed between every member of the OCA’. As further proof of the special bond between women in the QMAAC, Clark quoted the remarks of one woman who on witnessing this reunion, stated “I envied you all, and wished I had been in the WAACs.” The report concluded with Clark’s summary of the evening: ‘with speeches, songs and reminiscences, the evening of the 11th passed, only too quickly, and to one, at any rate, it will long remain a very happy memory’. The emotions expressed in this report – excitement, happiness and nostalgia – seem jarring when, as in this final statement, it is made clear that these feelings were experienced on ‘the evening of the 11th’. The regret at the passage of time and the explicit reference to the fact that that evening would ‘remain a very happy memory’ clearly stand in direct contrast to cultural expectations surrounding responses to Armistice Day. Reports such as these are much more redolent of accounts of Annual Reunion Dinners held by the OCAs than reports of national commemorations or even other local branch reports. The inclusion of reunions as part of Armistice Day celebrations introduced an alternative discourse into the journals – one that highlighted the potential of local memorials as spaces for reminiscence and the sharing of happy recollections of what wartime service had meant for members of the OCAs.

Armistice Day events were also about reuniting with ex-servicewomen from other OCAs, as one report of the ceremony in Glasgow in 1926 made clear. The author of the report, a member of the local QMAAC OCA branch, began her account by sending ‘a message to my girls, the girls of Rouen and St Pol and to the new friends I have found since those far back days in France’. She continued with a description of her attendance at the United Services Club in Glasgow on the evening of Armistice Day and her search for ‘Miss Gilchrist’ whom she had served alongside in the QMAAC. She wrote, ‘no familiar face greeted me, but one or two voices said, “Do sit down Miss Laird, even although we aren’t WAACs”’. Again, the way in which the report focused on the welcome given to Miss Laird by former servicewomen from OCAs shows how the meanings

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124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
ascribed to Armistice Day were often a product of the encounters between ex-servicewomen during reunions following the more official commemorative events at the local Cenotaph. Similarly, in December 1926 the Birmingham branch of the WRAF OCA reported ‘twenty-eight QMAAC and WRAF gathered together’ at their ‘usual Armistice Day Reunion Dinner’. The secretary summarised the dinner by reflecting that ‘the time was passed very pleasantly and all too swiftly.’ The coming together of ex-servicewomen from the three OCAs was often a feature of local Armistice Day reunions which, as these branch reports demonstrate, were characterised by the creation of new friendships as well as a reaffirmation of the comradeship between women.

Conclusion

In his influential study of ‘collective remembrance’ Jay Winter argues that ‘memory’ is fundamentally ‘unstable, plastic, synthetic and repeatedly reshaped’. Discourses and cultures of commemoration shift as the legacies of war are repeatedly contested and re-constructed. This chapter has both supported and challenged this claim. By looking in turn at the reports of Armistice Day in the 1920s and 1930s, we can see that the OCAs were spaces in which the cultural impact of ‘pessimistic, cynical and sometimes very brutal and bitter’ war literature was felt. The shift that occurred within the reports of the 1930s shows a divide between earlier reports which reflected nostalgic memories of war and a sense of pride in the former military identities of ex-servicewomen. Yet whilst these changes in the nature of commemorative discourse in the OCA journals demonstrate how memory can be ‘repeatedly reshaped’ this chapter has also shed light on the influence of the norms, values and expressions that defined the emotional community of the OCAs in the reports of Armistice Day. As Adrian Gregory has argued, the ways in which ‘British veterans remembered the war clearly influence[d] their attitude to commemorative rituals.’ Arguing that the emotional legacies of war were crucial in structuring the responses of ex-servicewomen to public rituals of remembrance in this period.

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131 Ibid.
132 Winter, Remembering War, p. 4.
134 Gregory, Silence of Memory, p. 51.
this chapter has taken this claim further by focusing more specifically on the unique experiences of female veterans.

OCA members understood that the emotional legacy of the war was tied to their own experiences of comradeship, friendship, and a sense of pride in their identities as veterans. Throughout the inter-war period former servicewomen reflected upon Armistice Day as an additional space – alongside branch reunions and social gatherings – in which women could re-unite and indulge in nostalgic reminiscences on their time as military auxiliaries. Despite political and public pressure to reduce the military presence at the Cenotaph in London and the issues surrounding recognition by civic officials and the press on a local level, ex-servicewomen ensured that through reunions and their own reports in the journals, they were able to carve out a space for themselves within official commemorative events and to celebrate what the war had meant for them. In highlighting their proficiency at marching and celebrating the appearance of attendees in uniform, adorned with medals, the authors of Armistice Day reports did seek to stress their equivalence with male veterans. But it is also clear that ex-servicewomen were determined to seize the opportunity presented by these occasions to validate and legitimate their distinct identities as female veterans. Attending reunion dinners, lauding the renewal of friendships and indulging in humourous recollections all suggest that the emotional values promoted within the OCAs also shaped how women reflected on their participation in national and local commemorations. Even in the 1930s when the gendered divisions within the veteran community were more willingly acknowledged, ex-servicewomen still proudly reflected on their participation in events which served as public reminders of the distinct contribution made by women during the war.

Including ex-servicewomen and their experiences in assessments of the landscape of commemoration of inter-war Britain further complicates our understanding of the impact of cultural discourses of remembrance by drawing attention to the ways in which positive legacies of women’s military service shaped their responses to Armistice Day on both a local and national level. In remembrance ceremonies, women drew on other identities other than wife and mother, and they assumed an active role on these occasions based on their service experience rather than their understanding of familial bereavement or widowhood. Understanding the importance of Armistice Day celebrations in allowing women to assert their veteran identities in public and
celebrate their friendships with other ex-servicewomen again makes clear the enduring emotional attachment women felt towards their former military identities. As we seen, the emotional legacy of the First World War was crucial in shaping personal reflections on gendered military service, forging bonds of ‘sisterhood’ across the OCAs and structuring the nature of political engagement with local elections, feminism and pacifism. The emotional communities of the OCAs were sustained by members’ collective investment in this shared legacy of wartime service and the values of duty, comradeship and service. As the next chapter will show, the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 threatened the cohesion of the emotional communities as, for the first time, the veteran status of OCA members was challenged in new ways.
Chapter 5 – ‘I wish we could all be in the Service again’: female veterans on the Home Front, 1939 – 1945

In January 1940, former servicewoman Mrs. D. E. Beardwell reflected on her role as a volunteer on the home front during the Second World War. In a letter published in the QMAAC Gazette, Beardwell expressed her regret that she was unable to enlist with the new women’s military forces but commented that ‘I still try to do my bit to serve.’¹ She went on to give details of the extensive volunteer work she had undertaken so far during the war, noting that she had attended ‘all the lectures of ARP (Air Raid Precautions) anti-gas’ and had successfully obtained her ‘badge and certificate’.² She had also completed ‘three courses in Red Cross and First Aid’ whilst acting as the treasurer and ‘deputy standard bearer’ for her local Women’s Legion Branch.³ Beardwell was clearly proud of her achievements as a civilian volunteer, which she listed in detail in her letter. But Beardwell also frequently returned to reflect on the enduring pride she felt in her identity as a former member of the QMAAC. She wrote how ‘proud’ she felt ‘to be an ex-Service woman’ and spoke of the material reminders she had kept of her time in the First World War.⁴ She still had her ‘WAAC badge’ which she was ‘always proud to wear’ as well as ‘a lovely illuminated Farewell from our Controller-in-Chief’ which she was also ‘proud to show.’⁵ The lasting affection for her time in the QMAAC suggests that whilst Beardwell had fully embraced the opportunities for civilian volunteer work, she still felt a strong connection to her old force and still thought of herself as an ‘ex-Service woman’.⁶ Although she was now part of new associations, including the Women’s Legion, Beardwell’s regret at not being able to enlist with the new women’s forces and her nostalgic reflections on the QMAAC suggest that her veteran identity remained an important aspect of Beardwell’s selfhood even after 1939.

Beardwell understood the importance of civilian work during wartime, yet her letter shows that she also felt a strong emotional attachment to the QMAAC. Her letter highlights the competing

² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid.
demands ex-servicewomen faced during the Second World War; on the one hand, Beardwell’s extensive list of civilian volunteer roles underscores her patriotic desire to support the war effort on the Home Front. Yet Beardwell’s emotional reflections on her identity as a member of the QMAAC reveal an enduring attachment to her former military corps. The outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 meant that many former servicewomen had to navigate the demands made by the wartime state whilst still holding on to their identities as former servicewomen. The emotional tensions that ensued are the focus of this chapter. The letters and articles within the OCA journals offer a unique opportunity to map the complex emotional responses of an older generation of women to life on the home front during the Second World War. The creation of new women’s auxiliary forces after 1939 – the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) in September 1938, the Women’s Royal Naval Service (WRNS) in November 1938 and the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) in June 1939 – imposed age restrictions for recruitment which excluded many former servicewomen from enlisting in their ranks. Initially, the ATS limited recruitment to women between the ages of 18 and 43, before increasing the age limit to 50. In the WRNS, the age limit in 1938 was between 19 and 45, before it was changed to between 17 and a half and 49 in 1941. The WAAF allowed women between the ages of 18 and 40 to enlist. This exclusion led many former servicewomen to express feelings of resentment and nostalgia for their own experience of military service.

The chapter investigates the evolution of the OCAs as emotional communities during the Second World War, as the older, ‘service’ identity of members became increasingly marginalised as a result of the formation and expansion of the ATS, the WRNS and the WAAF. During the war, the OCAs evolved from spaces solely inhabited by former servicewomen to new, hybrid institutions that actively encouraged current members of the new women’s forces to join. In March 1940, the Gazette reported that the Headquarters Council of the QMAAC OCA voted to admit ex-members of the ATS to join, before the OCA announced the decision to admit current

7 Women between the ages of 20 – 30 conscripted into the women’s auxiliary forces in December 1941 (with the exceptions of married women). For more on the details and evolution of the National Service (No. 2) Act see Jeremy Crang, ““Come into the Army, Maud”: Women, Military Conscription, and the Markham Inquiry”, Defence Studies, 8 (2008), 381 – 395. Military conscription into the male armed forces applied to men aged between 18 and 41 by 1941. For more on male conscription see Geoffrey Field, ““Civilians in Uniform”: Class and Politics in the British Armed Forces”, International Labor and Working Class History, 80 (2011), 121 – 147.
members of the ATS in March 1941. The name of the journal changed from the QMAAC Gazette to the QMAAC and ATS Comrades Association Gazette in May 1942, formally signalling the evolution of the OCA to incorporate members of the ATS. In July 1940 editor of The Wren Mrs. Geikie-Cobb reported that the Council of the Association of Wrens had agreed to permit members of the new WRNS to join the OCA. In April 1941, the General Committee of the WRAF OCA agreed that the association would amalgamate with the Comrades of the Royal Air Force, which led to the dissolution of the WRAF OCA in April 1942.

This chapter will focus on the impact of the influx of new servicewomen to the emotional community of the OCAs and will explore how the communities changed as a result. As Rosenwein argues, ‘dominant emotional communities may themselves change, or they may lose purchase and become marginal’. In what follows, I will explore the extent to which the dominant emotional vocabularies found within the journals changed after the outbreak of a new conflict in 1939. As we have seen, the discursive landscape of the OCA journals had evolved in diverse ways throughout the course of the inter-war period. The promotion of various political discourses infused the journals with diverse and even radical debates. The creation of a civic-minded, politically engaged body of female veterans was a discursive process that happened gradually over the inter-war period, aided by the interventions of key individuals within the leadership and membership during the 1920s and 1930s. The OCAs thus proved themselves to be flexible institutions. The editors and contributors to the journals had ensured that readers were exposed to a range of political viewpoints. Yet the politicisation of the journals worked precisely because the arguments and viewpoints introduced did not challenge the emotional values within the OCAs. For example, articles promoting pacifist campaigns presented this type of political activism as a continuation of wartime service that required the deployment of military skills and qualities. In contrast, the entry of a new generation of servicewomen during the Second World War challenged the emotional norms of the OCAs in new ways. The narrative of gendered

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military service that ex-servicewomen had collectively fostered within the OCAs throughout the 1920s and 1930s became increasingly marginal in journals which sought to promote the experiences of a younger generation of women whose experience of wartime service took place in new military contexts.

The chapter adds to existing work on women’s experiences in the Second World War by focusing on the experiences of older women who had previously served in the women’s forces in the First World War. As James Hinton has argued, whilst the lives of younger, working-class women have been the subject of numerous studies, ‘the wartime experiences of middle-aged women, and particularly middle-class ones, have attracted less attention from social historians’.11 Existing studies have explored in depth the experiences of women who served with the new women’s forces, but little has yet been written about the inter-generational tensions between an older generation of female veterans and younger women.12 By exploring these tensions, the chapter will further contribute to existing literature that has shown clearly the complexity and ambiguity that defined cultural discourses related to women’s wartime roles in the military, in industry and within civilian volunteer organisations on the Home Front. As Sonya Rose has argued, the ‘ambivalent meanings of wartime femininity’ that circulated within the public sphere indicate clearly that ‘the very category “woman” in the context of the “People’s War” was full of contradictions.’13 Ultimately, as Rose shows, attitudes towards women’s roles in wartime were marked by ‘tensions and contradictions’ as the government’s need for female recruits for war

work clashed with the need for women to remain in the domestic sphere and continue to be ‘wives and mothers’. Work by Rose, Summerfield and Gledhill and Swanson has illustrated effectively the complexity of gendered discourses that circulated during the Second World War. This chapter departs from a focus on cultural discourses in the public sphere, and instead maps the discursive shifts within the OCA journals. Doing so provides a deeper insight into marked changes that occurred within this associational culture as a result of the Second World War. By looking in more depth at the emotional responses of female veterans to life on the Home Front, the chapter focuses on the impact of volunteer work and the emergence of new servicewomen on the martial subjectivities of older women who had served in the First World War.

The chapter’s focus on emotional responses to war will provide new perspectives on gendered experiences on the home front between 1939 and 1945. Whilst existing narratives have illuminated the significance of women’s roles as ARP wardens, factory workers and hosts for evacuee children, the chapter uses the insights of emotions history to explore in greater depth the ways in which previous experiences of military service in the First World War shaped responses to civilian volunteer work after 1939.

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discourses were re-framed within the emotional community of the OCAs. This chapter argues that many older women like Beardwell – excluded from the forces and undertaking volunteer work – attempted to re-frame their civilian roles in relation to their veteran identities. It will become clear how the emotional legacy of the previous war – fostered within the emotional community of the OCAs – continued to shape how women experienced their new roles as civilian volunteers. In this way, the relationship between gender, identity and emotion on the home front – which has been neglected within existing historiography – will be fully explored.17 Recent research by Alison Twells uses the diaries of a ‘working-class scholarship girl from the East Midlands during the Second World War’ to explore the ‘importance of emotional expression as part of her gradual self-construction as a modern girl’.18 Twells too uses Rosenwein’s ‘emotional community’ framework as part of an approach which she argues helps us ‘move beyond cultural directives concerning appropriate female emotional expression to develop a greater understanding of the daily crafting of the female self in wartime Britain’.19 This chapter similarly utilises the emotional expressions of ex-servicewomen in the OCA journals to explore how the martial subjectivities of women that had been kept alive through the letters, articles and reports in the OCA journals changed after 1939.

Chapter One argued that nostalgic letters written in the immediate years after the war allowed women to make sense of their wartime experiences and give expression to an emotional, gendered legacy of wartime service. As the women’s services were disbanded and the wartime state gave way to peacetime conditions, women’s identities as servicewomen came under threat. In communicating a longing for military life, women could share in the construction of a distinct cultural memory of the war and thus protect their martial identities. 1939 saw female veterans confront a new threat to their identities as former servicewomen – yet instead of nostalgia and celebrations of ‘sisterhood’ the emotions expressed by former servicewomen during the Second World War included pride in their veteran status and frustration at being excluded from the new

17 For more on emotion in military and diplomatic contexts in the Second World War, see Frank Costigliola, “‘Mixed Up’ and ‘Contact’: Culture and Emotion among the Allies in the Second World War”, The International History Review, 20 (1998), 791 – 805.
19 Ibid., p. 4.
women’s forces. An analysis of women’s responses to volunteer work and the new women’s forces will offer a more complex assessment of the emotional landscape of the home front in the Second World War. Overall, the chapter uses the OCA journals to highlight the ways in which age, gender and the legacy of the First World War interacted in the complex emotional expressions of former servicewomen in response to the Second World War.

‘Back to the Old Days’: Nostalgia and Civilian Volunteer Work on the Home Front

This section explores the ways in which ex-servicewomen made sense of their new roles as civilian volunteers on the home front during the Second World War. It focuses on the tensions that emerged as former servicewomen clung on to their old identities as military veterans whilst coming to terms with their exclusion from the new women’s forces. Either because of age or existing domestic responsibilities, many OCA members had to acknowledge the fact that their contributions to the war effort in this new conflict would involve signing up with one of the volunteer organisations on the Home Front. The WVS was the largest and most prominent of these organisations. Created in 1938 and led by Stella Isaacs, the Marchioness of Reading, the WVS provided food for returning servicemen, distributed clothing to needy families on the home front and offered care and support to evacuated children and their families. Hinton has argued that the WVS shared much in common with other women’s organisations such as the Women’s Institute and the Townswomen’s Guild.20 These conservative associations collectively characterised a ‘vigorous female public sphere’ which offered ‘housewives, but also professional women and spinsters of independent means’ the opportunity ‘to meet and socialise outside the home’.21 Yet for older ex-servicewomen, whose former military identities had proven so significant during the inter-war years, the option to join the WVS did little to assuage the sense of disappointment felt by many after being told they were unable to enlist with the new women’s forces.

21 Ibid., p. 2.
The struggle to adjust to a new civilian life in wartime was felt particularly acutely by members who joined the WVS, for whom the organisation’s vision of gendered voluntarism proved problematic. OCA members had to choose between enlisting with the new women’s forces and continuing with domestic or familial duties. In a letter published in July 1941, former Wren Dorothy Stoate explained that her ‘two daughters must be my first consideration’ and as such, she had made the decision to enlist with the WVS in her home town of Bournemouth.\(^{22}\) The emotional impact of Stoate’s decision to forego military service and enlist with a civilian volunteer service was highlighted in her letter, in which she spoke of the ‘hard lesson’ learnt ‘when, with a deep longing, I have wanted to become a Wren again, feeling that I could do so much to help our beloved Service.’\(^{23}\) The emotional tensions illuminated in Stoate’s response serve as a reminder of the impact of military service on women’s responses to the Second World War. Stoate’s dilemma saw her wrestle with her own emotional bond with her ‘beloved’ WRNS and her acknowledgement that her maternal duties should take priority. Stoate framed her decision to enlist with the WVS as an uneasy compromise between her desire to serve the war effort and her need to look after her two daughters.

Yet whilst Stoate made clear that her commitment to her family precluded any possibility of enlisting with the new WRNS, she was also determined that her military skills would be put to use in her work with the WVS. Stoate described how ‘after some time of striving to get what abilities and training I have used to the best advantage’ she had secured a role as the Secretary for Rear-Admiral W. H. Ham working with the Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch Wing of the Air Training Corps.\(^{24}\) Stoate therefore succeeded in finding a volunteer role which allowed her to work with a branch of the military in a way that alleviated her regret at being unable to serve as a Wren once more. Stoate’s wish to utilise her ‘abilities and training’ on the home front was a product of her enduring attachment to her former military service – which was a central pillar of the emotional community of the Association of Wrens. Stoate’s response to her volunteer work was therefore informed as much by her veteran identity and membership of the OCA as it was by any contemporary recruitment efforts.\(^{25}\) Although Stoate was unable to re-join

\(^{22}\) Dorothy E. Stoate, ‘Correspondence’, The Wren, July 1941.
\(^{23}\) Ibid.
\(^{24}\) Ibid.
\(^{25}\) Ibid.
the WRNS, she nonetheless sought work which would allow her to showcase her abilities in a military environment. In many ways her narrative exemplifies the dilemmas faced by women on the Home Front, but it is telling that Stoate sought to alleviate the ‘longing’ she felt for the WRNS by seeking work which enabled her to work closely with a naval official in a secretarial role. Stoate acknowledged that her maternal duties circumscribed her role in the war effort, but she also makes clear how she managed to secure suitable work in the WVS that was different from the traditional domestic tasks undertaken by volunteers.

Stoate managed to negotiate her way through the multiple roles demanded of her during wartime. She was willing to abandon her ambition of resuming military service – but only to a point. Her admission that prioritising her daughters had caused her pain in preventing her from joining the ‘beloved service’ provides a key example of the unique emotional tensions experienced by ex-servicewomen during the Second World War. During the war, former servicewomen had to balance their patriotic and domestic duties, but as Stoate’s letter highlights, an enduring commitment to a ‘service’ identity was equally key in shaping the lives of OCA members on the Home Front. Stoate spoke of the nostalgia for her old service life that her role with the WVS had provoked. Frequent trips to the naval base in Great Yarmouth often required Stoate to work ‘until 4’ o clock in the morning’ and it was this nocturnal working routine that Stoate argued transported her ‘back to the old days’. Stoate framed her account of her current volunteer role with nostalgic references to her previous military service with the WRNS in a way that suggests her ‘deep longing’ to ‘become a Wren again’ was never fully assuaged. In her letter, Stoate attempted to draw links between her old military role and her new role as secretary, claiming that the ‘discipline’ that she had ‘learnt’ during the First World War had been ‘of untold value’ in her work with the WVS. Her willingness to make clear that her ‘abilities and training’ along with her ‘discipline’ were still relevant in her work on the home front again points to the underlying emotional tensions experienced by OCA members during the Second World War. Having seized upon the opportunity to work in a quasi-military capacity through the WVS, Stoate further

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26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
attempted to assert her veteran credentials in a letter which highlighted the enduring importance of the qualities held by an older generation of servicewomen.

As well as asserting the continuing applicability of her military skills, Stoate was also keen to establish links between her generation and the servicewomen enrolled with the re-formed WRNS. Crucially, she credited the Association of Wrens and The Wren with facilitating this connection between former and current servicewomen. She wrote that ‘I should like to say how much I look forward to receiving The Wren’ and described how ‘eagerly’ she searched ‘for news of Wrens and ex-Wrens’.³⁰ The news reports published in The Wren that informed ex-servicewomen of developments in the WRNS were described by Stoate as a ‘great joy’ which allowed her ‘to feel that we old ones have at least a link to the new’.³¹ Although Stoate made clear earlier in her letter that parental commitments rather than age had stopped her from enlisting with the WRNS, here she refers to the existence of a generational divide between the OCA members and new recruits to the WRNS. Yet the gap she identified between ‘old’ and ‘new’ servicewomen was, in Stoate’s view, lessened by The Wren, which provided a much-needed link between the generations. Although Stoate had joined the WVS, her letter underscores the strength of her commitment to her former military identity and her membership of the Association of Wrens.

The uniform, badges, and hierarchical structures of the WVS implemented by Lady Reading differentiated the service from other civilian volunteer organisations. As a ‘uniformed auxiliary service’ the WVS offered women like Stoate more of a connection to their previous military service than other organisations.³² Yet despite the WVS’s appearance as ‘a recognisably civilian army’ Stoate remained determined to seek out work which provided a more solid connection to her former life in the WRNS.³³ Stoate’s nostalgia for her former military corps drove her to seek work that lay outside the more common, domesticated work volunteering with WVS entailed. Stoate’s letter therefore sheds light on the ways in which her emotional attachment to the WRNS

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³⁰ Ibid.
³¹ Ibid.
³³ Ibid., p. 284.
structured her engagement with the WVS. Whilst Hinton claims that class identities were paramount in shaping women’s interactions with the WVS, Stoate’s letter provides a clear example of how her identity as a former servicewoman remained a key factor in her pursuit of war work. Stoate did not reject secretarial work, but in her letter in the journal she interweaved her narrative of civilian work with nostalgic reflections and affirmations of the importance of the OCA that upheld the emotional values of the Association of Wrens.

Ms. Allcorn, a former member of the WRAF also wrote to the *WRAF Old Comrades Association* informing readers how much more she valued the journal now the nation was once more at war. Allcorn volunteered with the British Red Cross and her local First Aid Station, yet she wrote how she had felt ‘afraid now that we are at war once more’ the journal would become ‘a thing of the past.’\(^34\) She continued by expressing the relief she felt after receiving her copy of the *WRAF Old Comrades Association* journal, noting that she been ‘surprised and naturally quite pleased’ to discover the publication was still in existence.\(^35\) Allcorn’s determination to remain connected to the OCA through this new conflict was expressed both in her anxiety around the publication of the journal and her stated desire to attend any social reunions organised by the OCA. Allcorn noted that should any of these ‘reunions’ take place, she would ‘certainly pop along’ provided she was not ‘on duty’.\(^36\) Despite having secured volunteer work on the Home Front, Allcorn’s letter – defined by a determination to stay in touch with the OCA – makes clear the enduring emotional attachment many ex-servicewomen felt to their former corps despite the outbreak of another conflict.

Former member of the WRAF Mrs. Hand worked as a Section Leader with the ATS and, as she noted in a letter to the journal in October 1939, she enjoyed her work ‘opening and linking, collating and assessing and issuing family allowance books to the Royal Engineers.’\(^37\) But, as she also admitted, she was less than satisfied with the appearance of the younger ATS recruits she worked alongside, noting her surprise that ‘younger women will wear their hats “cock-eyed”’.\(^38\)

\(^{34}\) News of Our Members’, *WRAF Old Comrades Association*, October – November 1939.
\(^{35}\) *Ibid*.
\(^{36}\) *Ibid*.
\(^{37}\) *Ibid*.
\(^{38}\) *Ibid*. 
Hand’s disapproval directed at the fashion habits of the new generation of servicewomen speaks to the generational tensions that existed between OCA members and younger women. Unlike many of her former comrades, Hand was able to serve with the ATS. However, her continued membership of the QMAAC OCA and her decision to express her dissatisfaction with younger servicewomen makes clear the continued importance of Hand’s veteran identity. Whilst Hand struggled to understand the fashion choices of her younger colleagues, she felt a deep sense of attachment to the WRAF OCA. She hoped that Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, former Controller-in-Chief of the WRAF would ‘pay us a visit’ noting that such a visit ‘would seem like old times.’

At the end of her letter, she stated ‘I miss my old pals and the reunions’ and expressed her wish that they ‘could all meet one Saturday afternoon’ stating ‘I think I could get a pass to London’. Both these letters point to the enduring significance of the OCAs for women engaged in civilian volunteer work. These women were active in alternative volunteer associations, yet both Stoate and Allcorn articulated their concern that the OCAs would dissipate during the war and their subsequent relief that this had not happened. Hand expressed how disconnected she felt away from her ‘old pals and the reunions’ and ended with a determination to reconnect with her fellow old comrades.

Membership of the OCAs took on a new significance in wartime; both the journals and the reunions provided a much-needed link to an alternative, pre-war associational culture that celebrated their identities as former servicewomen.

Other former servicewomen chose to become involved with fundraising campaigns for the armed forces as part of the war effort. In this way, OCA members were able to perform their patriotic duty whilst also maintaining a connection to their former military corps. Ex-servicewomen re-asserted their veteran identities, albeit within the more conservative and traditionally feminine space of charitable campaigns. At the Annual General Meeting of the Association of Wrens in December 1939, it was proposed that ‘the Association of Wrens should adopt HMS Wren or some other ship of the Royal Navy with a view to providing extra comforts for the ship’s company’. Those present at the meeting agreed to contribute a grant from the ‘Savings Bank

39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
account of the Association of Wrens.\footnote{Ibid.} It was also recorded that former Wren Miss Carpenter had ‘expressed a wish that the members of the Women’s Royal Naval Service might be asked to contribute, as she felt sure that they would like to do so, and this would be the means of keeping the new Service in touch with the ex-members of the Women’s Royal Naval Service.’\footnote{Ibid.} Clearly, in Carpenter’s view, fundraising provided an opportunity to connect with the new WRNS and through them, the navy more broadly. The Association of Wrens later formed the ‘Comforts Fund’ to co-ordinate the campaign to raise money for and produce knitted garments for sailors. Run by Winifred Daykns, the OCA registered the ‘Comforts Fund’ as a ‘Sub-Depot’ of The Depot for Knitted Comforts for the Royal Navy, a national group that organised and distributed knitted clothing for the naval service.\footnote{Ibid.} Whilst the Association of Wrens was part of this larger coordinating body, Daykns argued that the clothes knitted by former Wrens ‘should be allotted so far as it is advisable to the destroyer HMS Wren.’\footnote{HMS Wren was not officially affiliated to the Association of Wrens and was sunk by the German Navy soon after the beginning of this appeal in October 1940. Its replacement, also named HMS Wren, was officially linked to the Association of Wrens and was launched by Chief of the WRNS and Association of Wrens member Vera Laughton-Mathews after being partly funded by contributions from former Wrens.} Daykns encouraged both former and current servicewomen to knit clothing including ‘pullovers, seaboot stockings, gloves, mittens, socks, scarves and balaclava helmets’.\footnote{Winifred Daykns, ‘To All Ex-Wrens: A Letter from Mrs. Daykns’, The Wren, July 1941.} Echoing statements made by other ex-servicewomen, Daykns also stressed that ‘for those ex-Wrens who are not in whole-time employment it offers the double privilege of helping in a really useful work and of joining in this one small matter with the present Service’.\footnote{Hinton, Women, social leadership and the Second World War, p. 63.}

The motivation behind the establishment of the ‘Comforts Fund’ combined with Daykns’s determination to see the knitted garments produced by OCA members dispatched to those on board HMS Wren challenges Hinton’s claim that ‘knitting for the troops’ was a means of ‘sustaining housewives’ during the war.\footnote{Ibid.} Daykns and other figures within the Association of Wrens, including Miss Carpenter, viewed the knitting campaigns as a way in which ex-
servicewomen could feel part of the Royal Navy once more. In the context of the Association of Wrens ‘Comforts Fund’ this type of work offered those women who were unable to serve an opportunity to re-establish a direct relationship with their former military force. Daykins maintained that the Association of Wrens would distribute the garments produced by former servicewomen to *HMS Wren* – a vessel not only linked to the WRNS but also a key component of the naval fleet. Destroyers made a vital contribution to naval warfare: Winston Churchill likened destroyer fleets to a ‘fast cavalry division’ that helped to ‘reinforce a dangerous area’. Aligning themselves with the destroyer *HMS Wren* therefore meant that members of the Association of Wrens could feel that they were contributing to the effective running of a ship that could play a decisive role in British naval defence. For these women, knitting ‘seaboot stockings’ and other items of clothing was part of a broader effort, conducted and coordinated through the Association of Wrens, that allowed ex-servicewomen to maintain their connection to the Royal Navy, underscoring the importance of their former military identities in shaping their experience of civilian war work. These women, prevented from enlisting with the new WRNS, re-framed the task of knitting as a vital contribution rather than a domestic chore that enabled ex-servicewomen to feel part of the Navy once more.

The Association of Wrens was not alone in its effort to use charitable work as a means of re-establishing a connection to the military. In May 1942, the Edinburgh branch of the QMAAC OCA suggested that members of the OCA should collectively purchase an item of military equipment for the Army to mark the twentieth-fifth anniversary of the formation of the QMAAC. At a subsequent committee meeting it was ‘agreed unanimously that the purchase of a Tommy gun, Bren gun, or airman’s outfit would mark the occasion in a fitting manner.’ In a similar way to the Association of Wrens’ determination to send their knitted clothes exclusively to *HMS Wren*, the QMAAC OCA sought to raise funds for a machine gun. The unanimous decision to purchase a Thompson submachine gun – known as a ‘tommy gun’ – or a Bren light machine gun is particularly striking given the non-combatant status of ATS recruits throughout the war. The

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50 It is not clear how many Wrens participated in campaign, but its active promotion in *The Wren* suggests that it was fully endorsed by the leadership of the Association of Wrens.
52 ‘Our Twenty-Fifth Anniversary’, *QMAAC and ATS Comrades Association Gazette*, May – June 1942.
eventual decision to purchase a ‘Bren 303 Machine Gun’ points to a collective willingness on behalf of the QMAAC OCA to transgress the gendered boundaries imposed by the wartime state. Buying new weaponry for the Army via a collective fundraising campaign allowed the QMAAC OCA to subvert gendered expectations whilst also aligning themselves more closely with their former military service. Charitable fundraising was a socially sanctioned wartime activity for older women, yet the object of their campaign seemed to undermine cultural expectations surrounding women’s roles in wartime. The OCA did not shy away from expressing these intentions, noting that the purchase of the machine gun was intended to ‘show our connection with the Army and help the war effort’. The QMAAC OCA argued that this purchase represented an ‘opportunity to show our thankfulness for having had the honour and privilege of serving in the QMAAC’. The report stated that the buying of the Bren machine gun was also a way of ex-servicewomen communicating ‘our gratitude that we are still here and able to serve the Army again by providing a weapon, especially those of us who are not able to help more actively by personal service in the ATS’.

Again, ex-servicewomen viewed these fundraising campaigns as a way of asserting their veteran status whilst subverting the age restrictions imposed by the ATS. To raise funds for the gun, former Chief Controller of the QMAAC and former Chief Controller of the ATS Helen Gwynne-Vaughan suggested charging borrowing rates for her recently published 1941 memoir *Service with the Army*. In an article for the QMAAC *Gazette*, Gwynne-Vaughan wrote ‘a small charge for the loan of the book might, in fact, help to fund the purchase of the Bren gun, which will remind the Germans that, despite the 25th Anniversary, members of the QMAAC are still very much alive!’ Gwynne-Vaughan clearly hoped that the ‘Bren machine gun’ would act as a physical reminder of the existence of the QMAAC both to the British Army and the German forces. Through the purchase of the gun then, former servicewomen were asserting themselves once more at the centre of military action. Whilst they were unable to enlist with the women’s

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56 Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, *Service with the Army* ([S.I.]: Hutchinson, 1941).
forces, the gun provided an opportunity for women to feel that they were, in some way, aiding the Army and helping to defeat the enemy. Ex-servicewomen worked within the existing boundaries of gendered volunteer activism whilst also re-asserting their identities as former servicewomen.

Despite their exclusion from the military forces, ex-servicewomen remained determined that their veteran identities would shape the type of volunteer work they performed on the Home Front. Within the discursive space of the OCA journals, ex-servicewomen presented their work with the WVS and their charitable activities in ways that emphasised their enduring emotional attachment to their former military corps. Although the roles offered to older women reflected more traditional ideas surrounding women’s activism in the public sphere, within the emotional community of the OCAs these former servicewomen continued to stress their former military identities and took pride in their attachment to the forces. Given this clear determination to retain a connection to the military in the face of their exclusion from the women’s forces, the lack of any references to the Women’s Home Defence (WHD) organisation is surprising. Formed in 1940, the WHD was an all-female counterpart to the Home Guard, a male civilian defence militia. Campaigned for and endorsed by Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, the former Controller-in-Chief of the QMAAC, Commandant of the WRAF and current President of the WRAF OCA, the lack of any evidence of OCA members joining WHD is surprising. As Penny Summerfield and Corinna Peniston-Bird have argued, the WHD was ‘an explicitly combatant organisation’ and allowed women to transgress the ‘wartime boundary between armed masculinity and unarmed femininity’. The refusal of the War Office to endorse WHD could have been a key factor in dissuading OCA members from supporting the formation of a women’s civilian defence corps. Like the WVS, the WHD organisation and the Home Guard represented key spaces that provided ex-servicewomen with opportunities to actively contribute to the war effort. The WHD allowed women to defy ‘the combat taboo’ and therefore offered ex-servicewomen a chance to organise

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in a military force once more.\textsuperscript{59} Yet as this section has argued, for ex-servicewomen, neither civilian force came close to assuming the significance of their former military corps. The intensity of women’s emotional investment in their veteran identities precluded any meaningful engagement with alternative organisations on the Home Front.

\textit{Encountering the new generation: the OCAs and the new women’s forces}

In July 1940, the Association of Wrens made the decision to admit members from the newly re-formed Women’s Royal Naval Service. The WRAF OCA followed suit in September 1940 with an announcement in the \textit{WRAF Old Comrades Association} that members of the Women’s Auxiliary Air Force were welcome to join the veteran association. Finally, the QMAAC OCA were the last association to open membership to women currently serving in the Auxiliary Territorial Service in March 1941. This decision taken by all three OCAs marked a key turning point for female veteran associations, as they evolved beyond their initial purpose to preserve the memory of women’s military service in the First World War. Once the OCA leadership acknowledged the value of opening membership to current servicewomen, it became clear that the content of the journals would have to change to reflect the changing demographic more accurately. News features, regular reports and correspondence within the journals increasingly came to reflect the realities of the women who were still serving. During the Second World War, the emotional landscape within the journals – previously defined by the pride and nostalgia expressed by the leaders and members of the OCAs – was shaped more by the sensibilities of those women in the WRNS, the ATS and the WAAF. The transformation of the OCAs – accelerated by a prioritisation of contemporary military reports over older discourses – created divisions between the leadership and the membership. Determined to avoid tension, leading figures such as Gwynne-Vaughan and Furse sought to build links between both generations of servicewomen.

Although – as the later part of this section will show – inter-generational tensions did emerge within the OCAs, the editors of all three OCA journals worked hard to promote the new

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 236.
women’s forces and inform their readers of the new developments within the current services. Encouraged by the many recruitment campaigns run by OCAs, servicewomen joined the associations during the war, with the QMAAC OCA and the Association of Wrens expanding as a result. Both the Gazette and The Wren ran regular features updating members on current developments with the ATS and the WRNS, and printed correspondence from current servicewomen who provided readers with insights into their everyday lives. Throughout the war The Wren included a section entitled ‘News from the Four Commands’ made up of reports sent in from Wrens based in the four key naval ports of London, Liverpool, Chatham and Rosyth. Yet these articles were more than just straightforward news updates related either to the ATS or the WRNS. The news features printed in the journals, which editors often selected for re-publication from other periodicals, celebrated the achievements of servicewomen who had assumed roles previously assigned to men. Whilst the members of the women’s corps in the First World War had largely been limited to administrative and domestic work, servicewomen in the ATS and the WRNS were increasingly offered roles requiring greater skill and responsibility and it was this evidence of women’s progression that was highlighted and acclaimed in the journals.

In October 1940 Mrs. Geikie-Cobb, editor of The Wren, selected two articles for re-publication in the journal entitled ‘Wrens Doing Men’s Work’ and ‘An All-Female Crew: Naval History in the Making’ taken from the Daily Telegraph and The Times respectively. The first article, ‘Wrens Doing Men’s Work’, focused on the contribution made by Wrens during ‘Dynamo Week’ when ‘Operation Dynamo’ – the code name for the Dunkirk evacuation – was actioned. The article focused on the key contribution the Wrens had made during the successful evacuation of over 300,000 British soldiers from the beaches of Dunkirk. Wrens had been drafted in to replace naval officers who had been deployed elsewhere during the evacuation, and as such had been tasked with carrying out ‘the important technical work of chart plotting’. As the article highlighted, this was a significant development: ‘never before had women been given the opportunity of taking such a direct part in naval operations.’ The article continued under the subtitle ‘Taking Men’s Place’ with additional information about the type of work undertaken by

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60 “‘Wrens’ Doing Men’s Work’, The Wren, October 1940.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
Wrens at the naval base at Dover. The author observed that despite the ‘dangerous’ work in ‘the frequently raided “front line” town’ of Dover, amongst Wren recruits ‘their sangfroid is a byword’. The publication of these two articles in *The Wren*, with their emphasis on the independence and competence of the Wren, suggests that Geikie-Cobb sought to encourage her readers to look upon the new service with pride and admiration, conscious of the development of the force from its inception in 1917.

The speeches given by Laughton-Mathews in the early years of the war highlight how leading figures within the OCAs attempted to cultivate a sense of pride in the new WRNS. In October 1941 she gave a speech to the Royal United Services Institution in October 1941 that saw her reflect on the development of the service from its birth in 1917 to its revival in 1939. Beginning her speech, Laughton-Mathews acknowledged the contribution made by the first female naval auxiliaries, stating that this ‘great experiment’ had effectively proven that ‘there were many jobs in which women could effectively relieve men for service afloat.’ However, whilst the first generation of Wrens had been limited to ‘duties conventionally applicable to women’ the new WRNS had been more successful in placing recruits in roles that had previously been the preserve of men. She described how Wrens had replaced men working as battery chargers, meteorologists and aircraft checkers and stated her belief that women could progress even further, stating that ‘the aim is to replace men by women in all possible shore appointments.’

Laughton-Mathews’ speech here celebrates the same developments detailed in the previous articles reprinted from the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* – the publication of her speech in *The Wren* therefore further contributed to the construction of a discourse that sought to instil in former servicewomen a sense of pride in the new incarnation of the service they had been instrumental in making a success during the First World War.

Laughton-Mathews echoed these statements at the Annual Dinner of the Association of Wrens in July 1944, in which she again celebrated the progress made by servicewomen in the WRNS. Laughton-Mathews began by reminding her audience that ‘at the beginning of the war Wrens

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63 Ibid.  
64 Ibid.  
65 Ibid.  
66 Ibid.
were given jobs conventionally associated with women’ but praised the fact that ‘to-day Admiraulty policy was to employ Wrens in every job which women could do which was a very wide field indeed.’\textsuperscript{67} She listed ‘some of the hundred categories of work’ undertaken by Wrens in roles such as ‘engineers, acetylene welders, air and radio mechanics, torpedo Wrens’.\textsuperscript{68} As Laughton-Mathews stressed, roles that had previously been designated as male-only, particularly those that involved direct contact with weaponry, were now being performed by women. Within the new service, there were ‘Wrens who service engines, who take guns to pieces and re-fit them, who care for torpedoes’.\textsuperscript{69} Women were no longer confined to ‘feminine’ jobs on shore – Laughton-Mathews informed the Association of Wrens that ‘some of the new jobs meant that women carried responsibility for the safety of men and ships’ whilst other Wrens had ‘accompanied the Prime Minister on his journeys’ and now served ‘in overseas Stations, in the Eastern Fleet, Mediterranean, South Africa and the USA’.\textsuperscript{70} Both of the speeches drew on similar themes, and point to Laughton-Mathews’ wish to emphasise the development and evolution of the WRNS since 1918. As Laughton-Mathews made clear, the Wrens now had opportunities to travel and serve overseas and were permitted to deal with weapons and undertake roles that required significant skill. The title of the article in which this speech was printed, ‘The WRNS: Past, Present and Future’, is telling of the way in which Geikie-Cobb used the speeches made by Laughton-Mathews to further encourage ex-Wrens to see themselves as one part of a broader chain linking them to the current, and future Wrens. This, combined with Laughton-Mathews’ emphasis on the expansion of women’s roles in the Royal Navy, should be understood as a conscious effort on behalf of Geikie-Cobb to promote a discourse that stressed the relationship between old and new servicewomen and various positive examples of a movement towards greater gender equality.

As editor, Mrs. Garrard ensured that the QMAAC Gazette celebrated the ATS and the new developments that allowed women to assume roles previously preserved for men. In November 1941, the Gazette re-printed an article from The Times that described the formation of mixed-sex anti-aircraft sites. Based in Richmond Park in London, the first anti-aircraft batteries staffed by

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
both men and women came into existence in 1941. These batteries were highly popular with ATS recruits: by 1942, ‘more women were working on anti-aircraft sites than men’ with over 50 per cent of new recruits choosing to work on these units.71 Working on these sites offered women a unique opportunity to take a leading role in front-line defence, but as Lucy Noakes has argued, whilst ATS women worked as ‘radar operators, height finders, spotters, predictors and locaters on the sites’ it was only men that were permitted to fire the guns.72 Yet despite the limitations placed on women working on anti-aircraft batteries, the article re-printed in the QMAAC Gazette celebrated these women, noting that the mixed-sex anti-aircraft batteries represented ‘one of the most far-reaching experiments ever made in the British Army’.73 Whilst the author of the article was keen to point out that women were still prevented from the ‘actual manning of the heavy guns’ it was maintained that their work proved that ATS members were ‘the equals of men’.74 The article celebrated the fact that not only were servicewomen able to work alongside men, their assumption of technical and skilled roles on these batteries proved that they were ‘the equals’ of male soldiers.75

Like Geikie-Cobb, Garrard’s deliberate selection and publication of articles in the Gazette resulted in a depiction of the ATS as an innovative and modern organisation whose recruits were increasingly asserting themselves in new positions within the army. Like the articles in The Wren, the emphasis here on the independence of servicewomen and their ability to educate and prepare themselves for new roles beyond those that had been assigned to QMAAC members in the First World War is significant. The existence of these two very similar discourses in the journals of the WRNS and QMAAC OCAs, when viewed alongside the articles and speeches by Katharine Furse and Gwynne-Vaughan amongst others, demonstrate the collective effort on behalf of leading OCA figures to encourage a sense of pride amongst ex-servicewomen towards the new generation of women’s forces. Feelings of loss and regret communicated in individual

71 Noakes, Women in the British Army, p. 119.
72 Ibid., p. 119.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
letters found expression in the journals, yet the expectations of ‘elite’ OCA figures were that former servicewomen would support, encourage, and feel pride in the new services.

The leaders of the OCAs and the editors of the journals therefore worked hard to promote a positive relationship between the two generations of servicewomen. We have seen how these women made consistent attempts throughout the Second World War to present the women’s services as progressive institutions built upon the legacies and traditions of the auxiliary services in the First World War. The remaining part of the chapter will assess how effective this discursive strategy was in building relationships between older and younger members, as leading figures sought to embrace the new generation of women whilst protecting the existing emotional community within the OCAs. In letters to the OCA journals, individual ex-servicewomen occasionally articulated feelings of envy and resentment towards the new generation of women’s forces. The secretary of the ‘North Staffs’ branch of the QMAAC OCA wrote to the Gazette in October 1939 to report that she had recently met with ‘Colcough’ who she had been stationed with at the QMAAC camp in Boulogne in 1919. During the meeting Colcough had apparently been ‘bemoaning the fact that she wasn’t doing anything of a military nature yet’ and as such, stated that ‘she felt quite jealous of the ATS and the WAAF’s.’ The secretary wrote that she understood how Colcough was feeling: after she had admitted feeling ‘jealous’ of current servicewomen, the secretary replied ‘aren’t we all!’

Similar feelings of envy can be found in branch reports printed in the WRAF Old Comrades Association in October 1939. Ennis reported that she was unable to join up as she had been evacuated along with the schoolchildren she taught and as such, the report noted ‘she envies you all in the ATS and WAAF’. In the same edition, it was stated that ‘Fenn’ who worked as a secretary in a ‘large London hospital’ also helped to ‘man a First Aid Post in the East End’. But the report also commented that ‘she, too, envies those who have joined up’.

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76 ‘Branch Reports: North Staffs’, Old Comrades Association Gazette, October, November, December 1939.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
letters, ex-servicewomen communicated their envy in spaces they clearly understood would be receptive to their feelings. In turn, the editors of the journals validated these responses by printing such letters and reports. Whilst Laughton-Mathews, Gwynne-Vaughan and others clearly hoped that incorporating news features and updates on the new women’s forces would inculcate a sense of pride amongst the membership in the continuation and progression of this new generation of servicewomen, these letters illustrate that in reality some women felt envious of the women able to serve.

Other older ex-servicewomen simply felt regret at their exclusion from the women’s forces. E.C. Jolly, secretary of the Brighton branch of the QMAAC OCA expressed disappointment that the age limit prevented her from enlisting with the ATS. In March 1940 she wrote to the Gazette to describe a visit by a new ATS recruit to the Brighton branch. According to Jolly, the recruit ‘looked very smart in her uniform’ and noted ‘her experiences of service were most interesting’. The fact that this new ATS recruit had visited the Brighton branch of the QMAAC OCA suggests that there was an attempt at bridging the generational gulf between the services in this particular branch. Yet on reflecting on her encounter with the new ATS recruit, Jolly noted that the experience had ‘made some of us wish that Anno Domini did not prevent us from joining up again.’ Although Jolly makes clear the success of the visit, her concluding remarks again point to the tensions that often accompanied these encounters. Rather than an overwhelming sense of pride in the new generation of servicewomen, Jolly and other members of the branch felt some resentment at being unable to share in the experiences of younger recruits. This type of encounter was clearly what the leaders of OCAs had hoped for, yet Jolly’s pessimistic reflection at the end of her report reminds us of the overriding sense of regret that prevented many ex-servicewomen from fully embracing members of the ATS. As these letters demonstrate, many former servicewomen struggled with their exclusion from the new services. When exposed to new servicewomen, either through meetings or through news reports, this sense of exclusion was further emphasised. Whilst elsewhere popular discourses and official propaganda material were infused with patriotic rhetoric that encouraged self-sacrifice in aid of the war effort, these letters

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83 Ibid.
underline the fact that many ex-servicewomen struggled to come to terms with their inability to re-establish themselves as auxiliaries in the women’s forces.

In the early years of the war, prominent individuals across all three of the OCAs sought to alleviate the collective sense of disappointment felt by women excluded from service. In July 1939 Vera Laughton-Mathews, former editor of *The Wren* and Chief of the new WRNS attempted to comfort ex-servicewomen over 50 who due to the age limit imposed upon WRNS recruits, were unable to enlist. She wrote that she felt ‘especially sorry for those who would like to serve but are over age’ and acknowledging the close bonds between those in the OCA, noted ‘I wish we could all be in the Service again’.  

Laughton-Mathews had clearly faced criticisms related to the age limit and she addressed these here, arguing ‘in a Service there has to be an age limit and having made a rule, one has to stick to it’ and reminding ex-Wrens that she had personally succeeded in raising the age limit ‘from 45 to 50’ precisely in order to accommodate more former servicewomen who wished to join up again. Whilst she acknowledged the feelings of those excluded from service Laughton-Mathews also stressed the importance of supporting younger women who were willing to serve. She urged her readers to appreciate the fact that ‘the Service will always be a small one’ and hoped ‘you will understand that we cannot entirely fill it with middle-aged women, but must give a chance to the young ‘uns who did not have the good fortune to serve in the WRNS before.’

The fact that Laughton-Mathews felt the need to address the disappointment felt by ‘middle-aged women’ towards the ‘young ‘uns’ in the new forces suggests that feelings of envy were common amongst the membership of former Wrens. In attempting to ameliorate these feelings, we can see how leading members within the OCAs sought to direct the emotions of their members and soothe the tensions between the old and new generations of Wrens, whilst also understanding how the values and norms that had defined the emotional communities of the OCAs throughout the inter-war period began to shift after 1939. The envy expressed by ex-servicewomen became a feature of the emotional landscape of the OCAs as leading figures like Laughton-Mathews

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attempted to encourage readers to abandon these feelings and in doing so, they sought to actively re-shape the emotional community of the OCAs. Laughton-Mathews framed the exclusion of older women from the new women’s forces as a necessary pragmatic decision. She acknowledged the enduring attachment former Wrens had to their service whilst also outlining her own personal intervention in raising the age limit from 45 to 50 in the new WRNS.

Katharine Furse made a similar attempt in April 1941 to encourage ex-servicewomen to embrace the new WRNS and its younger recruits. Although she was less empathetic than Laughton-Mathews she attempted to appeal to her readers’ sense of fairness and pragmatism, arguing that those women who had led the WRNS ‘into uncharted seas in 1917 should give way to those who would bring in new ideas and have more elasticity and resilience to enable them to do their full share in what would prove to be a more far exacting war.’ Two years after Laughton-Mathews’ attempt to assuage these tensions, the appearance of Furse’s article suggests that the feelings of resentment had failed to disappear completely amongst older ex-servicewomen. Furse acknowledged the painful emotions that ex-servicewomen felt in adjusting to their status as civilians in a new war, writing ‘we old Wrens feel a little homesick and slightly envious of the younger women’ but she urged her readers to ‘show zeal and alacrity in controlling all such feeling and let us devote it to sustaining the new Service in every way we can’. Again, by acknowledging the collective envy felt towards the new WRNS by older OCA members, Furse legitimised these emotions whilst at the same time attempting to limit their expression. In making this intervention, Furse further attempted to control the emotional expressions within the Wren Association that threatened to undermine relations between the old and new generations of WRNS.

Like Laughton-Mathews had done two years earlier, Furse encouraged her readers to look beyond their exclusion from the new forces and instead think through what valuable contribution they could make on the Home Front. She argued that ex-Wrens had their ‘own special function in reading and thinking and praying and, in every way, trying to prepare new charts for

88 Ibid.
generations to come so that our winning may bear good fruit.’

Furse’s statement here is surprising in its seeming endorsement of more sedate and ‘traditional’ occupations for women. Given the active way in which ex-servicewomen volunteered with the WVS and continually sought work which would allow them to remain connected to their former military identities, Furse’s promotion of more passive activities for women already struggling to come to terms with their marginalisation from the WRNS points to a level of detachment from the membership. However, whilst her suggestions may have been of little consolation to women yearning for the excitement and adventure of military service, Furse’s recommendations for how former servicewomen should occupy themselves in wartime does attempt to conceive of a practical role for women that would ensure they still felt they were contributing to the formation of a better society in peacetime. Whilst different in their approaches, both statements by Laughton-Mathews and Furse represent an attempt to quell the feelings of disappointment expressed by ex-servicewomen and instead encourage a more positive relationship between old and new servicewomen.

Helen Gwynne-Vaughan’s attempt to forge more positive links between old comrades and new servicewomen in the QMAAC Gazette saw her adopt a different approach from that taken by Laughton-Mathews and Furse in The Wren. Helen Gwynne-Vaughan had been Controller of the QMAACs during the First World War, before she was appointed Commandant of the WRAF in September 1918. She became Major-General of the ATS upon its foundation in September 1938. At the 19th annual reunion dinner of the QMAAC OCA in February 1939, Gwynne-Vaughan proposed a toast to ‘HM Forces’ during which she reflected on the establishment of the ATS. She stated ‘the Corps has started a family. That family is called the Auxiliary Territorial Service’ and continued, ‘it is a fine child and, from what I have seen of it, it is going to show several of characters of its Mamma’. The close familial language here is telling of Gwynne-Vaughan’s broader attempt to encourage affectionate relations between the QMAAC and the ATS. Far from ‘replacing’ the QMAAC, Gwynne-Vaughan presented the ATS as the inheritor of the characteristics and traditions of the older women’s service. Gwynne-Vaughan’s speech, in which

89 Ibid.
she stressed the links between the two forces via familial language may have been an attempt to prevent any awkwardness between former and current servicewomen – an issue Gwynne-Vaughan later admitted she had been concerned about. In a speech at a reunion dinner in 1940, Gwynne-Vaughan confessed that she had been unsure how ‘my Old Comrades were going to treat my new comrades.’ But later in the speech Gwynne-Vaughan again utilised familial rhetoric as part of an additional attempt to emphasise the role played by ex-servicewomen within the ATS. She stated ‘I know, too, that these younger women who will be ex-Service women someday are learning to respect and admire and to look up to the WAACs of the last war.’

Moreover, Gwynne-Vaughan claimed that she delighted in greeting new ATS recruits and telling them ‘this story and that story about the good work you did and the great tradition that you laid down for them to follow.’ As Gwynne-Vaughan highlighted, ‘one of the heartening things about this new Service is the extent to which it has been possible for it to get the benefit of what you did and of what you learned’. Through her speeches, Gwynne-Vaughan emphasised the links between the QMAAC and ATS, emphasising how the latter organisation was the beneficiary of the ‘great work’ and the ‘great tradition’ the QMAAC represented. Central to Gwynne-Vaughan’s speeches was her acknowledgement of the powerful nostalgia and sense of pride in their veteran identity that many OCA members felt. Whilst the nostalgia found in individual letters from former servicewomen fed a sense of loss and regret at their exclusion from the new forces, Gwynne-Vaughan chose to celebrate the fact that the legacy of the QMAAC lived on through the ATS.

An attempt to construct links between the QMAAC and ATS is also evident in an article written by Florence Simpson in the Gazette in December 1939. Simpson had been the Controller-in-Chief of the QMAAC during the First World War and was a leading figure within the OCA throughout the inter-war period. In her article, Simpson addressed the collective sense of disappointment felt by many older ex-servicewomen. She reflected on the upheavals of wartime

91 ‘Speeches at the Annual Dinner’, Old Comrades Association Gazette, March – April 1940.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid.
life, writing ‘we have all lived through so much during the past months in thought and feeling, as well as in action’. 96 Having experienced first-hand the hardships faced by a nation at war, Simpson made reference to the difficulties experienced by ‘those of us who are not young or strong enough to take an active part in National Service’, noting that ‘it has been a time of stern self-discipline to accustom oneself to the knowledge and conviction that one is no longer eligible or able to serve’. 97 Echoing the earlier speeches made by Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, Simpson stressed that the only way to overcome this disappointment was to support current servicewomen. She wrote ‘we must console ourselves with the thought that there are still many more fortunate “Old Comrades” who are able and willing, actively to carry on the WAAC tradition for us’. 98 Here, Simpson attempted to alleviate the sense of loss felt by older ex-servicewomen by arguing that former ‘old comrades’ who were serving again were ably placed to continue the ‘WAAC tradition’. As Gwynne-Vaughan had done, Simpson argued that far from heralding the demise of the QMAAC, the ATS could become a vehicle in which the traditions created during the First World War by members of the QMAAC could be carried forward into the next war.

As Simpson further elaborated, ‘old comrades’ joining the new forces brought with them ‘their service and experience in the last war’ which, she stressed ‘will be of great value to all concerned’. 99 Simpson’s article should therefore be viewed alongside Gwynne-Vaughan’s speeches and the articles written by Laughton-Mathews and Furse as attempts to replace the more negative emotions expressed by those individual OCA members unable to serve with a more positive vision of the relationship between the older and younger generation of servicewomen. In doing so, these leading figures within the OCAs attempted to re-configure attitudes towards the women’s forces by encouraging a relationship based on mutual respect and support in place of a relationship marred by resentment. In this way, these leading figures were actively re-shaping the boundaries of the OCA as an emotional community. Here, we can see how figures such as Laughton-Mathews and Gwynne-Vaughan sought to promote a happier,

96 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
positive relationship with the ATS, thus suppressing the more negative emotions found with the letters of individual members and encouraging a more cordial atmosphere within the association. Although the dominant emotional values of the OCAs had become marginal in organisations that were now not solely focused on the incubation of positive legacies of the First World War, the concerted efforts by leading OCA figures suggests that older women were valued and – whilst perhaps unrealistic – women like Furse and Gwynne-Vaughan hoped that the emotional communities that had been so resilient throughout the inter-war period would evolve and adapt to welcome a new generation, who brought different experiences and new conceptions of what it meant to be a servicewoman serving in the Second World War.

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to shed new light on the emotional worlds of middle-class, middle-aged women excluded from military service during the Second World War. We have seen how disappointment and resentment expressed by OCA members led to an evolution of the emotional community of the OCAs in the pages of the journals. The letters written by ex-servicewomen who assumed roles within the WVS and became involved in charity work demonstrate the continued influence of military pride and nostalgia for the First World War on women’s reflections on their new civilian roles on the Home Front. The martial identities forged during the First World War that continued to be celebrated within the pages of the OCA journals remained crucial in shaping women’s responses to the roles they performed after 1939.

Remaining attentive to the emotions expressed by women when reflecting on their volunteer work on the home front and their exclusion from military service therefore makes it possible to show how important older ‘service’ identities were for OCA members, and how crucial their membership of the OCAs became after 1939 despite their involvement with new organisations as part of the war effort. At the same time, leading members of the OCAs were not content to allow ex-servicewomen to indulge in their regret and disappointment. The journals offered the membership spaces to express their feelings which leaders such as Furse, Gwynne-Vaughan and Laughton-Mathews professed to share, whilst simultaneously trying to redirect to forge a more positive relationship between the two generations of servicewomen.
Exploring the experiences of older ex-servicewomen on the home front during the Second World War has also shed light on the problems inherent in dividing the early twentieth-century into separate and discrete periods of the ‘First World War’, ‘inter-war’ and the ‘Second World War’. This chapter has highlighted how an experience of service in the First World War directly influenced how women made sense of and reflected upon their lives during the Second World War. Looking at the evolution of the OCAs over a longer period offers access to the changing emotional expressions of women who lived through both wars. As the evidence from the OCA journals makes clear, it is only through an understanding of the importance of the legacy of women’s military service during the First World War that is possible to appreciate the emotions, and the experiences, of ‘old comrades’ as they encountered another conflict not as servicewomen, but as female veterans and civilian volunteers.
Conclusion – Female veterans as ‘pioneers’ in post-war Britain

When Lily Davy reflected on the experiences of the QMAAC in August 1920, she noted how servicewomen had thought of themselves as ‘pioneers’.1 It had been up to the members of the newly formed auxiliary services ‘to prove what women could do.’2 Whilst Davy’s characterisation of her fellow servicewomen as ‘pioneers’ was related to their wartime roles, this thesis has argued that female veterans remained ‘pioneers’ long after 1918. Within the OCAs, an associational culture defined by political debate, nostalgic reflection and military tradition flourished and became a unique space for women in which their identities as veterans were protected and championed. But whilst nostalgia and the protection of military traditions were central components of OCA life, the associations themselves were far more than incubators of sentimental reminiscence. Key figures such as Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, Katharine Furse and Vera Laughton-Mathews injected the OCA journals with radical political ideas and encouraged intellectual debate and discussion. Ex-servicewomen did not simply look back; the editors and contributors to the journals introduced OCA members to ideological debates within the feminist movement and pacifist ideas as espoused by intellectuals working for the League of Nations and were given opportunities to respond to dominant cultural attitudes towards public commemorative practices. OCA members were ‘pioneers’ in their unfailing attachment to their former military identities and their willingness to see the OCA journals become intellectual spaces in which debate and discussion were encouraged.

What underpinned these associations was a shared investment in a positive emotional legacy of the First World War. The collective awareness amongst the membership that military service had been a time of enjoyment, adventure, and comradeship sustained the OCAs throughout the inter-war period. Working with Rosenwein’s theory of emotional communities this thesis has prioritised the exploration of emotional responses to women’s military service and argued that shared emotional values were key to the construction of female veteran associations that championed political and civic activism in various forms. Whilst the OCAs can, according to Rosenwein’s criteria, be viewed as ‘emotional communities’ the thesis has gone beyond simply

2 Ibid.
defining female veteran associations as emotional spaces. The existence of a lively culture of political debate within the OCA journals makes clear the ways in which their status as military veterans informed women’s engagement with politics and culture. Exploring this further meant broadening Rosenwein’s original framework and looking in more depth at the relationship between politics, gender, and war memory in the context of the ‘emotional community’ of the OCAs. Taking a thematic approach, the thesis has looked in turn at various aspects of political culture that found a platform in the OCA journals, and has shown that the shared emotional legacy of the war remained crucial in shaping the ways in which ex-servicewomen thought about and engaged with inter-war feminism, pacifism, commemorative practices and home front politics in the period between 1920 and 1945.

Rosenwein’s own studies of the emotional communities of the medieval period range between the clerical, religious world of Pope Gregory VII and the everyday lives of the citizens of the towns of Vienne, Trier and Lyon. Whilst Rosenwein uses the emotional cultures of these spaces to offer conclusions about the wider socio-cultural values of the medieval world, her focus nonetheless remains primarily on tracing the boundaries and characteristics of specific emotional communities. Applying Rosenwein’s model to the modern era however has made it possible to draw broader conclusions about the relationship between political culture and emotional communities, specifically regarding all-female communities like the OCAs. We cannot understand the commitment to equal rights feminism within the QMAAC OCA and the Association of Wrens if we do not also understand the leadership’s commitment to presenting these associations as one of a number of spaces in which the future of post-war society would be worked out. Equally, we cannot appreciate the interventions made by OCA members in the politics of national and local commemorations without acknowledging the determination with which these women sought to assert their status as veterans in public spaces during Armistice Day.

An approach sensitive to the relationship between emotion, identity and memory has significant implications for our understandings of the multiple legacies of the First World War. Female

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veterans have long gone unnoticed in studies which remain preoccupied with the experiences of nurses and munitions workers. As Lucy Noakes has summarised, too often it has been assumed that ‘the memoirs of Vera Brittain’ can act as a ‘satisfactory representation of all female experience’. The thesis has not only sought to make a case for the inclusion of female veterans in broader narratives of women in the First World War, it has used the OCAs to show clearly the value of the history of emotions in illuminating the thoughts, feelings and responses of women who undertook active service between 1917 and 1918. Gail Braybon was one of the first scholars to acknowledge that women’s experiences of wartime employment gave them ‘a new sense of self-worth’. By looking closely at how nostalgic memories of gendered military service were mobilised to encourage public and political activism, the thesis has argued that the emotional legacy of the war fostered within the OCAs underpinned the assertion of a new veteran identity for women after 1918. Ex-servicewomen did not simply exploit their veteran identity for financial gain in the public sphere, nor was the claim to veteran status solely motivated by resentment towards servicemen, or a desire to claim heroic status in the aftermath of conflict. This veteran identity gave women’s lives value and purpose. For those for whom civilian life had heralded a return to more restricted and limited life. OCA membership provided reassurance that their wartime service had been important and valuable, and provided a connection to a time in their lives in which they were ‘pioneers’ united by comradeship.

The OCAs should be understood as emotional communities which offered women spaces in which domestic roles, marital relationships and maternal identities could be temporarily relegated. This is not to say that domesticity was either condemned or dismissed within local branches or in the journals. The fact that children of members of the QMAAC OCA were frequently referred to as ‘Waaclets’ serves as a reminder of the influence of women’s veteran status on their maternal roles. The OCAs were intended to function throughout the inter-war period and beyond as spaces predominantly for women who wished to retain a connection to their former military lives. As Stephanie Ward has recently shown in her study of local Labour women’s sections in this period, we need to be more aware of the existence of spaces in which

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domestic identities were simply less important than other identity positions held by women. Ward has argued in local Labour women’s sections, ‘the distancing from domestic identities and influences was important in the construction of Labour women’s assertion of their political identity.’ As we have seen, in the inter-war period ex-servicewomen too were often keen to distance themselves from any overt affiliation from political movements that cast women primarily as mothers or wives. Although the principles of the ‘new’ or welfare feminist groups were never explicitly critiqued within the OCA journals, as editors of the QMAAC Gazette and The Wren respectively Cecil Eastgate and Vera Laughton-Mathews were keen to stress what they felt to be the ideological superiority of the arguments made by supporters of the equal rights feminist movement. Similarly, whilst the Association of Wrens was officially affiliated to the Women’s Advisory Council of the League of Nations Union, the preference for the more intellectual discourses provided by League officials such as Alec Wilson and Lucy Mair should be read as a rejection of the ‘maternalist-pacifist’ propaganda promulgated elsewhere by the LNU.

Given the often uneasy relationship between the OCAs and maternalist politics more generally it is useful to consider the position of female veteran associations in the wider landscape of women’s organisations in this period. It is here again that we can appreciate the value of the emotional community model. This model is appealing because it takes into account the complexity and fluidity of the lives of individuals and the communities within which they exist. Emotional communities like the OCAs were not static; they were constantly re-shaped by the introduction of new political ideas and cultural discourses. The fact that the editors of the OCA journals were willing to offer a platform to feminist politics and pacifist politics whilst at the same time reporting on national and local commemorative practices and later, adapting to the emergence of a new generation of servicewomen makes clear the plurality and diversity of ideas that existed alongside the emotional discourses that remained a consistent feature of the OCA journals. But these two aspects of the journals – the emotional and the political – were not separate: political discourses were discussed, critiqued, and re-formulated by ex-servicewomen in ways that reflected the emotional values of the OCA community. Former Wrens challenged

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Alec Wilson’s attempt to promote naval disarmament, as they made clear that this aspect of pacifist politics went too far in undermining the valuable contribution of the Royal Navy. Similarly, whilst older members of the OCAs attempted to welcome the recruits of the new women’s forces after 1939, their resentment at their exclusion from military service made a whole-hearted embrace of patriotic volunteer work with the WVS impossible.

The OCA journals were dynamic discursive spaces that did not simply reflect political ideas. Editorial staff welcomed debate, discussion, and critiques in the journals. Although one of the functions of the OCAs was to foster a service identity that had been forged during the war, the associations were constantly changing to reflect the shifting politics of the leaders, the editors, and the membership. Within the OCAs existed a unique political culture, shaped primarily by the shared emotional values that characterised the emotional communities of female veterans. The culture of sociability enjoyed by local branches of the OCAS, defined by whist drives and tea parties, combined with the emphasis on civic activism within the journals invites comparisons with other women’s organisations such as the Women’s Institutes and the Young Women’s Christian Associations. Yet, given the dominance of emotional language tied to specific gendered memories of wartime service, and the unique political culture that these ‘emotional vocabularies’ generated, the extent to which the OCAs occupied similar ground to these other more mainstream organisations is questionable. The OCAs were certainly shaped by their dynamic relationship with key political and cultural institutions and organisations in the inter-war period and during the Second World War, yet they also generated their own emotional norms that were crucial in structuring the type of political engagement that the leaders and editors were willing to promote to the membership.

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During the Second World War, the values and norms that had helped construct the emotional community in the OCA journals were challenged by the admittance of a new generation of servicewomen admitted to the associations. Yet these tensions did not lead to the retreat of older members; instead, they continued to communicate via emotional vocabularies that reflected their commitment to an older service identity. In this way, the memories of this older generation of female veterans were preserved within the pages of the OCA journals. As this example further demonstrates, the OCAs were not merely vehicles for the promotion of sentimental narratives that expressed nostalgia for a bygone era of wartime service. The core commitment to a positive and emotional celebration of the women’s forces remained, yet women proved themselves to be flexible, willing to celebrate these associations as pressure groups, as spaces in which military values could be repackaged as political and ideological beliefs.

Some aspects of the OCA journals posed challenges to more comprehensive explorations of the membership. In particular, the absence of author details alongside many of the articles within the journals often prevented any detailed assessment of individual contributions within the publications. Leaders who did have a public profile have been easier to study, and therefore their contributions have been more visible than the contributions made by members. But in a sense, this reflects the dynamic of the associations themselves. As earlier chapters have argued, key figures such as Gwynne-Vaughan, Furse and Laughton-Mathews played an instrumental role in constructing, shaping, and defining the OCA communities. In their editorials and feature articles, they articulated their own visions for post-war society. The political campaigns that Furse and Laughton-Mathews became involved with informed their appeals for a politically engaged community of female veterans. But whilst the limitations of the sources themselves have made it difficult to delve deeper into the lives of ordinary members, their voices – and their emotions – have come through in the letters they wrote and in branch reports which illustrate the everyday activities of local branches. The lack of editorial archives has limited the scope of the investigation into the wider reception of these political debates and intellectual discussions amongst the readership. However, the aim of this thesis has been not to show that members either agreed or disagreed with the politics promoted in the journals. Instead, the thesis has aimed to draw attention to the ways in which leading figures in the OCAs, including the editors
of the journals, utilised a collective, emotional attachment to ideas of ‘duty’ and ‘service’ to promote engagement with certain political issues.

This connection between emotions and politics that the thesis has illuminated makes clear that we need to take seriously the importance of female friendships that existed within social communities in shaping engagement with politics and culture in this period. Historians have long acknowledged the enduring nature of the bonds forged between men in the horror and suffering of the trenches. Yet what this thesis has argued is that the bonds between women were equally transformative – the reunions, branch socials and sports tournaments were all crucial in constructing a collective sense of community that in turn, evolved to become a platform for serious intellectual debate about the future of feminism, pacifism and commemoration.

Following the pioneering work of Beaumont, Innes and others, the thesis has argued that whilst the culture of sociability that existed in the OCAs may be considered ‘conservative’ we need to take seriously the innovative ways in which women such as Gwynne-Vaughan, Laughton-Mathews and Furse made use of veteran organisations to carve out spaces for political debate and discussion in a society that had only recently deemed women fit to participate in official political processes.

This thesis has explored in greater depth the impact of military service on women’s emotional worlds and in so doing, has drawn attention to the importance of considering the relationship between emotions and gender in broader studies of the first half of the twentieth century. As Rosenwein has argued, ‘the study of emotions should not (in the end) form a separate strand of history but rather inform every historical inquiry.’

Not only can emotions help shed further light on the complexities of gender and identity in the aftermath of the First World War, the emotional community model can also disrupt accepted chronologies. Tracing the emotional legacy of the war for ex-servicewomen across the inter-war period and into the Second World War has highlighted the limitations of marking these periods as discrete chronological blocks is laid bare. The enduring importance of women’s veteran status, combined with the influence of military service on political debate in the OCAs suggests that we need to be more attentive to the ways in

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which emotional legacies of the First World War shaped the everyday realities of women’s lives even up until to and including the Second World War. The fact that the OCAs continued into the 1960s and beyond serves as a reminder of the enduring importance of female veteran organisations long after the official disbandment of the QMAAC, WRNS and WRAF.

The Old Comrades Associations existed between 1919 and 1945 as emotional communities led by women like Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, Katharine Furse, Muriel Currey, Cecil Eastgate and Vera Laughton-Mathews, who understood that the experience of military service had equipped their members with the skills and qualities that would enable them to become ‘pioneers’ of a new post-war world. They understood that fostering nostalgic memories did not preclude the OCAs from advocating radical political ideas. International feminist politics in The Wren sat alongside reports from tennis tournaments between the QMAAC OCA and the Association of Wrens. Detailed instructions for the ‘White Elephant Sale’ in the WRAF Old Comrades Association were followed by Helen Gwynne-Vaughan’s update on technical developments in the RAF. The QMAAC Gazette printed letters from members lamenting the loss of the happiest days of their life followed by articles highlighting the need for equal pay legislation. These were dynamic, diverse, and vibrant associations supported by women who were unwilling to accept that demobilisation meant the end of their lives as Army, Royal Navy or Royal Air Force auxiliaries. The journals offer insights into communities of women who were sociable, intellectually engaged, and united in a shared appreciation of the long-term emotional impact of military service on their selfhood. It is hoped that this thesis has succeeded in rehabilitating the OCAs and their members and highlighted their singular contribution within the diverse landscape of women’s organisations in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century.
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