

The Role of British Home Front Needlework during the First World War, 1914-1918.

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Abstract

Between 1914 and 1918, over 18.5 million knitted and sewn needlework garments were made by volunteers on the British home front and sent to front line troops by voluntary organisations, including Queen Mary's Needlework Guild. This thesis addresses the role of home front needlework, in the form of knitting, sewing, crochet and embroidery, during the First World War. Drawing on a wide range of primary sources, including letters, reports, diaries, newspapers and magazines, knitting patterns, song, film and cartoons, this study demonstrates the way needlework formed a complex social, cultural, political, and economically significant activity during the war. Needlework was a dynamic social tool for women which enabled them to question and contest their wartime role and to advocate and express their responses to the war. The dominant historiographical view that war needlework took place in a frenzy of 'needlework mania' in 1914, characterised by poor production, which then died out in the later war is challenged. It is shown that voluntary needlework was always subject to various quality controls, devised by needlewomen themselves, and that distribution was the more problematic issue. Furthermore, voluntary needlework became increasingly professionalised during the war to the extent that it was fully integrated into the supply logistics of the War Office and into the home front network of charitable war work. Needlework offered agency to women and also to wounded men on the home front: it provided a political tool for women's war employment; it formed a communication of care between the home front and the front line; while the 'feminine' design language of embroidery gave wounded men a means of renegotiating their masculine status. This research demonstrates that First World War needlework held a meaningful and integrated role during the war.

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Glossary

Groups and Organisations

CCWE Central Committee on Women's Employment

DGVO Director General of Voluntary Organisations

DSEI Disabled Soldiers Embroidery Industry

LSWS London Society of Women's Suffrage

NFWW National Federation of Women Workers

QAFFF Queen Alexandra's Field Force Fund

QMG Quarter Master General

QMNG Queen Mary's Needlework Guild

QWWF Queen's Work for Women Fund

VW Volunteer Worker badge

WAAC Women's Auxiliary Army Corps

WCG Women's Cooperative Guild

WFL Women's Freedom League

WGA Women's Guild of Arts

WO War Office

WSPU Women's Social and Political Union

WTUL Women's Trade Union League

WVR Women's Volunteer Reserve

Archives and Collections

BL British Library

RC Royal Collection

IWM Imperial War Museum

KRL Knitting Reference Library, Winchester School of Art

TNA The National Archives

WWC Women's Work Collection

Contents

Abstract		p.2
Acknowledgements		p.3
Glossary		p.5
Index of Illustrations		p.8
Chapter One	Introduction and Literature Review	p.13
Chapter Two	Early war needlework: a dynamic social tool of war response, 1914-1915	p.52
Chapter Three	'Needlework mania', 1914: making sense of the war	p.112
Chapter Four	War needlework schemes and women's unemployment, 1914-1915	p.160
Chapter Five	Quality controls and needlework garment distribution, 1914-1915	p.202
Chapter Six	Late war needlework: integration, professionalism, and innovation, 1915-1918	p.250
Chapter Seven	A communication of care: needlework from home front to front line, 1914-1918	p.296
Chapter Eight	Wounded men's home front embroidery: needlework and masculinity, 1915-1918	p.340
Chapter Nine	Conclusion	p.387
Appendix A	<i>Punch</i> cartoons: war needlework garment making, 1914-1918	p.399
Appendix B	<i>Punch</i> cartoons: women visiting the wounded in hospitals, 1914-1918	p.405
Bibliography		p.409

Index of Illustrations

Chapter Two

- Fig. 2.1. Queen Mary and members of Queen Mary's Needlework Guild, c.1914-1918. p.60
- Fig. 2.2. Lady French and members of her voluntary war knitting group in 1914. p.62
- Fig. 2.3. Lady Eleanora French in July 1916. p.66
- Fig. 2.4. Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, leaving the War Office in London, 1916. p.73
- Fig. 2.5. Quartermaster General Director Sir John Cowans in 1919. p.76
- Fig. 2.6. Quartermaster General Director Sir Ronald Maxwell in March 1917. p.78
- Fig. 2.7. Emmeline Pankhurst knitting, recreating her 1908 incarceration in Holloway Prison for the Women's Exhibition in 1909. p.91
- Fig. 2.8. Vera Brittain as a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurse in 1915, the year following her *Chronicle of Youth* diary entries about needlework. p.104
- Fig. 2.9. Vera Brittain in 1936, three years after the publication of *Testament of Youth*. p.105

Chapter Three

- Fig. 3.1. Photograph possibly depicting Caroline Playne (far left), with the pacifist campaigner Countess Bertha von Suttner (far right), at the Universal Congress of Peace, Westminster, London, 1908. p.131
- Fig. 3.2. Constance Dorothy Peel in 1917. p.136
- Fig. 3.3. 'Mabel: "Mother, Dear! I do hope this war won't be over before I finish my sock!'. Cartoon by G. Jennis, *Punch*, 30th September 1914, p.277. p.140
- Fig. 3.4. 'The History of a Pair of Mittens'. Cartoon by E.H. Shepard, *Punch*, 18th November 1914, p.417. p.148

- Fig. 3.5. 'Gallant Attempt by a Member of the British Expeditionary Force to do justice to all his New Year's Gifts'. Cartoon by E.H. Shepard, *Punch*, 13th January 1915, p.21. p.151
- Fig.3.6. 'The Last of the Nuts of Sandy Cove; Or, How to Make Use of Our Stay-At-Homes'. Cartoon by Lewis Baumer, *Punch*, 16th September 1914, p.245. p.153
- Fig. 3.7. 'Win-the-War Vice-President of our Supply Depot (doing grand rounds). "Here again is a fifth glaring example. The hem of this bag is an eighteenth of an inch too wide. Get them all remade. We cannot have the lives of our troops endangered"'. Cartoon by F.H. Townsend, *Punch*, 19th September 1917, p.205. p.156

Chapter Four

- Fig. 4.1. Mary Macarthur in December 1918. p.173
- Fig. 4.2. Margaret Bondfield in August 1919. p.184
- Fig. 4.3. Sylvia Pankhurst (second from left) and Charlotte Despard (fourth from left) in 1916. p.190
- Fig. 4.4. Members of Queen Mary's Needlework Guild at St James's Palace in 1917. p.195
- Fig. 4.5. Bales of needlework items arriving for unpacking at St James's Palace in 1917. p.197
- Fig. 4.6. Isle of Bressay, Shetland Branch of Queen Mary's Needlework Guild, c.1914-1918. p.198

Chapter Five

- Fig. 5.1. Pattern illustration for pyjamas, a nightingale and a hospital shirt. 'Paper Patterns – Help Our Soldiers and Sailors', *The Queen*, 15th August 1914, p.296. p.208
- Fig. 5.2. Woollen Helmet Pattern (detail). 'Comforts for our Soldiers and Sailors: Woollen Helmet', *The Queen*, 15th August 1914, p.297. p.209
- Fig. 5.3. 'I am making garments to help the Soldiers? Are you?'. Cover, *Woman's Own*, 5th September 1914. p.211

- Fig. 5.4. Cover, *Women & War! How to Knit and Crochet Articles necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors*, Manchester School of Embroidery, Needlecraft Ltd, Manchester, 1900. p.214
- Fig. 5.5 Cover, *Women & War. How to Knit and Crochet Articles necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors*. Manchester and London, Needlecraft Ltd, 1914. p.215
- Fig. 5.6. Pattern for a crochet Balaclava Helmet. *Women & War! How to Knit and Crochet Articles Necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors*, Needlecraft Ltd, 1900, p.6. p.216
- Fig. 5.7. Pattern for a crochet Balaclava Helmet. *Women & War. How to Knit and Crochet Articles Necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors*, Needlecraft Ltd, 1914, p.3. p.217
- Fig. 5.8. Brewer's Cap, Knitted and in Crochet. *Weldon's Knitted, Crochet and Flannel Comforts for our Soldiers, Second Series*, c.1901, p.10-11. p.218
- Fig. 5.9 'Sleeping Cap in Crochet', *Weldon's Garments and Hospital Comforts for Our Soldiers and Sailors, First Series*. Weldon's Ltd, 1914, p.12. p.219
- Fig. 5.10. 'Knitted Sleeping Cap', *Weldon's Garments and Hospital Comforts for Our Soldiers and Sailors, First Series*. Weldon's Ltd, 1914, p.4. p.219
- Fig. 5.11. Beginner muffler patterns in crochet. 'Crocheting for the Soldiers and Sailors', *Woman's Own*, 5th September, 1914, p.3. p.223
- Fig. 5.12 'Useful Things that Granny Can Make'. *Woman's Own*, 24th October 1914, p.2. p.225
- Fig. 5.13 'Useful Things that Granny Can Make'. *Woman's Own*, 24th October 1914, p.3. p.225
- Fig. 5.14. Pattern for heelless socks by Marjory Tillotson. 'Bed Socks (Heel-Less)', J.J. Baldwin, *Knitted Comforts for Men on Land and Sea*, Beehive No. 17, J.J. Baldwin, Halifax, 1914, p.9. p.235
- Fig. 5.15. Pattern for 'A Military Helmet with Ear-Flaps'. *Leach's Comforts for Men, No 4*, London, 1914, p.9. p.236

Chapter Six

- Fig. 6.1. Sir Edward Ward in 1921. p.257
- Fig. 6.2. Stamford Needlework Association with bales of garments addressed directly to the front line in France, care of the DGVO, 1917. p.259
- Fig. 6.3. Detail of the Sock Pattern issued by the Department of the Director General of Voluntary Organisations, October 1915. p.264
- Fig. 6.4. Detail of the Sock Pattern issued by Queen Mary's Needlework Guild, 'The Queen's Gift to the Troops', January 1915. p.265
- Fig. 6.5. Cover, claiming pattern approval by the DGVO. *Leach's More Comforts For Our Men*, Issue No.9, Leach's Home Needlework Series, c.1915. p.268
- Fig. 6.6. Film still showing a soldier's wife 'knitting a muffler for her soldier husband', 'How to Help Tommy', 1916. p.270
- Fig. 6.7. Film fade into footage of a soldier wearing a knitted muffler, 'How to Help Tommy', 1916. p.271
- Fig. 6.8. Film still showing 'an East End schoolgirl knitting a muffler', 'How to Help Tommy', 1916. p.272
- Fig. 6.9. Front line soldiers shown wearing a variety of knitted garments in the film, 'How to Help Tommy', 1916. p.273
- Fig. 6.10. Film still showing 'Officers wives' making garments, 'How to Help Tommy', 1916. p.275
- Fig. 6.11. Film still showing munitions workers knitting garments, 'How to Help Tommy', 1916. p.276
- Fig 6.12. Volunteer Worker badge, 1915-1918, obverse. p.286
- Fig 6.13. Volunteer Worker badge, 1915-1918, verso. p.286

Chapter Seven

- Fig. 7.1. Knitting booklet with patterns for 'comforts' garments for soldiers during the Crimean War. Eléonore Riego de la Branchardière, *Comforts for the Crimea: or the Fourth Winter Book in Crochet and Knitting*, 1854. p.302

- Fig. 7.2. Cover, showing comforts patterns for children. *Needlecraft Practical Journal*, No. 116, Briggs & Co, Manchester, Needlecraft Ltd, 1914. p.306
- Fig. 7.3. Pattern for a Combination Hood and Cap and Pillowcase. 'Ideal Presents for Soldiers', *Women's Own*, Knitting Supplement, 14th November 1914, p.vi. p.322
- Fig. 7.4. Lt William Eugene Charles of the 8th Battalion, Bedfordshire Regiment. p.336

Chapter Eight

- Fig. 8.1. The Royal Victoria Hospital, Netley, with the Red Cross field hospital huts located in the grounds behind, c.1918. p.350
- Fig. 8.2. Two women asking a wounded soldier questions about being wounded. Cartoon by F.H. Townsend, *Punch*, 5th January 1916, p.5. p.359
- Fig. 8.3. 'How to Talk to the Wounded'. Cartoon by H.M. Brock, *Punch*, 2nd February 1916, p.93. p.360
- Fig. 8.4. 'People We Should Like to See Interned'. Cartoon by F.H. Townsend, *Punch*, 5th July 1916, p.5. p.361
- Fig. 8.5. Photograph of May Morris at her embroidery, c.1890s. p.377
- Fig. 8.6. Portrait of Ernest Thesiger, by William Ranken, 1918. p.377
- Fig. 8.7. Pattern progression recommended to women for teaching embroidery to wounded men. 'Needlework for Soldiers: How Wounded Tommies Pass Many a Weary Hour Happily in Hospital', *Home Chat*, 2nd December 1916, p.365. p.383
- Fig. 8.8. A wounded soldier displaying his embroidery, location unknown, possibly Netley Red Cross Hospital, c.1916. p.383

Chapter One

Introduction and Literature Review

Introduction

The First World War produced the most widespread public engagement in needlework in the history of Britain and Ireland. Between 1914 and 1918, over 18.5 million needlework garments were made by volunteers on the home front and sent to front line troops by voluntary organisations working for the War Office and Queen Mary's Needlework Guild.¹ In addition to these, tens of thousands of knitted and sewn garments were made and sent by individuals to friends and family in service, while thousands more garments were sent by independent voluntary needlework groups.² Needlework garments would therefore have been one of the most visible and tangible materialisations of home on the front line during the war. Yet, despite the scale of public production and national participation, no comprehensive history has been written about war effort needlework on the British home front during the First World War. This thesis addresses this gap by seeking to examine the role of home front needlework during the war.

Throughout, this thesis shows the diverse ways in which First World War needlework formed a complex social, cultural, political, and economically significant activity that

¹ The total number of knitted and sewn garments made for these two charitable organisations was 18,848,080. This is the combined figure of the 14,983,206 garments made for distribution by the Director General of Voluntary Organisations at the War Office with the total of 3,864,874 garments which were made by volunteers with Queen Mary's Needlework Guild. Both of these organisations also made surgical dressings; however, these items have not been included in this calculation. For organisational itemisations, see *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort Resulting from the Formation of the Department of the Director-General of Voluntary Organisations*, London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1919, p.8-9; and *Queen Mary's Needlework Guild: Its Work During the Great War. St James's Palace, 1914-1918*, London and Wealdstone, George Pulman & Sons, The Cranford Press, 1920, p.88.

² The itemisation of many of these privately sent garments may never have existed; however, further statistics may yet come to light in private papers.

communicated responses to the war between people on the home front and men serving, and it argues that knowledge of this role can help historians to better understand how the war was experienced, both by men on the front line and women at home.

Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to clarify that the term 'needlework' in this study refers to the range of needle disciplines that were used to make garments for the war effort, although knitting, crochet, sewing and embroidery are the principal disciplines of focus here.³ The geographic range under examination includes both Britain and Ireland. This is because Ireland participated in the voluntary needlework schemes organised by the War Office and Queen Mary's Needlework Guild, and for this reason, Irish examples are included in this study of home front production.⁴

Although this thesis follows a chronological progression which begins with an investigation of early war needlework and then proceeds to consider late-war needlework in later chapters, it is primarily a thematically structured examination which presents a rethink of the dominant historiographic understandings of First World War needlework and offers new frameworks of interpretation for understanding the role of First World War needlework. This current chapter will therefore set out the format of this analysis.

³ This reflects the use of the term 'needlework' to refer to a range of needle disciplines in women's magazines of the period 1914-18, which this thesis refers to, including *Fancy Needlework Illustrated*, *The Queen*, *Woman's Own*, and within the text of *Needlecraft Practical Journal*. 'Needlework' is also the term used in the historiography of research into needle disciplines, within which this thesis is located, see Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, eds. *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750-1950*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009.

⁴ This thesis does not examine how the social and political context of the Irish experience of war needlework compared with that in England, Scotland and Wales; however, this subject certainly warrants future research.

Chapter Summary

Initially, this current chapter reviews the existing literature in the historiography of the First World War to examine how war needlework has been approached for study to date. I will argue that the subject of First World War needlework has received very little critical attention in academia due to its positioning in a series of deeply-rooted historical and epistemological binaries. These take the form of 'front line versus home front'; 'new war work versus domestic war work'; and 'domestic agency versus domestic stasis'. This literature review is followed by a discussion and presentation of the sources and research methodologies that are used in this study.

Chapter Two engages with the gender-based theoretical frameworks which have presented early First World War needlework as a means of gendered state control. Far from composing an exercise of patriarchal control, the chapter will show how war needlework originated in women's philanthropic tradition, which quickly came into conflict with War Office priorities. Referring to women's magazines and the writings of Vera Brittain, the chapter demonstrates that early war needlework was a dynamic social tool for women: it was used by them to question their role and responses at the start of the war.

Chapter Three examines the popular characterisation of early war needlework as an irrational 'mania'. Scrutinising the most-cited primary sources used to evidence 'needlework mania', this chapter shows that, by contrast, needlework responses were complex, meaningful and purposeful at the start of the war, and that these are capable of being investigated.

Chapter Four looks into women's employment in the early stages of the war, and argues that voluntary garment making schemes should not be seen as a causal

factor in women's early-war unemployment. This chapter argues that needlework was a powerful political and social tool for working women's organisations, who voiced politically-motivated criticisms of middle class women's philanthropic needlework. It will be shown how the effectiveness of middle class war needlework enterprises have frequently been dismissed, yet, drawing on newspapers and reports of philanthropic organisations, this chapter will show that they were highly-organised and conscientiously concerned with women's employment at the start of the war.

Needlework garment production at the start of the war is the focus of Chapter Five, which argues that there has been an over-emphasis on poor production in histories. With reference to women's magazines, the chapter demonstrates that there were a number of quality controls in private production and group work at the start of the war. Referring to War Office reports, I argue that poor distribution, rather than poor production, was the primary cause of needlework wastage and over-supply on the front line between 1914-15.

Late-war needlework is the subject of Chapter Six, which addresses the assumption that war needlework declined in popularity and production, as women became engaged in other war work. I argue here that needlework sustained a prominent role in war work. Referring to knitting patterns and reports from needlework groups, the chapter shows how war needleworkers led the way in garment innovations, while volunteer groups were self-governing, systematic and professional in the late war. Using War Office reports and film, this chapter shows that there was a synergy between the War Office and needlework groups, where needlework was fully integrated into the home front network of charitable war work.

Chapter Seven examines the role of needlework in the relationship between the home front and front line. It challenges the view that the creation of garments distanced women from the 'realities' of war. It explores the experiences of therapeutic solace, comfort and discomfort to show that these responses to needlework depended upon the context of receipt. This chapter argues that needlework exchange was formative in composing a communication of care between the home front and the front line, and amongst men themselves. It shows how needlework care-giving was integrated into the logistics of War Office supply.

Chapter Eight considers the way embroidery needlework was used in the rehabilitation of wounded men in hospitals on the home front. This chapter continues the main argument of this thesis that war needlework enabled agency during the war; however, the shift in context, where men carried out needlework on the home front, further reveals the complexity of needlework's role. I argue that the activity of civilian women in introducing needlework rehabilitation strategies in war hospitals has been overlooked. The gendered distinction between vocational and occupational therapy is broken down. While the gendered framework that has presented embroidery as an emasculating process for wounded men in hospitals is challenged. This chapter shows how wounded men could use embroidery to renegotiate characteristics of hegemonic masculine status. The chapter further demonstrates the way needlework facilitated contact and connections between women and wounded men.

This thesis therefore reappraises existing understandings of the role of war needlework in the First World War, however, as it will show, First World War needlework, and particularly knitting, has received so little critical academic attention, that what this thesis revises in some cases are long-standing, historically situated,

yet, unassessed assumptions, presumptions and exclusions. In providing alternative readings of primary sources and presenting new detailed historical narratives of the events and people involved, this thesis provides a new perspective which emphasizes the integrated and multi-faceted role of needlework during the war. This study therefore seeks to contribute to knowledge of gender relations between men and women during the war; to studies of home front and front line discourses; and to the inter-disciplinary knowledge of how craft processes can provide valuable information for historical analysis.

My own interest in and affinity with needlework through my practice of knitting, crochet, sewing and embroidery, is threaded throughout this thesis, and it is this perspective which has led me to question the limitations suggested by the current historiography for the role of needlework in the First World War. This thesis weaves together my identification as a needlewoman with my curatorial background researching and interpreting objects, many of which are textiles, as well as my historic research background in the period of the First World War. In combining these disciplines, I am proposing a rethink and new interpretation for the role of needlework during the First World War, one which will demonstrate how it played an integrated part during the war.

Literature Review: How the History of the First World War has been told

In their analysis of the way the history of the First World War has been told, Jay Winter and Antoine Prost have outlined distinct and identifiable paradigms in the study of the war which have evolved over the course of the twentieth century.⁵ The first of these, the 'Military and Diplomatic' perspective, Winter and Prost suggest, emerged during the 1920s-30s, when 'historical actors and professional historians were one'.⁶ These historians had fought in a combatant role in the war, and are described by Winter and Prost as 'witness historians'.⁷ 'Witness historians' adopted an overview of the war concerned with logistics, leadership and strategy, which, Winter and Prost note, made no reference to soldier's experiences.⁸ Nor, however, did these histories refer to the role of women, either on the front line or at home.

Also emerging in the 1920s-30s was the voice of the combatant 'soldier-author', which Paul Fussell presented in his study of the literary memory of the First World War.⁹ The 'soldier-author', Fussell argued, powerfully communicated the discomfort and disillusion of soldiers' experience on the front line.¹⁰ Referring to the 'dichotomising' tendency of First World War culture, Fussell has suggested that the 'soldier-author', epitomised by the poet Siegfried Sassoon, opposed the soldier's

⁵ Winter and Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies 1914 to the Present*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

⁶ Winter and Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies 1914 to the Present*, p.7.

⁷ Winter and Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies 1914 to the Present*, p.7. Basil Liddell Hart (1895-1970) wrote solely of the military and diplomatic status of the First World War and of the theatres of war, in particular, trench warfare on the Western Front. See Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *A History of the World War, 1914-1918*, London, Faber & Faber, 1934. For this reason, Liddell Hart's history is exemplified by Winter and Prost for its intense, singular focus on critiquing the viability of trench warfare, based upon Liddell Hart's own experience in the war.

⁸ Winter and Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies 1914 to the Present*, p.29.

⁹ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1975.

¹⁰ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p.75.

battle experiences to the experience of those on the home front.¹¹ Thus, whilst the historical approach of the ‘witness-historian’ excluded the home front as a topic from histories of the war, the ‘soldier-author’ identified it as a subject for opposition and antipathy.

However, Fussell’s own emphasis on the Western Front, on literature, and on male combatant perspectives, has been challenged for the way it reduces and excludes other representations of war experience: the ‘soldier-author’ was not the only voice to communicate the experience of the war.¹² Santanu Das has summarised the ‘chief problem’ with Fussell’s account is that ‘it became the defining narrative of the First World War, confining it narrowly to the trench experience of a group of educated, mostly middle-class British officer-writers’.¹³

¹¹ To example this, Fussell refers to Sassoon’s: ‘anti-war – or better, anti-home-front – poems’, and draws attention to the contrast presented by Sassoon’s poems between: ‘the knowledge born of the line and the ignorant innocence at home’. Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p.91.

¹² Fussell’s Western front focus has been critiqued for its lack of representation of the experiences of other battle fronts and of colonial troops, see Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p.10; Fussell’s suggestion that ‘disillusion’ was the primary sentiment experienced by soldiers in the war has also been challenged by military historians, who argue that it is not representative of soldiers’ voices, while logistical military historians have claimed that tactical achievements have been overshadowed by ‘disillusion’ histories, see Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: the First World War Myths and Realities*, London, Headline, 2001. For an overview of this debate also see Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p.272; The restriction of Fussell’s evidence to literature and written sources has been challenged by Jay Winter, who has shown the significance of objects and structures, such as war memorials, on the formation of public war memory. Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995; Fussell’s exclusion of women’s writings from his representation of war experience has been countered by feminist historians, including Margaret Higonnet, *Lines of Fire: Women Writers of World War I*, New York, Penguin, 1999; Sharon Ouditt, *Women Writers of the First World War: An Annotated Bibliography*, London and New York, Routledge, 1999; and Gail Braybon, *Evidence, History, and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18*, ed. Gail Braybon, Oxford and New York, Berghahn Books, 2003, p.2. For further analysis of the implications of the gendered exclusion of women writers, see Angela Smith, *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism and the First World War*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000, p.1-13; Jane Potter has also addressed this exclusion with her examination of women’s writing during the war. Jane Potter, *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print: Women’s Literary Responses to the Great War, 1914-1918*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005.

¹³ Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*, p.10.

Although Adrian Gregory has identified literature which queries the extent of the impact of the 'soldier-author's' voice in the years immediately following the war, Winter and Prost have suggested that it is the way the 'memory' of the war has been constructed more recently, through dominant histories, that has been influential.¹⁴ They describe how, during the 1960s, public interest was drawn to the combative soldier's story and there emerged a popularising presentation of the war as a 'waste of effort of men and women thrown away by politicians and generals'.¹⁵ Although there were other valid and varied experiences and presentations of the war, therefore, and Fussell's 'soldier-author' account was neither universal or primary, it has nonetheless powerfully shaped mainstream public memory of the war.

Dan Todman has highlighted the way that the 'understanding of the war as tragedy and disaster still pervades British culture'.¹⁶ Todman suggests that even 'if we realise that they do not fully represent historical events, these shared beliefs are extremely powerful'.¹⁷ They take on the status of myth, which builds upon symbols of the war, such as the mud of the trenches and the war poets. These myths, Todman has argued, are hard to dispel. The attempt to uncover the history of the war, Virginia Renard has referred to as a 'memorial quest' which is 'caught up in memory

¹⁴ For critiques of the view that the soldier-author 'dictated the terms on which the war was remembered', see Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, p.272.

¹⁵ Winter and Prost consider the broadcasts of imagery of the war on the BBC in 1964 and the 1964 publication of A.J.P. Taylor's, *The First World War: An Illustrated History* to be pivotal in leading the public to become interested in the war. Winter and Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies 1914 to the Present*, p.21; See also Nial Ferguson, who has criticised the creation of public memory through television and novels which, he asserts, generalise war experience as one of suffering, Nial Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, London, Penguin, 1998, p.xix-xlv.

¹⁶ Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory*, London and New York, Bloomsbury, 2005, p.xii.

¹⁷ Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory*, p.xiii.

politics'.¹⁸ However, she argues that trying to connect with the war is vital for the construction of current identities.

This growing consciousness of *how* the history and memory of the war is constructed has been fostered by gender historians over the last thirty years.¹⁹ In their search for women's experiences of the war, gender historians have identified the way recognition of women's war histories has been hampered by the presence of binaries in the interpretation of the First World War, the most pervasive of which, they have argued, has been the popular prioritising of combatant experience against the non-combatant. In her studies of women during the war, Susan Grayzel has argued that the binary framework has led to the neglect of both women's war experience and home front histories. The mentality of the 'soldier-author', Grayzel argues, was critical of the right of women to make statements about the war because women had not experienced the physical pain of combat warfare.²⁰ To the 'soldier-author', home

¹⁸ Virginie Renard, "Reaching out to the Past: Memory in Contemporary British First World War Narratives", *British Popular Culture and the First World War*, ed. Jessica Meyer, Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2008, p.303.

¹⁹ The argument that gender is a social construct is a central feature of 'third wave feminism', which considers gender characteristics, roles and divisions to be socially and culturally attributed through performance and not biologically determined. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, Routledge, New York, Routledge, 1990; Margaret Higonnet has stressed the significance of studying war to understand gender relations and argues that: 'as a first step, war must be understood as a "gendering" activity, one that ritually marks the gender of all members of society, whether or not they are combatants'. Margaret Higonnet, "Introduction", *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, eds. Margaret Higonnet, Jane Jenson, Sonya Michel, and Margaret Collins Weitz, New Haven and London, Yale, 1987, p.4; Joan W. Scott, meanwhile, has identified previous historical study as concerned with 'progress, politics and western male experience'. According to Scott, gender analysis aims: 'not only for the direct study of the relationships between women and men, but also for a more complex understanding of politics, power, state policy, and so on'. Joan Scott, "Rewriting History", *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, eds. Margaret Higonnet et al, p.21-22; Historians interested in gender inequalities have also focused in particular on change and stasis in women's status during and after the war. See Gail Braybon, "Winners or Losers: Women's Symbolic Role in the War Story", *Evidence, History, and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18*, ed. Gail Braybon, Oxford and New York, Berghahn Books, 2003; That militarisation and war are never gender-neutral has been advanced by Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*, California, University of California Press, 2000; See also, Alison Fell, 'Gendering the War Story', *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 1:1, 2008, p.53-58.

²⁰ Susan Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War*, London, University of North Carolina Press, 1999, p.7.

front experience was not only external to the experience of the war, but in opposition to it, and a result of this is the relegation of home front history.²¹

The focus of historical analysis on front line combatant experience explains why women's wartime roles, and in particular those on the home front, were not considered of central relevance to the history of the war until relatively recently; the opposition of male and female experience is reflected in the opposition of front line and home front. War needlework, as a home front activity, primarily carried out by women, was therefore also excluded as a subject of detailed analysis for its role and contribution to the experience of war.

Grayzel has argued that the structuring of a binary between home and war front dates to the war itself.²² However, the boundaries between home and front were not fixed during the conflict, and were, Grayzel argues, commonly transgressed and collapsed by the mobility of women and men to cross into each front, and by tangible connections made through letters and parcels, where: 'Despite the separation

²¹ A binary is constructed by the attribution of opposing gendered characteristics. In this relationship the 'home' is secondary to the 'front', and has the potential to be excluded or dismissed. The association of women with the home front thus makes their experience subject to this secondary ranking. Grayzel has argued that the emphasis on combative experience favours the assumption that the 'true' experience of war is that of the fighting male and the roles of women on both home front and war front have been ignored for not playing a notable part in the history of the war. See Susan Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War*, p.7.

²² Susan Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War*, p.11. Margaret Darrow, too, has observed the binary concept of home and war front in France during the war, with the home referred to as the 'arrière', i.e. the rear. In France, Darrow argues, this rear position removed women from the masculine war to the extent that the feminine 'hibernated in a state of suspended animation'. Margaret Darrow, *French Women and the First World War: War Stories of the Home Front*. Oxford, Berg, 2000, p.15. Despite this apparent containment, however, Grayzel has pointed out how the binary also functioned for feminist pacifists in the war, as they employed the concept of a divide. Their argument, designed to empower the feminine half of the binary, stated: 'that the "physical" force of men was distinct from the "moral" force of women but that each could form the core of separate but equal claims to citizenship'. Susan Grayzel, *At Home and Under Fire: Air Raids and Culture In Britain From The Great War To The Blitz*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p.4. See also Joshua Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001.

implied by this new language, the boundaries erected between home and war fronts were often porous'.²³ This therefore indicates that the distinction between home and front line was much more unstable during the war than it came to be seen in post war, front line focused histories.

Home front histories and needlework

Over the past twenty years, social and cultural histories have investigated the mutability of the boundaries between home and front line, and have drawn on a wide array of sources to show how the home and domestic identities were present on the front line, and vice-versa, how militarism and wounds were visible at home. In her research into war and masculinity, Joanna Bourke has highlighted the way soldiers needed to assume domestic roles on the front line where 'gender roles were rendered more fluid'.²⁴ Emmanuelle Cronier, meanwhile, has shown how the front line was visible in the presence of the wounded on the streets at home.²⁵ The visibility of the front at home has also been the examined by Jan Ruger, who has shown how film and the cinema brought war imagery to a home audience.²⁶ Referring to soldiers' letters, Jessica Meyer has argued that is not possible to make clear distinctions between men's familial and domestic identities and their role as soldiers.²⁷ Meanwhile, taking a psychoanalytical approach, Michael Roper has

²³ Susan Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War*, p.11.

²⁴ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, London, Reaktion Books, 1996, p.133.

²⁵ Emmanuelle Cronier, "The Street", *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919*, eds. Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2, 2007, p.83.

²⁶ Jan R ger, "Entertainments", *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919*, eds. Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2, 2007, p.119.

²⁷ Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain*, Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p.34.

questioned the feasibility of an emotional divide between home and front, specifically: 'the view that there existed an: "emotional chasm" between the home and battle fronts'.²⁸

All of these studies have opened up the potential for historians to use diverse sources to examine the experience of war; sources which are not restricted to confirming a polarisation of home and front line. Gender historians, in particular, have sought to examine women's activities, both at home and on the front line, to explore how boundaries were challenged, renegotiated or affirmed during the war. This has resulted in a series of studies of women's war work in nursing in the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) and Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD); in munition

²⁸ Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*, Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2010, p.8.

factories; and within the women's militaristic organisations the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) and Women's Volunteer Reserve (WVR).²⁹

However, gender historians' attention to women's work in 'new' war related activities has noticeably exceeded their attention to the subject of women's domestic war work in more traditional roles, such as war needlework. The potential for gender subversions and changes to women's employment status and working context appears to have drawn gender historians to favour the investigation of women's new war work outside of the home. An exception to this is Janet Watson's study of women in nursing and munitions, which also looks at domestic home service during the war.³⁰ Watson has argued that war work was gendered with characteristics of femininity, within which home service, which included caring for a family and war

²⁹ For examples of the focus on women's new war work: Janet Lee has explored the way women negotiated gendered barriers to participate in the FANY. Janet Lee, "I Wish My Mother Could See Men Now": The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) and Negotiation of Gender and Class Relations, 1907-1918', *NWSA Journal*, 19:2, 2007, p.138-158; Lee also examines the transgression of gender boundaries between nursing and combat identities in Janet Lee, 'A Nurse and a Soldier: Gender, Class and National Identity in the First World War Adventures of Grace McDougall and Flora Sandes', *Women's History Review*, 15.1, 2006, p.83-103; Janet Watson has studied the class and gender tensions between women in VAD, munitions and home front war work. Janet Watson, 'Khaki Girls, VADs, and Tommy's Sisters: Gender and Class in First World War Britain', *The International History Review*, 19:1, 1997; Deborah Thom has produced a detailed history of women working in munitions during the war, see Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War I*, London and New York, Tauris 1998; Angela Woollacott has investigated gender and class tensions on the home front in "'Khaki Fever" and Its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29:2, 1994, p.325-347; Jenny Gould has traced the foundation of, and controversies over, women's military services in Jenny Gould, "Women's Military Services in First World War Britain", *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, p.114-125; Krisztina Robert engages in a spatial analysis of the Women's Volunteer Reserve (WVR) use of home front 'heterotopic sites' for martial training, see Krisztina Robert, 'Construction of "Home", "Front", and Women's Military Employment in First World War Britain: a Spatial Interpretation', *History and Theory*, 52:3, 2013, p.319-343; The home front reception of the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) is analysed in Lucy Noakes, "Playing at Being Soldiers: British women and military uniform in the First World War", *British Popular Culture and the First World War*, ed. Jessica Meyer, Leiden, Brill, 2008, p.123-146; The subversive role of the WAAC is also identified by Susan Grayzel, "'The Outward and Visible Sign of Her Patriotism": Women, Uniforms, and National Service During the First World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, 8:2, 1997, p.145-164; However, it is women's pacifist responses to militarism that forms the subject of Clair Tylee, "'Maleness run riot' – The Great War and Women's Resistance to Militarism', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 11:3, 1998, p.199-210.

³⁰ Janet Watson, 'Khaki Girls, VADs, and Tommy's Sisters: Gender and Class in First World War Britain', *The International History Review*, 19:1, 1997, p.51.

knitting, formed an acceptable feminine activity during the war. However, Watson does not explore war knitting in any detail beyond this observation. The implication is that domestic activity did not challenge gender boundaries, whereas, Watson argues, women's other war work did.

That war needlework, specifically, did not challenge gendered boundaries is asserted by Susan Kingsley Kent in her feminist perspective on the war, which argues that needlework, particularly knitting, formed a useful tool of the state to confine and control women's war participation.³¹ Although, as this thesis discusses in the next chapter, Kent's work has been widely critiqued, the understanding that needlework in particular formed a means of women's domestic control during the war has not been countered to any extent in histories. Indeed, it has been supported by Sharon Ouditt, Paul Ward and, in fashion history more recently, by Jane Tynan.³² However, as will be shown, these historians have presented an ideological framework to which needlework history forms a support: they have not interrogated the history of war needlework in its own right.

This thesis will show that war needlework had a far more complex role as a means to question and challenge gender roles; however, what is apparent is that the topic of war needlework has been subject to another binary of interest in historical study, in this instance, between women's new war activities and domestic activities in the home. Women's home front domestic war work, including needlework, has not

³¹ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Inter War Britain*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993, p.14-15.

³² Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 88-96; Paul Ward, 'Women of Britain Say Go: Women's Patriotism in the First World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, 12, 2001, p.23-45, and Paul Ward, 'Empire and Everyday: Britishness and Imperialism in Women's Lives in the Great War', *Rediscovering the British World*, Calgary, University of Calgary Press, 2006, p.267-283; Jane Tynan, *British Army Uniform and the First World War*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p.79-86.

received the same attention and scrutiny, and this appears to be because domestic work is not considered influential in challenging women's gender roles or traditional identities during the war. That there is a separation between women's war knitting, in particular, and women's ability to understand and experience the reality of the war has also been implied in gender studies. This is indicated by Grayzel's assertion that many of the women's war writings that she has studied: 'reflect fervent attempts to convey what women were denied the right to speak of: a war not measured by the knitting of socks but by detached bits of dead bodies'.³³ The implication is that war knitting was an activity to which women felt their authoritative voice had been restricted; and it is presented as the activity which women saw as shielding them from the reality of combat war. This presents knitting in particular as a remote and unrelated war activity which does not have the potential to convey the reality of understandings or experiences of the true nature of the war. It is this projection of war knitting - as abstracted and distanced from the war - that this thesis will challenge and redress.

However, this is not to say that British war needlework has not been studied in academia. It has been the subject of specific case study research. Susan Pedersen's study of the local experience of Aberdeen's needlework organisation has provided valuable local information about how women experienced organised war needlework. However, Pedersen has drawn national conclusions from her study which, as this thesis will show, are not borne out by wider national comparison.³⁴ Cally Blackman has also made a design study of First World War needlework, in

³³ Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War*, p.21.

³⁴ Susan Pedersen, 'A Surfeit of Socks? The Impact of the First World War on Women Correspondents to Daily Newspapers', *Scottish Economic and Social History*, 22:1, 2002, p.50-72.

which she argues that the creative potential of the knitwear designer Marjory Tillotson was held back during the war; a period that Blackman considers negligible in knitting design.³⁵ Blackman's study is design focused, however, and so she does not take into account the broader potential of war knitting to affect social change in women's lives. More recently, Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas have sought to reveal the relevance of domestic activity during the war.³⁶ As Andrews notes: 'the domestic space of the home and domesticity have often been marginalised in the study of the First World War Home Front'.³⁷ Andrews and Lomas have profiled the importance of domestic economies and explored changes to women's domestic status, such as war widows. They have argued that the home front was not a homogenous entity. Thus, Karen Hunt's work on housewives during the war shows that women's experiences differed according to age, class, urban or rural location, and family situation. Hunt argues that the home front changed over time, and that food strategies, in particular, were important to the 'prosecution' of the war.³⁸ However, in Andrews and Lomas' much-needed domestic study, war needlework only receives a passing mention as a domestic skill 'commandeered for the war effort'.³⁹ Thus, although Andrews and Lomas' work will surely lead to further

³⁵ Cally Blackman, 'Handknitting in Britain from 1908-39: the Work of Marjory Tillotson', *Textile History*, 29:2, 1998, p.177-200.

³⁶ Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas eds. *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences since 1914*, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2014, p.3.

³⁷ Maggie Andrews. "Introduction". *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences since 1914*, eds. Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2014, p.3.

³⁸ Hunt argues that: 'food was a weapon of war, wielded everyday by housewives in their kitchens and in food queues, shops and market places'. Karen Hunt, "A Heroine at Home: The Housewife of the First World War Home Front", *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences since 1914*, p.87.

³⁹ Andrews observes that: 'Caroline Playne's 1931 remark about the outbreak of war that "the great era of knitting set in" is a little dismissive but women's domestic skills were certainly commandeered for the national war effort'; however, Andrews does not investigate Playne's statement. Andrews discusses the founding of war charities and their different types, but no further mention is made of knitting for the war effort. Maggie Andrews, "Ideas and Ideals of Domesticity and Home in the First World War", *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences since 1914*, p.11.

investigations into women's domestic war experience, it does not include a study of one of women's most common domestic war activities: war needlework.

Needlework has largely been overlooked in histories of the First World War, and I would argue that this is due to its position in a series of epistemological binaries. The paradigm of home front versus front line opposition, prevalent in post-war analysis, located women's and home front activities external and incidental to the conflict, and has, by default, excluded examination of women's war needlework. However, needlework for the war has not been a popular subject for gender-based histories of the home front either, as these have shown a preference for women's non-domestic war activities. Where domestic activity has been examined in gender studies of the home front, needlework has primarily been placed in a negative binary comparison with other, more transgressive, female war roles. This is to the extent that the feminist studies of Kent and Ouditt have suggested that needlework was a tool for women's exclusion from the war.

In his study of Australian knitting during the war, Bruce Scates has observed that philanthropic war work has been neglected in war histories, as it does not fit into the framework of labour studies: it is too domestic.⁴⁰ To date, however, war needlework has also received little attention in academia from home front domestic historians, although as this thesis is situated as an addition to and extension within this area, it seeks to address this gap. The lack of attention to needlework as a domestic war activity is likely to be related to the way in which, to date, war needlework has been presented as a productive but inert war activity. As this chapter will now discuss, the

⁴⁰ Bruce Scates, 'The Unknown Sock Knitter: Voluntary Work, Emotional Labour, Bereavement and the Great War', *Labour History*, 81, 2001, p.29-31.

academic literature that *does* refer to First World War needlework presents it as an activity of domestic stasis rather than domestic agency during the war.

Arthur Marwick's role for needlework during the First World War

The social historian Arthur Marwick was the first to turn towards interpreting the role of First World War effort needlework.⁴¹ In *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* and *Women at War, 1914-1918*, Marwick suggested that knitting was a welcome activity on the home front, especially in comparison to less traditional female gender activities, such as assisting on the front line. Thus, women: 'who sought a more constructive part in the war effort found that, whilst the knitting of garments and comforts for the troops was welcomed, more ambitious efforts were treated with extreme reserve'.⁴² Marwick asserted, however, that men serving on the front line found the garments that women made were 'unwanted, and often unsuitable'.⁴³ This negative reception, Marwick comments, was in contrast to the positive public reception for those women who joined the war effort as VADs.⁴⁴ In his analysis of the role of knitting for the war, Marwick thus suggests that it was a benign traditional activity compared with other war work, and that the results were not positively received by the front line in any case.

Marwick was not the first historian to assess the impact of the war on women and social conditions; however, Gail Braybon has shown how influential, and yet

⁴¹ Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 1973; and *Women at War, 1914-1918*, London, Harper Collins, 1977.

⁴² Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War*, p.89; see also *Women at War, 1914-1918*, p.35.

⁴³ Arthur Marwick, *Women at War, 1914-1918*, p.35.

⁴⁴ Arthur Marwick, *Women at War, 1914-1918*, p.35.

detrimental, Marwick's studies have been for the history of women in the war.⁴⁵

Braybon and Margaret Higgonet have both approached Marwick's work from a feminist stand-point, and have challenged his assertion that changes to the economic and social conditions of women during the war, including new employment opportunities, provided a long-term positive change to the social and economic status of both working and middle class women.⁴⁶ This 'watershed' projection, as Braybon has termed it, was critiqued by Joan Scott for the way its positive conclusions have closed down further historical examination of, or indeed any comparison between, women's war experiences.⁴⁷

Marwick's reference to knitting for the war is generalised and, principally, it is dismissive of women's knitting experience and the contribution of needlework to the war. In his study of charitable enterprise during the war, Peter Grant has identified Marwick's influence in leading to the dismissal of charitable war work in general as: 'an amateurish exercise that had little impact either on the home front or with the troops'.⁴⁸ Significantly, however, Braybon has identified the key weakness to Marwick's work to lie in his lack of criticality to primary sources.⁴⁹ Marwick's

⁴⁵ Gail Braybon, "Winners or Losers: Women's Symbolic Role in the War Story", p.91-94. Braybon also argues that Marwick's dominance in social and cultural histories of the war neglects the way in which studies of the social, economic and cultural impact of the war began during the war itself, see Gail Braybon, "Winners or Losers: Women's Symbolic Role in the War Story", p.91.

⁴⁶ Braybon has argued that women faced considerable difficulties, a negative reception, and little long-term benefits from entering the workforce during the First World War. Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War*, London, Croom Helm, 1981; Margaret Higgonet has gone a step further in responding to Marwick as she has presented a counter-claim which argues that changes to women's status were accompanied by parallel changes to men's position of power, resulting in little beneficial change to gender relations for women, see Margaret Higgonet, "The Double Helix", *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, p.31-47; For the original assertion regarding the benefits of the war for women, see Marwick, *Women at War, 1914-1918*, p.12.

⁴⁷ Scott has argued that the claims of 'watershed' history, specifically that women gained economic, political and social advantages from the war, have meant that historians have had to argue from the framework of these claims, regardless of their refutation of them, see Joan Scott, 'Rewriting History', *Evidence, History, and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18*, p.22-25; See also Gail Braybon, 'Winners or Losers: Women's Symbolic Role in the War Story', p.91-94.

⁴⁸ Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War*, Oxford and New York, Routledge, 2014, p.2-3.

⁴⁹ Gail Braybon, 'Winners or Losers: Women's Symbolic Role in the War Story', p.91.

assertions are based on a superficial approach to primary sources which give the impression that these sources need no further study. As this thesis will show in forthcoming chapters, when reappraised, many of the primary sources Marwick refers to actually undermine his assertions that war needlework simply constituted a passive, traditional activity during the war, where the garments were generally unwanted by the front line.

It is notable that Marwick's references to war knitting, written in the 1970s, continue to hold firm and still influence the way First World War knitting, specifically, has been understood in both academia and popular histories today. Certainly, Kent appears to have developed Marwick's suggestion that knitting constituted a traditional domestic activity which did not challenge women's war roles in her feminist argument that needlework formed a useful tool of the state to confine and control women's war participation.⁵⁰ Marwick's assertions have also been influential in shaping the focus of popular histories of war needlework, including those by Richard Rutt, Lucy Adlington and Lucinda Gosling, all of which have concentrated more on the subject of unwanted garments on the front line at the beginning of the war than on the form of later war needlework.⁵¹ However, in the light of a review of the primary sources in forthcoming chapters, this thesis will assess Marwick's assertions as well as the assumptions that they have provoked, to show that needlework had a much more complex, integrated and sustained role during the war. In the first instance, however,

⁵⁰ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993.

⁵¹ Richard Rutt, *A History of Hand Knitting*, London, Batsford, 1987; Lucy Adlington, *Great War Fashion: Tales From the History Wardrobe*, Gloucestershire, The History Press, 2013; Lucinda Gosling, *Knitting for Tommy*, Stroud, Gloucestershire, The History Press, 2014.

it is necessary to locate the approach of this thesis within the wider context of needlework and craft studies.

Critical approaches to needlework studies

This thesis is situated within and draws upon research approaches that have formulated in the study of needlework since Rozsika Parker's 1984 seminal work on the gendering of modern embroidery.⁵² Noting that needlework was a male activity in professional contexts, Parker argued that domestic needlework has been actively gendered as 'woman's work' since the thirteenth century, and her work has since inspired a number of critical studies concerned with the gendered practices and constructs in needlework processes; fashion and dress; textile material culture; and design history.⁵³ Parker's argument that embroidery should be redefined within art to remove it from an oppressive gendered binary has, however, proved problematic, particularly for the valuation of other needlework disciplines which have been categorised as domestic crafts, such as knitting.⁵⁴ It is also problematic for embroidery itself, as, paradoxically, it removes embroidery further from the context of women's everyday social agency. Parker's emphasis on embroidery as an

⁵² Rozsika Parker. *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, London, Women's Press, 1984.

⁵³ See Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham, eds. *A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design*, London, Women's Press, 1989; Barbara Burman, *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, Oxford, Berg, 1999; Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin eds. *Women and Things, 1750-1950: Gendered Material Strategies*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009; Mary C. Beaudry, *Findings: the Material Culture of Needlework and Sewing*, London, Yale University Press, 2006.

⁵⁴ See Jo Turney, *The Culture of Knitting*, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p.4; The definition of embroidery as 'art' can be seen to date back to the nineteenth century writing of May Morris. See May Morris, *Decorative Needlework*, Gloucester, Dodo Press, 2010. First published 1893; Tanya Harrod has also noted that: 'embroiders of the 1950s and 1960s were more concerned to position embroidery within the fine art world than to make work which commented on gender'. Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*. New Haven, The Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Yale University Press, 1999, p.295.

instrument against oppression has also been challenged for the way that it overlooks the capacity of needlework to convey a range of women's everyday concerns, interests and self-expression, many of which are not seeking to contest gendered oppression.⁵⁵

In his analytical study, *Thinking Through Craft*, Glenn Adamson has sought to understand why 'craft, as a cultural practice, exists in opposition to the modern conception of art itself'.⁵⁶ This positioning Adamson relates to a binary understanding of craft and art where the 'objects that are associated with craft have been unfairly undervalued since the beginnings of the modern era'.⁵⁷ Adamson identifies a contradiction in the feminist movement which, he explains, was attracted to the expressive capacity of women's needlework as a 'ready-made alternative art history' and 'a language form that summoned up vast realms of women's experience' on the one hand, yet saw it as a negative force of oppression and domestic control on the other.⁵⁸

In the first critical academic study of the practice of knitting, Jo Turney has argued for the need to transcend 'hierarchical boundaries such as 'art', 'craft' and so on, merely because these classifications tend to dismiss knitting'.⁵⁹ However, this thesis approaches needlework in the historical context of a patriarchal social and political order during the first two decades of the twentieth century, and so it is necessary to address the implications of the placement of knitting within social and cultural

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Robinson has made a thorough examination of the overlooked category of needlework processes as a means of expressing women's daily social identities, aspirations and decision-making, see Elizabeth Robinson, 'Women and Needlework in Britain 1920-1970', Unpublished PhD, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2012.

⁵⁶ Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, Oxford: Berg, 2007, p.2.

⁵⁷ Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, p.5.

⁵⁸ Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, p.151.

⁵⁹ Jo Turney, *The Culture of Knitting*, p.4.

binaries during this period, but, I argue that this will certainly not lead to the dismissal of knitting. Indeed, Adamson has argued ‘that it is precisely through an examination of the terms of subordination’ that ‘the social prejudices that attend craft can be redressed’.⁶⁰ This suggests that studying the conditions and form of binaries of needlework classification goes some way towards identifying, challenging, and breaking them down. In the study of the history of needlework, this acknowledgement has enabled historians to identify overlooked categories of domestic craft, such as home dressmaking.⁶¹

As Heather Pristash, Inez Schaechterle and Sue Carter Wood have observed, gendered binaries have long been present in needlework practice, and so attention needs to be directed towards examining how, why and where these binaries may have been altered, challenged and sustained by women for their own self-agency.⁶²

Parker’s premise that needlework could form a means for women’s oppression underpins the First World War studies of Kent, Ouditt, and Ward; however, these studies *only* present needlework as oppressive, whereas Parker also argued for the

⁶⁰ Adamson, *Thinking through Craft*, 2007, p.5.

⁶¹ Judy Attfield has observed that the: ‘art versus design/craft debate still rears its head in the context of the history of women and design when it comes to how the products of women’s work are valued’. However, she has argued that a: ‘more inclusive embracing of the “everyday” as opposed to the “other”, both theoretically and in practice, can challenge the rigid and reductive divisions between public and private, male and female’. Judy Attfield, ‘Review Article: What Does History Have to Do With It? Feminism and Design History’. *Journal of Design History*, 16:1, 2003, p.83-84; Barbara Burman has focused on the intersections of production and consumption to argue that dressmaking ‘defies polarization’ into either. Burman, *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking*, p.15. However, the studies of Attfield and Burman both forefront needlework products and consumption rather than the social and cultural role of the creation of needlework in meaning making; For the significance of needlework processes in expressing women’s social identity, see Elizabeth Robinson, ‘Women and Needlework in Britain 1920-1970’, Unpublished PhD, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2012; For studies of women’s agency in home dress-making and design, see also Cheryl Buckley, “De-humanised Females and Amazonians”: British Wartime Fashion and its Representation in Home Chat, 1914-1918’, *Gender & History*, 14:3, 2002, p.516-536; See also Jill Seddon and Suzette Worden, *Women Designing: Redefining Design in Britain between the Wars*, University of Brighton, 1994.

⁶² Heather Pristash, Inez Schaechterle and Sue Carter Wood, “The Needle as the Pen: Intentionality, Needlework, and the Production of Alternate Discourses of Power”, Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, eds. *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750-1950*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009, p.13-29.

empowering agency of needlework.⁶³ This thesis challenges the understanding in areas of academia that knitting and sewing garments was a singularly oppressive or limiting activity for women during the First World War. This is not to suggest, however, that war needlework was an entirely positive or harmonious experience for women. Rather, this thesis follows Maureen Daly Goggin's call which 'redirects attention to the power of the needle as an epistemic tool'.⁶⁴ Needlework, Goggin argues, has 'the power to create knowledge – cultural, social, political, and personal'.⁶⁵ Needlework could be used by women to define and renegotiate their identities as well as to communicate within a social context. As Mary Murphy has observed 'needlework has always been a form of self-writing and should no longer be overlooked'.⁶⁶ This thesis therefore contributes to the study of needlework as a rhetorical discourse which, as Pritash et al have argued, functions as 'a form of rhetoric with the potential to shape identity, build community, and prompt engagement with social action'.⁶⁷

Sources and Methodology

⁶³ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Inter War Britain*, p.14-15; Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War*, p. 88-96; Paul Ward, 'Women of Britain Say Go: Women's Patriotism in the First World War', p.23-45, and Paul Ward, 'Empire and Everyday: Britishness and Imperialism in Women's Lives in the Great War', p.267-283.

⁶⁴ Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, eds. *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750-1950*, p.6. Goggin has noted how scholars from a variety of disciplines: 'have begun theorizing the complex, dynamic relationship among women, gender, culture, politics, and needle arts, thereby opening up spaces for recouping the material strategies and objects associated with the needle'. Maureen Daly Goggin, *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750-1950*, p.2.

⁶⁵ Maureen Daly Goggin, *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750-1950*, p.5.

⁶⁶ Murphy, Mary A., 'The Theory and Practice of Counting Stitches as Stories: Material Evidences of Autobiography in Needlework', *Women's Studies*, 32:5, 2003, p.646.

⁶⁷ Heather Pritash et al, "The Needle as the Pen: Intentionality, Needlework, and the Production of Alternate Discourses of Power", p.14.

A central aim of this thesis is to show that First World War needlework not only warrants more academic attention, but also that the primary sources to which this attention can be directed are abundant, rich in information, and are as robust for scrutiny as other primary sources of academic historical study. The last twenty years have seen a growth in histories interested in investigating personal narratives to examine events, economic trends, and social and cultural experience. Penny Summerfield has referred to this as a 'turn to the personal', which has 'enriched the possibilities of analysis with ideas concerning, for example, subjectivity, narrative, technologies of self, agency, the other, public discourse, and the unconscious'.⁶⁸ In this move towards personal and emotional experiences, subjectivity is 'a legitimate matter for historical enquiry and a route to understanding the past'.⁶⁹

Subjectivity is important in a study of women's needlework. Women's history is often most prevalent in subjective sources, such as in diaries and letters. In her study of the potential for agency and political activism by seamstresses in France between 1830-1850, Maria Tamboukou has suggested that attempting to elucidate formerly hidden histories, such as those of women needleworkers, requires approaching alternative evidence in a way that brings the subjectivity of the sources to the forefront.⁷⁰ Summerfield has noted, however, that historians have approached subjectivity within sources in different ways, including as data sources, sources of

⁶⁸ Penny Summerfield, *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice*, London and New York, Routledge, 2019, p.15.

⁶⁹ Penny Summerfield, *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice*, p.14.

⁷⁰ Tamboukou achieves this new form of history by incorporating a wide range of objects and textual references to contextualise women's lives and create a picture of their political activism; a picture that it would not be possible to see from formal documentation. Maria Tamboukou, *Sewing, Fighting and Writing: radical practices in work, politics and culture*, Rowman and Littlefield, London & New York, 2016. See also, Stephanie Spencer, 'Sewing Fighting and Writing: radical practices in work, politics and culture, by Maria Tamboukou', *Women's History Review*, 26:4, 2017, p.659.

fact, and as constructions of the self, and that their methodology has largely been directed by the questions that they ask.

In my thesis there is a central research question: what was the role of British home front needlework during the First World War? However, to investigate this the thesis also needs to ask how needlework was used and experienced by practitioners - mainly needlewomen on the home front; how it was experienced by wider communities and organisations; and how it was experienced by men, both on the front line and home front. It therefore needs to consider a number of subjectivities and sources, including letters, memoirs and autobiographies. To answer the questions posed by this study, a combination of approaches to subjectivity have been adopted in the attempt to draw out both personal and collective experiences. These methodological approaches - how the sources have been seen - and frameworks of analysis will now be presented in more detail.

Memoirs, Diaries and Autobiographical sources

Memoirs, diaries and autobiographical sources are approached in this thesis as sources in which the writer engages in a reflexive practice which constructs meaningful (and valid) subjectivity. I argue that, to date, the most frequently cited biographical sources relating to war effort needlework have been read as representing straightforward and generalised 'facts' about war needlework. These sources are re-visited in this thesis to show how historical reference to them has become primarily formulaic rather than investigative.

One of the most cited sources on war needlework, the war memoirs of Constance Peel, have been read in the historical literature as presenting a direct window on the general and popular opinion of war needlework, and to this end, allocated a largely factual role.⁷¹ Peel's memoirs are, however, revisited in my research in the light of literary research approaches which consider memoir and autobiography 'as a creative literary form through which subjectivity is composed'.⁷² Peel's interest, concerns and omissions regarding war needlework are thus explored to present alternative readings of the role of war needlework.

The diary and autobiography of the writer Vera Brittain have also formed popular references in the history of war needlework. In this thesis, these are reassessed through comparative analysis which acknowledges that the two sources (of diary and autobiography) are 'shaped by the two points in time that inform their creation: the moment at which they are composed, and the period in the past that they recall'.⁷³ The historical separation between the two sources, as well as their role in Brittain's construction of self, is examined to reveal that Brittain held a far more complex attitude to war needlework.⁷⁴

Caroline Playne's studies of the war years have been a prominent source in the few academic studies that have referred to war needlework.⁷⁵ However, as with the memoirs of Constance Peel, Playne's writing has been reported in histories primarily

⁷¹ Constance Peel, *How We Lived Then 1914-1918*, London, Bodley Head, 1929; and her autobiography, Constance Peel, *Life's Enchanted Cup*, London, Bodley Head, 1933.

⁷² Penny Summerfield, *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice*, p.79

⁷³ Penny Summerfield, *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice*, p.79.

⁷⁴ Vera Brittain, *War Diary 1913-1917: Chronicle of Youth*, London, Victor Gallancz, 1981. Reprint Phoenix Press, 2002; Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925*, London, Victor Gollancz, 1933. Reprint Virago, 2014.

⁷⁵ Caroline Playne, *The Neuroses of the Nations*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1925; *The Pre-War Mind in Britain*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1928; *Society at War, 1914-1916*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1931; and *Britain Holds On, 1917-1918*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1933.

as a factual memoir. By contextualizing Playne's writing within her political and sociological agenda, this thesis will investigate Playne's selectivity and omissions to show that her observations about war needlework cannot be taken in isolation from her political agenda, and that her selectivity regarding the role of war needlework served a purpose.

Letters

Letter writing is approached as 'a social and cultural practice' which commented on, changed and created social relationships.⁷⁶ Letters from soldiers on the front line are thus examined for how men chose to describe their reception and experience of the needlework garments that they received from family and from voluntary groups; whilst letters from the home front are investigated as indicators of how women found making, acquiring and sending garments.⁷⁷ Letters are considered to be agents of change in this thesis, as their reference to needlework garments created further relationships, whilst they could also voice attempts to change and channel garment exchange.⁷⁸ The way in which letters communicated subjective responses to needlework garments is investigated to reveal the dynamic role of needlework in personal relations between the front line and home front.

⁷⁶ Summerfield, *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice*, p.23.

⁷⁷ The letters sourced in this thesis are held in the collections of the Imperial War Museum and in published sources.

⁷⁸ For studies which investigate the social role of letters as affecting change in relationships and practices during the war, see Matt Houlbrook, "'A Pin to See the Peepshow': Culture, Fiction and Selfhood in Edith Thompson's Letters, 1921-1922', *Past & Present*, 207, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p.215-249; Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*. London, Reaktion, 1996; Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009; Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*, Manchester University Press, 2010.

Film: 'How to Help Tommy'

The War Office film 'How to Help Tommy' features the topic of voluntary needlework. Filmed in 1916, under the instructions of the Director General of Voluntary Organisations, Sir Edward Ward, it was released as a topical news film into public cinemas in 1917.⁷⁹ In this thesis, the film is examined for the stylistic information that it contains on knitted garment types. However, it is also investigated for its messaging regarding voluntary needlework.

In his study of the use of films as historical sources, Anirudh Deshpande has compared films to textual sources of history to argue that they both form valid sources of 'representational history'.⁸⁰ Pierre Sorlin, in his analysis of using newsreel films as sources, has similarly argued that historians need to be aware that what they see 'is a result of subjective choice'.⁸¹ It is precisely this subjectivity which is of interest in this thesis. If, as Sorlin argues, newsreels are "'directed" images of society', they can reveal much about the motivations and concerns of film commissioners.⁸² 'How to Help Tommy' is thus approached as an instructional guide from the War Office, and it is investigated as a source of information about the War Office's interests and priorities concerning voluntary needlework. Analysis is applied

⁷⁹ 'How to Help Tommy', 1916, *Imperial War Museum*, Film 1221.

⁸⁰ Anirudh Deshpande, 'Films as Historical Sources or Alternative History', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39:40, 2004, p.4459.

⁸¹ Pierre Sorlin, "How to Look at an "Historical" Film", *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*, ed. Marcia Landy, London, The Athlone Press, 2001, p.28.

⁸² Pierre Sorlin, "How to Look at an "Historical" Film", p.34.

to both the filmed footage and the intertitles, since the latter could steer viewers towards interpreting the imagery with a specific focus: they specify intent.⁸³

Original knitted garments

Due to the fragile, functional and often transient nature of First World War knitted garments, few original examples have survived in the historic record. In order to consider the structure, style and texture of First World War knitted garments this thesis, therefore, draws upon alternative primary sources.⁸⁴ Knitting patterns are referred to as a means of figuratively reconstructing knitted garments, since they enable an examination of the potential technical composition, imagery and variety of garments. The 1917 War Office film 'How to Help Tommy' is referred to for its depiction of men wearing an assortment of knitted garments. Soldiers' letters are explored for their observations about the comfort or discomfort of knitted garments. The collection of replica First World War knitted garments made by the war knitting practitioner, Joyce Meader, has also been consulted. Although these replicas are not referred to as evidence in this thesis, the opportunity to handle recreated garments has greatly aided my understanding of garment composition.⁸⁵

⁸³ For reference to the propaganda role of intertitles in First World War film, see also, Toby Haggith, 'Reconstructing the Musical Arrangement for "The Battle of the Somme" (1916)', *Film History*, 14:1, 2002, p.21.

⁸⁴ As a result of the thematic arguments examined in this thesis, knitted garments are primarily the focus of examination, rather than sewn items; however, further analysis of patterns for sewn garments is desirable for future study.

⁸⁵ Joyce Meader also holds a large collection of First World War patterns, books and assorted ephemera, and a selection of these items are gratefully referred to as evidence in this thesis. See also Joyce Meader, *Knitskrieg: A Call to Yarns! A History of Military Knitting from the 1800s to the Present Day*, London, Unicorn Publishing Group, 2016.

Patterns

To date, detailed technical and design analysis of knitting patterns has tended to be confined to the discipline of needlework studies, and it has mainly been concerned with developments in knitting design and form. The history of patterns has, however, been investigated by Sandy Black who has shown the ad hoc way in which knitting pattern terminology developed since the nineteenth century. Black also charts how the growth of printing increased publication circulation of patterns, making access to knitting processes and garment forms more widespread.⁸⁶ Jennie Atkinson, has shown how knitting patterns reflect changes in social concerns, education and consumerism, and how early twentieth century patterns maintained their relevance in women's growing fashion interests in health and sport.⁸⁷ The content of knitting patterns are also referred to by Lucinda Gosling, Lucy Adlington and Joyce Meader in their studies of war knitting; however, in these, patterns have primarily been illustrative rather than explicitly examined as historical sources.⁸⁸

In *The Culture of Knitting* Jo Turney has demonstrated the way in which knitting patterns can be read as complex cultural texts. Her case-study of the depiction of men in twentieth century knitting patterns shows that knitting patterns could present or obscure masculinity through their representation of men's garment types and poses. In this context, Turney argues, patterns formed a means by which women could manipulate and control male imagery.⁸⁹ As with Turney's study, this thesis

⁸⁶ Sandy Black, *Knitting, Fashion, Industry, Craft*, London, V&A Publishing, 2012, p.124.

⁸⁷ Jennie Atkinson, 'Unravelling the Knitting Pattern', *Text: For the Study of Textile Art, Design and History*, 36, 2008-9, p.21-25.

⁸⁸ Lucy Adlington, *Great War Fashion: Tales From the History Wardrobe*, Gloucestershire, The History Press, 2013; Lucinda Gosling, *Knitting For Tommy: Keeping the Great War Soldier Warm*, Gloucestershire, The History Press, 2014; Joyce Meader, *Knitskrieg: A Call to Yarns! A History of Military Knitting from the 1800s to the Present Day*, London, Unicorn Publishing Group, 2016.

⁸⁹ Joanne Turney, *The Culture of Knitting*, p.29-32.

approaches knitting patterns as cultural and historical texts which could comment upon, interact with, alter and present social and cultural messaging. They are seen to be influential sources for knowledge creation, discourse and agency during the war.

The patterns studied in this thesis have been drawn from women's magazines and from commercial needlework magazines from the period 1900-1918. They also include the war patterns issued by Queen Mary's Needlework Guild and the War Office's Director General of Voluntary Organisations. This study therefore incorporates patterns which would have been in commercial circulation during the war as well as those issued by needlework organisations; however, this is not to suggest that the patterns under study were restricted within or to these groupings.

The historical context of patterns is considered vital in this thesis, which argues that changes in context and knowledge presentation in patterns reveals the dynamic role of needlework over the course of the war. Patterns of 1914-1918 are compared with one another and with earlier patterns of the Boer War to explore how knowledge and imagery changed and was asserted - and by whom - over time. The technical language and directions of the patterns, or lack of, is also examined as a means of showing the form of knowledge available to needleworkers. My own practice of knitting informs this analysis, as it enables me to examine both the technicalities and details of patterns, and in this way, to examine how the information of war needlework responded to and intervened in war events.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Hilary Davidson has suggested that re-making historical clothing is an informative means of historical research which: 'recognises the process of doing, making and remaking, and reconstructing as a fruitful methodology with quantifiable, academically valid results'. Hilary Davidson, 'The Embodied Turn: Making and Remaking Dress as an Academic Practice', *Fashion Theory*, 23:3, 2019, p.329.

Cartoons and Illustrations in *Punch*, 1914-1918

This thesis has referred to all editions of *Punch* between August 1914 and November 1918 to compile a comparative set of illustrations and cartoons which reference, or depict, home front war needlework and garment making.⁹¹ *Punch* illustrations of women visitors to home front hospitals have similarly been compiled for the analysis in Chapter Eight of this thesis.⁹² This compilation, which spans the duration of the war, has enabled comparison over time. However, it also draws attention to the historically situated nature of the imagery in the chronology of the war, and this, I argue, enables a re-assessment of the common assumptions about how particular illustrations summarise war needlework for the *whole* of the war.

The 1914 song ‘Sister Susie’s Sewing Shirts for Soldiers’

The 1914 song *Sister Susie’s Sewing Shirts for Soldiers* is examined as a popular cultural depiction of early war needlework.⁹³ Emma Hanna has argued that ‘music was not in any way ephemeral: it was unmatched in its power to cajole, console, cheer and inspire during the conflict and its aftermath’.⁹⁴ While Kate Kennedy and Trudi Tate have shown how music, as much as literature, has: ‘remembered,

⁹¹ See this thesis, Appendix A.

⁹² See this thesis, Appendix B. This analysis draws upon the work of Pierre Purseigle, ‘Mirroring societies at war: pictorial humour in the British and French popular press during the First World War’, *Journal of European Studies*, 31, 2001, p.289-328; Edward Madigan, ‘“Sticking to a Hateful Task”: Resilience, Humour, and British Understandings of Combat Courage, 1914-1918’, *War in History*, 20:1, 2013, p.76-98; Tim Cook, ‘“I will meet the world with a smile and a joke”: Canadian Soldiers’ Humour in the Great War’, *Canadian Military History*, 22:2, 2013, p.48-62.

⁹³ Robert Patrick Weston and Herman Darewski, *Sister Susie’s Sewing Shirts for Soldiers*, New York, T.B. Harms & Francis & Day & Hunter, 1914.

⁹⁴ Emma Hanna, *Sounds of War: Music in the British Armed Forces During the Great War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020, preface.

mourned, and raged against – as well as celebrated’ First World War experience.⁹⁵

In this thesis, this particular song is considered in the historical context of the early war as a cultural commentary, critique and means of connection.

Primary Source Reports and Newspaper Articles

Primary source reports referring to women’s war needlework have been drawn upon, including reports made by Queen Mary’s Needlework Guild; The Director General of Voluntary Organisations at the War Office; Queen Alexandra’s Field Force Fund; The Central Committee on Women’s Employment; and the Red Cross.⁹⁶ Despite the detailed content of these reports, many of which ‘give a voice’ to women’s war needlework groups, these sources have not been commonly referred to in the secondary literature on war needlework. This thesis triangulates report content with newspaper articles; the correspondence papers of the War Office; and Hansard debates to build a narrative of the events and decisions that were made about public needlework for the war.⁹⁷ This research has also drawn extensively on the cuttings,

⁹⁵ Kate Kennedy and Trudi Tate, ‘Literature and music of the First World War’, *First World War Studies*, 2:1, 2011, p.1.

⁹⁶ *Report of the Central Committee on Women’s Employment*, 1915. IWM, WWC, EMP 3.11; *Report of Queen Alexandra’s Field Force Fund: Report and Accounts for 1917*, London, William Brown & Co Ltd, 1918; *Queen Mary’s Needlework Guild: Its Work During the Great War. St James’s Palace, 1914-1918*, London and Wealdstone, George Pulman & Sons, The Cranford Press, 1920; *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort Resulting from the Formation of the Department of the Director-General of Voluntary Organisations*, London, His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1919, and *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort resulting from the formation of the D.G.V.O Department: Being a detailed record of the work of the Recognised Associations, Appendices III and IV*, London, HM Stationery Office, 1920; *Reports by the Joint War Committee and the Joint War Finance Committee of the Red Cross Society and The Order of St John of Jerusalem in England*, London, British Red Cross, 1921.

⁹⁷ Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, August to December 1914. TNA WO 107/21; Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, January to June 1915. TNA WO 107/14; Minutes and Correspondence of the Quarter Master Generals at the War Office, July to December 1915. TNA WO 107/15; *Hansard*, House of Commons Debates, 1914-1918.

reports, and correspondence held in the Women's Work Collection at the Imperial War Museum.⁹⁸

Magazines

Magazines are approached as forums for women's knowledge construction and identity negotiation. This follows Margaret Beetham's proposal that nineteenth and twentieth century magazines can be read as interactive 'text' which: 'interacts with the culture which produced it and which it produces. It is a place where meanings are contested and made'.⁹⁹ Magazines are sites of shifting and at times potentially contradictory messages. The domestic magazines studied here include the middle class circulation *Home Chat* and *Woman's Own* as well as the upper middle class society journal *The Queen*.¹⁰⁰ All of these magazines featured articles on war needlework, while *Woman's Own* and *The Queen* also featured knitting patterns.

⁹⁸ The Women's Work Collection was assembled for the newly formed Imperial War Museum between 1917 and 1920 by the museum's Women's Work Subcommittee under honorary secretary Agnes Conway. The collection includes a large selection of books, articles, reports, papers, photographs and objects relating to women's service and charitable activities during the First World War. For further information about the history of the collection, see Mary Wilkinson, 'Patriotism and duty: the Women's Work Collection at the Imperial War Museum', *The Imperial War Museum Review*, 6, 1991, p.31-37; For a study which investigates the selectivity of the Women's Work Collection, see Deborah Thom, "Making Spectaculars: Museums and how we remember Gender in Wartime", *Evidence, History, and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914-18*, ed. Gail Braybon, Oxford and New York, Berghahn Books, 2003, p.48-66.

⁹⁹ Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine 1800-1914*, London and New York, Routledge, 1996, p.5.

¹⁰⁰ For this research I have referred to *Home Chat* from 1914 to 1918 and all editions of *Woman's Own* between 1914 and 1917 (when it ceased publication). *The Queen*, unlike the other magazines studied here, included an index, and so I have referred to the needlework references according to the index between 1914 and 1918. One feature that all of the selected magazines have in common is that they were all in circulation when the war broke out, and so, magazine response to the war can be compared and, in some cases, related to pre-war content; The needlework publications considered in this study include all 1914 to 1918 editions of *Lady's World Fancy Workbook*; *Needlecraft Practical Journal* and *The Fancy Needlework Illustrated*. Pattern booklets examined are by Weldons, Leach's, JJ. Baldwin and Briggs and Co.

Woman's Own, first published by W.B. Horner's in 1913 with the strapline 'The best woman's paper', was published weekly at the cost of one penny and was intended to be affordable to the lower-middle and middle class woman.¹⁰¹ *Home Chat* was published between 1895-1958 by Amalgamated Press and, according to Cynthia White in her study of women's magazines, it was directed at the middle and lower-middle classes to 'provide regular and comprehensive coverage of home management' and 'domestic guidance'.¹⁰² *The Queen*, meanwhile, was launched in 1861 by Samuel Beeton as 'a weekly Record and Journal which ladies can read and profit by; one in which their understandings and judgements will not be insulted by a collection of mere trivialities, but which will be to them a help in their daily lives'.¹⁰³ However, Beetham has noted the way the annual income of the readership of *The*

¹⁰¹ During the war, *Woman's Own* gave guidance on home management with household tips. It also gave advice on marriage and relationships through regular columns by the writer Jeannie Maitland. Women's role in wartime was also frequently discussed. There were also features on fashion and beauty and regular competitions. For the purposes of this study, *Woman's Own* has been selected for discussion because it is targeted towards women at home. It is also of interest because it issued a regular knitting and crochet supplement which featured war knitting patterns. During the war, *Woman's Own* was acquired by The Amalgamated Press, which also published *Home Chat* and *Woman's Weekly*. In 1916, editions of *Woman's Own* start to remark to the readership about problems experienced on account of paper shortages caused by the war, and in June 1917 publication of *Woman's Own* is ceased and the magazine is incorporated into the fiction magazine *Horner's Penny Stories*. See also Cynthia White, *Women's Magazines 1693-1968*, Michael Joseph, London, 1970; and Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine 1800-1914*, 1996.

¹⁰² Cynthia White, *Women's Magazines 1693-1968*, p.75. The war-time format of *Home Chat* was one which featured biographies and news of people from society, military and Royal life, those living in Britain and abroad; fashion and beauty features; stories; cooking; a children's section; and various articles, including items of war related news and articles on home economising.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Cynthia White, *Women's Magazines 1693-1968*, p.50. *The Queen* took the format of an illustrated broadsheet, and at the beginning of the war it contained headed sections dedicated to Court news; reports on society events, including balls, bazaars, charity events, fashionable marriages, and the movement or lives of international society figures. It also contained sections on fashion and beauty; social etiquette; drama and theatre; home decoration; art and antiques; music; gardens; pets; country living; hobbies; travel; naturalism; the nursery and the 'work table', which was a section specifically featuring needlework patterns and projects, although it also included leatherwork and other handicrafts. As the war progressed, regular sections appeared in *The Queen* on 'The Country and The War' and 'Women's Employment'. Before the war, the 'Work Table' featured patterns for decorative embroidery and crochet for decorative items for the home. It is in the 'Work Table' section that patterns and articles about war effort knitting are featured.

Queen was assumed to be above £300, which would have been high in the late-nineteenth century.¹⁰⁴

Although these magazines were targeted to certain classes, they were widely circulated and their cross-class commentaries enable comparison of women's needlework activities.¹⁰⁵ White has noted how between 1885 and 1910 magazines: 'became a medium of communication not only between editorial staff and their readers, but between women all over the country, a reflection of an undercurrent of social change which was gradually creating the conditions for free and easy contact'.¹⁰⁶ In her study of *Home Chat* during the First World War, Cheryl Buckley has identified the way magazines also make gendered tensions visible by: 'the factual reporting of what women were doing; the fictional stories dealing with different aspects of women's lives; and in the visual representations of femininity'.¹⁰⁷ This thesis therefore considers magazines to reveal the tensions surrounding, and resolutions offered on, the topic of war needlework, with magazine content intervening in, responding to and negotiating with women's expectations, concerns and responses.

¹⁰⁴ Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine 1800-1914*, p.89.

¹⁰⁵ Margaret Beetham has remarked that although it: 'explicitly constructed an upper middle class reader with an above average income, *The Queen* was almost certainly read by those for whom such a style of life was an aspiration or even a fantasy'. Margaret Beetham, *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine 1800-1914*, p.90-91.

¹⁰⁶ Cynthia White, *Women's Magazines 1693-1968*, p.77. Fiona Hackney has also demonstrated the dynamic social capacity of commercial magazines in the way they re-framed craft in the inter-war 20th Century: 'as a modern activity and the housewife as an agent of modernity. Fiona Hackney, "'Use Your Hands for Happiness": Home Craft and Make-do-and-Mend in British Women's Magazines in the 1920s and 1930s', *Journal of Design History*, 19:1, 2006, p.26.

¹⁰⁷ Cheryl Buckley, "'De-humanised Females and Amazonians": British Wartime Fashion and its Representation in *Home Chat*, 1914-1918', *Gender & History*, 14:3, 2002, p.517.

Image Illustrations

Image illustrations are featured in this thesis in two ways. The first, is as illustrations to the narrative of events and of people presented by this research. To this extent, these images are not critically assessed; they are illustrative. However, they are still considered important in this illustrative capacity, since they make visible the people and places that are relevant to events, and in some cases, have been overlooked in the narrative of First World War needlework.¹⁰⁸ The second use of images is as the subject of critical analysis, and these illustrations include cartoon imagery from *Punch* as well as the imagery and content of knitting patterns.

As it proceeds, each chapter of this thesis develops the methodological and source-based analysis presented in this introduction. This is because a core feature of this study is to examine *how* the varied primary sources have been read to present the history of First World War needlework. The following chapters therefore reappraise how the sources have been read; however, this thesis also proposes alternative readings - how they could be read - which will show that war needlework offered a multi-faceted means of war response.

¹⁰⁸ For example, in the case of Vera Brittain, the two photographs selected show the same woman, but at different times in her life when she was writing the two biographical sources examined in this thesis; these photographs further suggest the contrast in Brittain's life experience. Caroline Playne, meanwhile, has omitted her personal biography from much of her writing, and so the illustration of her in this thesis is the only alleged photograph of her. Its inclusion is thereby part of the attempt to put Playne back into the historical narrative. Other images are included throughout the thesis to show the places and individuals - the subjects - of narrative and investigation.

Chapter Two

Early war needlework: a dynamic social tool of war response, 1914-1915

Introduction

Following the entry of Britain and Ireland into the war on 4th August 1914, handmade garments were knitted, crocheted and sewn by people on the home front for those serving and, in anticipation, for those wounded by the war. Within the first weeks of the war, magazines and newspapers called for women, specifically, to become involved in a widespread national war effort to contribute scarves, hats, gloves and hospital garments, including shirts and pyjamas. This chapter examines the origins of this widespread movement and the form that it took during the first year of the war. That the majority of the garment making volunteers were women has meant that war effort needlework has inevitably been considered a gendered activity by historians. This chapter will examine these gender-based academic frameworks of interpretation for early war needlework in detail. In addressing prevalent historical understandings of needlework, this chapter sets the scene for forthcoming analysis, which will assess current understandings and also present a new, more complex and empowering, role for war needlework.

The chapter begins with an examination of the argument, prevalent in academia, that early war needlework, specifically knitting, was employed by the state as a means of ideological control over women which confined them to a domestic role. Referring to primary source War Office documents, magazines and newspaper reports, examination is made of the historical events that led to and defined needlework garment making at the start of the war. It will be shown how the initial call to knit and sew for the war in 1914 was not a state-led enterprise, but rather, that early war

needlework originated from the tradition of women's philanthropic organisations and charities who were as concerned with women's welfare as they were with supporting the needs of the men going to fight in the war. Far from being promoted by the state, this chapter shows that women's war effort needlework was considered unwelcome by the state, as the priorities of two women's philanthropic garment production enterprises, Queen Mary's Needlework Guild and, independently, Lady French, came into direct conflict with War Office priorities at the start of the war.

The second half of the chapter examines the academic assertion that needlework did not disrupt traditional gender roles at the start of the war. The related argument that it formed a means of domestic control over women by restricting and excluding them from more meaningful participation in the war is also scrutinised. Referring to secondary source studies of needlework in nineteenth century education; and primary source imagery and biography from the pre-war suffrage campaign of Emmeline Pankhurst, I argue that at the start of the First World War, rather than constituting a passive activity which ensured women's domestic containment, knitting was already both a *subject* and *means* of contestation. This finding will be developed by an examination of needlework articles in women's magazines at the start of the war. Using discussion of the magazines *Home Chat* and *Woman's Own*, it will be shown how needlework expressed women's diverse responses at the start of the war. This analysis argues that women used needlework to debate, question and define the terms of their initial engagement in the war, and that it was used to challenge gender roles.

Referring to methodologies developed for studying primary source diaries and autobiographies, the chapter goes on to examine the formative account of women's

wartime needlework by the writer Vera Brittain.¹ It approaches Brittain's *Chronicle of Youth* and *Testament of Youth* as historically-contextualised testimony that helped Brittain make sense of events. I argue that an alternative reading can be made of Brittain's references to early war needlework; one that suggests that rather than forming a means for the gendered subjugation of women, needlework held a complex role as a social and practical tool which women could use to debate and formulate their roles at the start of the war.

Finally, this chapter will examine the origins and implications of the powerful historical binary of early war women knitting versus men fighting - and how this binary has been read in academia. The assertion that the binary evidences the gendered subjugation or exclusion of women from the war is challenged. Through a reappraisal of the war study of the social historian Caroline Playne, often cited as the first observer of the binary, I argue that Playne's account does not imply clear-cut gendered control or the exclusion of women from the war, but rather records Playne's observations on manifestations of early war apprehension and the use of needlework within the tradition of urgent *war* response.

¹ For the methodological approaches to memoir, testimony and biography followed in this analysis, see Penny Summerfield, *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice*, London, Routledge, 2019; For further studies that have approached testimony as a reflexive meaning making source see Matt Houlbrook, "'A Pin to See the Peepshow': Culture, Fiction and Selfhood in Edith Thompson's Letters, 1921-1922", *Past & Present*, 207, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, p.215-249; Geneviève Brassard, 'From Private Story to Public History: Irene Rathbone Revises the War in the Thirties', *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, 15:3, Gender and Modernism between the Wars, 1918-1939, The John Hopkins University Press, 2003, p.43-63; Richard Badenhausen, 'Mourning through Memoir: Trauma, Testimony, and Community in Vera Brittain's "Testament of Youth"', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 49:4, 2003, p .421-448.

Needlework as a means of state control of women at the start of the war

Although academic studies of early war needlework are limited in number, the suggestion that traditional domestic needlework was used during the First World War as a means of social and specifically female control has received favour in academic studies.² In these studies, women's needlework is an activity which does not disrupt traditional gender roles and is therefore non-threatening to a late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century patriarchal ideology which aims to maintain a gendered imbalance of social and political power. Susan Kingsley Kent's work in the 1990s first shaped the perspective that domestic activity during the war, particularly needlework, ensured the containment of women within a domestic sphere which prevented them from continuing to develop their political identities in women's suffrage.³ Kent's work is rooted in feminist debate and has received criticism, particularly her conclusion that there was a movement in the war to 'reassert' women's domesticity and prevent

² See Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Inter War Britain*, Princeton New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1993, p.14-15; Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p.88-96; Paul Ward, "'Women of Britain Say Go': Women's Patriotism in the First World War", *Twentieth Century British History*, 2001, 12:1, p.23-45, and Paul Ward, 'Empire and Everyday: Britishness and Imperialism in Women's Lives in the Great War', *Rediscovering the British World*, Calgary, University of Calgary Press, 2006, p.267-283; Jane Tynan, *British Army Uniform and the First World War*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p.79-86.

³ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Inter War Britain*, p.14-15.

the furtherance of the political aspirations of the pre-war suffrage campaign.⁴

However, Kent's suggestion that *knitting* had a restrictive role for women during the war has not been critiqued in academia. Indeed, Kent's theory on knitting has been supportively developed by historians, and this has had significant implications for the interpretation of the role of needlework during the war.

Paul Ward has advanced Kent's argument regarding First World War needlework most comprehensively, suggesting that the state embodied the patriarchal power which both supported and advocated middle and upper class women's war needlework, thereby ensuring that gender roles were not challenged or disrupted.⁵ In his two studies of middle and upper class women's needlework efforts during the First World War, Ward presents the state as the ideological force in ultimate control of women's voluntary war effort needlework.⁶ On the outbreak of the war, Ward suggests, middle and upper class women's voluntary work: 'was entirely acceptable within traditional notions of femininity, particularly when it seemed the chief

⁴ Susan Grayzel has countered Kent's argument that gender was 'reconstructed' after the war, and argues that reconstruction: 'was a constant and ongoing process from the first day of the war'. See Susan Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War*, London, University of North Carolina Press, 1999, p.244; Kent's argument that the suffrage cause was sent into political regression by the war has been critiqued by Adrian Gregory who has suggested that by the end of the war, suffrage objectives had by necessity shifted and that Kent underestimates: 'the extent to which the achievement of limited suffrage in 1918 inevitably took the wind out of the pre-war agenda'. Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p.339; Kent's argument that a distinction between a female domestic sphere and a male public and military sphere which rendered the domestic politically null has also been countered by critics who have shown that the boundaries between women's domestic and political roles were much more fluid. Martin Pugh has pointed out that domestic identity and political identity were, in fact, interconnected within the suffrage movement itself, as the larger, less radical women's organisations were domestic in character, with domesticity constituting: 'an important formative force which contributed to the changes in the public and political status of women'. Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain*, London, Macmillan Press, 1992, Second ed. 2000, p.3.

⁵ Paul Ward, "'Women of Britain Say Go': Women's Patriotism in the First World War', p.23-45. Even where Ward has identified sincerely felt motives for war needlework, women are nonetheless seen to be subject to a broader patriarchal state control via their needlework practice.

⁶ Paul Ward, "'Women of Britain Say Go': Women's Patriotism in the First World War', p.23-45; Paul Ward, 'Empire and Everyday: Britishness and Imperialism in Women's Lives in the Great War', p.267-283.

occupation to be undertaken by patriotic women in the early months of war would be knitting'.⁷ The acceptability of needlework and domestic activities, Ward argues, was due to the fact that: 'the state was not keen to encourage women to challenge traditional gender roles'.⁸ The state is also the body which, according to Jane Tynan in her study of British Army uniform, was the steering force for women's voluntary needlework activity. The state, she asserts, intervened following an early war period of confused production.⁹ This 'official' state support for home front knitting, Tynan argues: 'was driven by the desire to use wartime for the reconstruction of gender roles'.¹⁰

However, drawing on primary sources which chronicle the origins and development of early war effort needlework, including newspaper reports; *Hansard* debates in the House of Commons; and the internal correspondence of the Quarter Master General Directors in the War Office, this chapter provides an historical account which demonstrates that far from being a state-led initiative, early war needlework came from the charitable tradition of urgent wartime appeals by women's philanthropic enterprises. Public appeals calling for women to engage in needlework were made by Queen Mary's Needlework Guild and Lady French. These enterprises focused as much upon the needs of women as on those of men on the front line. It will be shown in this account how, rather than forming a repressive gendered force of the state, women's war needlework came into conflict with a number of state, that is War Office, priorities at the start of the war.

⁷ Paul Ward, "'Women of Britain Say Go': Women's Patriotism in the First World War', p.30.

⁸ Paul Ward, "'Women of Britain Say Go': Women's Patriotism in the First World War', p.33.

⁹ Jane Tynan, *British Army Uniform and the First World War*, p.86.

¹⁰ Jane Tynan, *British Army Uniform and the First World War*, p.86.

First World War needlework garment making and the War Office, 1914-1915

On 10th August 1914, six days after the declaration of war, Queen Mary presided over the first executive meeting of Queen Mary's Needlework Guild at Buckingham Palace. Originally founded as The London Guild in 1882 by Georgiana, Lady Wolverton, a close friend of Queen Mary's mother, the Duchess of Teck, the guild reformed on the outbreak of war to focus its attentions on providing charitable assistance during the war.¹¹ It was renamed in honour of its 1914 patron as Queen Mary's Needlework Guild (QMNG), and twelve new committee members were appointed to oversee decision making (Figure 2.1). The subject for discussion by the newly restructured QMNG in the first week of the war was how 'to alleviate all distress occasioned by the war'.¹² Following the first executive meeting, QMNG issued an appeal, published in *The Times* on the same day, in which Queen Mary addressed presidents of existing guild branches, as well as women across the country, asking for their assistance:

I appeal to all the presidents of the needlework guilds throughout the British Isles to organize a large collection of garments for those who will suffer on account of

¹¹ Initially, the London Guild undertook small charitable distributions of hand-made garments. The first charitable request was made in 1882 for 24 knitted socks and 12 'jerseys' for an orphanage in Dorset which was under the patronage of Lady Wolverton (c.1825-1894). In 1885, the Duchess of Teck became the London Guild's patron; and in 1889 it was renamed The London Needlework Guild. In 1897 Queen Mary became patron, a role that she held until her death in 1953. In 1986 Queen Mary's Needlework Guild was renamed Queen Mary's Clothing Guild; and in 2010 it was retitled the Queen Mother's Clothing Guild, after the late Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, who favoured the charity and was the patron of it from 1953. The Queen Mother's Clothing Guild continues to work as a charitable organisation today, run on much the same lines as the original Queen Mary's Needlework Guild, with Branch Presidents; clothing collections; knitted and sewn garment production; and a 'packing week' at St James's Palace. Today, the remit is to supply new clothing to UK charities for those in need, including homeless charities. See *Queen Mother's Clothing Guild: A Clothing and Linen Charity Since 1882: Annual Report*, London, Queen Mother's Clothing Guild, 2017, p.4.

¹² *Queen Mary's Needlework Guild: Its Work During the Great War. St James's Palace, 1914-1918*, London and Wealdstone, George Pulman & Sons, The Cranford Press, 1920, p.5.

the war, and I appeal to all women who are in a position to do so to aid the guilds with their work.¹³

This appeal identified those in need to be soldiers, sailors, territorials, and their families, as well as military and naval hospitals, and: 'those among the poorer classes of the population who will suffer from any distress that may arise'.¹⁴ The appeal specified that:

the most useful garments for soldiers and sailors on active service are flannel shirts, socks, sweaters, and cardigan jackets; for the naval and military hospitals, nightshirts, pyjamas, flannel bed jackets, and bed socks, which would be distributed by the British Red Cross Society.¹⁵

For women and children 'large numbers of all the ordinary garments' were required; and to alleviate distress at home 'owing to unemployment' the appeal instructed that garments be sent directly to the 'committees for the Prevention and Relief of Distress', which QMNG attributed to the administration of local Mayors, District and County Councils.¹⁶

¹³ *The Times*, 10 August 1914, Issue 40600, p.3.

¹⁴ *The Times*, 10 August 1914, Issue 40600, p.3.

¹⁵ *The Times*, 10 August 1914, issue 40600, p.3.

¹⁶ *The Times*, 10 August 1914, issue 40600, p.3.

What is striking about the first appeal is that it demonstrated concern for those who might suffer privations at home, specifically women and children, since the wives and families of those serving, as well as the unemployed, were to be provided for. This appeal therefore gave the needs of those on the home front equal weight with those of soldiers, sailors and wounded men.

Fig. 2.1.



Queen Mary and members of Queen Mary's Needlework Guild, c.1914-18. The Queen (centre, front row) is flanked by Princess Mary (her left) and Princess Beatrice (right), and surrounded by the Branch Presidents. *Queen Mary's Needlework Guild: Its Work During the Great War. St James's Palace, 1914-1918*, George Pulman & Sons, The Cranford Press, 1920, p.19.

In the appeal, QMNG aligned with existing charitable bodies working to relieve domestic distress, including the Soldiers' and Sailors' Family Association and

Territorial Associations.¹⁷ However, whilst the Red Cross is referred to as the body responsible for the distribution of garments to hospitals and the wounded, what is unclear from the appeal is which organisation would take responsibility for distributing garments to serving soldiers and sailors on the front line. The first appeal of QMNG was therefore more specific about domestic distribution than it was about the, as yet unknown, format of garment distribution to men on active service.

Less than three weeks later, a further public appeal for garments was issued by another prominent woman in society. On 29th August 1914, Lady French, the wife of the Commander in Chief of the British Expeditionary Forces, Sir John French, made an urgent personal request to the public, also via a letter in *The Times*. Entitled 'Socks for Soldiers', the appeal came from 'The Manor House, Waltham Cross, Herts':¹⁸

There is a great need for knitted socks, etc for our troops. It is, indeed a crying need, as the War Office allowance is only three pairs for each man, and a long day's march will wear socks into holes. I would ask those who have leisure to knit or are willing to employ others to do so, to send parcels as soon as possible, not direct to me, but to Miss Douglas and Miss N. Selby-Lowndes, at the Ceylon Tea Depot, 64 Beauchamp Place, Brompton Road, London, S.W.¹⁹

Lady French makes clear that all donations 'whether in knitting, wool, or money' will be acknowledged and forwarded 'in my name to the different regiments'.²⁰ She thus

¹⁷ In 1914, the Soldiers' and Sailors' Family Association was one of two existing charities, along with the Soldiers' and Sailors' Help Society, which provided assistance to servicemen's families, but as Peter Grant has observed: 'on the outbreak of war they had few resources'. Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War*, Oxford and New York, Routledge, 2014, p.23.

¹⁸ Lady Eleanora Anna French (1844-1941), née Selby-Lowndes.

¹⁹ 'Socks for Soldiers', *The Times*, 29 August 1914, Issue 40619, p.11.

²⁰ The 'Miss Selby-Lowndes' referred to in Lady French's appeal was her sister. The Ceylon Tea Depot was a large tea distribution warehouse, part of which Lady French had secured for her charitable usage in 1914.

presents prospective volunteers with a basic system for the collection and distribution of women's knitted work. Like Queen Mary, Lady French refers to the need to support women in her appeal, in this case by providing work for the unemployed; she also accommodates skilled but less well-off women in the scheme:

wool is very welcome, as there are many willing workers who are glad to give their time but cannot afford to buy materials; and gifts of money will also be laid out to provide these and to pay for the work being done when it cannot be given voluntarily, thus doing a double kindness.²¹

Fig. 2.2.



Lady French (standing, third from right) and members of her voluntary war knitting group in 1914. Photograph by Sport & General Press Agency. ©National Portrait Gallery.

²¹ 'Socks for Soldiers', *The Times*, 29 August 1914, Issue 40619, p.11.

Two concerns therefore grew in the first weeks of the war which Lady French sought to resolve: the alleviation of discomfort for men in service; and the provision of work for women in need. Her letter concludes that socks 'are needed more than anything', but that 'comforters (not less than 2.5 yards long and 12in wide) are much appreciated.'²² No further technical specifications in terms of sizing were given at this time.

The charitable galvanisation of women to produce needlework items for serving troops during wartime was not a new activity.²³ Knitting pattern booklets show that women volunteers were encouraged to make garments for troops in both the Crimean War (1854-1856) and the Boer War (1899-1902).²⁴ Nor was it new for charitable enterprises to seek to support women affected by war. In his study of army wives in Ireland during the Crimean War, Paul Huddle has shown how women's needlework charities had a tradition of providing employment to women.²⁵ Marie Hartley and Joan Ingilby have also shown how the tradition of organising knitting as a means of giving employment relief to women has a long history in Britain and Ireland, dating back to the sixteenth century reign of Elizabeth I.²⁶

²² 'Socks for Soldiers', *The Times*, 29 August 1914, Issue 40619, p.11. 'Comforters' was the term used to describe scarves.

²³ See Joyce Meader, *Knitskrieg: A Call to Yarns! A History of Military Knitting from the 1800s to the Present Day*. Unicorn Publishing Group, London, 2016.

²⁴ For charitable knitting during the Crimean War, see Madame Riego de la Branchardiere, *Comforts for the Crimea*, London, Simpkin, Marshall & Co, 1854. For charitable knitting during the Boer War see the pattern booklet, *Women and War! How to Knit and Crochet Articles Necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors*, Manchester, Manchester School of Embroidery, Needlecraft Ltd, 1900.

²⁵ Paul Huddle, 'Victims or Survivors: Army Wives in Ireland during the Crimean War, 1854-56', *Women's History Review*, 26:4, 2017, p.541-554.

²⁶ Hartley and Ingilby refer to the reign of Elizabeth I as marking: 'the beginning of a state organisation of poor relief; and knitting, amongst other crafts, was taught to provide work'. Marie Hartley and Joan Ingilby, *The Old Hand-Knitters of the Dales*, North Yorkshire, Dalesman Books, 1978, p.9. They also note the revival of hand knitting in Donegal, Ireland, in 1887, as a means to relieve poverty. See Marie Hartley and Joan Ingilby, *The Old Hand-Knitters of the Dales*, p.13.

In their public appeals, both QMNG and Lady French were concerned with the home front needs of women as much as the service needs of men. Lady French's appeal had a more urgent tone than that of QMNG, as it claimed there was a 'crying need' for socks. Her observation that the three pairs of socks issued by the War Office were not enough for soldiers' needs added justification to her case for urgency; however, it also suggested a deficiency of supply on the part of the War Office. Lady French was directly associated with the War Office through her husband, Sir John French, and arguably this association gave authority to her appeal for garments for the troops. However, her appeal was made on her own initiative; it originated from her philanthropic role, which she based from her home. Although it is unlikely that she intended to, in making her appeals Lady French nonetheless publicly calls into question the adequacy of the War Office garment allowance.

The public appeals made in the first months of the war by QMNG and Lady French in fact quickly caused alarm and embarrassment to senior figures in the War Office. On 10th September 1914, the issue of the satisfactoriness of garment supply to the troops was discussed in the House of Commons, when James Hogge, MP for Edinburgh East, asked the Under Secretary of State for War, Harold Tennant:

whether offers of socks, shirts, etc., have been declined for the use of soldiers at the front; and whether this means that soldiers on active service are having all wear and tear on clothes made good without any charge to them?²⁷

This question was provoked by the attention that had been raised by the recent press appeals of Lady French and QMNG. In response, Tennant confirmed that

²⁷ House of Commons Debate, 10 September 1914, *Hansard*, 66, c641. James Hogge (1873-1928), MP for Edinburgh East, 1912-1924.

public offers of items had been declined and that soldiers were equipped.²⁸ However, on the following day, 11th September 1914, Lady French published a further letter in *The Times*. This thanked the public for their response to her first appeal and renewed her request for assistance with the statement 'I shall still be most grateful for any further help'.²⁹ In her second appeal, Lady French informs the public of the benefits that her first appeal has brought to women:

I have received many contributions of money, which I am spending on wool, flannel, etc, and also on employing some women (who are out of employment in consequence of the war) to knit and to make garments. Some ladies who are very kindly helping me have collected a small fund for providing a substantial mid-day dinner and tea for these workers, which in many cases is their chief or only meal; and Messrs Harrods have most kindly placed a room at my disposal for the women to work in.³⁰

Lady French thus demonstrates the success of her initiative by showing how her appeal *provided for women*. Again, this would indicate that a primary purpose of her initiative was to support women's needs. However, it is apparent from this further appeal that she was unaware that garments had been declined by the War Office. This appears to be because no such refusal had been made to her. Certainly, no public announcement declining public offers of knitted and sewn garments had been published in *The Times* - the favoured forum for public notices about voluntary garment production during the war. Lady French had not yet been asked to cease her activity.

²⁸ House of Commons Debate, 10 September 1914, *Hansard*, 66, c641. Harold Tennant (1865-1935), Under Secretary of State, 1912-1916.

²⁹ Letter to the Editor, 'Lady French's Appeal', *The Times*, 11 September 1914, Issue 40632, p.9.

³⁰ Letter to the Editor, 'Lady French's Appeal', *The Times*, 11 September 1914, Issue 40632, p.9.

Fig. 2.3.



Lady Eleanora French in July 1916. Photograph by Bassano Ltd. ©*National Portrait Gallery*.

Whilst Tennant's confirmation in the House of Commons that offers of garments had been declined may have been motivated by a wish to close down any question of a problem with War Office supplies to the troops, it is evident that no decisive action was taken by the War Office at this time regarding voluntary needlework production. The War Office had not initiated needlework production for the war and it did not

have a coherent plan to manage charitable contributions. Indeed, early interactions show that the War Office was reluctant to accept needlework contributions from women's voluntary production. During September of 1914 there was therefore confusion and contradiction in the War Office response to the voluntary production of garments for the troops to the extent that, on 23rd September 1914, the Under Secretary of State for War's statement that garments had been declined was publicly contradicted by a further appeal in *The Times* made by QMNG. What made this contradiction a source of embarrassment for Tennant as Under Secretary was that this latest appeal from QMNG claimed to be made *on behalf* of the Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener.³¹

The appeal confirmed that Queen Mary:

on the request of Lord Kitchener, has undertaken to supply 300,000 belts and 300,000 pairs of socks for immediate distribution among the troops at the front. Her Majesty appeals to the women of the Empire to assist her in making this offering.³²

Called 'The Queen's Gift to the Troops', this public partnership between Lord Kitchener and QMNG joined up voluntary production with an apparently specified need for garments defined by the Secretary of State for War. However, QMNG also used the appeal to provide paid employment opportunities for women and to see that production contracts were issued through the newly formed Central Committee on Women's Employment (CCWE).³³ The appeal thus supported the interests of

³¹ Field Marshal Herbert Horatio Kitchener, 1st Earl Kitchener (1850-1916), was the Secretary of State for War and Harold Tennant's direct superior.

³² *The Times*, 23 September 1914, Issue 40644, p.8.

³³ Press cutting, 'The Queen's Fund for Belts and Socks', *Observer*, 15 November 1914. IWM, WWC, SUPP 42/46. The Queen gave the responsibility for contracting out some of the production of garments to the newly formed Central Committee on Women's Employment (CCWE).

women's employment, whilst Lord Kitchener was also able to show that the War Office was working coherently with charitable production.

Entering into a wartime partnership with philanthropic society women was a familiar arrangement for Lord Kitchener. He had made public requests for soldiers' garments from women's charitable groups during the Boer War, and at that time was represented directly by philanthropic women in the press.³⁴ Kitchener appears to have recognised the need not to alienate women's charitable initiatives, and the Boer War appeals show that he also recognised the effect public support, through garment gifting, might have on the morale of those serving. However, the QMNG request for a fixed number of belts and socks implies that short-term production was all that Lord Kitchener envisaged in 1914. The joint appeal does not suggest that the War Office is encouraging long-term, mass engagement in the production of garments. Rather, it gives the impression of a manageable and finite activity where charitable production is limited and specified. This undermines the proposition that the state wished to divert women into knitting and sewing at the start of the war. Indeed, the key motivation for Lord Kitchener's partnership with QMNG appears to be one of limiting production and maintaining good relations with charitable producers. It was also a means to indicate that War Office supplies are in good order.

These motivations are supported by the fact that the quantity of belts and socks quoted in this appeal did not originate from any identifiable supply need made by the War Office's Quarter Master General Directors - the senior officers responsible for

³⁴ See *The Times*, 27 March 1900, p.7; *The Times*, 23 March 1901, p.13; *The Times*, 13 May 1902, p.12; see also 'Our Duty to the Soldier', *Daily Mail*, 21 March 1901, p.4.

overseeing the supply of equipment to the troops.³⁵ It was not until 6th October 1914 that Kitchener asked the QMG Directors for:

statements showing what orders had been placed from various Branches of the office since the war began, and how they were distributed between the United Kingdom, the colonies, and other countries.³⁶

In the light of this, Kitchener seems to be trying to establish what was needed and how it was distributed *after* initiating the garment production call.

In the first three months of the war, the QMG Directors were reluctant to encourage the public to send items to the troops. Between August of 1914 and December 1914, they discussed the transportation of horses, general supplies and munitions and the appointment of personnel. The question of the voluntary supply of garments was discussed primarily in terms of the problematic transportation and distribution of items, and the perceived burden a large number of private parcels would place on the postal and transport networks.³⁷ Discussion also referred to the difficulties observed with parcels sent to soldiers in South Africa during the Boer War,

³⁵ In 1914 the Quarter Master General Director to the Forces based at the War Office in London was Sir John Cowans (1862-1921). He held this position from 1912 to 1919. His opposite based in France in 1914 was Sir William Robertson (1860-1933). In January 1915, Robertson was succeeded by Sir Ronald Maxwell (1852-1934). See Keith Grieves, 'Sir John Steven Cowans', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004; and David R. Woodward, 'Sir William Robert, first baronet Robertson', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September 2004; also 'Obituary of Lt Gen Sir Ronald Maxwell', *The Times*, 22 July 1924, Issue 43710, p.16.

³⁶ Minutes and Correspondence of the Quarter Master General Directors Meeting, 6 October 1914, TNA, WO 107/21.

³⁷ Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors, August to December 1914, TNA, WO 107/21, includes the correspondence, meeting minutes and press communications made by the Quarter Master General Directors in late 1914. However, the stoppage of comfort parcels is only discussed at length from February 1915 in TNA, WO 107/14, which covers January to June 1915.

specifically to problems with the transportation and distribution of these, and also to the potential for inappropriate items, such as alcohol, to be sent to soldiers.³⁸

The inclination of the QMG Directors in late 1914 was towards minimising the number of public parcels sent to the front line. However, for Lt General Sir William Robertson, QMG Director in France, it soon became a firm intention to entirely halt the sending of public parcels. At a meeting at the War Office on the 8th November 1914, he informed his counterparts that 'the number of gifts was stupendous' and that the First Army Corps 'had wired to him asking him not to send any more'.³⁹

During the first months of the war, the QMG Directors were thus concerned about garment production *on logistical grounds*, and this led them to disfavour sending publicly produced items to the troops.

By November of 1914, the War Office faced growing criticism and reputational concerns, as queries about the adequacy of its provision of supplies to soldiers continued. These stemmed directly from the way in which voluntary garment production challenged war office supply: voluntary production provoked the question of whether the War Office was providing enough essential garments to troops.

³⁸ Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War*, p.55. The discussions of the Quarter Master General Directors were heavily influenced by the recorded opinion of the Deputy Adjutant General of Supplies for the South African Campaign, Sir Wodehouse Richardson, who had a strong disinclination towards the sending of private parcels. Richardson referred to public parcels as a 'nuisance', and he also objected to them on the grounds of equity, as: 'gifts should either be for general distribution or for distribution to individual regiments or brigades'. Quote in Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War*, p.55. Original quotation in Sir Wodehouse Richardson, *With the Army Service Corps in South Africa*, London, Richardson & Co, 1903, p.125.

³⁹ Minutes of the 50th Meeting of QMG Directors, 8 November 1914, Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, TNA, WO 107/21. See also Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War*, p.57.

On 12th November 1914, following the appeal by QMNG on behalf of Lord Kitchener, questions were raised once more in the House of Commons about public garment production, this time by Sir Harold Elverston, who asked:⁴⁰

Would the nation be content to leave to voluntary effort the equipment of the mechanical instruments of war? Would the nation be content to leave to voluntary effort, say, the provision of rifles or of ammunition or of something of that kind? We know, of course, that they would not. Then I want to know why they leave the equipment of the human instrument to this voluntary effort.⁴¹

On this occasion, the Home Secretary, Reginald McKenna, responded:

a great many people feel, I am sure my hon. friend feels, and we all feel, that we should like to do something personally for the individual soldier [...] They [the public] naturally inquire what would be the article which the soldier would most like.

McKenna went on to define the item most requested as a 'comforter hood', which he claimed was beyond war issue supply.⁴² McKenna's response appears to divert attention from the question of the adequacy of war office supply by suggesting that garment production was simply to satisfy the wishes of the public to assist, and then only in producing non-standard items. The rather faulty logic of this, which suggested that people only made things that were not essential in order to satisfy their wish to make something, was contradicted by the fact that Lord Kitchener's recent request to the public via QMNG was for socks and belts, items which would certainly be

⁴⁰ Sir Harold Elverston (1866-1941). Liberal MP for Gateshead during the war.

⁴¹ House of Commons Debate, 12 November 1914, *Hansard*, 68, cc143-144.

⁴² Reginald McKenna (1863-1943). House of Commons Debate, 12 November 1914, *Hansard*, 68, cc143-144. A comforter hood is a scarf which also forms a hat.

considered standard war issue. Towards the end of 1914, far from composing a non-threatening domestic activity to the state, voluntary garment production - knitting and sewing for the troops - was causing a burgeoning scandal for the government.

On 30th November 1914, six weeks after his joint request with QMNG for socks and belts, Lord Kitchener issued a thank you letter, addressed to the Queen, in which he confirmed:

Madam, I have the pleasure to inform your Majesty that the whole of the "Gift from the Queen and the women of the Empire" has reached France, and that careful instructions have been given as to the distribution of the belts and socks. I would take the opportunity of thanking your Majesty and all those who worked under your direction for the generosity and energy which marked this valuable contribution to the comfort of the troops.⁴³

This letter announces the successful outcome to Kitchener's request for public contributions and, presumably, indicates an end to it. Yet, the War Office still did not issue an unequivocal statement that voluntary production should stop. Kitchener's letter with its nuanced confirmation that garment supply had been satisfied did not put a halt to the charitable initiatives of Queen Mary or Lady French, and nor did it stop the public from continuing to make items for those serving.

⁴³ 'Welcome Comforts', *Daily Mail*, 2 December 1914, Issue 5824, p.3. Also printed in *The Times*, 2 December 1914, Issue 40714, p.9.

Fig. 2.4.



Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, leaving the War Office in London, 1916. ©Imperial War Museum, Q56658.

Over the winter of 1914 and 1915, public production of knitted and sewn items continued and by February 1915 the QMG Directors turned decidedly towards a strategy to discourage the public from sending parcels. This is borne out in a letter of 4th February 1915 from Lt General Sir Ronald Maxwell in France to Sir John Cowans, QMG Director at the War Office.⁴⁴ Maxwell warned that it was:

⁴⁴ Maxwell was Lt General Robertson's replacement as QMG Director in France from January 1915.

undesirable to encourage the sending of parcels to the troops at the front. These chiefly consist of gifts from kindly disposed persons of which the troops are not really in need.

At the end of the typed letter Maxwell added by hand: 'I have spoken to Sir John French who agrees generally with what I have written'.⁴⁵ The QMG Directors were particularly concerned about the burden of parcels on the postal service and lorry supply lines beyond the railways.⁴⁶ At this time, however, Cowans also received notification that Lady French had just issued a new public appeal for garments. This appeal was made in an article titled 'Shortage in Comforts for the Troops', printed in the *Daily Chronicle* on 2nd February 1915.⁴⁷

Lady French, who is collecting comforts for the troops, states that there has been "a very marked falling off of late" in gifts. This fact she attributes entirely to the impression, which a large majority of people are under, that the men are now provided with warm clothing. Lady French adds: "This is not the case, as is proved by my constantly receiving letters from commanding officers of units at the front asking for comforts. Clothing wears out very quickly under such trying conditions and it is essential that there should be a continuous supply of such things as shirts, socks, underclothing, woollen caps and gloves etc., to make good this wastage."

The article included the address to which goods and money could be sent. A copy of this arrived in the War Office with a note dated the 4th February 1915 from the

⁴⁵ Letter from Lt Gen Sir Ronald Maxwell to Sir John Cowans, 4 February 1915. Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, TNA, WO 107/14.

⁴⁶ Letter to Sir John Cowans, 5 February 1915. Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, TNA, WO 107/14.

⁴⁷ 'Shortage of Comforts for the Troops', *Daily Chronicle*, 2 February 1915, reproduced in a typed letter in correspondence in Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, TNA, WO 107/14.

Director of Equipment and Ordnance Stores, Major General Sir John Steevens, stating 'I know of no shortage of the warm clothing referred to'.⁴⁸

The QMG Directors were increasingly perplexed at the shortages reported in the charitable appeals. Maxwell was confident that all items required by the troops were being sent from Army supply and he recommended that a notice be issued to the press 'to check the sending out of gifts', recommending the wording:⁴⁹

The supply of warm clothing to the troops has been completed, and during the past three months the Public has most generously supplemented the War Department issues by gifts of additional winter comforts in very large numbers. The Army Council is advised that the requirements of the troops at the front have been fully met, and would suggest that the sending out of gifts of clothing and necessaries for general distribution should now cease.⁵⁰

The reference to 'general distribution' in this notice clearly relates to charitable collections, rather than to personal post directed privately to an individual. Maxwell, writing from France, added a footnote advising Cowans not to include lists of articles that have been sent, as: 'this will certainly lead to letters from individuals to say that they have not received some of the articles specified'.⁵¹ This suggests that Maxwell was at least aware that there may be an issue with *delays* in distribution, rather than simply a lack of need.

⁴⁸ Letters of 3-4 February 1915. Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, TNA, WO 107/14.

⁴⁹ Letter Maxwell to Cowans, 4 February 1915. Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, TNA, 107/14.

⁵⁰ Letter Maxwell to Cowans, 4 February 1915. Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, TNA, 107/14. In this notice, 'War Office' has been crossed out and 'Army Council' written in by hand.

⁵¹ Letter Maxwell to Cowans, 4 February 1915. Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, TNA, 107/14.

Fig. 2.5.



Quartermaster General Director Sir John Cowans in 1919. Photograph by Walter Stoneman. ©National Portrait Gallery.

In London, Cowans was not convinced that the press statement would help resolve the matter.⁵² At the same time as receiving Maxwell's communication he also received a letter from Lady French's son, John R. L. French, defending his mother's latest appeal for garments. John French explained that:

It is difficult to know what to do to be right, as one day one is told that comforts are very badly wanted, and the next that they are an incumbrance [sic]. My mother felt

⁵² Letter Cowans to Maxwell, 7 February 1915. Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, TNA, WO 107/14.

herself justified in issuing this appeal as she has received countless applications for clothing (especially socks and underclothing) largely from officers returning to France from leave and from wives of officers serving there. It was incorrect to state that 'commanding' officers were constantly asking for comforts, although she has received applications from at least two [...] We have been acting all along in accordance with your statement to my sister a little time back when you said that anything and everything was wanted, and that we could not send too much.

125,000 mufflers have now been despatched from the depot in Berkeley Square towards the 250,000 you asked for. I understand from our conversation on the telephone this morning that you wish this collection to continue. Yours truly, (Sgd.)

J.R.L. French⁵³

This letter shows the level of miscommunication about garment supply, not only within the War Office itself, but also between the War Office and those on active service. The letter suggests that Cowans had, at one stage, encouraged Lady French and her daughter Essex French to collect garments. Yet, this was against the inclination of the QMG Directors in their discussions of the transportation and supply of items to troops in late 1914 and early 1915. John French asserts that his mother and sister are acting on reliable information, which they have received from officers and/or their wives, which confirms that Lady French was contacted directly by those serving. Thus, not only was there a contradiction between the responses of Cowans

⁵³ Letter signed J.R.L. French to Sir John Cowans, 5 February 1914. Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, TNA, WO 107/14. In the War Office correspondence file, the letter has been copy typed and headed: 'Copy of a letter from Miss French to Sir J. Cowans'. This wrongly attributes the letter to Essex French. However, the letter is signed with the initials J.R.L. French and makes reference to 'my sister'. Sir John and Lady French only had one daughter, Lady Essex French, and so this would confirm that the letter came from Essex's brother, John Richard Lowndes French. Strangely, Cowans sent a copy of the letter to Maxwell also attributing the letter to 'Miss French'. See Cowans to Maxwell, 7 February 1915, Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, TNA, WO 107/14.

and the other QMG Directors, but there was also a powerful and direct channel of communication between those serving and those organising the charitable collection of garments: a channel of communication which by-passed the War Office entirely.

Fig. 2.6.



Quatermaster General Director Sir Ronald Maxwell in March 1917. Drawn by Francis Dodds. ©Imperial War Museum, Art 1815.

On receiving information that officers were asking for garments, Cowans and Maxwell focused on informing the troops that: 'the C-in-C considers it undesirable that appeals should be made, either publicly or privately'.⁵⁴ That the Commander in

⁵⁴ Confidential letter to the 1st Army from Lt Gen Ronald Maxwell, 13 February 1915, Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, TNA, WO 107/14.

Chief referred to here was Sir John French, Lady French's husband, shows the extent to which the objectives of women's philanthropic activity had come into direct conflict with the War Office's priorities. The opposing position of Sir John French on the one hand, and his wife and children on the other, reflect the positions of the War Office and philanthropic groups gathering needlework garments for the war. In the context of First World War needlework for the war effort, women's philanthropy presented a clear challenge to the War Office's reputation and logistics.

Despite continued concern in the War Office over the public supply of garments to the front line during the first four months of 1915, notably from Maxwell in France, neither Cowans nor Lord Kitchener wished to alienate those making voluntary contributions, and on 9th March 1915 Cowans wrote to Maxwell that: 'Lord K. has decided not to put any notice in the press as he fears it might choke off voluntary contributions at a later date when they may again be required'.⁵⁵ Cowans recommended that requests for garments from the front line be investigated on a case-by-case basis.

However, two weeks later, the embarrassment caused to the War Office by Lady French's latest appeal in particular, led Cowans to confirm to Maxwell that:

the Secretary of State has now approved of a Communique being issued informing the public that no further supplies of warm clothing need to be sent to the troops, and giving a list of articles which have been officially supplied. The Grand Duke Michael and Lady French are also closing their appeals for gloves

⁵⁵ Letter from Cowans to Maxwell, 9 March 1915. Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, TNA, WO 107/14.

and mufflers respectively at the end of this month and putting into store the surplus stock they now have.⁵⁶

Whilst this confirmed the closure of Lady French's appeal, no public 'communique' was in fact issued to stop the production of garments for the troops. QMNG and the Red Cross in particular continued to collect garments from the public. This does not mean that production by QMNG was not problematic for the War Office. The joint appeal with Lord Kitchener suggests that there was an attempt to limit QMNG's garment production; however, it was much harder to stop the forces of this established national charitable organisation, especially since, from September 1914, QMNG became directly involved in providing women with employment through the Queen's Work for Women Fund (QWWF).

Lord Kitchener's alignment with the appeal by QMNG can be understood as an attempt to stem criticisms about the War Office's garment supply; criticisms which had been provoked in some part by Lady French's appeals. What was controversial about Lady French's appeals was that as the wife of the Commander in Chief of the British Expeditionary Force, Lady French held a position of public association with the War Office, yet her appeals implied that there were deficiencies in War Office supplies to the troops. This placed the War Office in the embarrassing position of defending its supply capability. In the War Office, the QMG Directors were also sensitive to the burden large parcels for distribution could place on transport and

⁵⁶ Letter from Cowans to Maxwell, 23 March 1915. Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, TNA, WO 107/14; 'Grand Duke Michael's Gift to Our Troops' was launched on 7 October 1914 to provide gloves and mittens to Queen Mary's Needlework Guild. See *The Times*, 7 October 1914, Issue 40658, p.10.

supply lines. Lady French's appeal would have sent items by general mail distribution, which prompted further War Office concern.⁵⁷

In his study of charitable and philanthropic work during the First World War, Peter Grant has stated that in 1915, although: 'the matter never reached the same proportions or seriousness as the 1915 shell scandal, the comforts scandal continued to the end of the year'.⁵⁸ That the situation can be classified a scandal at all is further indication that voluntary needlework was not the acceptable and welcome feminine activity of the state that has been assumed in the academic literature of First World War needlework. Indeed, Maxwell's deep discomfort with the situation is evident when he writes to Cowans that 'it is not easy to thank Lady French on behalf of the C-C'.⁵⁹ That is, to thank Lady French on the cessation of her appeal on behalf of her husband, Sir John French.

At the start of the war, voluntary garment production led to friction between the War Office and women's traditional philanthropic activity. However, whilst the War Office found that garment production challenged their reputation and logistics, philanthropic women also felt destabilised, as their traditional work was met with a hostile and conflicting reception. The production of knitted or sewn garments for the war effort

⁵⁷ Queen Mary's Needlework Guild, in comparison, used Red Cross transport routes where possible so as not to duplicate journeys. However, these would have been irregular. See *Queen Mary's Needlework Guild: Its Work During the Great War. St James's Palace, 1914-1918*, p.31.

⁵⁸ Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity*, p.58-59.

⁵⁹ Letter from Maxwell to Cowans, 27 March 1915. Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, TNA, WO 107/14. The 'C-C' (Commander in Chief) referred to is Sir John French.

was not the unthreatening, state-approved activity that has been suggested in the academic studies of Ward, Ouditt, and Kent.⁶⁰

Certainly, if by the 'state' what is meant is the War Office, war effort needlework garment making was neither state-led nor state-approved. Sonya O. Rose has observed that 'States are institutions and institutionalized practices'; however, in histories of First World War needlework the definition of the state remains indistinct.⁶¹ In his analysis of the role of First World War voluntary needlework, for example, Ward suggests that the state is an ideological force, yet he also embodies it as the government responsible for the dissemination of war propaganda and he presents the monarchy as its armature, whereby 'the function of the monarchy as a personalization of the state rose in importance' during the war.⁶² This presents the state as a shifting, but nonetheless ideologically unified, entity.

However, the state was neither such a cohesive or proactive force during the First World War. The garment production initiatives of QMNG - and thus, the monarchy - acted independently of, and albeit unintentionally, *against* the wishes and priorities of the government - the War Office - at the start of the war. As this chapter has shown, the QMG Directors did not approve of the swell of voluntary garment production: it undermined their reputation as it questioned the efficiency of their supply system and it was perceived as a threat to transport logistics and the postal service.

⁶⁰ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Inter War Britain*, p.14-15; Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War*, p. 88-96; Paul Ward, "'Women of Britain Say Go': Women's Patriotism in the First World War", p.23-45, and Paul Ward, 'Empire and Everyday: Britishness and Imperialism in Women's Lives in the Great War', p.267-283.

⁶¹ Sonya O.Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain 1939-1945*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003, p.12.

⁶² Paul Ward, "'Women of Britain Say Go': Women's Patriotism in the First World War", p.37.

The response of the War Office to the issue of garment supply was neither unified nor consistent. There was confusion and contradiction about how to respond between the QMG Directors themselves; between the QMG Directors and Lord Kitchener, as the Secretary of State for War; and between Lord Kitchener and the Under Secretary of State for War, Harold Tennant. The state, in the institution of the War Office, found that war effort needlework challenged its priorities at the start of the war, and for this reason it tried to limit and discourage the unsettling activity of women's wartime needlework production.

Needlework as a contested subject

Alongside the argument that the state used needlework to control women's war participation, the assertion that war effort needlework, as a feature of domesticity, did not challenge traditional gender roles has prevailed in the academic literature on First World War needlework.⁶³ However, this chapter will now show that by 1914

⁶³ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Inter War Britain*, Princeton, 1993; Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War*, p.88-96; Paul Ward, "Women of Britain Say Go": Women's Patriotism in the First World War', p.23–45, and Paul Ward, 'Empire and Everyday: Britishness and Imperialism in Women's Lives in the Great War', p.267-283; Jane Tynan, *British Army Uniform and the First World War*, p.86-88; See also, Maggie Andrews argument that domestic activity did not challenge traditional gender roles during the war. Maggie Andrews, "Ideas and Ideals of Domesticity and Home in the First World War", *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences since 1914*, eds. Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p.17.

needlework, including knitting, was already a contested subject in women's gendered education and employment options.⁶⁴

In her study of Lydia Becker, a prominent campaigner for women's suffrage in the 1870s, Joan Parker has shown how Becker made the case that an emphasis on needlework in state school girls' education led to the eclipse of academic subjects for girls, especially science.⁶⁵ Becker argued that there was too much needlework in girls' education; however, as well as reducing the quota, she called for less decorative work and more practical needlework.⁶⁶ This distinction indicates that there was a debate over the *type* of needlework taught, as well as the quantity. During her lifetime, Becker's call for reform in needlework education was met with resistance; however, Parker identifies Becker's achievement to be 'challenging accepted

⁶⁴ In the latter half of the nineteenth century the importance of knitting and sewing was confirmed in the 1862 publication *Revised Code of Minutes and Regulations of the Committee of the Privy Council on Education*. This specified that needlework was to be taught to girls in State supported schools. These schools provided education to: 'children belonging to the classes who support themselves by manual labour'. In 1870, the *Elementary Education Act*, which applied to state schooling of children aged 5 years to 12 years, required girls in state schools to learn how to knit and it also recommended that boys learn the skill, although it was not compulsory for them to do so. Matthew Arnold, *Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, ed. F.S. Marvin, London, HMSO, 1908, p.331-382; see also Annmarie Turnbull, "Learning Her Womanly Work: The Elementary School Curriculum, 1870-1914". *Lessons for Life: The Schooling of Girls and Women, 1850-1950*, ed. Felicity Hunt, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1987, p.83-101. See also J.S. Hurt, *Elementary Schooling and the Working Classes, 1860-1918*, London, Routledge, 1979.

⁶⁵ Lydia Becker (1827-1890), compiled statistics to show the amount of time girls spent on needlework during the school day, and argued that the time dedicated to needlework led to the exclusion of other subjects. Parker shows how Lydia Becker opened up the debate over the domestic versus academic structuring of the curriculum, and the gender divide in education, evident since the delineation of compulsory needlework for girls, but not for boys, in the 1862 and 1870 Education Acts: 'Becker's intention was to heighten public awareness of the sectarian policy and through this to bring about change'. Joan E. Parker, 'Lydia Becker's "School for science": a challenge to domesticity', *Women's History Review*, 2001, 10:4, p.638;

⁶⁶ According to Joan Parker, the curriculum: 'called for intricate and detailed work bearing little relationship to the needs of a working-class home'. In 1877, Becker and: 'several other women on the London School Board' protested against the Department of Education's new Needlework Code. Becker herself described it as: 'a specimen of masculine legislation in women's sphere...framed by one who was a fanatic in respect of needlework'. Quoted in Joan E. Parker, 'Lydia Becker's "School for science": a challenge to domesticity', p.641. Original in Lydia Becker, *The English Women's Review*, 14 April 1877, p.171-172.

traditional values and working to create a fresh climate'.⁶⁷ The form and quantity of needlework in female education was not without dispute before the war.

In her study of the background, training and experience of Domestic Studies teachers during the period 1870-1914, Annmarie Turnbull has also shown how women's domesticity in general was much debated in the late nineteenth century.⁶⁸

The movement to train women in domestic skills, Turnbull argues, came from the women's campaign movement of the late nineteenth century which sought to provide paid employment for (middle class) women and create domestic professionalism with trained teachers.⁶⁹ During the nineteenth century, women were not only querying, but seeking to reshape domesticity and the role of needlework within a wider social and economic agenda.

Knitting as a means of domestic containment at the start of the war

Despite the evidence of contestation around late-nineteenth century needlework, Susan Kingsley Kent's projection for war needlework has remained unchallenged in academia. Kent has argued that the First World War enabled a strengthening of women's traditional roles which resulted in the 'return' of women to a pre-war non-

⁶⁷ Joan E. Parker, 'Lydia Becker's "School for science": a challenge to domesticity', p.644.

⁶⁸ Turnbull argues that some women believed that: 'the elevation, and if possible the professionalization, of their traditional domestic skills would raise women's social status'. She identifies a conflict between the idea that domesticity should come naturally to women and the idea that it needs to be taught to women. Turnbull notes that it was women who led the movement to educate other women in domestic skills: 'No women educators in the period denied that women needed some domestic training, they only debated the amount of this, and the ways and means by which it was to be acquired.' See Annmarie Turnbull, 'An Isolated Missionary: The Domestic Subjects Teacher in England, 1870-1914', *Women's History Review*, 3:1, 1994, p.82.

⁶⁹ Turnbull nonetheless suggests that a contradiction lies in the way in which domestic teachers were pioneering professionals on the one hand and on the other: 'a blinkered isolated missionary preaching outmoded ideals, preventing the development of new social roles for the sexes and discouraging women's search for new horizons.' See Annmarie Turnbull, 'An Isolated Missionary: The Domestic Subjects Teacher in England', p.82.

threatening domestic containment. This, she suggested, was achieved by the promotion of a gendered binary:

The sudden and dramatic prospect of a newly masculinised English manhood had its counterpart in the reassertion of women's traditional roles, which included a large measure of passivity, despite feverish attempts on the part of countless women who, to feel useful to the war effort, knitted enough socks and mufflers to outfit half the British Expeditionary Force.⁷⁰

Kent presents a resurgent patriarchal ideology as responsible for directing the containment of women, with war acting as the catalyst, and domestic activities, specifically knitting, forming the means by which gendered control was achieved. Early war knitting was, according to Kent, a 'feverish' activity which nonetheless still resulted in passivity for women. As this chapter has noted previously, Kent's arguments regarding the gendered impact of the war on women have received criticism. However, the role that she assigns to knitting as a means of domestic containment for women has not received critical attention.

The exclusion of the domestic sphere from the war has been convincingly countered by home front historians, including Maggie Andrews, Janis Lomas and Karen Hunt, who have all argued that the war was as much a domestic experience and that the significance of home front experiences should not be overlooked.⁷¹ Despite demonstrating that the home front is a valid context of the war, however, no home front historian has questioned the restrictive role assigned to needlework - Kent's

⁷⁰ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Inter War Britain*, p.14.

⁷¹ Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas, eds. *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences since 1914*; specifically, Karen Hunt, 'A Heroine at Home: The Housewife of the First World War Home Front', eds. Maggie Andrews and Janis Lomas, *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences since 1914*, p.73-91.

characterisation of war knitting has not been questioned. This chapter will now show how *knitting* was an activity which was already the subject of domestic contestation at the start of the war.

Knitting as a subject of gendered contestation before 1914

Joanna Bourke has pointed out how domesticity and housewifery in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century could be effectively used for power contestation and negotiation.⁷² Kent's suggestion that women's domestic needlework was *necessarily* a restraining force of domestic containment is clearly belied by the use suffragists made of embroidery during the campaign for the vote between 1906-1914.⁷³ However, it is knitting, rather than embroidery or sewing, that has been singled out as the needlework activity which did not challenge traditional gender roles and thus constituted a means of gender control during the war, and it is this characterisation of knitting that will be examined here.

In her study *The Culture of Knitting*, Joanne Turney has described how the theory that knitting formed a symbol of oppression emanated from 'second-wave' feminist thought from the 1970s onwards. Seeking to challenge the ascendancy of patriarchy:

⁷² Joanna Bourke, 'Housewifery in Working-Class England 1860-1914', *Past & Present*, 143, 1994, p.167-197.

⁷³ See Eileen Wheeler, 'The Political Stitch: Voicing Resistance in a Suffrage Textile', *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*, Textile Society of America, 2012, p.1-12; Lisa Tickner has shown how the embroidered and appliqué banners in the pageantry of suffrage marches were a key feature of the debate: 'about definitions of femininity and women's place in public life'. Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-14*. London, Chatto & Windus, 1987, p.ix; Similarly, Maureen Daly Goggin's study of the handkerchief embroidered by suffragette Jane Terrero during her incarceration in Holloway Prison in 1912 has demonstrated how personal embroidery on a smaller scale gave suffrage women a means of making a public and political record of their protest. Maureen Daly Goggin, "Fabricating Identity: Janie Terrero's 1912 Embroidered English Suffrage Signature Handkerchief", *Women and Things, 1750-1950: Gendered Material Strategies*, eds. Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009, p.17-42.

second-wave feminism views knitting as a sign of women's oppression, as a largely domestic task that takes up a considerable amount of time for little - if any - remuneration. Knitting is seen as one of many 'chores' that enslave women, bind them to the domestic environment and keep them occupied in mundane and lowly activities. Similarly, knitting within the domestic sphere is a relatively mute activity; it is invisible labour, unseen and unrewarded, and as a consequence is socially and culturally deemed without value.⁷⁴

Turney suggests that knitting was considered oppressive to women due its domestic context and 'its sociocultural negated status'; since second-wave feminist theory considered these qualities rendered women powerless in a patriarchal society.⁷⁵

Turney charts a more recent change in post-feminist or 'third-wave feminist' theory, which has seen: 'a move away from knitting as an extension of thrifty housewifery and chores towards one of personal pleasure, leisure and luxury'.⁷⁶ Knitting is now seen to be a choice.

However, the historical frameworks of second or third wave feminism do not provide a satisfactory interpretive framework for considering knitting in the patriarchal context of the First World War. Rozsika Parker's dismissal of the assumption that women could not achieve empowerment or make a challenge through the activity of embroidery is also valid for knitting, as this chapter will show.⁷⁷ To consider *knitting* a means of domestic control over women - however unaware of the imposition women are defined to be - denies women and knitting an empowering meaning-making role, and this creates a paradox for feminist theory. It is also the case that we cannot, and

⁷⁴ Joanne Turney, *The Culture of Knitting*, Oxford, Berg, 2009, p.9.

⁷⁵ Joanne Turney, *The Culture of Knitting*, p.9.

⁷⁶ Joanne Turney, *The Culture of Knitting*, p.11.

⁷⁷ Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, London, The Women's History Press, 1984.

arguably should not, disengage knitting from the context of 'thrifty housework' and the domestic chores of women between 1914 and 1918, and so a leisure framework does not suit either. However, this chapter follows Turney's argument that knitting is best approached as a complex social activity which women could find oppressive and/or empowering, often for different reasons, and that knitting enabled rather than disabled expression.⁷⁸

The use of knitting in the Suffrage campaign, 1908-1909

Lisa Tickner and Eileen Wheeler have both demonstrated how embroidery was a means of political expression in the promotion of the suffrage campaign before the First World War.⁷⁹ However, a lesser investigated point to make is that knitting and its domestic associations was also used by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst to generate support for their pre-war suffrage campaign. Angela Smith has stated that the display of femininity and domesticity was central to the militant suffrage campaign of the suffragettes, particularly in the campaigns of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, in which they presented themselves:

as very feminine figures, celebrating rather than sacrificing womanhood. Though they are New Women in deed, their retention, even exploitation, of a conventional femininity operates to soften their public personas, and make their bitter messages easier to swallow.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Joanne Turney, *The Culture of Knitting*, p.221.

⁷⁹ Eileen Wheeler, 'The Political Stitch: Voicing Resistance in a Suffrage Textile', Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings; Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-14*.

⁸⁰ Angela K. Smith, 'The Pankhursts and the War: Suffrage Magazines and First World War Propaganda', *Women's History Review*, 2003, 12:1, p.105.

In May 1909, Emmeline Pankhurst reconstructed the scene and symbols of her 1908 prison incarceration for the 'Women's Exhibition' in Knightsbridge, London, and she posed for a series of photographs. One of these shows Pankhurst in prison uniform, standing against the backdrop of a painted cell, knitting a sock (Figure 2.7).⁸¹ In her autobiography, Pankhurst describes how she sought peace of mind in needlework as she endured hardship in Holloway Prison:

The days passed very slowly, the nights more slowly still. Being in hospital, I was deprived of chapel, and also of work. Desperate, at last I begged the wardress for some sewing, and she kindly gave me a skirt of her own to hem, and later some coarse knitting to do.⁸²

Both image and account suggest a feminine, unthreatening figure reduced by her incarceration to carrying out 'coarse' needlework, which nonetheless offers her some relief. Pankhurst juxtaposes the domestic symbolism of herself knitting with the environment of punishment and containment; sympathy and support are sought for a domestic woman in a prison context. The association of knitting with the functions of the home, but also with manual domesticity, provides a stark contrast *and* a criticism of Pankhurst's treatment. It is not just that a domestic woman is locked up, it is that she is reduced in her domesticity to 'coarse' needlework. The subject and practice of knitting was not, therefore, a benign topic at the start of the First World War: it was already freighted with a range of competing symbols and associations for femininity.

⁸¹ Photograph 50.82/1255, Museum of London. See also, Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette*, New York, Source Book Press, 1970, facing p.330. First published *The Suffragette*, New York, Sturgis & Walton Company, 1911.

⁸² Emmeline Pankhurst, *Suffragette. My Own Story*, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, Solis Press, 2015, p.64. First published *My Own Story*, New York, Hearst's International Library, 1914.

It is misleading to assume that these could not be used to challenge forces of control at the start of the war.

Fig. 2.7.



Emmeline Pankhurst knitting, recreating her 1908 incarceration in Holloway Prison for the Women's Exhibition in 1909. ©Museum of London, Photograph 50.82/1255.

***Home Chat* and *Women's Own*, 1914-1915: needlework debates and contestation**

At the start of the war, women used knitting to debate, confirm and assert the form of their war participation. Referring to articles in the women's magazines *Home Chat* and *Women's Own*, 1914-1915, this chapter will show how needlework and women's domestic roles were juxtaposed *by women* against other war roles as a means to question their responses at the start of the war.

This position challenges Sharon Ouditt's argument that the presence of needlework in magazines in 1914 facilitated the domestic containment of women.⁸³ Ouditt claims that at the start of the war, women's magazines: 'were reluctant to foreground the radical changes in women's lives that the war could effect'.⁸⁴ Instead, she argues, they were:

primarily concerned to convince women of their proper duties and (which amounts to the same thing) to offer them strategies to manage the war's crises, strategies which barely redirect the readers' attention from their pre-war tasks: knitting, sewing, cooking and cleaning.⁸⁵

Knitting, Ouditt suggests, was a distractive device to affect the domestic confinement of women at the start of the war.⁸⁶ However, in her studies of homecraft in magazines in the inter-war period, Fiona Hackney has suggested that craft could be

⁸³ Taking a similar perspective to Susan Kingsley Kent, Sharon Ouditt considers domesticity to be a means of subjugating women, and she presents women at home as passive and inactive in the war: 'women who saw their role throughout the conflict as being associated with the home, and who did not attempt even to take temporary advantage of the opportunities for war work'. Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War*, p.88.

⁸⁴ Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War*, p.90.

⁸⁵ Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War*, p.92.

⁸⁶ Ouditt suggests this was achieved in magazines by: 'combining the increasingly popular war work ethic with woman's traditional sphere, while reinforcing the acceptable limits of women's employment'. Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War*, p.92.

a dynamic force for change in magazine dialogues. Rather than considering homecraft, which includes needlework, as a reactionary or oppressive force which held women back, Hackney has argued for the capacity of homecraft to affect domestic change; this change, she suggests, was recast by commercial magazines.⁸⁷ Following Hackney's proposition, this chapter argues that magazines had a far more discursive role as a forum for women to discuss needlework as a means of their response to the start of the war. Instead of advocating the containment of women, magazines provided a site in which the topic of needlework opened up a vocal and searching debate about women's roles in the war and, for some women, provided the means by which they could challenge and negotiate their wartime role. Rather than simply reaffirming traditional gender roles, magazine dialogues discussed needlework as a means to question, challenge, and assert women's responses to the war.

Home Chat and Woman's Own

One month into the war, an article in *Home Chat* identifies the dissatisfaction felt by women who wanted to contribute to the war effort but needed to stay at home. 'They Also Serve', published anonymously on 5th September 1914, argued that women who are unable to serve in the same capacity as men on the front line, or as nurses, whether at home or abroad, should see their sacrifices at home: 'as necessary as the courage of those who fight – of those who tend the wounded. Some of us *must* stay at home'.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Fiona Hackney, "Use Your Hands for Happiness': Home Craft and Make-do-and-Mend in British Women's Magazines in the 1920s and 1930s', *Journal of Design History*, 19:1, 2006, p.26.

⁸⁸ 'They Also Serve', *Home Chat*, 5 September 1914, p.436.

The defensive nature of this article is striking, since most women were at home at the start of the war, including the lower middle class readership of *Home Chat*, however, in this article, so early into the war, we can observe an immediate call from women at home to do more.⁸⁹ This narrative shows that debate was not simply a post-war phenomenon: women were not automatically engaging in domesticity without making critical comparisons in 1914. The *Home Chat* article suggests that women at home were questioning the value of their wartime role at the start of the war.

Cheryl Buckley has presented *Home Chat* as 'uniquely placed to delineate shifting gender and class relations' during the First World War.⁹⁰ She observes that *Home Chat* provided women 'with the practical advice about all aspects of their daily lives, from the traditional concerns of fashion and beauty, marriage and children, to the more contentious issue of women's aspirations beyond the home, it exposed tensions around class and gender which were particularly evident during wartime'.⁹¹

Buckley argues that the First World War:

disrupted conventional gender roles as never before, and in a magazine such as *Home Chat* the ideal of the gendered self as a fixed entity was increasingly questioned, and, in this sense, wartime issues of *Home Chat* could be simultaneously "regulatory and liberatory".⁹²

⁸⁹ Martin Pugh has observed how: 'Even in 1918 when some 6 million women were officially in paid employment, the substantial majority of women still remained at home'. Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain*, London, Macmillan Press, First ed. 1992, Second ed. 2000.

⁹⁰ Cheryl Buckley, "De-humanised Females and Amazonians": British Wartime Fashion and its Representation in *Home Chat*, 1914-1918', *Gender & History*, 14:3, 2002, p.533.

⁹¹ Cheryl Buckley, "De-humanised Females and Amazonians": British Wartime Fashion and its Representation in *Home Chat*, 1914-1918', p.517.

⁹² Cheryl Buckley, "De-humanised Females and Amazonians": British Wartime Fashion and its Representation in *Home Chat*, 1914-1918', p.517.

The theme of women's disappointment at staying at home was taken up again by *Home Chat* the following year, by which time women's war options outside the home had expanded. The article, 'The Little Housewife's Dream', by Mary Mortimer Maxwell, describes one woman's feeling of disappointment when she thinks about what other women are doing for the war:

nursing wounded soldiers in hospitals, joining Volunteer Service companies, offering to work in munition factories to speed the production of shells, driving motor cars, preparing themselves to conduct tram-cars, so that fit men should be released for the Front. And she? Well she just knitted a sock once in a while, and was able to turn out a few respirators for the victims of the German gas outrages. But her main business was housekeeping.⁹³

The comparison in this story is not with male service, but between domestic service and women's work outside the home. Staying at home and knitting a sock are sources of dissatisfaction. Although this article ultimately defends the war contribution of domestic women, it indicates that debate continued to take place.⁹⁴ In 'The Little Housewife's Dream', knitting socks at home is an example of the discussions taking place about whether women at home *consider themselves* to be doing enough in the war. The author's solution is to suggest the wider benefits of good home management; however, the question as to whether knitting socks, presumably for those serving, provides adequate service to the war from a domestic woman remains unresolved.

⁹³ 'The Little Housewife's Dream', *Home Chat*, 10 July 1915, p.55.

⁹⁴ The article then offers economising tips on using leather, salt and serge, and concludes with a dream during which the housewife realises that by economising at home, women did their bit too. See 'The Little Housewife's Dream', *Home Chat*, 10 July 1915, p.55.

Whether needlework for the war was an occupation for *all* women was also discussed in *Home Chat* early in the war. In 'When I joined the Women's Volunteer Corps', the author, Helen Colt, suggests that there was not necessarily an easy acceptance of the 'naturalness' of women's needlework role:

When first the war broke out and every woman seemed to be throwing her whole energies into helping, either in Red Cross activities or by working furiously at shirts and comforts for our brave troops, I own that I for one felt dreadfully low-spirited. You see, it so happens that I am not a scrap of use at sewing, or at nursing either, except where quite a "home invalid" is concerned.⁹⁵

As a woman gardener during the day, the author could not: 'offer my services in the way the girl of leisure has come forward in such a splendid way to do'. However, since she was an 'outdoor woman', she suggests that she is suitable for the Women's Voluntary Corps, where her duties included guarding bridges, carrying despatches, and signalling.⁹⁶ Colt supports her case by arguing that she does not have domestic needlework skills to offer, yet she presents the less feminine work of the Corps as quite suitable to a woman used to working out of doors. Colt makes a case in which her inability at needlework *supported* her wish to contribute to war work outside of the home. Janet Watson has observed how the Women's Voluntary Reserve 'aroused grave suspicions' for assuming military-style uniforms and parades at the start of the war, and argues that this was unpopular.⁹⁷ In showing that she does not suit the domestic pursuit of knitting, but does suit the *domestic* pursuit of

⁹⁵ Helen Colt, 'When I joined the Women's Volunteer Corps', *Home Chat*, 20 February 1915, p.314.

⁹⁶ Helen Colt, 'When I joined the Women's Volunteer Corps', p.314.

⁹⁷ Janet S. K. Watson, 'Khaki Girls, VADs, and Tommy's Sisters: Gender and Class in First World War Britain', *The International History Review*, 19:1, 1997, p.38.

gardening and 'outdoor life', Colt avoids a jarring contrast between pseudo-military and domestic roles.

The prolific contributor to editorials and articles in *Woman's Own*, Jeannie Maitland, was also probing when considering the war role of the domestic woman. Ouditt has singled out Maitland as the embodiment of the 'ethics of the angel in the house'.⁹⁸ However, a number of Maitland's war time *Woman's Own* articles are written as a searching monologue; they are contradictory and question women's home lives at the start of the war.⁹⁹ These include early debates on whether war effort needlework was enough as a response from women at home at the start of the war. In 'Women Who Really Love Their Land', Maitland suggests that the initial enthusiastic response to knit and sew garments for the war is hasty. She encourages readers to do 'more' by assisting those at home:

There are active ways of helping which will open out to those who are intelligent and willing. The easy way is not always the right way, and I believe there is a call for something more than making shirts and knitting socks.¹⁰⁰

Maitland suggests buying shirts in shops to keep seamstresses in work; offering dinners to the poor; giving work to those in need; and volunteering as a cook or

⁹⁸ Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women*, p.92. Ouditt states that: 'Rather than offering women the chance actively to alter the world [...] Maitland and the others spirit them further off, to higher regions, where, apparently, they were naturally bound in any case. At least it gets them out of the way'. Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women*, p.95.

⁹⁹ For an example of Maitland finding housework a drudge, see 'Honour for the Housewife', *Woman's Own*, 24 April 1915, p.1; For her giving career advice to those who want equal pay, see 'Avenues of Adventure', *Woman's Own*, 6 March 1915, p.1; For Maitland's claim that it is sweeter for a woman to earn than a man can dream, where she presents mothers at home as wage-earners and suggests that men and women look after family expenses 'together', see 'After the War – What?', *Woman's Own*, 12 August 1916, p.1; For Maitland's account of her differences with her daughter who wants a career rather than marriage, in which she notes that the growth of liberty 'will go on', see 'Recollections of a Minister's Wife', *Woman's Own*, 8 January 1916, p.11; For Maitland's statement that she has faith in new opportunities still being 'womanly', see 'While We Go Marching On', *Woman's Own*, 1 July 1916, p.1.

¹⁰⁰ 'Women Who Really Love Their Land', *Woman's Own*, 26 September 1914, p.19.

crèche minder. She warns: 'do not let us waste our hearts over easily-roused sentiment and hasty, ill-conceived efforts.'¹⁰¹ Maitland does not advocate knitting and sewing as a first war response and nor does she suggest that women should work in direct support of men's war service; rather, the domestic occupations that Maitland suggests *support women at home during the war*. Knitting and sewing are not Maitland's preferred domestic war response. The magazines *Home Chat* and *Woman's Own* therefore not only discuss whether knitting was an adequate activity for women's response at the start of the war, but they also question whether it was the only war contribution for women at home. These magazines demonstrate that from very early in the war, domestic gender roles were subject to evaluation and challenge, and women's knitting and sewing for the war effort were key subjects in this debate.

Janet Watson has argued that the domestic activity of knitting for the war effort did not threaten gender roles, whereas women who joined the newly formed women's services and wore uniforms: 'undermined the social order which the soldiers were fighting to preserve'.¹⁰² Watson states that making bandages, knitting and looking after a family were acceptable, whilst nursing was 'unthreatening because it was nurturing and healing – inherently women's work'.¹⁰³ However, Watson's distinction would suggest that gender roles are *only* challenged when women adopt the social practices and gendered norms of men. As this chapter has shown, however, traditional gender roles were challenged during the war in the forum of women's domestic magazines and the subject of needlework could articulate this. Domestic

¹⁰¹ 'Women Who Really Love Their Land', *Woman's Own*, 26 September 1914, p.19.

¹⁰² Janet K. Watson, 'Khaki Girls, VADs, and Tommy Sisters: Gender and Class in First World War Britain', *The International History Review*, 19:1, 1997, p.51.

¹⁰³ Janet K. Watson, 'Khaki Girls, VADs, and Tommy Sisters: Gender and Class in First World War Britain', p.51.

women questioned, considered, and in some cases challenged, gendered roles in the war; war effort needlework was both a subject and a means for this. In the light of the evidence from women's domestic magazines, the complex significance that needlework held for women as they negotiated their war roles at the start of the war should not be overlooked.

Knitting in Vera Brittain's *Chronicle of Youth* and *Testament of Youth*

One of the most high-profile critics of the gendered limitations of knitting as a response to the war was the writer Vera Brittain. Brittain's references to war needlework in her war diary, *Chronicle of Youth*, and in her autobiographical account of the war, *Testament of Youth*, have been formative for the way historians have considered the role of needlework, particularly its status as an insufficient, gendered response to the war.¹⁰⁴ Kent refers to Brittain as an example of a woman who turned with dissatisfaction to knitting during the early war's 'reassertion of women's traditional roles'.¹⁰⁵ While, Lucinda Gosling refers to Brittain as one of the 'many women who had initially taken up needles at the outbreak of war', but had 'moved on to find other ways to contribute to the war effort' as the war progressed.¹⁰⁶ Primarily, Brittain is noted for finding knitting frustrating and unsatisfactory, and for quickly moving on to more meaningful war work as a VAD nurse.

In the light of methodological approaches which consider personal testimony a reflexive expression of self, Brittain's references to needlework in her biographical

¹⁰⁴ Vera Brittain, *Chronicle of Youth: War Diary 1913-1917*, London, Victor Gollancz, 1981. Reprint Phoenix Press, 2002; and Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925*, London, Victor Gollancz, 1933. Reprint Virago, 2014.

¹⁰⁵ Kent, Susan Kingsley. *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain*, p.14-15.

¹⁰⁶ Lucinda Gosling, *Knitting for Tommy*, The History Press, 2014, p.18-19.

writings are examined here.¹⁰⁷ Comparing the biographical source *Chronicle of Youth*, Vera Brittain's diary written during the war, with *Testament of Youth*, her autobiography which evolved through the late 1920s and was published in 1933, I argue that in *Chronicle of Youth* Brittain actively used needlework to express her initial anxiety and frustration at events of the war. However, in her autobiographical account, *Testament of Youth*, written some years after the war, Brittain reframes her experience of early war needlework, presenting it as distanced from the events of the war. By reframing her experience, I argue that Brittain seeks to distance herself from the domestic context of her war needlework and the sentiments that she experienced at home whilst performing it.¹⁰⁸

Memoirs, diaries, letters, and eye witness accounts form the foundation for many historical understandings of wartime needlework activity, and following recent work in 'historicising self-hood', emotional histories and literary criticism, this chapter considers these to be testimonies which make meaning of a person's interaction with needlework, rather than as expressing general 'truths' about that activity.¹⁰⁹ As Jane Potter has observed: 'both wartime and post-war memoirs served the same *essential* function for their authors, that of ordering the experience of unimaginable suffering and of the feelings of helplessness to mitigate that suffering' [*italics in the original*].¹¹⁰ Angela Smith has noted how First World War diaries and published accounts differ from one another, as women 'move from the private to the public sphere', and she

¹⁰⁷ See Penny Summerfield, *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice*, London and New York, Routledge, 2019.

¹⁰⁸ Vera Brittain's *Chronicle of Youth* was the diary that she kept between 1913 and 1917. It was first published in its own right in 1981 by Victor Gollancz. Brittain's *Testament of Youth* was first published by Victor Gollancz in 1933. See Paul Berry and Mark Bostridge, *Vera Brittain: A Life*, Virago Press 2008, p.238-239.

¹⁰⁹ Penny Summerfield, *Histories of the Self: Personal Narratives and Historical Practice*, Routledge, 2019.

¹¹⁰ Jane Potter, *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print: Women's Literary Responses to the Great War, 1914-1918*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p.223.

points to ‘what can be understood from the things that are left out, as well as the alterations to what is included’.¹¹¹ This chapter argues that the way in which Brittain viewed knitting during the war, and how she viewed it afterwards, changed to reflect her understandings of the war, and is much more complex than has been thought to date.

Brittain refers to knitting very early in her war diary, later published as *Chronicle of Youth* (hereafter *Chronicle*), on 6th August 1914:

Today I started the only work it seems possible as yet for a woman to do – the making of garments for the soldiers. I started knitting sleeping-helmets, and as I have forgotten how to knit, & never was very brilliant when I knew, I seemed to be an object of some amusement. But even when one is not skilful it is better to proceed slowly than to do *nothing* to help.¹¹² [Brittain’s italics]

Her first observation is that knitting was the extent of work available to women at the start of the war, and her complaints about her skill show that she is unlikely to have chosen to knit under ordinary circumstances. She describes how her efforts lightened the mood as she became ‘an object of some amusement’; however, the activity appears to serve her need to be physically active for the war and to get involved in an activity directly related to the war.

Brittain’s diary entry for the following day records the destruction of HMS Amphion by a mine; her brother Edward’s argument in trying to persuade their father to agree to his wish to enlist; and the German siege of the fortress at Liege, in Belgium; meanwhile:

¹¹¹ Angela K. Smith, *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism and the First World War*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000, p.47

¹¹² Vera Brittain, *Chronicle of Youth: War Diary 1913-1917*, p.79.

All day long I knitted away. Various reports kept coming in of battles, different dreadnoughts being sunk, multitudes of Germans being killed, but none of them confirmed.

In her war diary, *Chronicle*, knitting accompanies and makes physically manifest Brittain's anxieties and uncertainty over war events at home and abroad. However, in her later memoir, *Testament of Youth* (hereafter *Testament*), she gives precedence to the tensions at home at this time, as she describes her father's anger on discovering that her brother had applied for a commission:

When my father discovered this exercise of initiative, his wrath and anxiety reached the point of effervescence. Work of any kind was quite impossible in the midst of so much chaos and apprehension, and letters to Edward from Roland, describing his endeavours to get a commission in a Norfolk regiment, did nothing to ease the perpetual tension. Even after the result of my Oxford Senior came through, I abandoned in despair the Greek textbooks that Roland had lent me. I even took to knitting for the soldiers, though only for a short time; utterly incompetent at all forms of needlework, I found the simplest bed-socks and sleeping-helmets altogether beyond me.¹¹³

In her memoir, *Testament*, knitting is introduced primarily as a distraction from familial tension: it is a last resort activity which she remarks on with some surprise, but no longer amusement. Unlike her on-the-spot wartime diary, *Chronicle*, Brittain's later memoir, *Testament*, does not suggest that knitting held a purpose for her as a means of connecting with the war. *Testament* moves on directly to satirise the home front war effort of the 'ladies of the Buxton elite' at their First Aid and Home Nursing

¹¹³ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925*, p.81.

classes, 'who never learnt any of the bandages correctly themselves', but 'went about showing everybody else how to do them'.¹¹⁴ She describes how she attended and passed examinations for these classes: 'In order to have something to take me away from the stormy atmosphere at home'.¹¹⁵ In her post-war *Testament*, home is therefore the focus of Brittain's frustration during this early war period, and knitting is associated with this.

However, in her diary *Chronicle*, Brittain's antipathy to the behaviour of the ladies of Buxton developed over several encounters, during which time she continued to be motivated by the need to be active in war-related work. On 14th August 1914 she confirmed that knitting still played a part in this when she wrote:

the great thing to be thankful for is the having something to do, for without that life would be unbearable. This morning as it happened the knitted helmets had to be given in to Mrs Heathcote, & we have no more materials in the house at present, so I had no sewing for the War to do at the time. I occupied myself in learning up parts of the First Aid book, and practising what bandages I could do single handed.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925*, p.81.

¹¹⁵ Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925*, p.81.

¹¹⁶ Vera Brittain, *Chronicle of Youth: War Diary 1913-1917*, p.83.

Fig. 2.8.



Vera Brittain as a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurse in 1915, the year following her *Chronicle of Youth* diary entries about needlework. ©Vera Brittain Estate, McMaster University Library, Hamilton, Canada.

In his study of Brittain, Richard Badenhausen has suggested that in writing *Testament* in the 1920s, Brittain relived the war in an attempt to understand it. *Testament*, he proposes, was a means for her to work through the trauma of war.¹¹⁷ In this, Badenhausen suggests, Brittain distanced herself from women's experience as she considered it to be too far from the experience of those that she loved, and

¹¹⁷ Richard Badenhausen, 'Mourning through Memoir: Trauma, Testimony, and Community in Vera Brittain's "Testament of Youth"', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 49:4, 2003.

instead, she associated with the front line male.¹¹⁸ In *Testament*, Brittain's disassociation from women's experience is bound up with her disconnection from her home and, in particular, her wish to escape from the 'narrowness of culture' in Buxton.¹¹⁹

Fig. 2.9.



Vera Brittain in 1936, three years after the publication of *Testament of Youth*. Photograph by Howard Coster.
©National Portrait Gallery.

¹¹⁸ Richard Badenhansen, 'Mourning through Memoir: Trauma, Testimony, and Community in Vera Brittain's "Testament of Youth"', p.429.

¹¹⁹ Richard Badenhansen, 'Mourning through Memoir: Trauma, Testimony, and Community in Vera Brittain's "Testament of Youth"', p.426.

Angela Smith has observed that in *Testament*, Brittain 'softens much of the patriotic fervour and romanticism adopted by the younger Brittain'.¹²⁰ However, Lynne Layton has noted that in 'tracing Brittain's struggle with war from 1914 to 1950, we discover not a straight line to pacifism or feminism but a series of backward and forward movements'.¹²¹ This suggests that in her writing, Brittain articulated the form of that struggle at the time in which it occurred.

In *Testament*, viewed as a post-war record of trauma, knitting is polarised along with sewing and First Aid working parties as a home front activity which is far removed from the front line experience that Brittain valorised. Knitting is associated with the frustrations and restrictions of home life. However, in *Chronicle*, Brittain's actual war diary, knitting is both the source and expression of Brittain's frustration. She dismisses the potential of her knitting to effectively serve the war effort when she states that she is not good at it, and she disassociates from finding that it comes 'naturally' as a feminine task; however, knitting *did* serve her nervous need to be physically active *in relation to the war*, and it also served as a comparison with the types of war activity that she wished to engage in. At the start of the war, Brittain used knitting to further define *how* she wished to engage in the war; however, in *Testament*, written after the war, knitting became a powerful symbol of the war-distanced home front.

¹²⁰ Angela K. Smith, *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism and the First World War*, p.48.

¹²¹ Lynne Layton, 'Vera Brittain's Testament(s)', *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*, Yale University Press, 1987, p.82.

'Men should fight but women should knit' Caroline Playne and the juxtaposition of needlework

The juxtaposition of the domestic woman against the fighting man has not received scrutiny with regard to its valuation of First World War knitting, despite critiques of Kent's projection for the post-war suffrage campaign and the oppressive role she has assigned to the domestic sphere. Indeed, the post-war consensus has been to accept that war effort knitting was a lesser, superfluous and rather embarrassing feminine activity compared to serious, war-related, male combat. The juxtaposition of female knitting against male fighting is key to the perpetuation of the abstraction of needlework from the 'real' history of the First World War. For this reason, this chapter will now conclude with a reappraisal of the most-cited primary source that first presents this binary: the writing of Caroline Playne.¹²² This appraisal will argue that early war knitting, rather than forming an activity which divided and distanced women from the war, originated from a tradition of integrated *war response*.

In her 1931 account of the home front during the war, *Society at War, 1914-1916*, Playne made what has become a highly influential statement for the role of First World War needlework when she observed that at the beginning of the war: 'The great era of knitting set in; men should fight but women should knit'.¹²³ Kent has referred to this statement as exemplifying the reassertion of women's traditional roles at the start of the war.¹²⁴ Paul Ward, similarly, argues that Playne points to the inadequacy of women in a male/female juxtaposition at the beginning of the war, which:

¹²² Caroline Playne, *Society at War: 1914-1916*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1931.

¹²³ Caroline Playne, *Society at War: 1914-1916*, p.94.

¹²⁴ Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Inter War Britain*, p.14.

emphasises Susan Kingsley Kent's argument that war's immediate effect was to strengthen women's traditional roles after the challenges to masculinity provided by prewar feminism.¹²⁵

In her home front study, Maggie Andrews has described Playne's observation as 'a little dismissive but women's domestic skills were certainly commandeered for the national war effort'.¹²⁶ However, Andrews appears to understate the dismissal, rather than challenge it. To date, the polarisation of domestic war needlework from 'the war' has not been questioned, and nor has the implication that women could not achieve empowerment or challenge through the activity of needlework during the war.

However, deeper examination suggests that needlework was not imposed on women to achieve domestic reversion, but rather, women were urged to take part in an activity by women, which drew upon a tradition of war response. Further scrutiny of the historical context and purpose of Playne's writing on knitting and sewing during the early war is required.

In *Society at War, 1914-1916*, Playne introduces herself as a collector of 'cuttings, pamphlets and letters' from newspapers and journals, which she gathered:

'throughout the palpitating four years and three months of the war's continuance'.¹²⁷

She refers to these throughout her work as a means of demonstrating the mood of the nation. Playne highlights the urgency of the tone in early war public discourse and she describes war needlework in the context of a feeling of apprehension about what might happen, or be needed by the war:

¹²⁵ Paul Ward, "'Women of Britain Say Go': Women's Patriotism in the First World War', p.31.

¹²⁶ Maggie Andrews, "Ideas and Ideals of Domesticity and Home in the First World War". *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences since 1914*, p.11.

¹²⁷ Caroline Playne, *Society at War, 1914-1916*, Preface, p.7.

The general fear of what might befall the nation crystallized into a dread of terrible material distress and unemployment. Neurotic dread inspired this vaguely placed generosity, excitement and the craving to do something “about it” drew forth the money. The great era of knitting set in; men should fight but women should knit. Whole columns in newspapers described “How to be useful in war time”.¹²⁸

In this reference to war effort needlework, Playne suggests that people are responding to the declaration of war, yet not to any known characteristics or needs.¹²⁹ This chapter has shown how the call to engage in war needlework originated from women’s philanthropic organisations: in preparation for and in apprehension of the war. Playne’s statement and juxtaposition also originated from this prominent call to women, which was circulated in the public press at the start of the war. Rather than characterising early war needlework as an attempt to revert women to an idealised and restrictive pre-war domestic femininity which is distinct from the war, war needlework is better understood as a historically situated recourse within women’s philanthropic tradition of *war response*; a tradition which provided a means to assist both women and men. That war effort needlework came from women’s philanthropic movements and not from a state ideology underlines the significance of its role for women in the first months of the war. It is therefore misleading to see needlework as abstracting women from the war in 1914: it was a ready formed feature of traditional *war response*. Playne’s selectivity in presenting needlework activity is examined in further detail in the next chapter.

¹²⁸ Caroline Playne, *Society at War, 1914-1916*, p.94.

¹²⁹ Adrian Gregory has argued that home front responses to the war were more complex and nuanced than has been previously assumed, and that before war was declared opinion was divided about taking part; however, he describes the: ‘anxiety, excitement, and fear of the moment’ which immediately followed after the outbreak of war. Adrian Gregory *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p.35.

Conclusion

This chapter has challenged the assertion that women's war needlework was directed by the state at the start of the war, whether institutionally or ideologically. Through analysis of the historical events of the early war work of Queen Mary's Needlework Guild and Lady French, it has been shown that early war effort needlework originated in women's philanthropic and charitable responses to war. The urgency of the women's movement to make garments for the troops at the start of the war was both discouraged and disapproved of by the state War Office, and it has been shown that the idea that the state immediately stepped in to direct women's domestic activity at the start of the war is founded upon a faulty premise: that women's needlework was a benign entity which could be used by a patriarchal force to contain and direct women and to all intents and purposes exclude them from the activity of male war. This chapter has demonstrated, in contrast, that women's philanthropic war needlework was not a fixed and passive entity, but has a distinct history as a subject and means of contestation as well as continuity - it has distinct agency, where its use by women at the start of the war even came to challenge women's traditional philanthropic work.

The examination of the women's magazines *Home Chat* and *Woman's Own* and the biographical war writings of Vera Brittain, have demonstrated that early war needlework was a far more dynamic social tool for women. It enabled them to question and contest their wartime role and to advocate, confirm and demonstrate their responses to the war. Early war needlework was invested with a range of characteristics, many of them gendered, but instead of limiting and containing women's participation, needlework formed a means by which women could and did

express diverse and complex responses to the start of the war. Needlework could be used by women to make sense of their wartime roles and, where they felt it necessary, to challenge them.

The perceived exclusion of wartime needlewomen from the war is intimately bound up with the acceptance of a deeply rooted binary of inequality between oppressive, subservient, female needlework and active, dominant, male military service. Despite feminist studies which question clear-cut binaries, the binary of the fighting male and the knitting woman has been powerfully sustained, and in not questioning it historians have by default accepted it. In reappraising the origins of the binary in the writing of Caroline Playne, this chapter has shown that needlework needs to be considered in the historical context of philanthropic *war response*, which was orchestrated by women's organisations. Needlework expressed immediate apprehension about the war, and rather than forming a force of containment and exclusion *from* the war, it was part of a tradition of active response *to* the war which served both women and men.

As a result of a lack of critical attention to the context of needlework performance and discussion, the role of needlework has been confined and to a large extent relegated to a set of interpretations that represent it as a marginal, feminised activity. This chapter has challenged historical frameworks which suggest that First World War needlework enacted women's domestic containment, exclusion or stagnancy at the start of the war, and it has demonstrated that war effort needlework had a far more discursive, contested, empowering and potentially activist role for women than has been considered previously.

Chapter Three

'Needlework mania', 1914: making sense of the war

Introduction

The popularity of home-based garment making for the war effort reached such a height in the first weeks of the war that on 29th August 1914, in its new letter-based column, 'How to be Useful in War Time: Advice and Suggestions', *The Times* termed this new national interest 'Needlework Mania'.¹ This description of early war needlework as a 'mania' has continued to be popular in home front social and fashion histories up to the present day, where it retains its appeal as an amusing term for defining both early war needlework and women's initial response to the war.² However, this chapter argues that the emphasis placed in histories on early war needlework as a mania - characterised by impulsive, disordered and confused garment production - has meant that far less attention has been paid to the purposeful role that war needlework held at the start of the war; or, indeed, to the long standing and complex role that war needlework maintained throughout the duration of the war.

It is argued in this chapter that the uncritical acceptance of early war 'needlework mania' has perpetuated, unchallenged, the negative characterisation of First World War needlework as a short-lived fashion, notable for disorganised production; poorly made garments; and, ultimately, for illustrating the miscommunication between the

¹ 'How to be Useful in War Time: Advice and Suggestions, "Needlework Mania." Some Practical Hints to Workers', *The Times*, 29 August 1914, p.11.

² See Richard Rutt, *A History of Hand Knitting*, London, Batsford, 1987, p.139; Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War*, London and New York, Longman, 1996, p.68; Lucy Adlington, *Great War Fashion: Tales from the History Wardrobe*, Gloucestershire, The History Press, 2013, p.105; Lucinda Gosling, *Knitting for Tommy: Keeping the Great War Soldier Warm*, Gloucestershire, The History Press, 2014, p.13.

home and the front line.³ Popular use of the terms 'mania' and 'epidemic' in interpretations have led scholars away from considering war effort needlework as *primarily* a purposeful and meaningful response to the war: meaningful to those making items and to those receiving them.

The terms mania, craze and epidemic suggest an irrational, uncontrolled activity, where motives cannot be fully explained or known, with the implication that the activity cannot be fully investigated or understood. The gendered associations between women, women's activities and madness, including mania, hysteria and insanity, also remain unquestioned by the uncritical use of this popular description of a mainly female activity.⁴ However, by reinvestigating the most-cited primary sources that have led historians to use this terminology, this chapter will show that the primary sources actually reveal a far more lucid but complex role for needlework as a war response. It is argued here that these sources on war needlework need to be scrutinised and not paraphrased uncritically. This chapter therefore develops the argument presented in the previous chapter that needlework gave women a *meaningful* agency which was directly related to the war. This chapter also foregrounds forthcoming chapters which argue that the popular activity of needlework was complex and purposeful at the start of the war, and that this is demonstrable and well-evidenced.

³ See Arthur Marwick, *Women at War, 1914-18*, 1977, London, Harper Collins, p.35; Richard Rutt, *A History of Hand Knitting*, 1987, p.139; Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War*, 1996, p.68; Jane Tynan, *British Army Uniform and the First World War: Men in Khaki*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p.79-86.

⁴ For studies which argue that gendered historical associations have been made between women and madness, see Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*, New York, Pantheon, 1985. Reprint London, Virago, 1987; see also Andrew Scull, *The Disturbing History of Hysteria*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009; For a counter position to Showalter, see Joan Busfield who argues some forms of madness were also linked to men and masculinity. Joan Busfield, 'The Female Malady? Men, Women and Madness in Nineteenth Century Britain', *Sociology*, 28:1, 1994, p.259-277.

The chapter begins with analysis of how mania has been researched in the historic record and how it has been associated with early war needlework. The chapter examines *The Times* article titled 'Needlework Mania' from 29th August 1914, and it will show that the appropriateness of applying the term mania to war effort needlework was, in fact, debated in *The Times* at the start of the war.⁵ This debate, and the complexity of the issues that it referred to, have generally been overlooked in the histories of war effort needlework, in favour of presenting an interpretive framework which has largely perpetuated the impression that war effort needlework in 1914 was manic, confused and, at worst, self-serving and misguided. However, this chapter will show that the use of the term mania was far more ambiguous in *The Times'* article in August 1914, and that it invited debate, rather than issued judgement.

Examination is then made of the 1914 song *Sister Susie's Sewing Shirts for Soldiers*.⁶ This early war song refers to itchy, poorly-made garments which were sent from the home front to soldiers on the front line. I argue that this song provides a more complex commentary on the challenge voluntary production made *to the home* and specifically to the domestic role of older men at home. It will be shown that whilst this song is popularly referred to as illustrating the misplaced enthusiasm women had for garment making at the start of the war - and poor-production - it also presents criticism of the potentially selfish responses of men in the home.

The description of early war needlework in Caroline Playne's 1931 home front study, *Society at War, 1914-1916*, then forms the subject of investigation.⁷ Playne's work

⁵ 'How to be Useful in War Time: Advice and Suggestions, "Needlework Mania." Some Practical Hints to Workers', *The Times*, 29 August 1914, p.11.

⁶ Robert Patrick Weston and Herman Darewski, *Sister Susie's Sewing Shirts for Soldiers*, New York, T.B. Harms & Francis & Day & Hunter, 1914.

⁷ Caroline Playne, *Society at War, 1914-1916*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1931.

has been influential as an eye-witness account of early war needlework; however, her writing on the issue has not been critically scrutinised. This chapter argues that Playnes' home front history needs to be considered in the light of her pacifist agenda which framed all of her published writing, and by which she made sense of, and condemned, the events of the war.⁸ In this light, I argue that although Playne presents early war needlework as an example of a 'neurotic' war fervour, as conceptualised in Playne's *own* definition of the popular psychoanalytic terminology of the 1930s, she does not account for why needlework was a popular activity, and nor does she include any account which indicates the longevity of war needlework during the war. This chapter argues that Playne presents a selective view of early war needlework as a frenzied activity, akin to a mania, because it illustrates her argument that war activity as a whole was irrational.

Following this, the chapter examines the influential home front writings on war needlework by the domestic historian Constance Dorothy Peel.⁹ I argue that assumptions have been made from Peel's biographical accounts which have not fully taken into account the relationship between Peel's observations and her use of evidence. In particular, Peel's descriptions of war needlework as short-lived and unwanted by the front line have not been considered in the light of her specific approach to narrative form. This chapter suggests that once Peel's writings are contextualised and critically assessed, they provide a much more nuanced source of information about early war needlework, as they range from personal testimony and reportage to comical sketch and anecdote.

⁸ Caroline Playne, *The Neuroses of the Nations*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1925; *The Pre-War Mind in Britain*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1928; *Society at War, 1914-1916*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1931; and *Britain Holds On, 1917-1918*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1933.

⁹ Constance Peel, *How We Lived Then 1914-1918*, London, Bodley Head, 1929; and her autobiography, Constance Peel, *Life's Enchanted Cup*, London, Bodley Head, 1933.

The final primary sources to be examined in this chapter relate to the role of humour in sustaining perceptions about war needlework as irrational, poorly-produced and unwanted by the front line. Cartoons from the satirical magazine *Punch* are examined, as these are popularly presented in histories of First World War needlework.¹⁰ The implication that these illustrate the distance between home front volunteer garment production and the needs of recipients on the front line is evaluated. This chapter argues that whilst these cartoons show the potential for poor production during the first six months of the war, they also show home front and front line communication, as well as evidence of poor garment *distribution*. I argue that rather than illustrating difference and distance, the humour of these cartoons actually created a powerful connection between the home front and front line. This chapter argues that a critical assessment of the primary sources relating to early war needlework reveals a less derogatory public picture of women's needlework at the start of the war.

Approaching 'mania' in studies of First World War needlework

In the historiography of the First World War, the terms mania, craze and epidemic have become commonplace as descriptions of war effort needlework at the start of the war. In his history of the home front during the war, for example, Gerard DeGroot describes the situation at the start of the war in quite dramatic terms when he states that: 'A "needlework mania" gripped the country'.¹¹ Richard Rutt, in his history of hand knitting, reserves judgement when he refers to how needlework has been *described*, pointing out that: 'The First World War stimulated British Knitting to the

¹⁰ *Punch: The London Charivari*, London, Punch, 1914-1918.

¹¹ Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War*, p.68.

point where it was regarded as a national mania'.¹² However, when Rutt records how 'All ages of women in Britain were knitting for dear life in something like a national addiction', he removes the conscious decision-making role from participants, and suggests that needlework was performed compulsively or mindlessly; he moves from the assumptions of its public conception to a suggestion of this claim as fact.¹³

In her illustrated history of First World War knitting, Lucinda Gosling is more tentative when she suggests that 'knitting for soldiers and sailors in 1914 became a national pastime – perhaps even a national mania'.¹⁴ However, in suggesting that early war needlework *could* have been a mania, Gosling implies that there is the potential for something unexplained or irrational about it. Gosling does not explore the form of mania other than to argue that 'the question of what Britain's civilians could do to help their fighting men found a quick and simple answer in a pair of knitting needles and a ball of wool'.¹⁵ Yet, this does not explain *why* so many women took up needlework at the start of the war, and it also overlooks the way in which, for some, knitting was neither quick nor simple. Lucy Adlington's history of fashion during the war reserves the definition of mania specifically for sewing, and refers instead to 'the wartime cult of knitting'.¹⁶ Again, however, this terminology would suggest a mass obedience to a ritualised activity for its own sake.¹⁷ This chapter argues that the uncritical use and associations of the term mania as a description for early war needlework has ignored the complexity of motives held by war time garment makers,

¹² Richard Rutt, *A History of Hand Knitting*, p.139.

¹³ Richard Rutt, *A History of Hand Knitting*, p.140.

¹⁴ Lucinda Gosling, *Knitting for Tommy: Keeping the Great War Soldier Warm*, p.13.

¹⁵ Lucinda Gosling, *Knitting for Tommy: Keeping the Great War Soldier Warm*, p.13.

¹⁶ Lucy Adlington, *Great War Fashion: Tales From The History Wardrobe*, p.104 for sewing; and p.106 for knitting.

¹⁷ Lucy Adlington's use of the term 'cult' is reminiscent of Flora Klickmann's 1915 embroidery guide, *The Cult of the Needle*; however, Klickmann's guide focuses on learning needlework techniques thoroughly, which suggests that she is concerned with a cult of habit, whereas Adlington's use of 'cult' refers to a popular group activity.

most of whom were women, as it suggests that their motives are unknowable or irrational. The home production of garments for the war effort was one of the largest co-ordinated voluntary activities to take place on the home front during the war, involving thousands of participants across the UK, Ireland and also the wider British Empire. To describe this orchestrated action predominantly as a mania, craze or epidemic fails to interrogate the reasons *why* the activity of needlework had such widespread appeal or relevance. Indeed, the adjectives: 'mania', 'craze' and 'epidemic', conjure up powerful imagery of extremes of irrational and pathological behaviour. When applied to group behaviour, they suggest an activity that is a passing fashion or a fad, but they also suggest an uncontrolled activity which spreads without a clear purpose other than to exist for its own sake.

In her study of female madness in English culture, Elaine Showalter has drawn attention to the gendered characteristics that have been associated with irrational behaviour in the historic record, where:

Women, within our dualistic systems of language and representation, are typically situated on the side of irrationality, silence, nature and body, while men are situated on the side of reason, discourse, culture, and the mind.¹⁸

Showalter points to the danger of naturalising perceived irrational behaviour to the feminine, as it becomes a fixed categorisation which is not investigated. Joan Busfield has countered Showalter's focus solely on the feminine associations of madness with the argument that some forms of madness were linked to men and masculinity.¹⁹ However, both Showalter and Busfield argue that definitions of

¹⁸ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*, p.4.

¹⁹ Joan Busfield, 'The Female malady? Men, Women and Madness in Nineteenth Century Britain', *Sociology*, 28:1, 1994, p.259.

madness are gendered and that historians must investigate, rather than accept, the gendering of behavioural definitions and treatments in particular cultural contexts.²⁰ With regard to early war needlework, attention should be paid not only to how the term mania was gendered in its war use, but also to how it has been gendered in its interpretation in the subsequent literature.²¹ Manias, as subjects of research, are therefore capable of investigation. Indeed, the design historian Elizabeth Kramer, in her study of 'Japan mania', has shown the impact an uncritical use of the term mania has within historical investigations.²² To qualify the term, Kramer refers to *The Oxford English Dictionary* definition of mania as both 'a collective enthusiasm, usually short lived, a "craze" or "rage"' and 'an obsessive enthusiasm for a particular thing'.²³ In her study, Kramer argues that the term 'Japan mania' is: 'associated with a superfluous use of Japanese motifs in pattern making as well as mindless expenditure by consumers enamoured with Anglo-Japanese objects'.²⁴ Thus, the adjectives superfluous and mindless have close associations with understandings of mania. To describe the popularity for Anglo-Japanese designs as a mania, Kramer suggests, prevents a critical examination of the topic more broadly. The subject of manias, Kramer argues: 'rarely extends beyond stylistic discussions to critical

²⁰ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*, p.5; Joan Busfield, 'The Female malady? Men, Women and Madness in Nineteenth Century Britain', *Sociology*, 28:1, 1994, p.275-276.

²¹ Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to note that the term 'mania' from the Greek word for 'madness', has a long history of use in the English language as a term which broadly defines conditions of insanity, melancholy, and obsessive or irrational behaviour, see Andrew Scull, *The Disturbing History of Hysteria*, p.35. In the twentieth-century, it has been clinically associated with depressive mental disorders, see German E. Berrios, *The History of Mental Symptoms: Descriptive Psychopathology Since the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

²² Kramer studies 'Japan mania' and the design and manufacture of Anglo-Japanese textiles by the firm Warner & Ramm in the 1870s and 1880s. See Elizabeth Kramer, 'From Luxury to Mania: A Case Study of Anglo-Japanese Textile Production at Warner & Ramm, 1970-1890', *Textile History*, 38:2, 2007, p.151-164.

²³ Elizabeth Kramer, 'From Luxury to Mania: A Case Study of Anglo-Japanese Textile Production at Warner & Ramm, 1970-1890', p.152.

²⁴ Elizabeth Kramer, 'From Luxury to Mania: A Case Study of Anglo-Japanese Textile Production at Warner & Ramm, 1970-1890', p.152.

interpretation'.²⁵ Presumably, this is because there is an implicit assumption that manias cannot, or need not, be critically explained.²⁶

An alternative approach, advocated by Kramer, has been pursued in her studies of the seventeenth-century 'Tulip mania', which saw the popularity and price of Dutch tulips escalate across Europe and then collapse. These studies emphasise the *relationships* between consumers, producers and retailers and how these have been characterised. Rather than accept that the cultural behaviour of manias is unexplainable, these studies focus on the social, political and economic features which compose the behaviour defined as a mania.²⁷ This investigative approach therefore acknowledges that critical attention paid to events and movements described as manias is not only feasible, but can provide valuable insights into social, political and economic relationships. The importance of investigating historically *contemporaneous* perceptions of activities is also highlighted, as these can influence how and why a behaviour is defined as a mania. This would acknowledge the influence of debates and assumptions, including gendered ones, which are made *at the time*, and which have a significant role to play in shaping how an activity is culturally defined thereafter. Although First World War home front and fashion historians have not examined the significance and characteristics of the term mania in its application as a description of war effort needlework, the appropriacy of

²⁵ Elizabeth Kramer, 'From Luxury to Mania: A Case Study of Anglo-Japanese Textile Production at Warner & Ramm, 1970-1890', p.152.

²⁶ Indeed, Kramer notes that: 'Economic historians have traditionally used the term mania to refer to crowd mentality or market psychology when *they cannot explain* market behaviour through fundamentals' [my italics]. Elizabeth Kramer, 'From Luxury to Mania: A Case Study of Anglo-Japanese Textile Production at Warner & Ramm, 1970-1890', p.152.

²⁷ Elizabeth Kramer, 'From Luxury to Mania: A Case Study of Anglo-Japanese Textile Production at Warner & Ramm, 1970-1890', p.152.

the term was debated in relation to war effort needlework when it was first used during the war.

'Needlework Mania', 1914

On 29th August 1914, *The Times* made the first national reference to needlework as a mania in its column, 'How to be Useful in War Time: Advice and Suggestions', under the sub-heading "Needlework Mania." Some Practical Hints to Workers':

To-day we devote this column to those who were recently described at a public meeting as the "needlework maniacs". The letter from "Hopeless" and that from "Harroviensis," printed below, make it unnecessary for us to discuss the phrase or its justice.²⁸

In the article, two letters from readers are printed under the heading: 'A Contrast'. The first of these, titled 'Hopeless': 'implores us to use our influence to suppress the women's needlework craze'. It is presented as a letter from a man who explains that his wife and three daughters:

have taken the Q.M.N.G. fever. They know nothing of shirt making, but that does not matter. They have purchased rolls of impossible material, particularly unbleached calico, for night shirts, they have turned the dining room into a sort of factory. At last some shirts have been made!!! I have tried them on. My heart goes

²⁸ 'How to be Useful in War Time: Advice and Suggestions, "Needlework Mania." Some Practical Hints to Workers', *The Times*, 29 August 1914, p.11.

out to poor suffering Tommy Atkins if he is to be condemned to endure these miserably cut, uncomfortable, and irritating garments, if only for 20 minutes.²⁹

This letter suggests that the enthusiasm of the women concerned is quite misplaced, as they do not have the necessary skills for garment making; and the result of their efforts are poorly produced items. The letter also presents a comical scene, where the home has been transformed, much to the exasperation of the male author and father of the house. 'Hopeless' is followed by a letter from 'Harroviensis', who writes as a co-ordinator of a needlework working party in Harrow. This letter gives a highly detailed account of needlework production by 'a body of over 500 voluntary workers'. The author assures the newspaper that:

Co-ordination of relief societies and charitable institutions is secured, so that there is no overlapping. Much of the work of the movement consists in checking unnecessary and harmful activities, and directing them into proper channels.

This letter refers to commissions received from local regiments and also notes that: 'It is found essential that all shirts should be cut out by professional cutters, who most generously give their help'.³⁰ *The Times* follows this letter up with a note to say that it has also received another account of the 'remarkable achievement in which Harrow has set an excellent example' from a reader who signs themselves 'A Needlework Maniac'.³¹

²⁹ Letter titled 'Hopeless'. 'How to be Useful in War Time: Advice and Suggestions, "Needlework Mania." Some Practical Hints to Workers', p.11. The abbreviation QMNG refers to Queen Mary's Needlework Guild.

³⁰ Letter titled 'Harroviensis'. 'How to be Useful in War Time: Advice and Suggestions, "Needlework Mania." Some Practical Hints to Workers', p.11.

³¹ 'How to be Useful in War Time: Advice and Suggestions, "Needlework Mania." Some Practical Hints to Workers', p.11.

In printing these two letters, side by side, *The Times* leaves the reader to come to their own conclusions about whether popular needlework activity was helpful to the war or not. The column acknowledges that: 'At the outset there was, it will be admitted, some little confusion and uncertainty'; however, it asserts that those: 'who are working for the Red Cross Society (which is now in the ablest possible hands) may rest assured that the Society's patterns may be implicitly trusted'.³² The column also argues for the continuation of needlework activity, as it assures readers that 'there is a demand for a practically unlimited supply of any kind of garment that workers or donors care to send'.³³ In this way, although the column initially appears to be ambivalent about whether garment making for the war effort should be termed a mania, explaining that the letters make it 'unnecessary for us to discuss the phrase or its justice', the article actually presents a clear defence of war effort needlework as it encourages women to continue to get involved.³⁴

The article also steers readers towards organised production. This is emphasised by the final statement: 'we advise our readers to keep their eyes open for the official pronouncements which will be regularly published, and to pay no heed to unauthorized notices'.³⁵ Thus, *The Times* column 'Needlework Mania' does not question the need for needlework production at this time; however, what is presented for criticism is poor and wasteful production, and specifically production in the context of the home. The use of the term mania is highly ambiguous in the column. Potentially, the term is directed negatively towards the excesses of poor and

³² 'How to be Useful in War Time: Advice and Suggestions, "Needlework Mania." Some Practical Hints to Workers', p.11.

³³ 'How to be Useful in War Time: Advice and Suggestions, "Needlework Mania." Some Practical Hints to Workers', p.11.

³⁴ 'How to be Useful in War Time: Advice and Suggestions, "Needlework Mania." Some Practical Hints to Workers', p.11.

³⁵ 'How to be Useful in War Time: Advice and Suggestions, "Needlework Mania." Some Practical Hints to Workers', p.11.

wasteful production, or positively towards efficient and purposeful production. That the column places “Needlework Mania” in inverted columns and asks readers to decide for themselves, suggests that further interpretation and debate is invited.

However, in his First World War home front history, Gerard DeGroot refers to *The Times* column ‘Needlework Mania’ by focusing only on the letter from ‘Hopeless’. DeGroot does not mention the contrasting letter from ‘Harroviensis’.³⁶ In this way, he not only confirms the definition of needlework as a mania characterised by poor production, but emphasises this at the expense of a more complex reading which would take into account the newspaper’s acknowledgement and encouragement of organised work. The impression that this selective evidencing gives is that war needlework was predominantly perceived as misguided and futile at the start of the war. The implication for gendered associations, however, is that *The Times* definition of mania is clearly connected with women’s irrational needlework activity.

The Times article on ‘Needlework Mania’ provided the first national commentary on the popular growing movement to produce garments for the war in August 1914, and it is the first to circulate this commentary using the term ‘needlework mania’. Other manias reported by *The Times* leading up to and during the war include articles titled the ‘German Spy Mania’ and the humorous ‘A Deadly mania’, about golfing.³⁷ The strength of the humorous image of poor production as a feature of mania is examined in more detail later in this Chapter; however, it has been shown here that *The Times* article ‘Needlework Mania’ is far more discursive than assumed, and it

³⁶ Gerard DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War*, p.68.

³⁷ ‘German Spy Mania’, *The Times*, 26 May 1914, p.9; the article on golfing, ‘A Deadly Mania’, *The Times*, 11 June 1914, p.15; ‘Victims of the Spy Mania’, 8 August 1914, p.4; ‘The German Conspiracy Mania’, *The Times*, 5 October 1914, p.9.

opened up a debate about early war needlework on the home front, rather than provided a dismissive judgement of it.

Sister Susie's Sewing Shirts for Soldiers

The early war song *Sister Susie's Sewing Shirts for Soldiers* bears a number of similarities to the letter from 'Hopeless' in *The Times* column "Needlework Mania".³⁸ This comical song is about a young girl sewing shirts at home for the war effort, but despite her best efforts, the shirts were not well received due to her lack of production skills:

Some soldiers send epistles,
Say they'd sooner sleep in thistles,
Than the saucy, soft, short shirts for soldiers sister Susie sews.³⁹

Each verse of the song was to be sung faster as a tongue twister, and 'Sister Susies' became popularly depicted in early war stories, postcards and jokes. Although the British release of *Sister Susie*, sung by Jack Charman, was issued as a sound recording in December 1914, this chapter has demonstrated how the joke of a girl making uncomfortable garments was already circulating in the first month of the war.⁴⁰

³⁸ Robert Patrick Weston and Herman Darewski, *Sister Susie's Sewing Shirts for Soldiers*, New York, T.B. Harms & Francis & Day & Hunter, 1914.

³⁹ Robert Patrick Weston and Herman Darewski, *Sister Susie's Sewing Shirts for Soldiers*, New York, T.B. Harms & Francis & Day & Hunter, 1914.

⁴⁰ The UK version, sung by Jack Charman, was released in 10" format by British record label *Winner* in December 1914. The song has been sung by various artists, including Al Jolson in America.

The first verse of Sister Susie's Sewing Shirts for Soldiers describes the comparable scene to the letter 'Hopeless' in *The Times*:⁴¹

Sister Susie's sewing in the kitchen on a "Singer",
 There's miles and miles of flannel on the floor,
 And up the stairs,
 And father says it's rotten getting mixed up with the cotton,
 And sitting on the needles that she leaves upon the chairs.⁴²

In histories of war needlework, *Sister Susie* has been presented as an example of the popularity and mania of early war needlework in the home.⁴³ However, although both the song and *The Times* letter find humour in the questionable production and haphazard scene of the home garment making of the women concerned, it is the complaints of the older, non-combatant male in the household which can be seen to be central to the joke. In this scenario, the home front male finds war effort needlework a disruption to his domestic comfort. This song and the representations of men complaining about the disruption that needlework causes therefore reveal the complexity of this new domestic production and the tensions that it caused *within the home*. Men on the home front who were beyond the age of enlistment are equally the subjects of needlework humour and critique.

Caroline Playne: making an example of early war needlework

⁴¹ Letter titled 'Hopeless'. 'How to be Useful in War Time: Advice and Suggestions, "Needlework Mania." Some Practical Hints to Workers', *The Times*, 29 August 1914, p.11.

⁴² See first verse, Robert Patrick Weston and Herman Darewski, *Sister Susie's Sewing Shirts for Soldiers*, New York, T.B. Harms & Francis & Day & Hunter, 1914.

⁴³ Lucinda Gosling, *Knitting for Tommy: Keeping the Great War Soldier Warm*, p.97; Lucy Adlington, *Great War Fashion: Tales From the History Wardrobe*, p105

Chapter Two of this thesis has shown how Caroline Playne's *Society at War, 1914-1916*, forms a popular source on war needlework in academia, with Playne's observations commonly cited by historians referring to the topic.⁴⁴ Between 1925 and 1933 Playne published four studies of the war, each of which argued that the war was a form of pan-European 'neurosis', characterised by a collective neurotic response.⁴⁵ *Society at War, 1914-1916* is Playne's sociological study charting the reaction of people on the British home front to the war during the years 1914 to 1916; and in it Playne describes early war work as a specific expression of the 'war neurosis' which overcame people at the start of the war, manifested as a country-wide urge to do something.⁴⁶ Playne's subject, she states, is: 'the psychology of social life, the state of men's minds under the influence of the stress and excitement of war'.⁴⁷ Her observational commentary on early war voluntary garment making examples it as an ill-considered activity which indicated people's initial

⁴⁴ Caroline Playne, *Society at War, 1914-1916*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1931; For citation of Playne's observations on needlework, see Susan Kingsley Kent, *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Inter War Britain*, p.14; Paul Ward, "'Women of Britain Say Go": Women's Patriotism in the First World War', p.31; Maggie Andrews, "Ideas and Ideals of Domesticity and Home in the First World War", *The Home Front in Britain: Images, Myths and Forgotten Experiences since 1914*, p.11.

⁴⁵ See Caroline Playne, *The Neuroses of the Nations*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1925; *The Pre-War Mind in Britain*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1928; *Society at War, 1914-1916*, 1931; and *Britain Holds On, 1917-1918*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1933.

⁴⁶ Caroline Playne, *Society at War, 1914-1916*, p.37.

⁴⁷ The post-war growth in popularity of Freudian language and the theory of psychoanalysis has been noted by Elaine Showalter who has recorded that: 'Freudian ideas became immediately popular with the literary avant-garde after the war', particularly in the 1930s. Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*, p.196; Graham Richards has also noted that: 'The percolation of Freudian and related language into everyday English was effectively complete by the 1930s'. Graham Richards, 'Britain on the Couch: The Popularization of Psychoanalysis in Britain 1918-1940', *Science in Context*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 13:2, 2000, p.183; Playne published *Society at War, 1914-1916*, in 1931; however, as Alberto Palazzi has pointed out, Playne's interpretation of the term 'neurosis' was quite different to Freud's theory of neurosis as a subconscious reaction to past events: 'What Playne called "Neurosis" is nothing but the dynamics of every action of a subject (individual or collective) that does not know how to attain an objective knowledge [of] its own desires and needs, and that therefore sets substitute goals. The underlying unconscious sphere was cognitive, not necessarily Freudian, and what was Freudian in Playne's work was basically only borrowed terminology'. Alberto Palazzi, 'Caroline Playne (1857-1948), Pacifist and Social Anthropologist in the First World War', *Academia.edu*, 2018, p.24; Playne is therefore likely to have been exposed to psychoanalytical language during the post-war period, however, her definition of the terminology is quite of her own construction.

apprehensions on the outbreak of war, but which also, therapeutically, satisfied their nervous energy:

Even before things became almost unbearable with the strain of constant acute anxiety, the general tension drove everyone to “float off” on war missions. For instance, among hundreds of other schemes, an attempt was made to get women of leisure all over the country to make clothes. This was found to be ill-advised, for at the time unemployment was great in the clothing trade’.⁴⁸

Here, Playne follows a similar argument to irrational mania interpretations of war needlework, as she presents it, along with other ‘self-devised projects’, as an unthinking and misguided activity:

In an astonishingly short space of time the neurotic excitement, the bellicose temper, which had long prevailed found vent in launching schemes to meet the exigencies of the day. Changes and adjustments of all kinds were needed, but the feverish haste with which many people set to work on self-devised projects with great eagerness increased the stress and confusion. It was all done as in a nightmare; the effect was compelling and inconsequential.⁴⁹

Playne suggests that ‘neurotic fervour’ urged forward early war work, and she implies that this work formed a distraction from actual needs, as well as from any questioning of the war.⁵⁰ However, although Playne’s comments about early war needlework have formed a key point of reference in academic discourses on the subject, her political motivations, which contextualise her writing about the activity, have not been taken into account in these. Richard Espley has observed that:

⁴⁸ Caroline Playne, *Society at War, 1914-1916*, p.36.

⁴⁹ Caroline Playne, *Society at War, 1914-1916*, p.85.

⁵⁰ Caroline Playne, *Society at War, 1914-1916*, p.37.

'Playne as campaigner is largely unknown and her work tends to be cited only as a source of reportage and observational detail of the war years'.⁵¹ I argue that Playne's writing should not be presented as a *straightforward* observation about needlework on the home front. Indeed, Playne selectively presented the example of early war needlework to support her pacifist argument.

In *Society at War*, Playne writes a sophisticated and deeply felt diatribe against the reasoning for going to war and for sustaining the war. She suggests that people were swept along between 1914 and 1916, many willingly, by a discourse which sustained conflict without question.⁵² Playne makes a passionate argument against the war, evidencing this with her collection of wartime press articles, leaflets, pamphlets; and various published books, accounts, speeches and treatises. It is intriguing, however, that despite her published writings and her large archive of observational material and publications dating to the first quarter of the twentieth century, Playne has left very few biographical details about her own life.⁵³ There is only one suspected photograph of Playne, attending the Universal Congress of Peace in London in 1908, although as Espley has noted, her identification in the image is unconfirmed (Figure 3.1).⁵⁴

⁵¹ Richard Espley, 'Caroline Playne: The Activities and Absences of a Campaigning Author in First World War London', *The London Journal*, 41:3, 2016, p.250.

⁵² Caroline Playne, *Society at War, 1914-1916*, p.17.

⁵³ See Sybil Oldfield, 'Playne, Caroline Elizabeth (1857-1948)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004. In 1938 Playne donated a substantial archive of papers and approximately 530 books to the University of London, Senate House Library. See University of London, Senate House Library, *Caroline Elizabeth Playne Papers*, SHL MS1112, 1907-1924.

⁵⁴ Richard Espley has identified Playne as: 'the black-clad figure on the left, with Countess Bertha von Suttner of Austria on the right' in the photograph of the 1908 Universal Congress of Peace in London (see Figure 3.1). Richard Espley, 'Caroline Playne: A Campaigning Life', *Senate House Library Blog*, 21 February 2014: <https://archive.senatehouselibrary.ac.uk/blog/caroline-playne-campaigning-life>; In 1936 Playne published a biography of von Suttner's pacifist attempts to prevent the war, Caroline Playne, *Bertha von Suttner and the Struggle to Avert the World War*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1936.

In his study of her research archive, Espley has explored Playne's motivations for 'what emerges as a sustained act of biographical erasure'.⁵⁵ He has shown that rather than refer in her writing to her first-hand experience as an activist for pacifist causes, Playne prefers to use evidence from press and published reports, and in some cases 'observations and eavesdroppings from the London crowd'.⁵⁶ He notes how Playne excludes any reference to her philanthropic work for pacifist causes in her published accounts of the war.⁵⁷ In *Society at War*, I argue, Playne's commentary on her sources serves a distinct pacifist purpose: to show the irrationality of the war, and her account of early war needlework was part of this.

⁵⁵ Richard Espley, 'Caroline Playne: the Archives and Absences of a Campaigning Author in the First World War', *The London Journal*, 2016, 41:3, p.249.

⁵⁶ Richard Espley, 'Caroline Playne: the Archives and Absences of a Campaigning Author in the First World War', p.257; See also Stefan Goebel and Jerry White, who state that: 'Playne did her utmost to conceal her own involvement in civil society in both her writings and (im)personal papers'. Stefan Goebel and Jerry White, 'London and the First World War', *The London Journal*, 41:3, 2016, p.211.

⁵⁷ This includes mention of the work that she carried out to assist German men and women stranded in the UK at the beginning of the war; and her efforts at committee level to campaign for a variety of peace initiatives, many of which were considered subversive during the war. Richard Espley, 'Caroline Playne: the Archives and Absences of a Campaigning Author in the First World War', p.254-255.

Fig. 3.1.



Photograph possibly depicting Caroline Playne (far left), with the pacifist campaigner Countess Bertha von Suttner (far right), at the Universal Congress of Peace, Westminster, London, 1908. ©Senate House Library.

In *Society at War*, Playne presents voluntary garment making - sewing and knitting - as a distinct and disordered phase at the beginning of the war.⁵⁸ Neither of her war studies, *Society at War, 1914-1916* or *Britain Holds On, 1917-1918*, profile garment sewing and knitting beyond the initial months of the war and there is no mention of how or whether the activity continued. Playne's study of the home front thus ignores the sustained role that garment making maintained throughout the course of the war. The criticism and confusion surrounding voluntary garment making that Playne

⁵⁸ Caroline Playne, *Society at War, 1914-1916*, p.94.

identifies in the early war years of 1914-1915 is largely absent from the press in the later war years. This may be one reason why criticisms of garment making feature so prominently in Playne's early war commentary, whilst the activity fails to receive a mention in her observations of the later war years. However, Playne's focus on garment making in the early stages of the war, and not beyond, also served another purpose: to evidence that at the start of the war, the nervous urge to do something over-rode, and distracted from, the need to question whether the war should proceed.⁵⁹

Using early war needlework as an example, Playne made the case that people were not thinking clearly about the implications of war - they were absorbed by the equivalent of a 'mania' - as there was:

a degree of emotional fervour which closed the avenues of judgment and sent men and women whirling round like leaves in autumn'.⁶⁰

Playne does not seek to explain why people took part in knitting and sewing except on a very superficial level as a reflection of their nervous state of mind. She does not consider how people connected with the activity, nor indeed, why it would hold any particular relevance to them or to the war. Voluntary war needlework appears to fulfil no further purpose in Playne's account other than as a confused expression of early war fervour. Thus, although *Society at War* is frequently cited as a chronicle of home front life during the war, it is crucial to note that Playne is not without a very specific pacifist agenda which shaped her war writings and her presentation of the evidence.

⁵⁹ Caroline Playne, *Society at War, 1914-1916*, p.27. Adrian Gregory refers to Caroline Playne's argument that there was an urge to do something at the start of the war and states his agreement that: 'The declaration of war did release some of the growing anxiety and tension, and the speed of the crisis did paralyse the opposition'. See Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p.35.

⁶⁰ Caroline Playne, *Society at War, 1914-1916*, p.36.

Playne should not be read as an impartial observer of the social life of the home front during the First World War, and her observations about war needlework as a frenzied activity should be seen to be selective and purposeful to the anti-war argument that runs so ardently through her writing.

Constance Peel: Testimony, wit and anecdote in a biographical account of war needlework

Closely related to the understanding that war needlework was carried out in an unthinking mania is the view that the garments produced in the early war period were amateur in production, and consequently, poorly-made or unsuitable. Arthur Marwick is of this opinion when he asserts that the knitted garments made by volunteers on the home front were unwanted and inappropriate for the troops:

one very widespread female response to the outbreak of war was the knitting of 'comforts' for the troops: socks, waistcoats, helmets, scarves, mitts, and bodybelts. It was said that many men in the trenches used these unwanted, and often unsuitable, items for cleaning their rifles and wiping their cups and plates.⁶¹

Marwick does not cite the source for this information; however, he is almost certainly drawing from the accounts of life on the First World War home front written by the domestic historian Constance Dorothy Peel.⁶² Peel's home front writings have been

⁶¹ Arthur Marwick, *Women at War, 1914-18*, HarperCollins, London, 1977, p.35.

⁶² Constance Peel, *How We Lived Then 1914-1918*, London, Bodley Head, 1929; and her autobiography, Constance Peel, *Life's Enchanted Cup*, London, Bodley Head, 1933. Constance Dorothy Peel wrote under her married name, using her husband's initials, as Mrs C. S. Peel. She is also sometimes cited as Dorothy Peel, which is the name that she preferred to use in her correspondence and family, see Vicky Straker, *Bicycles, Bloomers and Great War Rationing Recipes: The Life and Times of Dorothy Peel OBE*, Barnsley, South Yorkshire, Pen and Sword Books Ltd, 2016. For clarity, in this thesis she is cited under her birth name, Constance Peel, which also accords with her entry in Deborah S. Ryan, 'Peel (nee Bayliff), Constance Dorothy Evelyn (1868-1934)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

popular and influential, and she is the most vocal source referred to by historians to evidence that First World War knitting was unwanted, inappropriate and a short-lived enterprise.

Peel, who wrote as Mrs C.S. Peel, was the editor of the household department section of *The Queen* magazine during the war (Figure 3.2). Her specialist interest was domestic food economy, and she worked as a co-director of women's service in the Ministry of Food during the war.⁶³ In her 1929 book, *How We Lived Then, 1914-1918*, Peel offers a 'sketch of social and domestic life in England during the war', in which she makes observations about change between pre and post-war life, and she takes a particular interest in the role of women during the war.⁶⁴ Peel's war time experience is also recounted in her later biography, *Life's Enchanted Cup*, published in 1933.⁶⁵ In both of these biographical works, Peel uses unreferenced quotes and stories which she has compiled from letters and observations related to her work responding to domestic queries for *The Queen* and *The Daily Mail*.⁶⁶ In *How We Lived Then, 1914-1918*, Peel's text jumps from first person to third person account and it is often unclear whether she is quoting from her own experience or that of others. However, both books make a brief, yet influential, reference to war effort knitting; and it is a quote from Peel's autobiography, *Life's Enchanted Cup*, which is repeated in the findings of Marwick.

⁶³ See Deborah S. Ryan, 'Peel (nee Bayliff), Constance Dorothy Evelyn (1868-1934)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004. During the war, Peel also published a book on food economy and household management, see Constance Peel, *The Labour Saving House*, London, Bodley Head, 1917.

⁶⁴ Constance Peel, *How we Lived Then, 1914-1918*, 1929, preface.

⁶⁵ Constance Peel, *Life's Enchanted Cup*, 1933.

⁶⁶ Peel became editor of the women's page of *The Daily Mail* in 1918. In *How We Lived Then 1914-1918*, Peel illustrates the text with images from *The Queen* and *The Daily Mail*, and she makes numerous references throughout these to quoting letters. In her autobiography, *Life's Enchanted Cup*, Peel refers to replying to 'many thousands of letters' received during the course of her work for the magazines *The Queen*, *Home and Hearth* and the newspaper *The Daily Mail*, see Constance Peel, *Life's Enchanted Cup*, p.115.

In *Life's Enchanted Cup*, Peel writes of how, at the start of the war:

Rich women organised concerts to which we all went, accompanied by our knitting. Men, women and children knitted, socks, waistcoats, helmets, comforters, mits and body belts. It was said that the trenches were littered with knitting, much of which was used for cleaning accoutrements. In trains and omnibuses and parks, in restaurants and canteens, people knitted. It was soothing to the nerves to knit, and comforting to think that our knitting might save some man something of hardship, for everyone was haunted by the knowledge of what suffering had been, and must be, endured in order to win the war.⁶⁷

Peel's use of the term 'littered' is significant, as it implies that knitting was equivalent to rubbish and easily discarded; however, her observation that it was soothing to knit as the garments eased men's hardship on the front line suggests that the garments were wanted by their recipients and served an important function for their producers. Arthur Marwick has paraphrased Peel's observations, yet, he has drawn from these the conclusion that knitting was unwanted and unsuitable.

⁶⁷ Constance Peel, *Life's Enchanted Cup*, p.180-181.

Fig. 3.2.



Constance Dorothy Peel in 1917. Mrs C.S Peel, *Life's Enchanted Cup*, London, Bodley Head, 1933, facing p.178.

Peel's home front history, *How We Lived Then, 1914-1918*, makes a more specific statement. This account, which pre-dates her autobiography, explained how knitting soothed the nerves and front line hardship, whilst it also indicated that it was a *surplus* of knitted items on the front line which led to their alternative use:

It was soothing to our nerves to knit, and comforting to think that the results of our labours might save some man something of hardship and misery, for always the knowledge of what our men suffered haunted us. It was said that such a stock of knitted goods flooded into the trenches that men cleaned their rifles and wiped their cups and plates with their surplus socks and comforters.⁶⁸

A surplus of knitted items on the front line does not support the claim that items were unwanted or inappropriate for their primary purpose, rather, it suggests that the additional items had multiple uses and adaptations. Marwick's description of items as unwanted and inappropriate is an assumption. However, this disparaging view of home front knitting has, to a large extent, overshadowed the meaningfulness that knitting held in the relationship between those at home and men in service. Peel's account presents the motivation of those at home to satisfy the need of the troops as a two-way relationship, yet Marwick's focus is on a poor reception for knitting on the front line. In Peel's accounts, no view is expressed directly from the front line about how knitting was received. Yet, her brief statements underpin Marwick's opinion that *most* knitting produced at home during the war was unwanted by the front line.

In his study of philanthropy and voluntary action in Britain in the First World War, Peter Grant has identified the perpetuation of disparaging imagery about charitable sock-knitting in the historical literature.⁶⁹ However, rather than question this in itself, Grant points to the way in which garment production became better organised and, quoting Peel, he asserts that: 'even shoddily produced goods could be helpful because "many men in the trenches used these unwanted, and often unsuitable,

⁶⁸ Constance Peel, *How we Lived Then, 1914-1918*, p.61.

⁶⁹ Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity*, p.3.

items for cleaning their rifles and wiping their cups and plates.”⁷⁰ Although this seeks a balanced interpretation, it suggests an apologetic approach to Peel’s evidence which, nonetheless, still assumes that re-purposed items were badly made and were produced without reference to need. In Peel’s writing, however, the popular production of knitted items at home is presented as exceeding the necessity for these items on the front line. This suggests that what the front line had to deal with was an *imbalance* in garment distribution. Indeed, in this thesis I argue that poor distribution led to the imbalance in supply and a surplus of items on the front line for certain troops. Thus, Peel’s account does not give us the full picture of the relationship between the popularity of knitting at home and the surplus reported; as supply may in fact have been met with demand, but items were not adequately distributed.

Once examined in detail, a tangle of assumptions can be seen to have been derived from Peel’s accounts of home front knitting. These appear to originate from the fact that historians have not fully interrogated the relationship between Peel’s observations - her selectivity - and her use of evidence. In *How We Lived Then, 1914-1918*, Peel maintains a balanced authorial voice, mixing humour with sincerity and pathos; however, she is also flippant, sketchy in her observations, and her use of hearsay is prolific. Peel intersperses her writing of *How We Lived Then, 1914-1918* and *Life’s Enchanted Cup* with both anecdote and testimony, often without distinguishing which is which. One example of the license that Peel takes in characterising events can be seen by the way that she describes early war knitting:

⁷⁰ Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity*, p.3.

We knitted at theatres, in trains and trams, in parks and parlours, in the intervals of eating in restaurants, of serving in canteens. Men knitted, children knitted, a little girl promoted to four needles asked anxiously of her mother, "Mummie, do you think I shall live to finish this sock?".

Peel's reference to a young girl knitting a sock is amusingly recounted; however, the same scene was presented in a cartoon in *Punch* on 30th September 1914, (Figure 3.3.), and it is unclear whether Peel's account comes from life or from her recollection of popular culture.⁷¹

⁷¹ Cartoon by G. Jennis, *Punch*, 30 September 1914, p.277.

Fig. 3.3.



'Mabel: "Mother, Dear! I do hope this war won't be over before I finish my sock!'. Cartoon by G. Jennis *Punch*, 30th September 1914, p.277.

The reason Peel's flexible approach to evidence has not been questioned in any detail to date may be because the account that she presents is amusing: her observations are personalised, gently witty and they have retained their popular appeal.⁷² It has therefore not been seen as necessary in histories of war needlework to verify Peels claims to any extent, since they are presented as autobiographical. However, this chapter has shown how Peel's observations have led historians to a number of assumptions and generalisations about war time knitting. One of the most prevalent of these is the assertion that war effort knitting was a short-lived phase. This is suggested by Peel's conclusive summary about war knitting:

And then at last wool became so dear that many of us could no longer afford to buy it, and as time went on there was sterner work than knitting for us to do.⁷³

Peel does not present knitting as sustained war work, and indeed, late-war knitting and sewing working parties, where wool was supplied, are not referred to in her chapters on women's war work.⁷⁴ Peel's reference is primarily to a passing trend which reinforces the general characterisation of war needlework as a mania, fad, or phase.

However, as this thesis will show in forthcoming chapters, knitting and sewing for the war effort continued throughout the war, becoming both professional and integrated into the late-war charitable war effort. Peel's account, I would argue, should be seen in the light of her own *preferences* regarding war needlework. Although it is apparent in her writing that Peel was herself a knitter, she did not continue with knitting for the

⁷² Peel's story about the child knitting the sock is also referred to as one of Peel's recollections in Lucinda Gosling, *Knitting for Tommy: Keeping the Great War Soldier Warm*, p.11.

⁷³ Constance Peel, *How we Lived Then, 1914-1918*, p.61.

⁷⁴ See Constance Peel, "The Work Women Did", and "More and More Women are Wanted", *How We Lived Then 1914-1918*, p.105-137.

war effort in the long term. Yet, Peel's personal experience and decision seems to have been generalised as the history of war effort needlework. In this way, Adlington has summarised general experience when she states that:

The knitting mania languished when wool supplies ran low...and when more heavy-duty demands were made of women in the textile industries.⁷⁵

It is Peel's description of turning away from knitting to 'sterner work' that is most misleading, as it implies that there was a cessation of knitting in the later war because it was not considered serious enough for war work. Once this is understood to be Peel's *own* response, and not the view of all women, or indeed the view of the War Office's Director General of Voluntary Organisations during the war, the need to seek further information about war effort knitting beyond the early war years comes into focus. It is the mix of biography, anecdote, testimony and comical observation that continue to make the writing of Constance Peel fresh, readable and entertaining today; however, this composition also means that her observations can be incomplete, comically structured, biographical and impressionistic. This does not make them in any way invalid, but it does mean that they need to be approached critically and contextually: they do not tell the whole story of war needlework.

Humour and First World War needlework

Although Peel's light-hearted approach to war knitting has retained its appeal in the history of First World War needlework, where her humour has been popularly represented in the historic record, humour and how it presents war needlework

⁷⁵ Lucy Adlington, *Great War Fashion: Tales From the History Wardrobe*, p.108.

warrants a more complex reading. In his study of pictorial humour in the British and French press during the First World War, Pierre Purseigle acknowledges that it is a difficult prospect to define humour; however, following the theorisation of Arthur Koestler, he suggests that:

As far as the jokes are concerned, the logic of laughter and humour thus stems from the collision, the confusion or the entanglement of 'previously unconnected matrices' of thought and experiences.⁷⁶

What this suggests is that humour lies in the idiosyncratic and in the presentation of opposites. It is in contrast and contradiction or the joining of potentially unrelated subjects. The juxtaposition of the subjects of war and needlework serve in this instance as the joining of 'unconnected matrices': it makes a good joke. A sense of the ridiculous, however fond, appears to lie in the juxtaposition of needlework and war. Within this humorous contrast, Peel's comments, which highlight the alternative use of knitted items on the front line, have been taken to illustrate the distance or opposites between the home and front line. Humorous comparison thus emphasises the juxtaposition of binaries - female (needlework) and male (front line war) - and due to the popularity of the joke, the associated gendered characterisation of female mania and irrational behaviour against male rational purposefulness goes unquestioned. In this chapter, however, I argue that humour about war needlework does not necessarily represent or enforce a polarity.

⁷⁶ Pierre Purseigle, 'Mirroring societies at war: pictorial humour in the British and French popular press during the First World War', *Journal of European Studies*, 31, 2001, p.302.

The role of humour in analyses of the First World War is one that has not received much attention in academia until relatively recently.⁷⁷ Edward Madigan has pointed out that:

although humour was a central, almost defining component of troop culture during the war, and evidently tells us something about combat mentalities, historians, with some exceptions, have given it scant attention.⁷⁸

Recent studies of First World War humour have focused, however, on the form of front line humour during the war and the *differences* between humour on the front line and the home front. In his study of First World War combat courage, humour and identity, Madigan has suggested that 'chivalry and dignified self-sacrifice resonated strongly with civilians' on the home front, whilst on the front line 'a robust rejection of victimhood and an emphasis on perseverance, articulately expressed through humour, became the new ideal of courage'.⁷⁹ Madigan therefore considers humour to define the distinction between the front line and home front, where:

each group responded to the dynamics of a very novel form of warfare by imagining and constructing an ideal of courage that corresponded with its own distinctive set of experiences and concerns.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Edward Madigan, "Sticking to a Hateful Task": Resilience, Humour, and British Understandings of Combat Courage, 1914-1918', *War in History*, 20:1, 2013, p.76-98; Pierre Purseigle, 'Mirroring societies at war: pictorial humour in the British and French popular press during the First World War', p.289-328; Tim Cook, "I will meet the world with a smile and a joke": Canadian Soldiers' Humour in the Great War', *Canadian Military History*, 22:2, 2013, p.48-62.

⁷⁸ Edward Madigan, "Sticking to a Hateful Task": Resilience, Humour, and British Understandings of Combat Courage, 1914-1918', p.94.

⁷⁹ Edward Madigan, "Sticking to a Hateful Task": Resilience, Humour, and British Understandings of Combat Courage, 1914-1918', p.76.

⁸⁰ Edward Madigan, "Sticking to a Hateful Task": Resilience, Humour, and British Understandings of Combat Courage, 1914-1918', p.98.

Tim Cook has similarly suggested that there was a separation between front line humour and the home front, exemplified in anti-heroic representations by artists such as Bruce Bairnsfather.⁸¹ Cook suggests that this distinction was deliberate:

Soldiers embraced the antiheroic in their comedy, songs, and skits because it allowed them to distance themselves from those at home, and reinforce the bonds that strengthened their own insulated society.⁸²

Cook argues that: ‘the antihero played against the constructed civilian image that equated all servicemen with selfless heroics’.⁸³ It is questionable, however, whether humour *facilitated* such clear-cut distinctions between the home front and front line. Much of the anti-heroic humour observed in the cartoons of Bruce Bairnsfather formed a parody of front line hierarchy and policy, and as such they provided a critical commentary on the front line that would exclude aspects of front line military establishment by deliberation, but they would exclude the home front by default. This suggests that front line humour was not necessarily *anti*-home front, but rather, it was front line focused. Another significant point to consider is that critiques of the home front did not necessarily emanate from the front line: in many cases it was the home front which produced this humour. Purseigle notes how cartoons could work as ‘implicit self-criticism’ and ‘as chastisement, part of a complex of policing

⁸¹ Captain Bruce Bairnsfather, (1887-1959), served in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment from 1914 to 1918. He illustrated cartoons about front line life which were published in weekly instalments titled ‘Fragments from France’ in *The Bystander* magazine throughout the war. For the collection of illustrations by Bruce Bairnsfather see Mark Marsay ed., *The Bairnsfather Omnibus: Bullets and Billets and From Mud to Mufti*, North Yorkshire, Great Northern Publishing, 2000; and Mark Marsay ed., *The 2nd Bairnsfather Omnibus: Bairnsfather Case, Fragments from his Life, Somme Battle Stories*, North Yorkshire, Great Northern Publishing, 2000.

⁸² Tim Cook, “‘I will meet the world with a smile and a joke’ Canadian Soldiers’ Humour in the Great War”, p.58.

⁸³ Tim Cook, “‘I will meet the world with a smile and a joke’ Canadian Soldiers’ Humour in the Great War”, p.58.

devices'.⁸⁴ First World War humour could critique attitudes which were present on the home front and the front line, neither of which was homogenous, and it could emanate from either. Referring to cartoons depicting war needlework in *Punch*, this chapter will now show that First World War humour should not automatically be read as derogatory of war knitting, or as indicating a distance between home front activity and front line needs. Rather, the humour surrounding war needlework could take the form of home front *self-criticism*, and it could also create connections between the front line and home front.

Punch

An influential source of humorous imagery of First World War needlework production is to be found in the British weekly social and political satire magazine, *Punch: The London Charivari*.⁸⁵ From the start of the war, *Punch* featured cartoons about war knitting which have been popularly reproduced, and referred to, ever since. It is argued here, however, that despite the influence of this imagery in shaping understandings of war effort needlework, the cartoons have not been critically examined in the historical context of war garment making. For this reason, historical readings of them have taken a formulaic format, rather than an investigative or critical approach.

This examination begins with a reappraisal of two of the most popular cartoons depicting war effort garment making, published in *Punch* during the war, Ernest Howard Shepard's, 'The History of a Pair of Mittens', and Shepard's, 'Gallant

⁸⁴ Pierre Purseigle, 'Mirroring societies at war: pictorial humour in the British and French popular press during the First World War', p.304-305.

⁸⁵ *Punch: The London Charivari* was first published in 1841. See Richard Price, *A History of Punch*, London, Collins, 1957.

Attempt by a Member of the British Expeditionary Force to do justice to all his New Year's Gifts'.⁸⁶ In the first instance, this chapter questions the assertion that these cartoons represent poor garment production. It will also be shown, however, that it is misleading to read this imagery as an illustration of home front and front line divisions.

Shepard's cartoon, 'The History of a Pair of Mittens', first featured in *Punch* on 18th November 1914 (Figure 3.4.).⁸⁷ Richard Rutt refers to this cartoon in his history of knitting as an example of the way 'women who had difficulties with their knitting were teased mercilessly'.⁸⁸ Rutt describes 'a desperately anxious woman knitter in two successive stages of distress' and goes on to paraphrase Constance Peel that 'so many knitted goods went to France that men cleaned their rifles and wiped their cups and plates with surplus socks and comforters'. Rutt captions the image: 'The knitting mania of the First World War as treated by E.H. Shepard in *Punch*'.⁸⁹ Rutt's reading of this cartoon therefore suggests that women's needlework efforts were generally ridiculed and characterised by a mania of poor and irregular production.

⁸⁶ E.H. Shepard, 'The History of a Pair of Mittens', *Punch*, 18 November 1914, p.417; and E.H. Shepard, 'Gallant Attempt by a Member of the British Expeditionary Force to do justice to all his New Year's Gifts', *Punch*, 13 January 1915, p.21.

⁸⁷ Ernest Howard Shepard, known as E.H. Shepard, (1879-1976), is best known for his illustrations for the children's books *Winnie the Pooh* and *Wind in the Willows*. He was a frequent contributor to *Punch* both before and during the war. In 1915, in his mid-thirties, he enlisted with the Royal Garrison Artillery and served in France until the end of the war. During this time, he contributed a number of war-related cartoons to *Punch*. His humorous non-*Punch* related depictions of knitting include cartoons of his aunts knitting for charity before the war, see E.H. Shepard, *Drawn from Memory: The Autobiography of E.H. Shepard*, London, Methuen, 2000. Shepard also described the knitted garments he himself wore on the front line in the story 'The Bob Tailed Sheep Dog', published in *The Royal Artillery War Commemoration Book* in 1919, see James Campbell, *Shepard's War: E.H. Shepard, The Man who Drew Winnie-The-Pooh*, London, Michael O'Mara Books Ltd, 2015, p.90.

⁸⁸ Richard Rutt, *A History of Hand Knitting*, p.139.

⁸⁹ Richard Rutt, *A History of Hand Knitting*, p.139.

Fig. 3.4.



THE HISTORY OF A PAIR OF MITTENS.

'The History of a Pair of Mittens'. Cartoon by E.H. Shepard, *Punch*, 18th November 1914, p.417.

Gosling has suggested that the humour of this imagery came about as a reflection of the reality of production:

The results of the nation's knitting endeavours were not always of such a high standard and the comic potential of the frustrated and inexperienced knitter grappling with purl and plain, and the bemused recipients of unrecognisable garments in the trenches, provided fertile subject matter for comic artists in magazines like *Punch* and *The Tatler*.⁹⁰

However, this does not take into account the role of this very early war imagery in fostering a mythology of poor production. Jane Tynan has argued that the imagery of women knitting did have a social role:

Knitting not only produced real material objects for the fighting troops but also conjured up images that reinforced gender roles in wartime. Images of women furiously knitting socks recreated an idealized version of the past.⁹¹

It is not clear precisely which visual representations Tynan is referring to; however, Shepard's cartoon is arguably the most well-known image of a woman 'furiously' knitting. What this cartoon shows, however, is a woman *who cannot knit*, and it would therefore present an ineffective image of an idealised female gender role.

In the cartoon, published full-page in *Punch*, a young, well dressed, middle class woman is trying to teach herself how to knit a pair of mittens to send to a serving soldier. The prominently placed 'How to Knit' book suggests that this is the first time that she has tried knitting, and her frustration with the task is clear. In the second half of the cartoon, the irregularly-sized mittens held up by her soldier recipient confirm

⁹⁰ Lucinda Gosling, *Knitting For Tommy: Keeping the Great War Soldier Warm*, p.19.

⁹¹ Jane Tynan, *British Army Uniform and the First World War*, p.83.

the beginner level of the woman's knitting skills; however, the soldier's ingenious use of her efforts suggests an affectionate appreciation of a well-meant gift and a wish to put it to use. Rather than simply drawing amusement from the woman's worthless or ridiculous effort, this cartoon suggests that the humour lies in the affection with which the soldier rates her *intention* to provide something useful. The soldier's willingness to find a use for the garments would imply that, in this example, the successful performance of knitting was not what mattered: knitting is not shown to be an idealised or particularly successful act of femininity; rather, its value appears to be as a means of creating a bond between the woman at home and the man serving.

Notably, the knitting and crochet specialist Flora Klickmann, who authored several books teaching home needlework between 1912 and 1921, reproduced the cartoon 'by permission of the Proprietors of "Punch"' in *The Girl's Own Annual* in 1915. In her role as editor, Klickmann noted in a caption below the reproduction: 'The Editor is so pained at these "shocking revelations," as recently depicted by "Mr Punch," that she will shortly be bringing out a book on knitting'.⁹² Klickmann clearly did not take the cartoon to be a criticism of *her* knitting instruction manuals, and she took the opportunity to advertise her latest guide.⁹³ The cartoon 'The History of a Pair of Mittens' was therefore not taken to be a criticism by one of the home front's most popular knitting instructors.

⁹² Flora Klickmann, ed. *The Girl's Own Annual*, 36, London, Office of The Girl's Own Paper & Woman's Magazine, 1915, p.303. My thanks to Hannah Wroe who drew my attention to Klickmann's reproduction of Shepard's cartoon.

⁹³ The forthcoming book referred to is Flora Klickmann, ed. *The Modern Knitting Book: A Book of Ideas for Knitted Under-wear, Coats and Wraps, Caps and Hoods, Babies' and Children's Garments, Socks and Stockings, also New Patterns in Fancy Knitting*, London, The Home Art Series, Office of The Girl's Own Paper & Woman's Magazine, 1915.

Fig. 3.5.



'Gallant Attempt by a Member of the British Expeditionary Force to do justice to all his New Year's Gifts'. Cartoon by E.H. Shepard, *Punch*, 13th January 1915, p.21.

Another popular *Punch* cartoon which shows war knitting is 'Gallant Attempt by a Member of the British Expeditionary Force to do justice to all his New Year's Gifts', also by E.H. Shepard (Figure 3.5). First published in *Punch* on 13th January 1915, this cartoon shows a soldier wearing a layered assortment of home-made garments including a knitted scarf; balaclava; mittens; jumper; body belt; and socks, as well as home-made shirts and fluffy boots. He smokes cigarettes, a cigar, and a pipe; all gifts from home. Gosling has described this imagery when she suggests that:

though some socks might have one or two dropped stitches and some mufflers might unravel, the image of the British Tommy in the trenches, wrapped up against the cold in an array of helmets, balaclavas, scarves and sweaters, has become a familiar one.⁹⁴

However, although this cartoon can be taken to illustrate over enthusiastic production in war effort knitting, it does not suggest the under-par poor production that Gosling refers to. Indeed, what has been overlooked is the way in which this cartoon presents a satire of *concentrated distribution* and affectionate gift-giving more than poor production. This thesis has shown how, over the winter of 1914 to 1915, soldiers did not receive equal amounts of garments from home front supplies, with some receiving too many and others not enough. In this cartoon we do not see poor production: all of the garments worn are well-made; nor do we see discarded items, but we do see an *over-abundance* of items.

The two *Punch* cartoons by E.H. Shepard examined here were published between November 1914 and January 1915, and as such, they are a satirical comment on the *early* stages of war knitting. However, these cartoons have predominantly been read

⁹⁴ Lucinda Gosling, *Knitting For Tommy: Keeping the Great War Soldier Warm*, p.21.

as satires of poor, disorganised and unwanted production, and as an explanation for the assumed diminishment of garment making in the later war. However, this chapter has shown how these cartoons presented concerns of the early war which included the form of the connection between home and front line and the issues related to that connection, such as garment distribution.

Fig. 3.6.



'The Last of the Nuts of Sandy Cove; Or, How to Make Use of Our Stay-At-Homes'. Cartoon by Lewis Baumer, *Punch*, 16th September 1914, p.245.

The satire of *Punch* was also turned towards men at home, and an overlooked topic is how the subject of women's garment making was used to achieve this. On 16th September 1914, just a few weeks into the war, *Punch* featured the cartoon 'The Last of the Nuts of Sandy Cove; Or, How to Make Use of Our Stay-At-Homes', by Lewis Baumer, which depicted an un-enlisted man being used by women as a

mannequin for making night-wear for the wounded (Figure 3.6). In this image, the man is made subject to the women's war industry, and this appears to be his penalty for staying at home. War garment making was, in this way, turned on men at home to accentuate the lack of standing of these men in the war.

Between August 1914 and November 1918, *Punch* featured twenty-one cartoons that specifically referred to war needlework garment making; however, overall, it featured twenty-nine cartoons which referred to knitting or sewing as a *topic* during the war (see Appendix A). Nine of these were published in 1914; and fifteen were published in 1915. There is one cartoon about a nurse sewing for a soldier on a Sunday in 1916; and in 1917 three cartoons refer to war knitting and sewing, but only two of these are about garment making. One is the 1917 cartoon by H. M. Brock, which refers to:

A Long-Sighted Patriot. Aunt Susie (whose charity begins as far as possible from home). "HAVE YOU FOUND OUT WHETHER THEY WEAR KNITTED SOCKS IN ARGENTINA?" [sic].⁹⁵

As Argentina remained neutral during the First World War, this appears to be critical of female charity rather than knitting: not only is the 'aunt' focused on a distanced country, but it is a country that had not entered the war in 1917.⁹⁶ The other cartoon of 1917 shows the Vice-President of a Supply Depot criticising the size of a war bag made by female war workers. However, rather than suggesting poor garment production, it is notable that in this image it is the pettiness of the male supervisor

⁹⁵ 'A Long-Sighted Patriot. Aunt Susie (whose charity begins as far as possible from home). "HAVE YOU FOUND OUT WHETHER THEY WEAR KNITTED SOCKS IN ARGENTINA?"', H.M. Brock, *Punch*, 17 October 1917, p.275.

⁹⁶ See also Roger Gravil, 'The Anglo-Argentine Connection and the War of 1914-1918', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 9:1, 1977, p.59-89.

which is the subject of the joke (Figure 3.7).⁹⁷ By 1917, women's voluntary garment production is shown to be professional and is not to be criticised.

Throughout the whole of 1918 there is only one war knitting cartoon, also by H. M. Brock, which re-issues the early war joke about an aunt knitting an oversized sock for her soldier nephew.⁹⁸ This cartoon of an aunt knitting badly may suggest, on first reading, that there was little change in war effort knitting between the start of the war and the end of the war; however, I would argue that the repetition of the knitting aunt joke simply indicates that there was no new material on war knitting to parody. War effort knitting continued to be a popular activity throughout the war, and as it became more efficient and professionalised the subject was simply not taken up by *Punch* as a fresh or fruitful topic to joke about after 1915.

⁹⁷ F.H.Townsend, 'Win-the War Vice-president of our Supply Depot (doing grand rounds)', *Punch*, 19 September 1917, p.205.

⁹⁸ H.M. Brock, untitled, *Punch*, 23 January 1918, p.61.

Fig. 3.7.



'Win-the-War Vice-President of our Supply Depot (doing grand rounds). "Here again is a fifth glaring example. The hem of this bag is an eighteenth of an inch too wide. Get them all remade. We cannot have the lives of our troops endangered"'. Cartoon by F.H. Townsend, *Punch*, 19th September 1917, p.205.

In his study of war cartoons, Roy Douglas has noted that: 'There is often exaggeration and over-simplification in a cartoon'; however, he observes that it is not possible to censor cartoons 'in a manner which preserves some features and excludes others'.⁹⁹ This chapter has argued that the *Punch* cartoons on war knitting reveal a much more complex relationship between women's needlework production and front line needs. It was a relationship which called for connections, rather than simply presenting polarities and failings. The boundaries between home and front

⁹⁹ Roy Douglas, *'Great Nations Still Enchained': The Cartoonists' Vision of Empire 1848-1914*, London and New York, Routledge, 1993, preface.

line in First World War humour are not as clearly defined as they might at first appear. This is apparent by the way that *Punch* jokes about war knitting appear to be critiques of home front behaviour and war response, and as such they are assumed to align with front line opinion; however, and significantly, *these jokes came from the home front itself*.

Richard Price has commented in his history of *Punch* magazine that the war:

increased the appeal of *Punch* for the public. There were Messes and hospitals and odd times behind the lines in billets. Mothers at home sent *Punch* to their sons at the front [...] At the Armistice *Punch* possessed an enormous amount of affection and good will.¹⁰⁰

This circulation suggests that the jokes in *Punch* were not one sided, or simply at the expense of the home front, but that they formed a dialogue between front line and home - where all were the butt of the jokes.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the absence of a critical approach to the key primary sources on women's early war needlework has led to a formulaic interpretive framework. This formula of interpretation has placed a superficial and prescribed emphasis on early war needlework as a 'mania' which resulted in 'poor production', and it has led to an exclusion of more complex analysis of sources or alternative explanations for action. The associations of the term 'mania' have been attendant, rather than examined, and this has led to a fixed and gendered definition of early war

¹⁰⁰ Richard Price, *A History of Punch*, London, Collins Sons & Co Ltd, 1957, p.223.

needlework as an irrational or mindless activity carried out by women at the start of the war. The humorous associations of mania have compounded this classification, as the appeal of this humour has deflected analysis.

Through re-examination of the primary sources, this chapter has shown that there was discussion and debate early in the war about the form and valuation of 'needlework mania'. Contextual analysis of *The Times* and the song *Sister Susie* show that the labels of mania and poor production were attributed early on, but that these were not simply criticisms of women's behaviour: they also revealed the tensions needlework production caused to the domestic home and they suggested the self-interest of men at home. The 1914 song *Sister Susie*, shows how humour about needlework could also be turned on non-combatant men at home, with needlework representing a threat to men's domestic arrangements.

In re-appraising the writings of Caroline Playne, this chapter has shown how her pacifist agenda exemplified needlework as a disjointed activity un-connected with the real needs of the war. To achieve this, Playne selectively presented needlework at the beginning of the war and she did not question why women took part in it, thereby suggesting it was mindless. This supported Playne's agenda to present the war as irrational. Constance Peel has been approached in this chapter as a source of the humorous representation of poor production. However, it has been shown how her writings suggested surplus production, with criticisms of poor production and rejection by the front line emphasised by subsequent histories. Attention has been paid to Peel's sources - part anecdote, part testimony - and this chapter has argued that the line between biography, factual account and story is blurred in her writings; yet, her commentary on war needlework has been reported in the historiography with very little critique.

Humour plays a significant role in the way First World War needlework has been perceived. However, humour critiquing the home front could come *from* the home front; whilst humour between home and front line did not necessarily equate to division. One of the most effective jokes about war needlework centres on the poor or un-required nature of wartime needlework garment production. This joke has been core to the understanding that the home front was not providing the front line with what it needed or wanted. Analysis of cartoons in *Punch* have shown, however, that rather than simply presenting poor production, these provided humorous commentary on early war connections between home and front line and distribution issues. Humour about war effort needlework in the First World War juxtaposed home needlework and the front line, which, paradoxically, facilitated a connection between the two.

This chapter has examined the origin, form and historical context of the primary sources to argue that alternative readings of early war needlework are not only possible, but desirable. The dominance in the historical literature of interpretive frameworks which assert, but do not examine, needlework as a mania characterised by humorous poor production has meant that the complexity of war needlework has not been fully explored. In forthcoming chapters, it will be shown how war effort needlework formed a dynamic expression and social tool of war response, both at the start of the war and for its duration. These war responses using needlework are not ambiguous and nor are they unknowable; rather, it is their multiplicity which gives that impression.

Chapter Four

War needlework schemes and women's unemployment, 1914-1915

Introduction

In the first few months of the war, women's unemployment was considered a serious problem. Between August and November of 1914, the dismissal of female workers was a notable and immediate response to the declaration of war by some trade and manufacturing industries.¹ Historians have highlighted the way in which the foundation of voluntary needlework schemes constituted a threat to women's employment at the start of the war, particularly to women's jobs in the textile industries. Lucy Adlington has noted how, in York, criticism was made of voluntary garment making by the York Trader's Association who: 'pointed out [these] were actually putting women out of work'.² Peter Grant has also identified how, referring to Queen Mary's Needlework Guild, there was the: 'potential for the work of the Guild to exacerbate unemployment amongst women working in the textile and clothing industries'.³ While in her history of women on the home front, Kate Adie has suggested that once it became clear that Queen Mary's Needlework Guild caused a problem for women's employment, there was a 'swift shift' in Queen Mary's position.⁴

To date, however, no critical study has been made of the relationship between women's unemployment and voluntary needlework garment making schemes at the start of the war. The extent to which the voluntary schemes actually *caused*

¹ Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain*, London, Macmillan Press, First ed. 1992, Second ed. 2000, p.12.

² Lucy Adlington, *Great War Fashion: Tales From the History Wardrobe*, Stroud, Gloucestershire, The History Press, 2013, p.109.

³ Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War*, Oxford and New York, Routledge, 2014, p.38.

⁴ Kate Adie, *Fighting on the Home Front: The Legacy of Women in World War One*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 2013, p.69.

unemployment has not been explored. Using newspaper and magazine articles from the war period; primary source reports on voluntary needlework and needlework employment schemes; the wartime writing of economists; and the biographical writing of working women's advocates, this chapter examines the historical events that shaped the role of early war needlework in women's relief and employment initiatives. Through this examination of women's unemployment at the start of the war, I argue that voluntary garment making schemes should not be seen as a *causal* factor in women's early-war unemployment. By referring to newspaper and magazine reports from 1914-15 and the wartime writing of economists and observers of the needlework schemes, this chapter will show that the loss of employment by women in textile and dress-making trades was an initial and immediate result of the declaration of war. Whilst the *potential* impact war effort needlework schemes *could* have on women's paid employment in textile trades was a subject of widespread debate between August and December of 1914, the *actual* impact caused by these voluntary needlework schemes on women's employment was limited at this time. Indeed, this analysis finds that the provision of employment to women was a formative motive for the foundation of Queen Mary's Needlework Guild's (QMNG) voluntary garment making scheme.

As with previous chapters, this chapter questions prevailing negative historical assumptions about needlework at the start of the war; however, it also develops the argument that needlework held a purposeful and meaningful role. Specifically, this chapter will show how needlework formed a significant economic and political activity at the start of the war. The origin and chronology of early war criticisms of voluntary needlework schemes are traced in this chapter. It will be shown how in 1914, war effort needlework quickly became a political and social tool for working women's

organisations, and that in order to further their interests, working women's representatives sought to reduce and, as far as possible, exclude war needlework by charitable enterprise, particularly the work of QMNG. An examination of newspaper articles shows how critics disparaged the work and the intentions of middle class female needlework volunteers and made a comparison between *poor* voluntary needlework production and *good* employed needlework production. Critics also drew comparison with the controversial legacy of voluntary garment production during the Boer War, placing First World War garment making in a disadvantageous position from the very start. This chapter will show how these criticisms came directly, vocally and immediately from women's political and social organisations which were motivated by a wish to ensure that middle class voluntary garment production did not jeopardise the employment prospects of working class women. Working women's organisations, composed themselves largely of middle class women, made the case that female middle class volunteers did not possess the skills required to make the garments that were necessary: the poor quality versus good quality comparison formed a core component of the argument that voluntary production was unnecessary and that war needlework should be left to professional manufacture.

Despite the antagonism that working women's representatives felt towards voluntary needlework schemes, it will be evidenced that there came to be a sophisticated synergy between Queen Mary's Needlework Guild (QMNG); the Central Committee on Women's Employment (CCWE); and the Queen's Work for Women Fund (QWWF). Referring to primary source correspondence, it will be shown how the middle class, female members of the CCWE defined the roles and remits of middle and upper-class female volunteers of the QWWF to deliberately restrict them to fund-raising; whilst the CCWE also attempted to reduce middle class voluntary garment

production by QMNG in favour of prioritising working women's production. In this way, needlework was used to further women's various causes, whilst the focus of these causes could align, oppose or contradict one another.

Although war needlework formed a significant social and political tool for furthering working women's interests, it will be shown how needlework did not necessarily come naturally to many unemployed working class women. Biographical sources demonstrate how there were divisions between working women's advocates over how war needlework would best serve the needs of women, with the women's trade unionist Mary Macarthur and the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW) representative Margaret Bondfield on one side and the suffrage campaigner Sylvia Pankhurst on the other; and that war needlework provided both a cause and a forum for these political debates. However, this chapter will argue that historical conflation has meant that the flaws in the needlework *employment* schemes have, over time, erroneously been attributed to QMNG's *voluntary* scheme; thus, further compounding the negative criticisms of First World War voluntary needlework production.

An examination of the organisation and functions of QMNG concludes this chapter. By referring to the published war report of QMNG, I argue that QMNG had a complex and efficient system of production. QMNG was more class-inclusive and home front relief focused than has previously been portrayed in the historical record; while negative connotations of 'middle class sock-knitters' have undermined and misrepresented the reputation of both middle class sock knitters and charitable enterprise in First World War history.

Women's unemployment on the outbreak of War, 1914

As it looked back on the first year of the war in August 1915, *The Gentlewoman* magazine described how at the start:

Men and women were thrown out of work from countless industries depending upon foreign trade, which derived their raw materials from countries involved in the War, or which existed to supply luxuries for which orders were no longer forthcoming.⁵

Those working in what were termed 'luxury' trades, including the garment making industry, were particularly vulnerable in the first months of the war. The American economist and sociologist Edith Abbott has described how at the start of the war:

The so-called "luxury trades" all over the country, and particularly in London, were terribly depressed as a result of the so-called "panic economy" that followed the outbreak of war, and these were also "women's trades." In dressmaking, millinery, blouse-making, and similar trades employment was practically at a standstill; and large numbers of women clerks, domestic servants, charwomen, actresses, typists, manicurists, and other "toilet-specialty" employees were suddenly thrown out of work.⁶

In October 1914, however, the Board of Trade made the observation that the immediate discharge of workers from industries at the outbreak of war was 'largely precautionary' and was: 'due to the uncertainty as to the conditions under which

⁵ Press cutting, *The Gentlewoman*, 21 August 1915. IWM, WWC, EMP 2.2.

⁶ Edith Abbott, 'The War and Women's Work in England', *Journal of Political Economy*, 25:7, 1917, p.642. Edith Abbott (1876-1957) campaigned in America for social work education alongside her sister Grace Abbott (1878-1939). See <http://spartacus-educational.com/USAWabbottE.htm>. Accessed 12 May 2019.

trade would be carried on in war time'.⁷ The early-war employment situation was grave for women in particular, and Abbott noted that whilst unemployed men could quickly find economic relief by joining up: 'mobilization failed to offer an immediate opening for unemployed women, but actually aggravated their plight'.⁸ She observed how, as a result of familial male unemployment, wives and female dependents faced the prospect of joining an already enlarged female workforce searching for jobs.⁹

On 15th August 1914, concern for the unemployed of the garment making industry motivated *The Times* editorial to issue a 'Plea for the Paid Worker', which tried to encourage women into purchasing items rather than making them, suggesting:

to those of our readers who are so naturally and charitably eager to *do* something for their country, that there may be cases in which it would be truer and a more useful charity to spend money on having things made than time on making them [italics in the original].¹⁰

However, the editorial acknowledged that 'this subject has received the serious attention of her Majesty and the Council of Queen Mary's Needlework Guild since the formation of the scheme', adding that it 'has always been the Queen's sincere wish to give employment to those who may be thrown out of work on account of the war'.¹¹ Thus, although *The Times* advised readers to have things made rather than to make them, it identified women's employment as a priority of QMNG, associating QMNG with the remedy and not the cause of women's unemployment. The priority of

⁷ *Report of the Board of Trade on the State of Employment in the United Kingdom in October 1914*, Cd 7703, 21, 1914-1915, p.15.

⁸ Edith Abbott, 'The War and Women's Work in England', p.642.

⁹ Edith Abbott, 'The War and Women's Work in England', p.642.

¹⁰ 'How to be Useful in War Time', *The Times*, 15 August 1914, Issue 40605, p.9.

¹¹ 'How to be Useful in War Time', *The Times*, 15 August 1914, Issue 40605, p.9.

enabling women's employment is also evident in the first appeal of QMNG to its presidents:

to try, in addition to organizing working parties in their own divisions, to give employment, when possible, to those who, owing to the war, may find themselves in need of employment.¹²

The phrase 'thrown out of work' by the war was used repeatedly to describe the unemployment crisis during the first months of the conflict. In *The Times*, it was used two days into the war, on 6th August 1914, in a newly created column 'How to be Useful in War Time: Advice and Suggestions'. In this early war article, the phrase indicated the hardship of those in the thick of the conflict, as it envisaged the *potential* of unemployment in battle zone areas:

Instead of dwelling on your own privations think of the infinitely worse state of those who live at the seat of war and are not only thrown out of work but deprived of all they possess.¹³

In subsequent weeks, however, the phrase was used in *The Times* to describe *actual* unemployment, male and female, witnessed on the home front; and by October of 1914, it was almost exclusively used to describe the unemployment of women which arose as a result of the war.¹⁴

¹² 'The Queen's Guild: Work to be Started Immediately', *The Times*, 11 August 1914, Issue 40601, p.9.

¹³ 'How to be Useful in War-Time: Advice and Suggestions: Practical Patriotism', *The Times*, 6 August, 1914, p.3.

¹⁴ For the anticipation of unemployment, see 'Organizing Help', *The Times*, 14 August 1914, p.7; For the use of the term 'thrown out of work', see *The Times*, 6 August, 1914, p.3; *The Times*, 15 August 1914, Issue 40605, p.9; *The Times* 17 August 1914, Issue 40607, p.11; *The Times*, 20 August 1914, Issue 40610, p.7; *The Times*, 7 September 1914, Issue 40628, p.12; *The Times*, 20 October 1914, Issue 40671, p.9; and *The Times*, 24 October 1914, Issue 40675, p.9.

The word 'thrown', suggestive of hasty disregard on the part of employers, implies an action that is unfair to the women concerned, and the phrase has been repeated without much critique in a number of references to the women's unemployment crisis of the first few months of the war, including in more recent historical studies.¹⁵

However, this chapter argues that the treatment of women workers in the first months of the war was immediately projected to the forefront of debate in 1914 by suffragist and working women's organisations, and the unfairness of women's early war unemployment was loudly objected to at the start of the war. This objection, from women's social and political organisations, presented voluntary war needlework by middle class women as a major contributor to women's unemployment.

On 15th August 1914, the suffragist journalist, Nina Boyle, representing the Women's Freedom League (WFL), levelled criticism directly at garment making volunteers:¹⁶

Several daily and weekly papers are giving out paper patterns, so that women can make shirts and other articles. Does it not strike the public that a number of wholesale and retail firms keep an army of people at work in making just such things, and that if there is any extra demand for them now it may make just the difference between discharging workers or keeping them on? Every woman who has means and leisure, and who rushes into this kind of 'help' to ease her

¹⁵ See Edith Abbott, 'The War and Women's Work in England', p.656; James Pope-Hennessy, *Queen Mary 1867-1953*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1959, p.489; Ian Beckett, *Home Front 1914-1918: How Britain Survived the Great War*, London, The National Archives, 2006, p.66; Lucy Adlington, *Great War Fashion: Tales From the History Wardrobe*, p.108.

¹⁶ The Women's Freedom League was not the only suffragist women's organisation to criticise middle class women's charitable garment making at the beginning of the war. In October 1914, Clementina Black, the Vice President of the London Society of Women's Suffrage (LSWS) and former Secretary of the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) also publicly objected to middle and upper-class women sewing garments for the troops at the expense of working women. See Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain Since 1914*, p.12.

own desire to 'do something' is helping to increase, not decrease, the national burden.¹⁷

In this, Boyle does not simply point out how charitable endeavour threatens an economic priority, she is judgemental and disapproving of the apparently selfish motives of women with 'means and leisure' who are, she suggests, only looking to make themselves feel better by rushing to do war work.¹⁸ However, the appeal for women to make garments for the war by QMNG was not proposing middle class charitable activity for its own sake. Indeed, the first appeal does not take the form of an ill-considered, vague or self-serving proposal. Rather, it defined a very specific aim and a procedure for garment distribution which would assist *both* those at home and those serving; where the most immediate and clearly defined support was, in fact, offered to women at home.

Boyle goes on to draw parallels with the voluntary production of needlework garments during the Boer War, stating that misguided production led to waste during this conflict:

The waste of material in 'comforts' and so forth that may never be needed that was so painful a feature of the South African War, should be carefully avoided,

¹⁷ 'How to be Useful in War Time: Employment Problems: Volunteer Work: A Warning', *The Times*, 15 August 1914, Issue 40605, p.9. The Women's Freedom League (WFL) was a suffragist organisation, formed in 1907 by members dissenting from the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), the latter led by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst. During the First World War, the President of the WFL was the anti-war suffragist Charlotte Despard, sister of the 1914-1915 Commander in Chief of the British Expeditionary Forces, Sir John French, and thus sister-in-law of Lady French. The WFL maintained an anti-war stance; however, it founded a Woman Suffrage National Aid Corps and worked to support women during the war. Nina Boyle campaigned for the founding of the Women's Police Volunteers in 1914. See Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866-1928*, London and New York, Routledge, 1999, p.720-724.

¹⁸ Nina Boyle makes her case in the same column in *The Times* in which Queen Mary's Needlework Guild had made its first appeal: 'How to be Useful in War Time'.

and it is because of my former experience in the emergency work of a great war that I venture to intervene now.¹⁹

However, the legacy of volunteer garment production from the Boer War was not unknown to Queen Mary at the start of the war, and according to her lady in waiting, Lady Bertha Dawkins, the Queen expressly:

did not “want to have that state of things which prevailed during the Boer War”. As Duchess of York she had been shocked by the amateurish and unco-ordinated efforts of the volunteer ladies’ organisations which had haphazardly despatched to the Cape “comforts” which the soldiers did not want, while failing to provide the necessities which they did.²⁰

The way in which voluntary garment production during the Boer War affected the reception of First World War production has not been critically examined in the history of First World War needlework; however, it is argued here that it had a significant influence, as First World War volunteer garment making was burdened with a problematic legacy from Boer War production *from the very start*. This legacy immediately affected how it was perceived and enabled powerful early criticisms of volunteer garment making schemes in 1914. These were made despite the best efforts of QMNG to show that it was run along different lines.

From the first months of the war, the cause of women’s unemployment was quickly taken up by working women’s advocate organisations, and an influential lobby

¹⁹ Nina Boyle, ‘How to be Useful in War Time: Employment Problems: Volunteer Work: A Warning’, *The Times*, 15 August 1914, Issue 40605, p.9.

²⁰ Lady Bertha Dawkins is quoted directly in quotation marks by James Pope-Hennessy in his biography of Queen Mary. Much of Pope-Hennessy’s biography is constructed with oral history of this type. See James Pope-Hennessy, *Queen Mary 1867-1953*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1959, p.488. Lady Bertha Dawkins was also the Treasurer of QMNG and attended the first meeting on 10th August 1914. See *Queen Mary’s Needlework Guild: Its Work During the Great War, St James’s Palace, 1914-1919*, London and Wealdstone, George Pulman & Sons, 1920.

formed which was critical of the voluntary garment making of middle class women. What is striking about this vocal lobby, however, is that it was in itself composed mainly, although not exclusively, of middle class women. Despite the stated objective of QMNG to help women find employment, the scheme to make garments for the war came under immediate criticism from working women's advocates. On 5th August 1914, representatives of working women established the War Emergency Workers' National Committee to consider the effect of the war on working women.²¹ On the executive committee was Mary Macarthur, the secretary of the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL), and her colleague in the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW), Margaret Bondfield, who was also an active campaigner for the Women's Cooperative Guild (WCG) (Figures 4.1 and 4.2). Together, they strongly opposed the garment making scheme of QMNG:

on the grounds that the already serious unemployment among women would probably become worse if any national scheme were promoted to supplant paid workers by volunteers.²²

Edith Abbott observes that the:

committee took a firm stand in opposition to the appeals which were being sent out urging women to volunteer for work rendered necessary by the war when more than half a million women were out of employment.²³

Macarthur's antagonism towards women's early war garment making can be understood, when we consider that it was two-fold: firstly, she opposed the activity

²¹ Edith Abbott, 'The War and Women's Work in England', p.647.

²² Edith Abbott, 'The War and Women's Work in England', p.647.

²³ Edith Abbott, 'The War and Women's Work in England', p.647.

as a form of charity garment distribution *towards women*; and secondly, she defined it as an activity which deprived working women of employment in garment making trades. However, Macarthur's criticisms of the early initiative of QMNG have largely overshadowed the fact that Queen Mary, and a number of philanthropic women in war garment schemes, including Lady French, shared Macarthur's aim to ensure that women achieved self-sufficiency through employment in the garment making schemes.

The objections to the QMNG scheme brought a quick response from Queen Mary on 17th August 1914, in which she explained that:

There has been evident misunderstanding about the aims of the Queen's Needlework Guild, some people feeling alarmed at the possibility that to invoke the voluntary aid of women workers would tend to restrict the employment of other women in dire need of paid work. Voluntary aid was meant to supplement and not to supplant paid labour, and, as was indicated in *The Times* of Saturday, one of the Queen's very first cares when the Guild appeal was decided upon was to avoid the infliction of hardship.²⁴

Queen Mary arranged to meet with the 'industrial experts and representatives of working class women', led by Macarthur, to consult with them about: 'a plan which she [Queen Mary] had had under contemplation for some days'.²⁵ This was an initiative to collect money which would be used to support work programmes for unemployed women. Queen Mary took the opportunity of this meeting to confirm

²⁴ 'The Queen and Unemployed Women. Plan to Finance Work Schemes', *The Times*, 17 August 1914, p.10.

²⁵ Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Mary Macarthur: A Biographical Sketch*, London, Leonard Parsons Ltd, 1925, p.137.

once more that voluntary needlework was to be supplementary and not supplant paid labour.²⁶

On 20th August 1914, at Queen Mary's request, the Home Secretary appointed the Central Committee on Women's Employment (CCWE), with Macarthur as the Secretary. The objectives of the CCWE were: 'to consider, and from time to time report upon, schemes for the provision of work for women and girls unemployed on account of the war'.²⁷ A short time later, on 4th September 1914, Queen Mary announced the founding of the Queen's Work for Women Fund (QWWF), also with Macarthur as Secretary, which would raise money for women's employment in 'the firm belief that prevention of distress is better than its relief and that employment is better than charity'.²⁸ The designation of a body for women's employment issues, affiliated to Queen Mary, suggests that a distinction is being made between voluntary and paid activities. However, philanthropic women and working women's representatives were actually motivationally aligned at the start of the war, both sharing the purpose of achieving paid needlework employment for women. It was necessary for this to be strategically downplayed by Macarthur, however, as she needed to make a clear distinction between women's voluntary and paid labour, with the argument that charitable needlework caused damage to women's employment.

²⁶ Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Mary Macarthur: A Biographical Sketch*, p.137.

²⁷ Edith Abbott, 'The War and Women's Work in England', p.647.

²⁸ *The Times*, 4 September 1914, Issue 40625, p.9.

Fig. 4.1.



Mary MacArthur in December 1918. ©*Illustrated London News*.

In late 1914, the objections to philanthropic middle class women in the war garment making schemes secured control for the women's trade union and working women's representatives, under the CCWE, of women's war employment schemes, including

war needlework schemes. This meant that contracts and commissions for war garments as well as needlework training in newly founded Queen Mary's Workshops would be managed by the CCWE, who would arrange to pay women to produce items.²⁹ Macarthur appears to acknowledge receipt of this control in a letter that she wrote to Queen Mary on 20th August 1914, after the foundation of the CCWE, in which she thanks the Queen 'on behalf of the working women'.³⁰ By this arrangement, middle class voluntary war effort garment production was to be peripheral and supplementary, as the employment schemes would have first claim on supplying garment orders related to front line needs.

Within the QWWF, the fund-raising body for women's employment schemes, middle and upper-class women's control and influence over fundraising finances was also removed. Macarthur's role as Secretary to this body placed her in a position which oversaw the charitable work of well-known society women, including Princess Victoria; and also upper-class women in regional Queen's Collecting Committees.³¹ The money raised by the QWWF was to be: 'applied exclusively to the assistance of schemes promoted by the Central Committee on Women's Employment'.³² Thus, although the money was raised by society women, the decision-making authority over the use of the funds lay entirely with the CCWE, whose members were the advocates of working women's interests. This indicates the arm's length position in which members of the CCWE wished to hold middle class philanthropic women: the

²⁹ 'The Work of the Fund', *The Times*, 10 October 1914, Issue 40661, p.3.

³⁰ Letter from Mary Macarthur to Queen Mary, 20 August 1914. *Royal Archives*, Windsor Castle, RA QM/PRIV/CC49/28.

³¹ Letter from Mary Macarthur, dated '1914'; stamped WER1 PRD 14; *Women's Work Collection*, IWM EMP 3.11.

³² *The Times*, 4 September 1914, p.9.

CCWE used the fund-raising capacity of society women, but they removed any influence or say that these women might have over how the funds were distributed.

However, members of the CCWE still felt some disquiet over the influence of upper middle class women in the employment scheme. In a circular addressed to Queen Mary, dated '1914', Macarthur feels it necessary to clarify that the women involved in fund-raising are not responsible for the employment schemes:

It has been brought to the notice of the Central Committee on Women's Employment that some misapprehension exists in a number of cases as to the scope of the responsibility of the Local Committees of the Queen's Work for Women Fund [...] the object in appointing these Committees was to collect money to finance schemes for the provision of work for unemployed women, and that it was not intended to ask them to undertake the quite different duties of administration, such as the establishment or supervision of workrooms.³³

Macarthur explains that Women's Employment Sub-Committees will be responsible for administering local employment schemes, not the Queen's Collecting Committees; and the Employment Sub Committees: 'you will observe, must be thoroughly representative and must include a strong representation of women from working class industrial organisations.'³⁴ In specifying this exclusion, Macarthur appears nervous about the potential influence of philanthropic fund-raising women, and this concern is also apparent in her directive that members of the Queen's Collecting Committee could only be appointed to the Employment Sub Committees if

³³ Letter from Mary Macarthur, dated '1914', stamped WER1 PRD 14. IWM, WWC, EMP 3.11.

³⁴ Letter from Mary Macarthur, dated '1914'. IWM, WWC, EMP 3.11.

they possessed experience in, and knowledge of, representing working women, and only 'subject to this condition'.³⁵

The role distinction that the CCWE makes between middle class and society women and women active in representing working women therefore ensured the containment of the former. This restricted, rather than reformed, the work of philanthropic women, as it attempted to exclude them from both the practice of war effort needlework and from influencing war needlework employment.³⁶ It gave philanthropic middle class and society women a 'hands-off' role, simply as fund-raisers. Martin Pugh has observed that for financially well-off women: 'the immediate effect of war was to increase the already considerable scope for philanthropic work', as: 'the sudden sense of national crisis lent a new urgency and a higher prestige to this traditional activity'.³⁷ However, this was not the experience of the philanthropic middle class women who took to the traditional activity of organising needlework garment making schemes at the start of the war. As this chapter shows, their efforts could be met with vocal discouragement, criticism, containment and exclusion. In the context of voluntary needlework, the scope for philanthropic women's work was made highly prescriptive by working women's advocates.

³⁵ Letter from Mary Macarthur, dated '1914'. IWM, WWC, EMP 3.11.

³⁶ For a study of similar complex debates surrounding the power of monied women in the American women's suffrage movement and women's philanthropy during this period, see Joan Marie Johnson, *Funding Feminism: Monied Women, Philanthropy, and the Women's Movement, 1870-1967*, Carolina, University of North Carolina Press, 2017.

³⁷ Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain Since 1914*, 2015, p.3.

Synergies between the Central Committee on Women's Employment, the Queen's Work for Women Fund, and Queen Mary's Needlework Guild

Whilst the CCWE, the QWWF and QMNG were designated as distinct entities, there were, nonetheless, synergies between them. The women employed in sock manufacturing by the CCWE's Queen Mary's Workshops made socks which were then distributed by QMNG in response to requests that the QMNG had received.

This arrangement was to ensure that there was no competition with existing manufacture:

The necessity of avoiding competition, direct or indirect, with normal trade was emphasized; stress was laid, not only on the fact that the articles made should not be offered for sale, but also on the fact that they should not even be distributed free to persons with purchasing power.³⁸

QMNG secured manufacturing contracts which were then allocated by the CCWE to women in the workshops, or to women in textile factories and dressmaking businesses. This included allocating the production of 75,000 wool body belts from the War Office contract for Lord Kitchener in September 1914, to provide employment for women in the carpet trade 'in Kidderminster, Belfast, and elsewhere'.³⁹

Meanwhile, the QWWF raised money which was used by the CCWE to pay women receiving training in the workshops, or to pay women to manufacture items

³⁸ Edith Abbott, 'The War and Women's Work in England', p.649.

³⁹ Edith Abbott, 'The War and Women's Work in England', p.652. On 15th November 1914, *The Observer* reported in its article 'War Appeals. The Queen's Fund for Belts and Socks' that: 'Eighty thousand knitted belts for the Queen's present to the troops at the front have been procured through the Central Committee on Women's Employment. Work has been found by this means for large numbers of women in Kidderminster, Stroud, Belfast, London and other places. 'War Appeals. The Queen's Fund for Belts and Socks', *The Observer*, 15 November 1914, IWM, WWC, SUPP 42/46, 1914.

elsewhere. QMNG also accepted donations of garments made by the public for charitable distribution, and thereby combined charitable and employment manufacture. Each of the three organisations thus had specific responsibilities, keenly guarded by the CCWE; however, their working cohesion with each other has been overlooked in the histories of First World War needlework. What the relationship between these organisations suggests is that ultimately, there was a distinct synergy between charitable and employment enterprise in First World War needlework which formed an efficient partnership, despite the tensions over control and remit.

Needlework as a social, economic and political tool for women's interests in the war

That needlework production should be reserved for working women was an argument that Macarthur pursued well beyond the initial unemployment crisis of the first months of the war. In an article entitled 'The War Problems of the Middle Class Woman', featured in the 8th November 1915 edition of the *Daily Sketch*, she remarked on the misplaced enthusiasm of leisured woman who have been: 'shaken out of themselves, shaken it may be out of idleness and luxury for the first time', and who: 'prefer to tackle some phase of work which is quite beyond them, and for which they have neither the training not the physical aptitude'. Macarthur was in no doubt that: 'their well-meant efforts may be worse than useless, and that, despite their

undoubted earnestness and zeal, they may get in the way, so that they hinder instead of help'.⁴⁰

Macarthur argued that:

to obtain the best results the making of shirts and the like must be taken gently but firmly out of the hands of innumerable Sister Susies and placed in properly equipped factories to be done by trained and efficient labour.⁴¹

Yet, Macarthur's *Daily Sketch* criticism was made at a time when the CCWE was reducing needlework employment schemes. It also post-dates the March 1915 foundation of the Women's War Register of employment and the formation of the Department of the Director General of Voluntary Organisations at the War Office in September 1915.⁴² This suggests that Macarthur continued to deliberately and strategically present a disparaging view of middle class women's garment production as part of a conscious tactic to contain and sustain all garment making as the preserve of working women.

Working women's advocates therefore used war needlework to further women's employment interests at the start of the war by claiming the right of working women to needlework, and they did so at the expense of philanthropic women's charitable

⁴⁰ 'The War Problems of the Middle Class Woman, by Mary Macarthur', *Daily Sketch*, 8 November 1915, p.14. Macarthur used the: 'war-time enthusiasm for the knitting of socks and the making of shirts' as her primary example of middle-class women working beyond their ability. Making garments for relatives was not the problem for Macarthur, it was the: 'indiscriminate transformation of homes into amateur workshops for the making of shirts and socks for the soldiers in general' that Macarthur objected to, and which she described as a 'haphazard and wasteful process'.

⁴¹ 'The War Problems of the Middle Class Woman, by Mary Macarthur', p.14. See this thesis, Chapter Three for details of the popular song that Macarthur references: 'Sister Susie's Making Shirts for Soldiers'.

⁴² For background details about the Women's War Register, see Deborah Thom, *Nice Girls and Rude Girls: Women Workers in World War I*, London, I.B.Tauris, 1998, p.xi and p.56-57. The foundation of the War Office's Director general of Voluntary Organisations is examined in relation to needlework schemes in this thesis in Chapter Six.

garment production. However, the activity of both movements - women's employment advocacy and women's philanthropy - had a deeply rooted tradition of using needlework to relieve women's poverty. Ultimately, both sought to use war needlework as a means of relieving the threat of women's poverty in the war.

The complex way in which needlework could be used to serve women's interests during the war is evident by the diversity of its use. At the start of the war, the pacifist suffrage organisation, the Women's Freedom League (WFL), opened employment-relief garment making workshops for women as a means of ameliorating the effects of a war that it disapproved of.⁴³ Meanwhile, the war-endorsing suffrage body, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), led by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, used a public display of war effort knitting to demonstrate their patriotic support for the war in March 1915.⁴⁴ These organisations held opposing views on the war - pacifist versus pro-militarist - yet, both used needlework to further their suffrage position; demonstrating the strong, yet complex, association of needlework with women's political interests.

The extent to which working women's advocates were willing to mould the practice and symbols of needlework to support their cause is shown by the actions of Macarthur, who despite her own pacifist beliefs, used the patriotic associations of war needlework to further women's interests in 1916 when she cast patriotic sock

⁴³ These workshops were opened towards the end of 1914 and located in London's poorer areas, including Nine Elms, however, they all closed in 1915 with the rise in women's employment options, see Claire Eustance, "'Daring To Be Free": The Evolution of Women's Political Identities in the Women's Freedom League 1907-1930', Unpublished PhD, University of York, 1993, p.256 and p.276.

⁴⁴ This was scathingly reported in the *Anti-Suffrage Review*, which stated: 'They sew and knit comforts for the soldiers, but with such a perpetual running accompaniment of suffragist self-laudation that they might as well embroider the sacred name of Mrs Pankhurst or Mrs Fawcett on every sock and muffler, so as to give notice to the soldiers as well as to the country at large that Suffragism alone has the trademark of thoughtful and benevolent patriotism.' Quoted in Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain Since 1914*, p.12; original quote in *Anti-Suffrage Review* 77, March 1915.

knitting by hand in a supporting role to advance the case for a minimum wage.

Despite a minimum wage agreed by the Munitions Tribunal for munition workers in 'a large firm in the Newcastle area employing 8,000 women', the firm had not received authorisation to pay women workers, and so the women stopped work.⁴⁵ Macarthur received a call from a 'furious' Winston Churchill, Minister of Munitions, to ask why the women were not at work:

Mary answered that the girls had waited patiently for the wages award granted them three months ago. She had not advised them to come out, and she would not advise them to go back until the firm was instructed not only to pay the rate, but promptly to pay the back money. It was a stay-in strike, and the girls sat on their seats before the machines, knitting socks for soldiers.⁴⁶

In this situation, Macarthur has no qualms in strengthening the women's case by presenting their sock knitting as a demonstration of their patriotic support for the war effort, despite the damage they were causing to war production by their sit-down strike. Macarthur was therefore not averse to referring positively to patriotic voluntary knitting, as long as it served working women's interests. The complex associations of war needlework therefore mean that it could be used as a social and political tool to represent women's volunteerism; employment; pacifism; or patriotism, and these causes could oppose or align with one another. The unifying factor in these uses of needlework during the war, however, was that needlework served the varied - and potentially opposing - interests of women.

⁴⁵ Margaret Bondfield, *A Life's Work*, London, Hutchinson & Co, 1948, p.60.

⁴⁶ Margaret Bondfield, *A Life's Work*, p.60.

War needlework skills and unemployed women, 1914-1915

Despite the argument, forcefully made, by working women's advocates that women should be provided with paid needlework employment, this chapter will now show how needlework skills were not always easily transferable amongst unemployed women in 1914-15. While Mary Macarthur and Nina Boyle presented middle class women as unskilled and untalented needlewomen, the corollary to this was that working class women were skilled, if only they could be given the opportunity to demonstrate it. However, the CCWE soon found that needlework did not necessarily come naturally to many working class women, despite the advantages of training initiatives. In August 1914, the provision of long-term self-sufficiency was clearly an aim of the CCWE:

the object of combining relief schemes of work is not merely to avoid the dangers which attend relief through doles. It is also to afford an opportunity of maintaining and definitely increasing the efficiency of the girls and women concerned.⁴⁷

The training of women in workshops was to achieve 'results of real and permanent benefit' from commercial and domestic training.⁴⁸ To facilitate this, the CCWE opened a central workshop at 138 Piccadilly, London, which provided domestic training, whilst it also sought to fulfil sock manufacturing contracts. Unemployed dressmakers were to receive training in the use of sock knitting machines.

The *Evening Standard* noted that sock making is:

⁴⁷ *Report of the Central Committee on Women's Employment*, Supplementary to WER 2, 1915. IWM, WWC, EMP 3.11.

⁴⁸ *Report of the Central Committee on Women's Employment*, IWM, WWC, EMP 3.11.

the most satisfactory solution to the dressmaker's difficulties yet found. The sock contract, including knitting and yarn spinning, will give employment to well over 1200 women per week until July.⁴⁹

However, the article also reported the mixed response of some women to the new training scheme:

"It's very interesting", said an unemployed hand shirt maker, "and not monotonous like making shirts. Besides anyone can make shirts, and you feel you're doing something all on your own in this." A dressmaker was a little disappointed that she could not become proficient in one lesson, while another thought she had nothing to do but turn a handle. Those who know better bewail their poor memories. "If you could only remember that you've got to change the needles for the top of the sock, and again for the leg, and put the ribber out of action for the heel!"⁵⁰

The article goes on to describe the results of the women's work in less than complimentary terms:

The beginner's finished socks are something of a curiosity. Instead of only splicing the heel and toe with a darker wool, one girl forgot, and made the whole of the foot variegated. And this in spite of the fact that the counter on her machine tells her how many rows she has done [...] Other socks look as if a mouse had found them dainty morsels, in consequence of the number of dropped stitches. The

⁴⁹ 'The Queen's Fund. School of knitting for London Dressmakers', *Evening Standard*, c1914. IWM, WWC, EMP 2.2.

⁵⁰ 'The Queen's Fund. School of knitting for London Dressmakers', IWM, WWC, EMP 2.2.

socks which are no use at all are unwound again by means of a hand-winder, so that there is practically no waste in the learning process.⁵¹

Fig. 4.2.



Margaret Bondfield in August 1919. ©Harris & Ewing Collection, Library of Congress, USA.

⁵¹ Press Cutting, undated, *Evening Standard*, September 1914 - March 1915. IWM, WWC, EMP 2.2.

As the employment scheme proceeded, it became evident that it was not so straightforward to turn dressmakers into knitters, including proficient machine knitters; nor was it easy to take working class women from manual trades and make them effective garment makers. In early 1915, the unemployed female industrial chain makers of Cradley Heath, in the West Midlands - who were represented by five local relief committees - were encouraged by the CCWE to attend a workroom where they would carry out paid needlework. However, the *Evening Standard* reported that: 'The great obstacle, which no single local committee felt equal to removing, was the unsuitability of the chain-makers for any other work'.⁵² Most of the workers, the article explained:

practically did not understand the use of a needle, and their hands were so hard with the rough work to which they were accustomed that to teach them seemed too great an undertaking.⁵³

The response of the CCWE was to suggest the 'establishment of a domestic economy centre which would include a needle-workroom'.⁵⁴ The CCWE were determined that these women would acquire needlework skills, as there:

seemed no reason, in the view of the CCWE, why the opportunity should not be used of instructing women, who confessedly have little such knowledge in the domestic arts.⁵⁵

⁵² Press cutting, *Evening Standard*, September 1914 - March 1915. IWM, WWC, EMP 2.2.

⁵³ Press cutting, *Evening Standard*, September 1914 - March 1915. IWM, WWC, EMP 2.2.

⁵⁴ Press cutting, *Evening Standard*, September 1914 - March 1915. IWM, WWC, EMP 2.2.

⁵⁵ Press cutting, *Evening Standard*, September 1914 - March 1915. IWM, WWC, EMP 2.2.

However, the need to adjust to the work in the workshops was not welcomed by some women. On a tour of the new workshop schemes in early 1915, the writer and reporter Arnold Bennett recorded how:

I also saw a garment stitched by a woman who had never used a needle before the war. In peace time she is a public house cleaner. When told that she must learn to sew, she wept, pined for a whole fortnight, and then rapidly picked up.⁵⁶

Part of the domestic workshop scheme included instruction in the making and mending of clothes, cradle-making and training as 'sick room helps'. A month into the Cradley Heath programme, the *Evening Standard* described the results as 'far ahead of all expectations. The workers have not only learned to use a needle, but to turn out very creditable work'.⁵⁷ Significantly, working women were taught garment cutting, the very same skill that middle class women were said to lack and which formed a large feature of the criticisms of their voluntary garment production. In the context of working women's needlework, however, women were not criticised for their lack of ability in cutting out material; rather, they were supported in acquiring the skills to do so.

In January 1915, the CCWE produced a positive report on the workshop scheme, which Macarthur's biographer, Mary Agnes Hamilton, referred to as a 'record of a big task successfully met'.⁵⁸ March 1915, also saw the QWWF compile 'in book form' a

⁵⁶ Arnold Bennett, 'At the Front in London', *Daily News*, '1915' (early), no page number. IWM, WWC, EMP 2.2.

⁵⁷ Press cutting, *Evening Standard*, September 1914 - March 1915. IWM, WWC, EMP 2.2.

⁵⁸ Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Mary Macarthur. A Biographical Sketch*, p.142.

collection of positive newspaper cuttings about the employment scheme.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, Margaret Bondfield recorded on behalf of the CCWE that:

At the end of the first twelve months of its existence Mary was able to report that the committee had demonstrated that the provision of work is better than charitable dole. The experience of the workrooms had been of permanent value to the individual, and its product had been of great use to distressed sections of the community.⁶⁰

However, despite these positive reports, the needlework employment scheme faced a very negative reception from the women's campaigner Sylvia Pankhurst, particularly for its training programme, fixed wages and, according to Pankhurst, its lack of long-term value (Figure 4.3). Pankhurst suggested that the training women received in the workshops was unprofessional:

Such experience as they got was mainly in garment making, in most cases not of a sort which would fit them for factory work. They were largely employed in repairing and converting old garments which had been given by charitable persons for distribution to the poor. Many of the workrooms were managed by amateurs with knowledge entirely restricted to home dressmaking.⁶¹

The CCWE's attempts to ensure that the workrooms did not undercut wages by fixing on a rate of 3d an hour, and no more than 10s a week, meant that women in

⁵⁹ 'Some Newspaper Extracts Relating to The Work and Activities of the Queen's "Work for Women" Fund', March 1915, Percy Green Press. IWM, WWC, EMP 2.3.

⁶⁰ Margaret Bondfield, *A Life's Work*, p.146.

⁶¹ Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Home Front. A Mirror to Life in England during the World War*, London, Hutchinson & Co Ltd, 1932, p.55.

the workshops were not paid as well as in other jobs. Sylvia Pankhurst took particular issue with this:

“Queen Mary’s Sweat-shops!” was the slogan I coined to attack their parsimonious standard, the influence of which was to depress even the existing most beggarly economic status of the women wage earner.⁶²

Pankhurst pointed out the idiosyncrasies in the workroom scheme, including the way employment was offered solely to women who had been employed before the war: ‘yet a common excuse officially offered for the miserable payment was that the women were being “trained”’.⁶³ She noted how ‘women who had not been wage earners before the War, but who were now in urgent need, because their husbands were unemployed’ were turned away.⁶⁴ The New Constitutional Society for Women’s Suffrage ‘was refused a grant for its workroom because it paid more than 10s a week, although the workers there were unemployed professional women who had been accustomed to substantial earnings’.⁶⁵

Pankhurst’s criticism claimed that the CCWE scheme hindered, rather than supported, working women, as the scheme depressed their wages; refused assistance to those genuinely in need; and would not support those who sought to raise needlework employment above a basic wage.⁶⁶ Macarthur and Bondfield, both of whom were sincerely committed throughout their trade union careers to raising

⁶² Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Home Front. A Mirror to Life in England during the World War*, p.54.

⁶³ Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Home Front. A Mirror to Life in England during the World War*, p.55.

⁶⁴ Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Home Front. A Mirror to Life in England during the World War*, p.55.

⁶⁵ Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Home Front. A Mirror to Life in England during the World War*, p.55.

⁶⁶ For wage comparison, Pankhurst notes that Mary Macarthur and her fellow Labour campaigner for improvements in women’s working conditions, Susan Lawrence, had initially agreed with the Labour War Emergency Committee’s recommendations that: ‘war relief should be at the rate of 12s. 6d. for one adult, 17s. 6d. for two, 20s. for two adults and a child, with 2s. 6d. for each additional child and 3s. 6d. extra in London [...] then had thrown over their Labour colleagues by establishing the 10s. maximum for the Queen Mary workrooms’. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Home Front. A Mirror to Life in England during the World War*, p.54.

women's wages, found themselves accused (by working women's activists) of designing a means of keeping women's wages low.⁶⁷

Pankhurst described, rather scornfully, how she and her representatives were unmoved when Macarthur:

ran to a table, snatched up and held out to the women dramatically some babies' woollies, crying: "See, they are making these lovely things in the workrooms! Some of them will find their way to the East End!" "I would rather take poison than them!" Charlotte Drake exclaimed, with a gesture of anger. Even her lips were blanched. Out we strode, with but stiff acknowledgement of Macarthur's leave taking.⁶⁸

This account appears intended to humiliate Macarthur. Macarthur, whose criticism of middle class women's garment production had been made so successfully, now found herself the victim of equally harsh criticism, not over garment quality, but over the practical and ethical impact her garment making scheme had on working women. Despite the fact that Sylvia Pankhurst shared many of Macarthur and Bondfield's social and political principles, including *universal* suffrage and pacifism, First World War needlework production highlights the tensions and divisions that existed between these superficially ideologically aligned, yet, methodologically drastically opposed women. Macarthur and her women's trade union colleague and friend Bondfield were both pacifists; however, they viewed wartime needlework as a means of supporting women during the war, rather than as a means of supporting the war. They saw wartime needlework as a necessary, and prime, opportunity to provide

⁶⁷ For details of Margaret Bondfield's work towards both a minimum and competitive wage for women, see, Margaret Bondfield, *A Life's Work*, 1948; for details of Mary Macarthur's campaigns for women's wages, see, Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Mary Macarthur. A Biographical Sketch*, 1925.

⁶⁸ Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Home Front. A Mirror to Life in England during the World War*, p.62.

employment and leverage for working women. Sylvia Pankhurst, meanwhile, considered their garment making scheme in the same light as she viewed the war: as an exploitation of women. First World War needlework thus provided both a cause and a forum for women's political organisations during the war, where women with different motivations, including pacifist, could engage in and promote their activities. However, this was not without friction, and allegiances and aims can be seen to both co-exist and diverge in this context.

Fig. 4.3.



Sylvia Pankhurst (second from left) and Charlotte Despard (fourth from left) in 1916. ©National Portrait Gallery.

Confusion over the legacy of the needlework employment scheme

By March of 1915, the CCWE needlework employment schemes wound down, as women found alternative war work, and Macarthur recorded that the 'real task now was not unemployment but to secure a decent wage for a perpetually increasing army of workers'.⁶⁹ However, the initial ambitions of the CCWE in needlework employment may have been difficult to achieve in any case, as the CCWE attempted to answer the need for a swift placement into war-bound, and thus finite-term, employment options with a sustainable long-term employment scheme. This objective was not to compete at all with current manufacturing in terms of wages or production; a policy that was destined to make the scheme unattractive and unsustainable in the long-term. The scheme simply could not win on all counts. Removing the competition of charitable needlework production was thus, perhaps, one of the more straightforward objectives of the CCWE.

Confusion has circulated since, however, in the history of First World War needlework over how closely QMNG should be associated with the criticisms that were made of the CCWE needlework training and employment scheme. Adlington has recorded that Queen Mary was:

patroness of the Queen Mary's Needlework Guild, which came in for criticism on several fronts. The piecemeal rates were pitifully low, no better than sweatshop payouts, and the guild employed amateur dressmakers who therefore edged skilled professionals out of the labour market.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Mary Agnes Hamilton, *Mary Macarthur. A Biographical Sketch*, p.142.

⁷⁰ Lucy Adlington, *Great War Fashion. Tales from the History Wardrobe*, p.109.

However, it was the CCWE which *created* amateur dressmakers out of women who were employed in other industries before the war; and it was the CCWE, composed of working women's spokeswomen, that defined and managed the working policies of Queen's Mary's Workshops. QMNG was not responsible for the employment scheme or workshops, although as the workshops were named after the Queen, it is easy to see the cause of confusion. Nonetheless, it is important to distinguish between the two organisations - and indeed, the CCWE was itself keen to make this distinction in 1914. This is because it should not be assumed that the middle and upper class women who were responsible for QMNG were also responsible for the problems identified in the needlework employment schemes. It was working women's advocates in the CCWE, prior critics of the middle class needlewomen of QMNG, who were responsible for the employment schemes, including any shortcomings.

Queen Mary's Needlework Guild and middle class sock-knitting

The criticisms of middle class needlewomen still have resonance in the historic record today, and I argue that this has had an effect on how the wartime role of QMNG, in particular, has been perceived. In his assessment of the work of QMNG during the war, Peter Grant is critical of the high profile that the charity has been given in First World War charitable enterprise:

Because it enjoyed royal patronage and produced a lavish history with a foreword by John Galsworthy, the QMNG is sometimes seen as the archetypal war charity. It was, in fact, only partially representative of even early efforts.⁷¹

Grant suggests that patronage enabled QMNG to set its work apart; while he suggests that self-promotion brought QMNG to the fore. However, the suggestion that QMNG was an exercise in patronage and not even 'partially representative' of early efforts in charitable enterprise overlooks the sophisticated charitable organisation and contribution of QMNG throughout the war. It is certainly the case that QMNG remains one of the better-known charitable organisations, along with the Red Cross; however, I would argue that what is 'known' and understood about the work of QMNG and its role in charitable production during the First World War has not been critically evaluated. This chapter therefore concludes with an examination of the system of production and communication of QMNG to argue that it had a complex and efficient charitable structure which was much more class-inclusive and focused on home front relief than has been portrayed in the historic record.

The operational activity of Queen Mary's Needlework Guild

On 11th August 1914, the day after the first appeal of QMNG, the Honorary Secretary of QMNG, Lady Anne Lawley, opened the post bag in St James's Palace to 'one thousand letters', all offering support to the garment production scheme from women

⁷¹ Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity*, p.37. The 'lavish history' Grant refers to is: *Queen Mary's Needlework Guild: Its Work During the Great War, St James's Palace, 1914-1919*, London and Wealdstone, George Pulman & Sons Ltd, 1920. However, it is arguable whether this history has had the influence that Grant claims; had it done so, the organised system of demand and production that it demonstrates would have mitigated criticisms of the scheme.

of all classes.⁷² The stated aim of QMNG was to 'provide what was wanted, where it was wanted and in the shortest possible time' for those serving; and also to provide for those in distress at home, including soldier's families and women facing unemployment.⁷³ St James's Palace became the headquarters and central depot of QMNG, with items sent to Friary Court from QMNG's branches across the UK, and as the work progressed, from abroad.

Lady Lawley described daily activity at St James's Palace, when she wrote that:

Every morning an incoming volume of appeals, requisitions and letters. Every night an outgoing stream of answers thereto. Cases coming in to be unpacked, their contents sorted, repacked and sent away, unpacking, repacking and reloading for despatch, day in day out, for 4 ½ years...'⁷⁴

⁷² *Queen Mary's Needlework Guild: Its Work During the Great War, St James's Palace, 1914-1919*, London and Wealdstone, George Pulman & Sons, 1920, p.5.

⁷³ *Queen Mary's Needlework Guild: Its Work During the Great War, St James's Palace, 1914-1919*, p.12.

⁷⁴ *Queen Mary's Needlework Guild: Its Work During the Great War, St James's Palace, 1914-1919*, p.29.

Fig. 4.4.



Members of Queen Mary's Needlework Guild at St James's Palace in 1917.
©Royal Collection RCIN 2303790.f.

This supply and demand response was managed by detailed stock-keeping, where all items received at St James's Palace were unpacked and marked on a stock sheet for the day. These details were then entered into an overall stock book the next day.⁷⁵ Daily record keeping throughout the war resulted in the quantification of 15,752,919 items received by 1918.⁷⁶ Garments produced included 718,388 socks and over 285,960 garments were collected for women and children. However, these totals only account for garments sent for distribution through St James's Palace.

⁷⁵ *Queen Mary's Needlework Guild: Its Work During the Great War, St James's Palace, 1914-1919*, p.30.

⁷⁶ *Queen Mary's Needlework Guild: Its Work During the Great War, St James's Palace, 1914-1919*, p.88.

QMNG also encouraged local branches to offer garments to alleviate local community distress and to provide local hospitals. The total number of these locally circulated items is unquantified.

Within QMNG's regional branches, there was also the option to provide items directly for local men serving abroad, in addition to sending items centrally to Friary Court for general distribution. This option was taken up by the Shetland branch of QMNG, where: 'the output has been divided between Friary Court and supplying the local men with comforts'.⁷⁷ This flexibility enabled communities to respond to locally affiliated requests as well as to national demand. The QMNG scheme also provided paid employment for women, and at the St Andrews branch they:

fulfilled the double purpose of providing paid work for women thrown out of employment owing to the war, and of being a collecting centre for gifts of work parties and individuals whence they have been dispatched to various units, regiments, and hospitals.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ *Queen Mary's Needlework Guild: Its Work During the Great War, St James's Palace, 1914-1919*, p.45.

⁷⁸ *Queen Mary's Needlework Guild: Its Work During the Great War, St James's Palace, 1914-1919*, p.46.

Fig. 4.5.



Bales of needlework items arriving for unpacking at St James's Palace in 1917. *Queen Mary's Needlework Guild: Its Work During the Great War, St James's Palace, 1914-1919*, London and Wealdstone, George Pulman & Sons, 1920, p.27.

Despite its reputation as a middle class organisation in First World War, women of all classes contributed to the work of QMNG - nationally and internationally, paid and voluntary. QMNG was not just composed of middle class women, and it was keen to report that items were:

made by working girls and servants who gave up their Saturday afternoons and evenings to devote them to the work of the Guild, as well as those of all grades, whose lives give naturally more leisure for such work.⁷⁹

From the start of the war, QMNG operated a versatile, organised and responsive system which addressed a number of needs. It was quick to combine the need for women's employment with the supply of garments for troops. It not only offered local employment to women at home, but provided local communities with a distribution of garments. QMNG also offered practical volunteer participation to all classes, supporting the involvement of those who could only offer their needlework skills.

Fig. 4.6.



Isle of Bressay, Shetland Branch of Queen Mary's Needlework Guild, c.1914-1918. *Queen Mary's Needlework Guild: Its Work During the Great War, St James's Palace, 1914-1919*, London and Wealdstone, George Pulman & Sons, 1920, p.47.

⁷⁹ *Queen Mary's Needlework Guild: Its Work During the Great War, St James's Palace, 1914-1919*, p.15.

Conclusion

The wartime strategic opposition to 'leisured' middle class women's needlework garment production from prominent working women's spokeswomen, such as Nina Boyle and Mary Macarthur, has been influential in forming subsequent understandings of middle class women's needlework contributions to the war effort. Macarthur and Boyle's negative image of the motives and inadequate organisation, skill and value of middle class women's war needlework has remained highly pervasive in histories that refer to First World War needlework. However, this chapter has shown that criticisms of middle class women engaging in voluntary needlework for the war did not emerge as part of a post-war critique of the activity; rather, these criticisms were voiced immediately in the first weeks of the war for strategic, political reasons by working women's advocates with an agenda to exclude middle class volunteers and provide employment for working women. This is significant, as it shows that criticisms of middle class needlewomen did not emanate simply from popular satire, or from a patriarchal or masculine forum of social or political debate: it came vocally from female representatives of women's causes and it was present from the very start of the war.

Challenging the criticisms of middle and upper class women's philanthropic needlework schemes, this chapter has shown that volunteer needlework schemes were not a causal factor in women's unemployment at the start of the war. However, it is argued here that uncritical acceptance of the assertion that voluntary garment making schemes, such as that of QMNG, deprived working women of employment has meant that the priority of these schemes to assist women with paid employment has been overlooked. The provision of assistance for working women has been assumed to come from a *counter-reaction* to middle class women's voluntary

garment making, that is, from an *external* employment strategy, rather than from the voluntary garment making scheme itself. This chapter has demonstrated that this was not the case, as the initiative to provide paid employment to women on the home front was integral to the voluntary garment production scheme of QMNG from the start of the war. Little recognition has been given to middle and upper-class philanthropic women in *identifying the need* to assist women with paid employment through their needlework initiatives; however, what is evident from the findings here is that they *did* work with this in mind from the beginning, but that it was strategically advantageous, if not crucial, for working women's advocates to overlook this.

If working women's advocates had not made an example of the voluntary garment making scheme of middle class philanthropic women, it is unlikely that they would have been able to build such a strong a case for the immediate establishment of schemes for women's employment at the start of the war. Indeed, in criticising voluntary production, working women's advocates were able to secure the full attention and co-operation of Queen Mary. Using needlework to further women's economic, political and social interests during the war was a key feature in the establishment of both the charitable and employment schemes in 1914-15.

Needlework provided a cause and a forum for debate over women's interests during the war, and its use could knit together complex and potentially opposing associations between patriotism, pacifism, employment and charity.

However, although the employment schemes were received positively at the start of the war, divisions quickly developed between working women's advocates over how and who to train in needlework and over wages. Needlework employment did not suit the skills of all unemployed women and professional needlewomen found it hard to secure support from the CCWE's 'Queen Mary's Workshops' scheme. The problems

of the war needlework employment schemes, despite originating from CCWE management which excluded interference from philanthropic needlewomen, have been attributed, over time, to QMNG. The result of this is that it compounds the problematic image of charitable middle class sock knitting. This chapter has argued that the negative connotations of 'middle class sock-knitters' and their association with QMNG has led to a superficial assessment of QMNG in the history of charitable enterprise during the First World War. This chapter has shown that the middle class sock-knitting of QMNG equated to a much more sophisticated, organised, inclusive and responsive charitable initiative.

Chapter Five

Quality controls and needlework garment distribution, 1914-1915

Introduction

During the war, volunteers could carry out needlework to support the war effort in a variety of ways. They could work privately on a garment at home, which they could then send to a loved one, acquaintance, or in response to a public appeal. They could also join a working party group. These could be private and subject to personal invitation or they could be a community initiative where members were encouraged to mix together, subject to the particular organisational structure and ethos of the working party concerned. This variety of options made needlework appealing to many women, as they could carry it out at home, join a community group, or do both. This thesis has shown that the predominant view in the history of early war needlework is that it was carried out in a frenzy of activity. The mass self-galvanisation of women to take part in war needlework at the start of the war is presented by historians as a phase of intense but also hasty production. Peter Grant has summarised that: 'there was a phase of frenetic knitting and stitching which spread throughout the country in 1914 and what they produced was sometimes not exactly what was needed'.¹ Grant's statement that results were not always wanted accords to the generally accepted view that women acted hastily; however, the implication of these readings is that war needlework is considered to be a rather self-satisfying activity for women; whilst the suggestion that needlework took place in an uncontrolled way equates closely with the interpretation of it as an early war 'mania'

¹ Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity*, Oxford and New York, Routledge, 2014, p.3.

which lacked focus. In this chapter, I expand on the analysis of previous chapters on mania and poor production to argue that there has been an over-emphasis on poor production in histories, which has meant that the purposeful role of needlework has been overlooked. I will show how, in contrast, needlework production was directed at the start of the war, with women attempting to engage meaningfully and purposefully. Referring to women's magazines and needlework publications, the chapter examines the information available to women about how and what to produce for war effort needlework at the start of the war. It will be shown that the speed - or 'frenzy' - to make garments was a manifestation of the urgency of the charitable call made by charitable needlework schemes, in particular those of Queen Mary and Lady French, but it is argued here that this did not lack organisation or purpose. Using knitting patterns as historical sources, this chapter charts the role of war knitting at the beginning of the war to argue that early war needlework by women was an activity which was guided from the beginning, with measures put forward to ensure quality controls; these were concerned with quality materials, construction and matching front line needs. However, it will also be shown how these directions could contradict and confuse, leading to problems in production. In their studies of war needlework, Lucy Adlington, Lucinda Gosling and Joyce Meader have all shown how knitting patterns can be a source of information about women's engagement in war needlework; however, this chapter critically examines patterns in their historical context in the chronology of the war.² By referring to needlework articles and patterns in *The Queen*, *Woman's Own* and *Home Chat*, this chapter examines the

² Lucy Adlington, *Great War Fashion: Tales From the History Wardrobe*. Stroud, Gloucestershire, The History Press, 2013; Lucinda Gosling, *Knitting For Tommy: Keeping the Great War Soldier Warm*, Stroud, Gloucestershire, The History Press, 2014; Joyce Meader, *Knitskrieg: A Call to Yarns! A History of Military Knitting from the 1800s to the Present Day*, London, Unicorn Publishing Group, 2016.

potential for poor production to be designed into the process: production advice *both identified and caused* the problems of early war needlework production.

The chapter begins by showing that needlework pattern publishers were caught off-guard at the start of the war by the urgency of the philanthropic call to make garments. For this reason, their response was reactive, as they quickly re-presented patterns from the Boer War. Magazines referred to these patterns as reliable sources, able to satisfy the need for speed in production and avoid the problems of poor production. However, the patterns were found to be problematic for beginners. It will be shown how this, combined with the demand for fast and plentiful production and sparse information on how to achieve garment sizing, could result in confusion and contradictory messaging in magazines. The form of quality controls in volunteer garment making is then examined. To date, little distinction has been made between the contexts of personal needlework garment production and those of organisational (working party) production: they have both been used to exemplify poor production. However, this chapter will show how patterns emphasised the need for good quality garments for private use and for group contributions to the front line. The chapter will argue that although there was the potential for poor garments to be made throughout the war, this was discouraged, and garment making was guided by patterns from the very beginning. In working parties, specific staged checks were advised which meant that the likelihood of shoddy garments reaching the front line was much lower than has been suggested by histories. However, the confusion over whether garments were for front line or hospital use, as well as contradictory information about where to send specific items, were a reason for inappropriate garments finding their way to the front line.

Drawing on magazine dialogues about war needlework in *The Queen*, *Woman's Own* and *Home Chat*, the chapter will show how early war needlework quality controls broke down class boundaries, as proficient needlework skills were prioritised in working groups over social standing. *The Queen*, targeted at upper middle class and society women, is discussed as it refers to working class women's needlework skills, whilst copies of the magazine would have potentially been available to all classes in different social contexts. *Woman's Own* and *Home Chat*, which were directed towards a lower middle class audience, also contain cross-class commentary on needlework activity. All classes were involved in needlework production, however, this chapter argues that quality control measures which specified the priorities and form of needlework group organisation enabled working class women to venture into the area of middle class women's philanthropic activity by creating their own community-funded needlework initiatives, which they could coordinate.

The second half of this chapter will investigate the historic events concerned with early war garment distribution. I argue here that there has been an over-emphasis on poor garment production in histories of First World War needlework. By referring to primary source correspondence between the Quarter Master General Directors in the War Office, and to debates on the subject of garment supply in the House of Commons between 1914 and 1915, this chapter will show how poor distribution, rather than poor production, was the primary cause of wastage, over-supply and the converse shortage of knitted and sewn garments on the front line at the start of the war. The issue of volunteer-made garment distribution did not receive War Office attention until late 1915; however, this chapter will show how front line troops identified the imbalance in garment provision, not the War Office. Indeed, it was front

line commanding officers and their families who sought to rectify distribution issues themselves, by dealing directly with women's charitable organisations, thereby creating a home to front line connection which actually bypassed the War Office. This, I argue, places more emphasis on garments being needed by the front line, than on garments being discarded because they were poorly made.

War Patterns: The Boer War re-issued for the First World War

In the months that followed the outbreak of war on 4th August 1914, *The Queen*, *Woman's Own*, and *Home Chat*, all encouraged women to knit or sew garments for the troops or to make hospital wear, as patterns were featured in magazines for sewn, knitted and crocheted garments. In *The Queen*, the first war-related sewing and knitting patterns appeared on 15th August 1914. This edition gave readers instructions on how to make three hospital garments: a set of pyjamas, a nightingale and a hospital shirt.³ Instructions followed Red Cross specifications, and were accompanied by the original pre-war illustration showing an older man, suggestive of the experienced regular army, modelling the pyjamas (Figure 5.1.). *The Queen* explained that its quick response was because:

already workers, privately and in parties, are making garments of different kinds.

That these are a crying need every one of authority is agreed; indeed, the demand in the many improvised hospitals which are springing up all over the land is enormous.⁴

³ The nightingale is named after the Crimean War nurse Florence Nightingale, and is a mid-calf length bed shirt or bed jacket. *The Queen* describes it as: 'a garment which in its very name bears the sign manual for its service to the wounded'. *The Queen*, 15 August 1914, p.296. The hospital shirt featured fabric ties at the arms and neck to allow easy access to wounded men.

⁴ *The Queen*, 15 August 1914, p.296.

Queen Mary's appeal to women to make garments for the war had been issued on 10th August 1914, and so, *The Queen* appears to be offering assistance to this movement.⁵ However, the 'crying need' referred to in the article is more suggestive of the language of Lady French's urgent appeal, which was to be made two weeks later on 29th August 1914.⁶ *The Queen* therefore appears to be building up momentum, although it made it clear that guidance was required:

Unfortunately, on these occasions goodwill is not all that is needed, and only too often much valuable time and effort is wasted, or at any rate deprived of a large part of its value. It is with a view to preventing this that we are presenting to-day three garments which are in immediate need for the care of the sick and wounded, of approved pattern and assured excellence of cut and shape.⁷

With these first patterns, *The Queen* demonstrated that at this early stage in the war, it was alert to the possibility of poorly-made items, but it reassured readers that the tried-and-tested nature of the Red Cross instructions would ensure success: *The Queen* suggests that using old patterns *avoids* poor production issues. On the facing page to the hospital garments, *The Queen* featured a knitting pattern: 'Comforts for our Soldiers and Sailors: Woollen Helmet' (Figure 5.2). The reliability of this pattern was emphasised, as it was: 'given in *The Queen* many years ago, but the Deep Sea Fishermen Mission issues a small book of useful comforts, including a similar helmet'.⁸ In this way, *The Queen* re-issued an existing 'helmet' pattern, but also suggested that the hard-weather wear of fisherman was appropriate for war use.⁹

⁵ *The Times*, 10 August 1914, issue 40600, p.3.

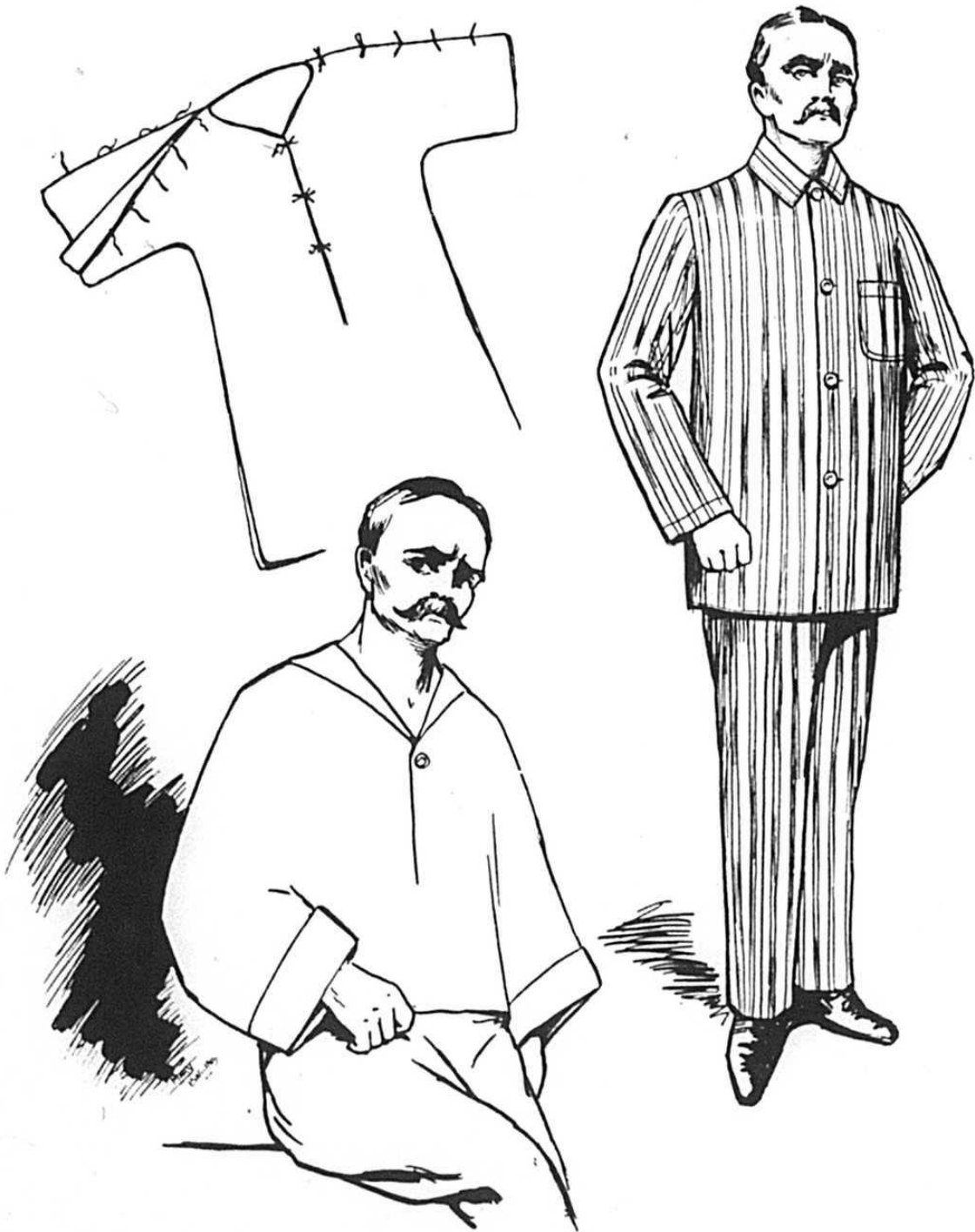
⁶ 'Socks for Soldiers', *The Times*, 29 August 1914, Issue 40619, p.11.

⁷ *The Queen*, 15 August 1914, p.296.

⁸ *The Queen*, 15 August 1914, p.297.

⁹ The term 'helmet' is used in First World War patterns to refer to knitted and crocheted balaclavas and hats.

Fig. 5.1.



PAPER PATTERNS.—HELP FOR OUR SOLDIERS AND SAILORS.

Pattern illustration for pyjamas, a nightgale and a hospital shirt. 'Paper Patterns – Help Our Soldiers and Sailors', *The Queen*, 15th August 1914, p.296.

Fig. 5.2.

COMFORTS FOR OUR SOLDIERS AND SAILORS.

Woollen Helmets.

HAVE FOUR BONE NEEDLES, No. 9, pointed at each end. Cast on 90 stitches, 30 on each of three needles, very loosely. Work thus: Knit 3 stitches, purl 3. Go on in this manner round and round till you have done a piece 5 inches long. Then place on a piece of string 21 stitches; this should be 4 knit ribs and 3 purl ones. Put the remaining stitches on two needles (it is awkward at first to place them on one only; after a few inches you can get them on one). leaving off ribbing, and knit backwards and forwards quite plain for 38 rows; this will be about 4 inches. Now knit 15 stitches, take 2 together, knit remainder plain, next row the same; go on thus till you have reduced to about 42 stitches, then knit 9 stitches only, and take 2 together. Work thus until you have reduced to 25 stitches.



Woollen Helmet Pattern (detail). 'Comforts for our Soldiers and Sailors: Woollen Helmet', *The Queen*, 15th August 1914, p.297.

In *Woman's Own*, the first reference to producing garments for the troops was made on 5th September 1914. This was only the second reference that the magazine had made to the war at that point, and it was the first war-related subject to be discussed in the editorial text of the magazine.¹⁰ Evidently, in the immediate outbreak of war, the subject of garment making was seen to be a means of engaging the readership with the war *and* the magazine. The edition cover features the face of a young woman looking out, smiling at the reader, captioned: 'I am making garments to help the Soldiers? Are you? See Inside' (Figure 5.3). An article follows with the commentary:

"How can I help?" is the cry that has been repeated over and over again of late, and this week and subsequent weeks "Woman's Own" is going to answer this question in the only really practical and useful way possible.¹¹

Here, garment making is a means of satisfying an urgent need to engage in the war, while the direct address of the language in *Woman's Own* accentuates this urgency.

¹⁰ The first reference to the war in *Woman's Own* was made on 29 August 1914 in the form of a full-page advertisement for an illustrated war progress report called, *The Great War: The Standard Illustrated History of the Great All Europe Conflict* by H. W. Wilson. The advertisement stated that the report was to be made available to purchase in instalments for the duration of the war. See *Woman's Own*, 29 August 1914, p.iii.

¹¹ *Woman's Own*, 5 September 1914, p.2.

Fig. 5.3.



'I am making garments to help the Soldiers? Are you?'. Cover, *Woman's Own*, 5th September 1914.

War-related patterns are presented in this edition of *Woman's Own* over four pages and include a 'shirt, bed jacket, night shirt, nurse's apron, sock and crochet patterns for mufflers'.¹² *Woman's Own* promises: 'Other garments will be treated next week',

¹² *Woman's Own*, 5 September 1914, p.2.

and paper patterns were available from the magazine on application.¹³ It directed garments be sent to the 'British Red Cross Society, Devonshire House, London, W.C.'.¹⁴ As with *The Queen*, *Woman's Own* therefore re-issued Red Cross instructions and existing knitting patterns for soldiers and sailors garments as a means of immediately providing guidance to women about what to make. The 'crying need' referred to by *The Queen* on 15th August 1914 and the 'cry' repeated in *Woman's Own* on 5th September 1914 echo the urgency of the August 1914 appeals made by Queen Mary and Lady French. However, the response from magazines to this call, was to re-issue existing Boer War front line and hospital needlework patterns.

Between August 1914 and December 1914, needlework magazine publishers quickly circulated pattern booklets with service and hospital wear for troops. These featured patterns previously published during the Boer War.¹⁵ The publisher *Needlecraft Ltd* was so quick to release a new pattern booklet on the outbreak of war in 1914 that it made only minor changes to the cover text and pattern titles of its 1900 booklet (see Figure 5.4 and Figure 5.5). Inside the 1914 booklet, however, the pattern illustrations were updated from drawings of 1900 to photographs. Figures 5.6 and 5.7 show the same design for a crocheted 'Balaclava Helmet' which featured in both booklets. In the 1914 design, however, the 1900 pattern has been adapted for use with a smaller

¹³ *Woman's Own*, 5 September 1914, p.2.

¹⁴ *Woman's Own*, 5 September 1914, p.2.

¹⁵ Most First World War pattern booklets do not publish their date of publication on the issue; however, the following were issued in 1914: *Knitted Comforts for Men on Land and Sea*, Beehive No 17, Halifax, J.J. Baldwin, 1914. Although this booklet is undated, it was advertised in *The Queen* on 5 September 1914, p.404; *Weldon's Garments and Hospital Comforts for Our Soldiers and Sailors, First Series*, Southampton Street, The Strand, London, Weldon's Ltd, 1914. This reprints patterns from Weldon's Boer War series and is dated to 1914 by the British Library; *Directions for Knitting Soldiers' and Sailors' Comforts*, Alloa, Patons, 1914. This is advertised in *The Queen*, 19 September 1914, p.474; *Women & War. How to Knit and Crochet Articles Necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors*, Manchester and London, Needlecraft Ltd, 1914. This is dated to 1914 by the British Library; *Ladyship Leaflet, No 18*, Halifax, Baldwin and Walker Ltd, 1914. This is advertised in *The Queen* on 5 September 1914, p.404.

crochet hook. This is likely to be because the 1900 pattern recommended Patons 5-ply wool, whilst the 1914 edition advocates 'Athletic Double Knitting', a brand of yarn newly produced by the publisher themselves, William Briggs and Co of Needlecraft Ltd.¹⁶ This change of yarn would necessitate pattern changes to the *number* of stitches required due to the change in yarn thickness, although not to the type of stitches, thus maintaining the same design. The publisher therefore updated the pattern to enable it to sell its yarn, but it did not otherwise alter the complexity of pattern instructions.

In 1914 the publisher *Weldon's* also made few changes to its Boer War pattern for a soldiers' sleeping cap, keeping the same khaki yarn advice, needle size, and pattern instructions. However, it changed the pattern name and illustration as well as the yarn from Patons in the Boer War version to Isaac Briggs in the 1914 version (Figures 5.8, 5.9, and 5.10).¹⁷ In this case, the publisher was able to make a straight swap of yarns in the patterns, most probably due to their similarity in thickness.

¹⁶ See *Women & War! How to Knit and Crochet Articles Necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors*, Manchester, Manchester School of Embroidery, Needlecraft Ltd, 1900, p.6; and *Women & War. How to Knit and Crochet Articles Necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors*, Manchester and London, Needlecraft Ltd, 1914, p.3.

¹⁷ See *Weldon's Knitted, Crochet and Flannel Comforts for our Soldiers, Second Series*, London, Weldon's Ltd, c.1901, p.10-11, IWM K83811; and *Weldon's Garments and Hospital Comforts for Our Soldiers and Sailors, First Series*, 1914, p.4 and p.12, IWM K06/101.

Fig. 5.4.



Cover, *Women & War! How to Knit and Crochet Articles necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors*, Manchester School of Embroidery, Needlecraft Ltd, Manchester, 1900. Joyce Meader Collection.

Fig. 5.5.



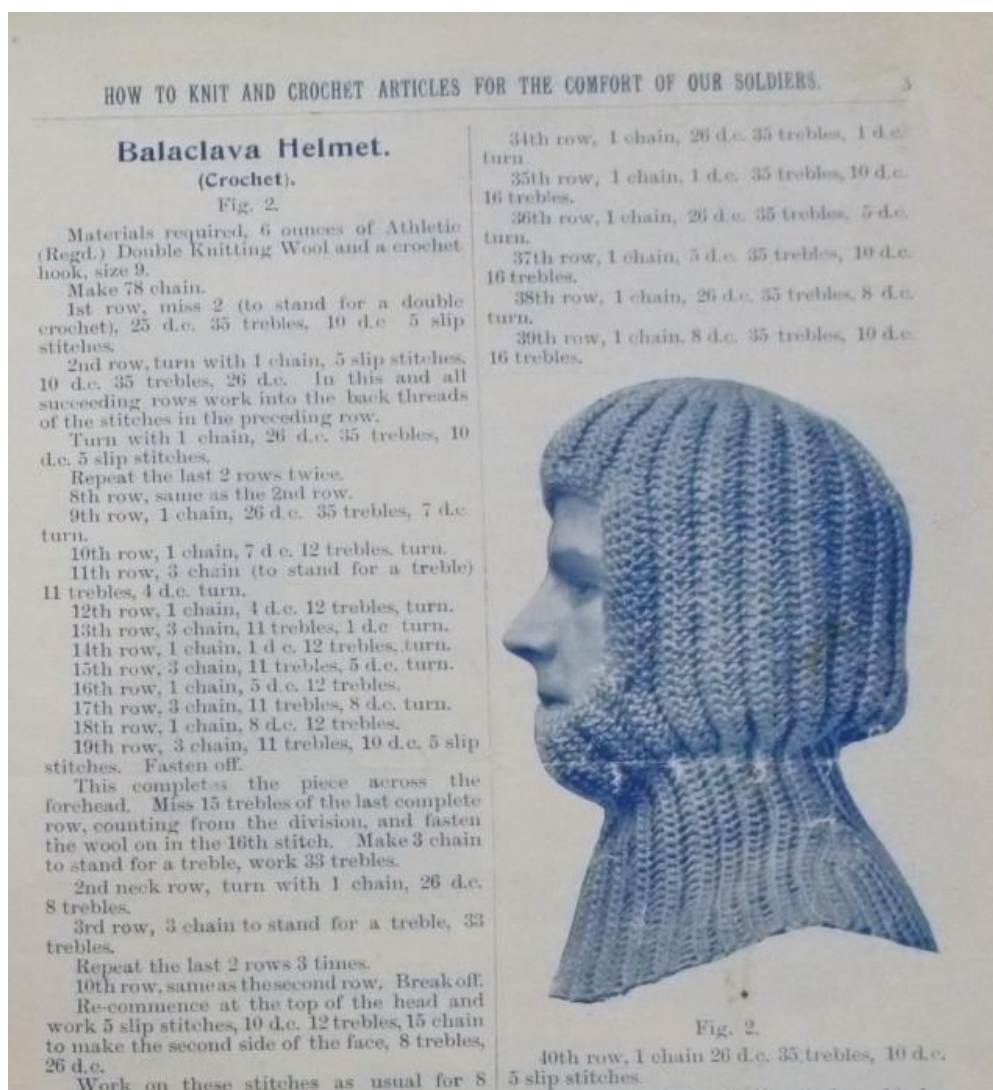
Cover, *Women & War. How to Knit and Crochet Articles necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors.* Manchester and London, Needlecraft Ltd, 1914. *Imperial War Museum, K14/633.*

Fig. 5.6.



Pattern for a crochet Balaclava Helmet. *Women & War! How to Knit and Crochet Articles Necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors*, Needlecraft Ltd, 1900, p.6. Joyce Meader Collection.

Fig. 5.7.



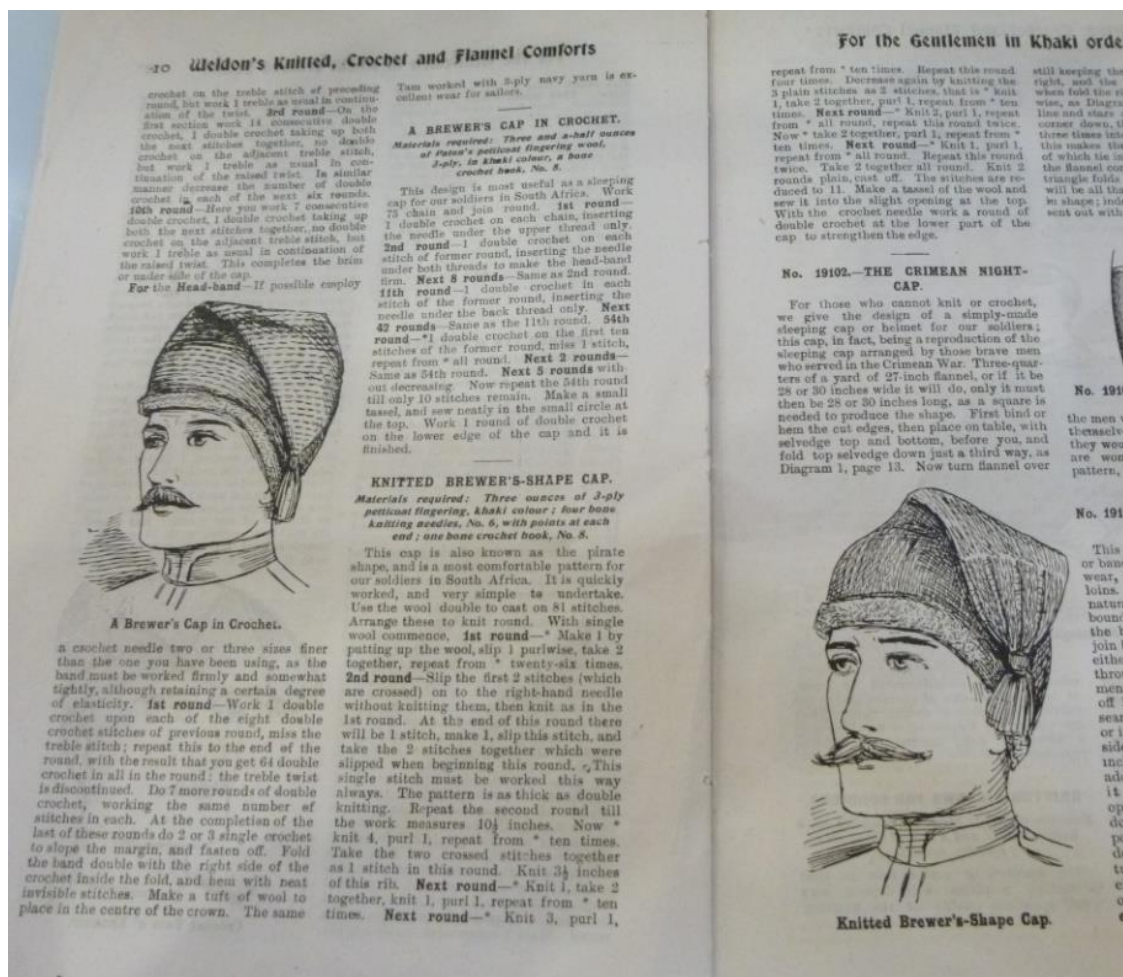
Pattern for a crochet Balaclava Helmet. *Women & War. How to Knit and Crochet Articles Necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors*, Needlecraft Ltd, 1914, p.3. *Imperial War Museum*, K14/633.

Sandy Black has noted how: 'At the beginning of the twentieth century, the individual pattern leaflet became a prime marketing tool for promoting branded yarns that continues to the present day'.¹⁸ What the 1914 pattern booklets show, is that on the outbreak of war, needlework yarn manufacturers and pattern publishers were astutely aware of the potential promotional opportunities of wartime garment making.

¹⁸ Sandy Black, *Knitting, Fashion, Industry, Craft*, London, V&A Publishing, 2012, p.125.

Their concern, however, was with matching patterns to their commercial yarns, rather than to changing the patterns to any great extent.

Fig. 5.8.



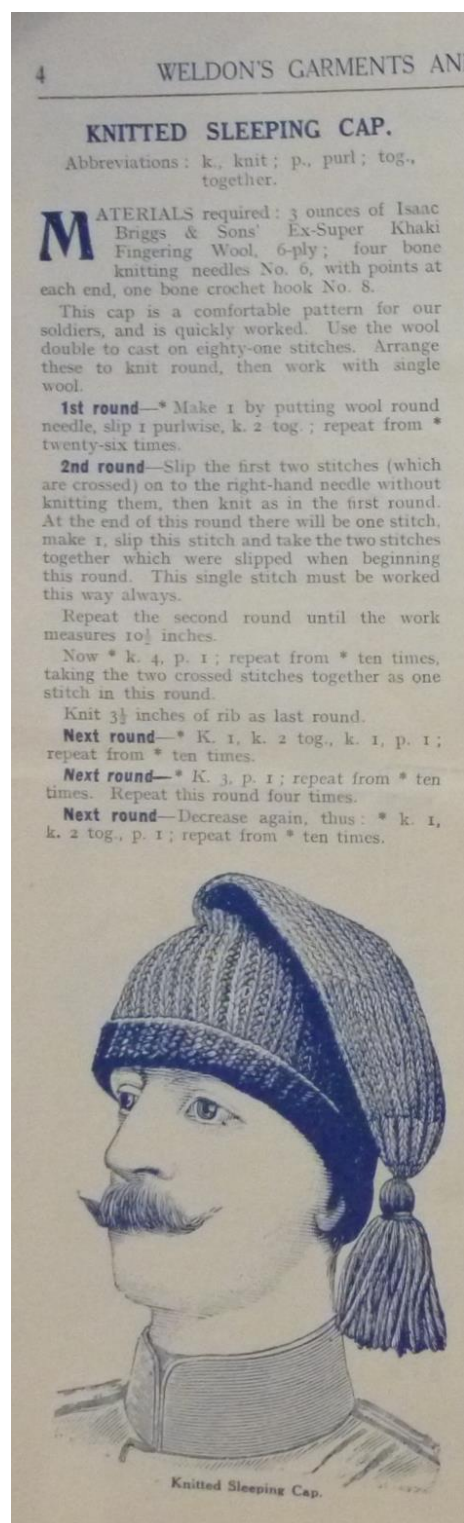
Brewer's Cap, Knitted and in Crochet. *Weldon's Knitted, Crochet and Flannel Comforts for our Soldiers, Second Series, c.1901, p.10-11, Imperial War Museum, K83811.*

Fig. 5.9.



'Sleeping Cap in Crochet', *Weldon's Garments and Hospital Comforts for Our Soldiers and Sailors, First Series*. Weldon's Ltd, 1914, p.12, *Imperial War Museum*, K06/101.

Fig. 5.10.



'Knitted Sleeping Cap', *Weldon's Garments and Hospital Comforts for Our Soldiers and Sailors, First Series*. Weldon's Ltd, 1914, p.4, *Imperial War Museum*, K06/101.

The flurry of needlework publications in 1914 suggests that on the outbreak of war, women's magazines and needlework pattern publishers found themselves in a *reactive* position. The appeals from philanthropic women in society had set an early tempo of urgency; however, by resorting to existing patterns from the Boer War, needlework publications and magazines were able to immediately offer guidance, and they could justify the call for urgent and speedy production by reassuring readers of the tested and reliable format of their patterns. Need and tradition were in this way aligned: readers could draw confidence from existing patterns, and this allowed magazines to replicate the urgency of charitable appeals and encourage haste, whilst also maximising the yarn promotional opportunity.

Fast production and accessibility are priorities in early patterns

That fast production was a priority in 1914 is evident from women's magazine articles. *Woman's Own* claimed that:

Mufflers will be in much demand by the wounded soldiers and sailors when autumn advances and the cold sets in. For convalescents their uses will be manifest to all, and the designs given here will suit every requirement for every worker. So set to work now and make as many as you can as quickly as you can.¹⁹

On 22nd August 1914, *The Queen* attempted to prioritise garment types: 'Apart from "garments", a most pressing need is felt for knitted socks, first of all, and after these, other knitted "comforts"'.²⁰ Any uncertainty about what would be required, found an

¹⁹ *Woman's Own*, 5 September 1914, p.4.

²⁰ *The Queen*, 22 August 1914, p.329.

answer in past production. Both *The Queen* and *Woman's Own* urged speed in production, however, they also stressed the ease of particular patterns. On 5th September 1914, *The Queen* described a pattern for 'crochet socks at the front' as 'quicker and easier to make than knitted ones'.²¹ *Woman's Own*, published on the same date, featured a pattern for 'Men's Ribbed Socks', which was captioned: 'Easy to Make and Serviceable to Wear'.²² However, emphasis on speed of production over the winter of 1914 to 1915 may also have led makers of all abilities to compromise on quality. *Woman's Own*, Knitting Supplement of 19th January 1915, suggests that:

While there is an urgent call for warm garments for our soldiers and sailors it is necessary to resort to the quickest method for making what is required, and rather than keep the men waiting it is a kindness to turn such things as old socks and stocking tops into warm mittens and wristlets.²³

Speed may be achieved by this method, but 'old' garments may not have converted into good quality, serviceable items for soldiers and sailors. Furthermore, problems may have been encountered when re-knitting older yarns which had worn thin and brittle.

Woman's Own quickly recognised that novice knitters would seek to be involved in garment production and featured a number of patterns which claimed that they were suitable for beginners. On 5th September 1914, the article 'Crocheting for the Soldiers and Sailors' stated: 'Here are some simple crochet patterns that anyone can work, which will make really useful and serviceable mufflers'. These were photo

²¹ *The Queen*, 5 September 1914, p.404.

²² *Woman's Own*, 5 September 1914, p.4.

²³ 'How to Divide Knitting', *Woman's Own*, Knitting Supplement, 19 January 1915, p.vi.

captioned: 'Pattern form of rows of double crochet any beginner can adopt' (Figure 5.11).²⁴ This indicates that *Woman's Own* did not assume that every woman could knit or crochet, but importantly, it anticipated that women would have the desire to learn these skills as a means of engaging in the war. This thesis has shown how magazines could act as a forum for women to debate and negotiate their engagement with war needlework, however, women's magazines also claimed to offer women a means of accessing needlework knowledge. Accessibility is offered by patterns through their stitch varieties, ranging from plain and purl knitting to complex crochet designs. These patterns allow women to focus on the simplicity or complexity of the stitches, rather than the specific sizing or design of the garments. However, they do not show the reader how to convert these stitches into more complex garments, such as jackets, gloves and hats. Although the patterns offer the beginner an insight into stitch variety, they are very far from the finished product.

²⁴ *Woman's Own*, 5 September 1914, p.3. On 19th September 1914, *Woman's Own* offered further follow-up patterns for mufflers (scarves), which could be: 'quickly worked and capable of many applications'. These were stated to be simple enough 'Even the average worker will find no difficulty in following these designs, and the most inexperienced worker can manage No.1 pattern, as it consists only of two of the most elementary stitches, being worked entirely in plain and purl knitting'. See *Woman's Own*, 19 September 1914, p.3.

Fig. 5.11.

Crocheting for the Soldiers and Sailors

Here are some simple crochet patterns that anyone can work, which will make really useful and serviceable mufflers

THE best wool for medium-weight mufflers is J. & J. Baldwin's "White Heather" Wheeling, 3-ply (which is supplied in the regulation khaki shade), or 4-ply "White Heather" Scotch Fingering. Both qualities are made in a large range of service-

DESIGN II.

The ordinary form of treble, shown in Fig. 2, is a light, quick stitch for this purpose, and must be firmly worked, about 6 trebles to the inch. For the ribbed effect, work into the back thread of



Design 1. Pattern form of rows of double crochet any beginner can adopt.

Design 2. Rows of treble stitches make a good pattern.

able shades, including steel-greys, blue-greys, heather etc. For making heavy, thick mufflers select Baldwin's "Beehive" double knitting wool. Work firmly throughout, and choose a smooth bone hook; No. 10 hook for medium wool, and No. 6 for double knitting. Make the foundation chain evenly, but not tightly, or the first row will pucker and not set nicely. Too loose a chain, on the other hand, means its being drawn into holes.

DESIGN I.

J. Baldwin's "White Heather" Wheeling, No. 13 $\frac{1}{2}$, is a useful shade of grey. Double crochet makes a firm muffer, worked backwards and forwards. Work firmly and evenly, inserting the hook under the two top threads. Always turn with 2 ch., this being counted as the first d.c. of the row. The second stitch (which is really the first d.c.) should be worked into the second stitch of the previous row, thus preserving an even edge.

previous row. Three ch. stitches are necessary at the end of each row of trebles, in order to keep the edge straight. Work these before the crochet is turned round.

(Continued overleaf)

INFANTS' GARMENTS.

Sixteen plain Knitting Receipts for Baby Garments, in the simplest of stitches, and the best possible shapes, made from the famous **BEEHIVE** Scotch Fingering, **it washes beautifully.** Write for Booklet No. 12, 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in stamps, direct from **J. & J. BALDWIN, HALIFAX.**
Look for the **BEEHIVE** on every skein.

Beginner muffer patterns in crochet. 'Crocheting for the Soldiers and Sailors', *Woman's Own*, 5th September, 1914, p.3.

The Queen also consciously sought to offer access to different abilities of knitter. At the beginning of September 1914, it advocated the booklet: 'J. J. Baldwin's, *Knitted Comforts for Men on Land and Sea*, Beehive No 17', describing the smaller projects as suitable for those 'who do not care to undertake either long or heavy work', whilst the 'working of steering gloves, mittens, and wristlets will appeal to the younger members of the family according to individual requirements'.²⁵ Accessibility for

²⁵ *The Queen*, 5 September 1914, p.404.

different ages was also emphasised in *Woman's Own* on 24th October 1914, with 'Useful Things that Granny Can Make. Easy-to-Work articles for the Soldiers and Sailors specially designed for aged workers' (Figure 5.12).²⁶ The pattern 'Warm Knitted Mittens for Cold Soldiers', was accompanied by the reassuring claim that:

Though the working of mittens is too fine for aged eyes, these articles are quite simple to make, and would be very much appreciated by our soldiers and sailors.²⁷

Nonetheless, this pattern included 73 rows of instructions, followed by finishing instructions, which would have made it difficult to follow by those with poor eyesight. 'A Seamless Crocheted Hospital Sock' for older knitters featured in *Woman's Own* on 24th October 1914, likewise, introduced a stitch technique called 'Liege', which involves drawing the yarn below and through previous stitches in a complex manner that many would have found challenging (Figure 5.13). Despite the invitations and reassurances given to beginners and older knitters by *Woman's Own* and *The Queen*, the patterns featured at the start of the war were by no means as easy or simple to follow as stated.²⁸

²⁶ *Woman's Own*, 24 October 1914, p.2. These patterns included 'Mufflers'; a 'Knitted Hospital Sock'; a 'Seamless Crocheted Hospital Sock'; and 'Warm Knitted Mittens for Cold Soldiers'

²⁷ *Woman's Own*, 24 October 1914, p.3.

²⁸ *Woman's Own*, 24 October 1914, p.3.

Fig. 5.12.



'Useful Things that Granny Can Make'.
Woman's Own, 24th October 1914, p.2.

Fig. 5.13.



'Useful Things that Granny Can Make'.
Woman's Own, 24th October 1914, p.3.

The Queen found that its tried-and-tested patterns were problematic for some; and in reply to a correspondent who was having trouble with the knitted helmet (Figure 5.2), the magazine replied, somewhat surprised and a little defensively:

The illustrated directions published in the Queen, Aug. 15, have since been worked out several times by different knitters, who have not found any mistake in it. It is one of the simplest and quickest recipes in print [...] Try again and let us know exactly where you get puzzled. We will try to help you.²⁹

²⁹ 'To Correspondents', *The Queen*, 12 September 1914, p.427.

Thus, although magazines and needlework booklets catered for speed by offering pre-war 'reliable' garment patterns and stressed the accessibility of their patterns, these patterns were not necessarily suitable for the beginners who wished to embark upon garment making, despite early war magazine articles claiming that a novice would be able to progress to finished garments smoothly. Certainly, the difficulties encountered by beginners would have caused some frustration at the start of the war, as women were being urged to take part immediately, yet some were not equipped with the skills to deal with interpreting the patterns. Carol Dyhouse has noted that up to the First World War:

a significant proportion of upper middle class girls never went to school at all, being educated at home under the aegis of governesses. Most of the middle class girls who did go to school attended private schools over which the state had no control.³⁰

This presents the prospect that middle class and upper middle class girls received a variable grounding in needlework. This is in contrast to the state supported and highly proscriptive needlework education provided for working class girls in state schools. Nevertheless, Lisa Tickner has observed that it 'was almost unthinkable that a respectably brought up Victorian or Edwardian woman should be unable to sew'.³¹ The extent, form and competency of women's needlework skills could, however, have been variable. The sewing skills associated with dress making in particular, were unlikely to have been taught in detail to middle and upper class women who could afford a dressmaker; while knitting, unlike embroidery, would have been a

³⁰ Carol Dyhouse, *Girls Growing up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England*, Oxford and New York, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, p.3.

³¹ Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-14*. London, Chatto & Windus, 1987, p.73.

more functional form of needlework for women, and so, knowledge of it would depend upon whether women were taught the skills.³² Many women therefore relied on the guidance in magazine patterns and booklets.

In 1914, alongside the call for speed in production, beginners faced the challenge of achieving the desired garment size. At this time, magazine patterns varied as to whether they included information on the basics of knitting gauge and tension, which are the key determinants to achieving the correct (or anticipated) size and fit of a garment.³³ The early war patterns in *The Queen* do not refer to tension.³⁴ On 19th September 1914, *Woman's Own*, offers tension guidance in a body-belt pattern mid-page, however, this appears as something of an afterthought under the heading 'Knitting Needles':

³² Mary Anne Garry has shown how types of needlework could be undertaken by different classes of women in one household. Her study of Mrs Larpent's journal, kept between 1790-1832, shows that there was a household division of needlework tasks between Mrs Larpent as lady of the house, the housekeeper and the maids. The basic work on household items: 'was given to the housemaids to do in the afternoons and evenings'. More skilled work, such as making up garments, was given to the housekeeper, and Mrs Larpent could choose her own work. Mary Anne Garry, "After they went I worked": Mrs Larpent and her Needlework, 1790-1800', *Costume*, 39:1, 2005, p.93.

³³ Gauge is the size of an individual stitch and it is determined by the size of needles used, which themselves are selected to best suit the thickness of a yarn. Gauge is also influenced by Tension, which is the strain that each individual knitter places on a yarn, i.e. how loosely or tightly they may knit. If the individual knits tightly, they would need to change needle size to a larger needle to achieve the desired gauge (to create larger stitches). For the technical details of gauge and tension, see Mary Thomas, *Mary Thomas's Knitting Book*, Hodder and Stoughton, Dover Publications, New York, 1972, p.40-45. Needlework magazines, although inconsistent, contain more information on tension than the magazine patterns in *Woman's Own*. Thus, garment tension is referred to in the introduction, with garment measurements given, in the patterns in *Knitted Comforts for Men on Land and Sea*, Beehive No. 17, 1914, p.2. Advice on tension is also in the pattern 'Socks for Soldiers' in *Women & War. How to Knit and Crochet Articles Necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors*, 1914, p.5.

³⁴ This is likely to be related to the way in which *The Queen* simply reproduced earlier patterns which did not contain this information in the instructions. Sandy Black has observed that during the First World War: 'The hit-or-miss quality of the knitting might have been the result of rather vague instructions, which often suggested using 'any knitting wool' on a specific size of needles, with no reference to gauge or tension'. Black examples this with reference to the *Khaki Knitting Book*, published in New York in 1917; however, the knitting magazines and booklets circulating in the UK at the start of the war were often more specific on yarns as they had a commercial interest in these. See Sandy Black, *Knitting Fashion, Industry, Craft*, p.136.

Bear in mind the lower the number the thicker the needle. The size given for use in making the knitted garments are for knitting of medium tension. If the knitter is a loose worker, she should use needles of a size finer than the number given, while a size larger should be taken by one who knits tightly.³⁵

The technical difficulty of a pattern, plus inexperience in achieving the right tension for a size, created a dual problem particularly perplexing for sock knitting.³⁶ Patterns could, however, accommodate different knitting tensions by giving size measurements as part of the instructions. In a pattern for a convertible cap muffler, *Woman's Own* states: 'Four steel knitting needles, size 10 will be required. Cast on sufficient stitches to measure 10 inches'. In this way, *Woman's Own* attempted to address what was presumably a growing problem, and on 19th January 1915 the *Woman's Own Knitting Supplement* includes 'Knitting Terms Simply Explained' and 'The Meaning of Knitting Phrases', which gives an explanation of tension, whilst specifying the need for good quality wool.³⁷ The absence of tension or sizing information in magazines increased the potential for beginners to make mistakes in sizing garments, especially if they were only following the pattern. The unspoken assumptions and variations inherent in patterns could be overcome by experienced knitters, however, the rudimentary and sometimes incomplete guidance offered by patterns still presupposed a reader conversant in knitting practices and pattern-reading.

³⁵ *Woman's Own*, 19 September 1914, p.2

³⁶ Knitting socks includes the more challenging technical prospect of turning the heel, whilst they also need to be made to some degree of accuracy for different sizes (and two must be made the same size). In the *Woman's Own* pattern for 'Men's Ribbed Socks' on 5 September 1914, the reader is not told the finished size of sock intended, and although the length of the ankle is given at 11 inches, the foot length is specified according to number of rows knitted. The resultant size of sock would therefore depend upon how tightly or loosely it was knitted by the individual knitter using the specified needle size. See 'Men's Ribbed Socks – Easy to Make and Serviceable to Wear', *Woman's Own*, 5 September 1914, p.4

³⁷ *Woman's Own*, Knitting Supplement, 19 January 1915, p.viii.

Early war patterns also introduced a competitive element to production, which could be intimidating for many needlewomen. Shirt patterns were particularly challenging for both beginners and those with intermediate sewing skills at the start of the war; and poor cutting-out, with the subsequent wastage of material, was a subject for criticism.³⁸ This problem is likely to have been compounded by magazines, as they made production both an urgent *and* a competitive enterprise. On 2nd January 1915, under the heading 'Wanted!', *Home Chat* informed readers that: 'Queen Mary's Needlework Guild is BADLY wanting good warm shirts for soldiers'. It asked readers for a:

"Good Luck Shirt" [...] The soft, warm COMFORTABLE kind, you know [...] A pattern YOU think good, and a material YOU think "comfy".³⁹

No pattern advice was given with this appeal; however, by the end of the month, a pattern was issued, simplified for beginners, which 'was invented for amateurs by an expert', suggesting that some early offerings had been variable.⁴⁰ Women reading this appeal are likely to have felt pressure to compete with each other and other working parties; however, *Home Chat* did rectify its over-confidence in women's sewing abilities by its subsequent issue of a pattern and advice. This suggests that needlework articles and patterns, although a cause of confusion and hasty work, also adapted to place a check on this and to offer further guidance. At the start of the war, therefore, novices to needlework came under pressure due to the demand for high garment quotas and pattern complexity, or indeed pattern omissions. The resultant frustration that this situation could cause indicates that early war

³⁸ See 'For the Troops', *The Queen*, 28 August 1915, p.401.

³⁹ *Home Chat* 2 January 1915, p.14.

⁴⁰ *Home Chat*, 30 January 1915, p.165-166. The appeal ended with the caustic observation that: 'You wouldn't and couldn't sew a "Good Luck" badge on the rubbish some of the working parties are turning out'.

needlework should not be seen as a benign feminine activity: there was a skills-based exclusion to its performance, and the scale of this exclusion was increased by the number of novices as well as the assumptions and omissions in early war patterns. However, this examination has shown that magazines and pattern booklets attempted to address oversights and correct omissions in early patterns, and to this extent, needlework literature was a self-monitoring forum.

Quality controls

When examining volunteer garment making in the First World War, a significant distinction to make is between those who made garments for personal distribution, for example, for family and friends, where they sent garments to the front line in a private capacity; and those who were part of a working party, where garments were made in an organised voluntary scheme and were distributed by a charitable organisation, such as the Red Cross or Queen Mary's Needlework Guild. Women and some men carried out both of these activities during the war, and quality controls differed depending upon whether garments were for personal or organisational distribution. Little distinction has been made between these two contexts of garment making in previous scholarship; they are conflated, often with the resultant garments seen as problematic overall. However, the distinction is important for assessing the *potential* for poor production. As this chapter will now show, quality controls functioned in both private and group production contexts.

Quality controls on private production of war needlework

It was possible for any class of woman to produce poorly-made garments at any point during the war, since garments could be sent in a private capacity throughout the war. As these garments were made and sent privately, they would not be subject to the same quality controls as those produced for organisations. However, there were a number of quality control instructions in magazines and pattern booklets which acted as a check on poor practice by private individuals. Needleworkers were guided both into and out of various production problems by these. Quality controls on individual production included recommendations for branded yarns and appropriate colours. In her study of British Army uniform in the First World War, Tynan has claimed that adequate pattern guidance only began following War Office intervention, later in the war, and that: 'To begin with, many garments were not even knitted using khaki wool'.⁴¹ This is not the case, however, as khaki yarn colours were recommended by many magazine and commercial needlework patterns at the start of the war.⁴² This recommendation of khaki yarn continued the practice of Boer War patterns, which had catered to the khaki dress specifications of the 1900 Army Dress Regulations.⁴³ Furthermore, wherever other yarn colours were recommended,

⁴¹ Jane Tynan, *British Army Uniform and the First World War: Men in Khaki*, p.80.

⁴² For example, see *Weldon's Garments and Hospital Comforts for Our Soldiers and Sailors, First Series*, 1914; and *Women & War. How to Knit and Crochet Articles Necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors*, 1914.

⁴³ See *Weldon's Knitted & Crochet Comforts, First Series*, c.1900; *Weldon's Knitted, Crochet and Flannel Comforts for Our Soldiers, Second Series*, c.1901; *Women & War! How to Knit and Crochet Articles Necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors*, Manchester School of Embroidery, Needlecraft Ltd, Manchester, 1900. See also W.Y Carman ed. *Dress Regulations 1900*, Arms & Armour Press, 1969; and Joyce Meader, *Knitskrieg: A Call to Yarns! A History of Military Knitting from the 1800s to the Present Day*, p.34.

patterns indicate that these recommendations had a practical purpose.⁴⁴ In giving directions for knitted socks on 22nd August 1914, *The Queen* advised that: 'Only neutral shades of grey, heather mixtures, and drab should be chosen, but it must be remembered that all these are as desirable as the actual khaki itself'.⁴⁵ This indicates that women were encouraged to work within a colour range, which was deemed acceptable for use by soldiers and sailors. During the war, there would not have been just one hue of khaki, since, as with other textile colours, variations in hue were dependent upon dye lots. Nonetheless, on 19th September 1914 *Woman's Own* referred knitters to Baldwin's 'regulation khaki shade' for soldier's garments, which is dyed 'regulation Army Pattern'.⁴⁶ This indicates that early in the war there were concerted efforts by commercial manufacturers to match shades that would be approved for service. Patterns also indicated brands of wool which would assure knitters of an appropriate colour match; however, the patterns were not just advocating the use of 'khaki' colour in general, but a branded khaki specifically. Magazine patterns thus associated branded yarns with achieving good quality results. *Woman's Own* warned readers: 'remember that your labour is largely thrown away if you do not use a good wool and for this work Messrs. J. & J. Baldwin's 2-ply dark blue or khaki White Heather Wheeling is a perfect wool'.⁴⁷ Commercial interests depended upon ensuring yarns matched uniform colours, and patterns directed

⁴⁴ In a letter to the Work-Table section of *The Queen* in August 1914 a correspondent referred to a previously-published 'memorandum of the British Red Cross' which specified the dimensions of socks, and stated that sizes should be distinguished by coloured bands 1 inch wide: 'knitted at the top of the socks', in red, blue and white. The coloured bands in this pattern served to help identify the size of sock. *The Queen*, 29 August 1914, p.364-365. Throughout the war, patterns in *The Queen* and *Woman's Own* recommended blue yarns for naval garments; whilst *Home Chat* refers to working parties using 'the grey wool that is used for Army socks'. See 'Our Working Parties', *Home Chat*, 19 September 1914, p.518.

⁴⁵ *The Queen*, 22 August 1914, p.329-330.

⁴⁶ *Woman's Own*, 19 September 1914, p.2.

⁴⁷ *Woman's Own*, 31 October 1914, p.3.

women towards these yarns. Although the use of these yarns would not guarantee successful results, they did ensure that garment colours were quality controlled.

Confusion over garment destination: hospital versus front line usage

Despite the attention paid in patterns to the use of quality yarns and appropriate colours, there was still the potential for garment makers to become confused about the appropriate destination for garment types. At the start of the war, *The Queen* does not specify the address to which items should be sent, although it features appeals from Queen Mary's Needlework Guild, Lady French and the Red Cross in other sections of the magazine. *The Queen* of 15th August 1914 features patterns for both service-wear and for hospital garments for the wounded, published alongside one another (Figures 5.1 and 5.2). In a February 1915 pattern for an 'Adjustable Abdominal Belt', *The Queen* vaguely combined both wounded and service use when it stated that: 'Our soldiers - and sailors too - would find the belt in the sketch below particularly comfortable, as it is elastic, but not too "stretchy"', whilst noting: 'It was designed for the use of the Tommy suffering from abdominal wounds'.⁴⁸ Readers could be forgiven for confidently sending this hospital garment to the front line as the guidance about who it would benefit and what it was for was adaptable to the point of causing confusion. On 5th September 1914, *Woman's Own* claimed that the garments featured 'are in Great Demand for the Army and Navy'.⁴⁹ However, throughout September and October of 1914, *Woman's Own* recommended sending items to the Red Cross, and so, for hospital use. During September and October of

⁴⁸ *The Queen*, 13 February 1915, p.268.

⁴⁹ *Woman's Own*, 5 September 1914, p.5.

1914, *Woman's Own* also referred to patterns for 'Soldiers and Sailors'; yet, indicated that garments were intended for the Red Cross. *Woman's Own* thus recommended patterns for general front line use, but directed garments to be sent to the Red Cross. In *Woman's Own* a lack of clear distinction between the service and hospital relevance of garments is therefore likely to have led to confusion amongst readers, and inappropriate items, such as those intended for hospital use, may have been sent for front line use.

The Heelless sock

In his study of the First World War home front, Ian Beckett remarks that the result of knitting comforts for troops was that 'vast quantities of unwanted garments flooded the army'.⁵⁰ Beckett examples this by quoting from a letter sent home in November 1914 by Captain John Liddell, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who, apart from finding volunteer-made garments 'thin and shoddy', exclaimed: 'Especially do I condemn the atrocity known as the heelless sock'.⁵¹ However, heelless socks were intended for hospital bed-wear, and would have been impractical for marching troops in any capacity other than as a bed sock (Figure 5.14). This is because the lack of heel was beneficial for ease of dressing men in bed; whilst it also maintained lower leg compression and did not come off easily as there was less friction due to the absence of heel. The heel-less sock would have been very uncomfortable to wear for walking and standing, since the absence of heel made it inflexible on the foot, especially in boots. With regard to the presence of heelless socks on the front line

⁵⁰ Ian Beckett, *The Home Front, 1914-1918. How Britain Survived the Great War*, London, The National Archives, 2006, p.66.

⁵¹ Quoted in Ian Beckett, *The Home Front, 1914-1918. How Britain Survived the Great War*, p.66.

therefore, it is important to understand that they were not necessarily badly made or unwanted in general: they were simply in the wrong place, unless they were intended for bed-wear.⁵²

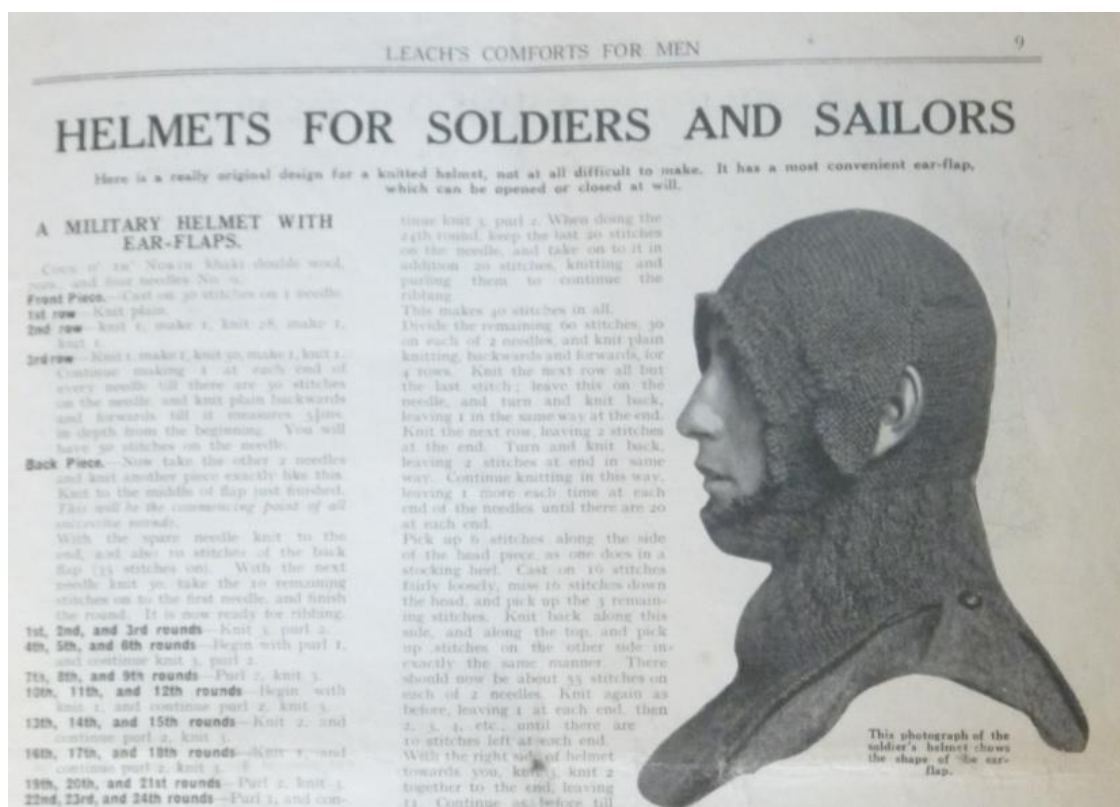
Fig. 5.14.



Pattern for heelless socks by Marjory Tillotson. 'Bed Socks (Heel-Less)', J.J. Baldwin, *Knitted Comforts for Men on Land and Sea*, Beehive No. 17, J.J. Baldwin, Halifax, 1914, p.9.

⁵² Attempts were made in patterns to call heelless socks 'hospital socks' and J.J. Baldwin's, *Knitted Comforts for Men on Land and Sea*, Beehive No. 17, expressly informed readers that: 'Socks without heels, unless for hospital wear, are rejected by the War Office as being impractical for use by men on active service'. Notably, patterns for heelless socks would have appealed to beginners, as they did not require a heel to be turned. See J.J. Baldwin, *Knitted Comforts for Men on Land and Sea*, Beehive No. 17, p.9.

Fig. 5.15.



Pattern for 'A Military Helmet with Ear-Flaps'. *Leach's Comforts for Men, No 4*, London, 1914, p.9. *Joyce Meader Collection*.

Multi-purpose helmets: confusion over purpose

Knitted helmets were another garment which could cause confusion regarding form and use. Marjory Tillotson's pattern for a 'Helmet (with cape pieces)' notes that: 'War Office Experts do not recommend apertures for the ears, the latter particularly requiring protection in cold weather'.⁵³ However, *Leach's Comforts for Men, No.4*, also published in 1914, contradicts Tillotson, as it recommended its pattern for a 'Military Helmet with Ear Flaps', claiming: 'Here is a really original design for a knitted

⁵³ J.J. Baldwin, *Knitted Comforts for Men on Land and Sea*, Beehive No. 17, 1914, p.3.

helmet not at all difficult to make. It has a most convenient ear-flap, which can be opened or closed at will' (Figure 5.15).⁵⁴

Early war needleworkers were thus presented with potentially conflicting or vague information about the purpose or appropriate destination of garments. However, they also received advice and guidance to correct problems, and both of these features were evident in needlework literature from the start of the war. This examination therefore shows that women were not acting mindlessly, without co-ordination or organisation, when they took up early war needlework for the war effort. The 'frenzy' of early production was not a 'natural' gendered reaction which served its own purpose; rather, speed and elements of confusion were introduced by the combination of the urgency of demand for garments; a lack of clarity over garment purpose; and gaps in needlework skills and practical advice. This combination of factors meant that women were presented with the problematic situation of potentially conflicting and confusing advice when they sought knowledge and guidance. These problems were later attributed incorrectly to women as producers, with flaws in pattern design and communication read as flaws in women's responses.

Quality controls in working party production

Volunteers making garments for the war in working parties were subject to more layers of quality control than individuals making items in a private capacity. By examining group quality controls, this chapter argues that these made it difficult for poorly-made garments from working parties to reach the front line. It will also be

⁵⁴ *Leach's Comforts for Men, No.4*, Leach's Home Needlework Series, London, 1914, p.9.

shown how quality controls in groups broke down class boundaries, as they prioritised skill over social position.

Although it lacked detail in its garment patterns, *The Queen* was aware of the potential for misplaced effort in group work at the start of the war, and it was particularly keen to offer detailed guidance about how to form garment making working parties. In early war articles, *The Queen* suggested that a lack of skills and poor organisation would compromise the end results, and it urged women of all classes gather to harness these skills. On 15th August 1914, *The Queen* recommended a teaching class to which 'Women of all classes can go' to learn how to make garments together.⁵⁵ On 29th August 1914, in 'Organising the Non-combatants', the author, Margaret Heitland, stressed the importance of allocating work to the skilled:

Voluntary help ought not to degenerate into involuntary hindering. But it quickly goes through this unhappy transformation if there is no society to take helpers in hand and apportion their work to them...certainly now is the time for utilising the already well organised society and the already well trained worker.⁵⁶

In 'Practical Suggestions for Working Parties', *The Queen* suggests that the skill of volunteers should be the primary concern of committees:

A great deal of the success, and certainly the prevention of much friction, depends on the organisation [...] if a committee is formed, it should be quite a small one, and concern itself solely with (a) the general arrangements, and (b) the cutting

⁵⁵ 'How to Help', *The Queen*, 15 August 1914, p.289.

⁵⁶ Margaret Heitland, 'Organising the Non-Combatants', *The Queen*, 29 August 1914, p.372.

out, two important matters which should be *faits accomplis* before the first practical parts.⁵⁷

Cutting out was to be done 'either by one competent woman, with possible helpers under her, or by a member selected for her capabilities in this direction'.⁵⁸ In these articles, therefore, *The Queen* recommended that working party roles were allocated according to member *competency*, rather than to social rank. As a result, class boundaries were blurred for the specific purpose of achieving efficient - and presumably skilled – production. The advice given by *The Queen* shows that there were checks on poor production in the form of clear directions, and that quality was prioritised to the extent that skill was prized over social class.

The recommendations for working party structures contradict the idea that knitting and sewing for the war was an exclusive activity for middle class and society women. Skilled needlewomen would include many working women, some of whom would have been dress-makers. Not only were these women given an important role, *The Queen* showed concern for working women's welfare and employment.⁵⁹ Middle class women reading the society magazine *The Queen* were urged, very early on *by their own class*, to ensure that employment, working party organisation and competency were the focus of their activity, thus propelling the interests of working class women to the forefront. As well as prioritising working women's employment, magazines indicate that *charitable* knitting for the troops was not the preserve of the

⁵⁷ 'The Work Table: How to Make Bandages. Practical Suggestions for Working Parties', *The Queen*, 22 August 1914 p.329.

⁵⁸ 'The Work Table: How to Make Bandages. Practical Suggestions for Working Parties', *The Queen*, 22 August 1914 p.329.

⁵⁹ Articles targeted to middle and upper-class women encouraged them to influence and support the interests of working women. In January 1915, *The Queen* calls for the army to: 'employ paid needlewomen on principle rather than volunteers' to make military garments; whilst early war articles encourage readers to offer employment to needlewomen to ensure that voluntary work does not compete with employment needs. See 'Army Needlewomen', *The Queen*, 2 January 1915, p.12.

upper middle class woman. The article, 'Our War Working Parties', published in *Home Chat* on 19th September 1914 by an anonymous author, is written as though from the perspective of a working class woman. She describes garment making for the war in her 'tiny village' and includes information on how the village working party divides the work; recruits and fundraises; and the costs involved in producing knitted and sewn items for soldiers and sailors.⁶⁰ Activities are allocated according to ability, with dressmaking requiring the most skill, and at the other end of the spectrum:

'some of our people who can't manage ordinary needlework are knitting socks'.⁶¹

There is equity in terms of the amount of money each person donates to the initiative, as members of the working party 'asked every householder in the village to give us money to start with, and guarantee a little more every week 'till the war is over'.⁶² Some of this money was used to 'pay needlewomen who, having been thrown out of work on account of the war, are very glad to make things for the working party'. This therefore created a scheme which saw that needlewomen were employed by the whole village, rather than by just a few benefactors. This communal initiative challenges the traditional structure of upper middle class women's philanthropic charitable giving, as it advocated a self-funded and self-managed scheme, which is structured according to skill rather than social position, where the financial responsibility is shared by the community.

Organisation according to skill was not the only quality control for working parties at the start of the war. Individuals were also nominated to check on the quality of volunteer work. 'Our Working Parties', in *Home Chat*, described the way finished

⁶⁰ 'Our Working Parties', *Home Chat*, 19 September 1914, p.517.

⁶¹ 'Our Working Parties', *Home Chat*, 19 September 1914, p.518.

⁶² 'Our Working Parties', *Home Chat*, 19 September 1914, p.517.

knitting was inspected by the vicar's wife 'who is a splendid needlewoman'.⁶³ Larger organisations, including Queen Mary's Needlework Guild at St James's Palace and the Red Cross at Devonshire House in London, checked and sorted garments before they were sent out to troops. Needlework working parties did not simply send items to the front without inspection, and in probability there would have been more than one inspection, at a local working party level and at the large organisational level.⁶⁴ In her study of knitting during the First World War, Gosling refers to a letter published in *The Queen* which asks for advice on how to deal with a volunteer, 'Mrs B', who has produced poorly made socks for a working group. Gosling suggests that:

Perhaps Mrs B's socks were some of those destined to clean rifles and boots in the trenches. At least then, her efforts were not entirely in vain.⁶⁵

However, articles in *The Queen* indicate that the objective was to put quality controls in place, and the publication of the letter about 'Mrs B's work' can be seen to be one of these. This is because it sought to identify a strategy to manage the disappointment of someone whose work was to be rejected. Although this may ruin the joke associated with badly-made garments, a priority at the start of the war was *not* to send inferior items to the front line. High profile reports in magazines and the press of badly made garments on the home front could act as a check on poor

⁶³ 'Our Working Parties', *Home Chat*, 19 September 1914, p.517.

⁶⁴ In January 1915, *The Queen* reports that Queen Alexandra's Field Force Fund was seeking to sort through left over comfort garments, indicating that there was also garment sorting dealing with odds and ends to minimise wastage: 'many of which came, or, were completed too late for inclusion in Christmas parcels to the front, while others have been more or less indiscriminately collected or made with no special end in view'. See 'How Best to Help the War Charities', *The Queen*, 2 January 1915, p.6.

⁶⁵ Lucinda Gosling, *Knitting For Tommy: Keeping the Great War Soldier Warm*, p.21. Gosling also makes the assumption that it was badly made items that were relegated for cleaning, rather than surplus items.

production, and it should not be assumed that the items identified in these reports necessarily reached the front line.

Magazines show that in volunteer working groups there was a clear effort to put quality controls in place at the start of the war. The majority of working party garments would have been checked for quality locally, and would have been assessed by administering organisations, such as the Red Cross and Queen Mary's Needlework Guild. However, the direction and movement of bulk batches of garments would lie with organising groups or with independent working parties, which would be responsible for establishing the appropriacy of garments for either hospital or service-use. Although there was certainly the potential for the 'wrong' things to get to the wrong place, these items were not necessarily badly made, and when they were mis-directed, it is still likely that they were needed elsewhere. The final examination of this chapter therefore assesses the historic events associated with garment distribution at the start of the war. In this assessment, I argue that poor distribution, rather than poor production, was the primary cause of needlework garment wastage and over-supply on the front line.

Problematic distribution as the cause of surplus and wastage

Poor garment distribution does not feature prominently in histories of First World War knitting and sewing, where emphasis is placed more on poor production and over-supply. This emphasis was first made in the work of Arthur Marwick, who argued that many items were wasted because they were found to be unfit or unwanted for front line use.⁶⁶ The implication of this has been that female makers and needlework

⁶⁶ Arthur Marwick, *Women at War, 1914-18*, HarperCollins, London, 1977, p.35.

organisers are seen to be at fault. In the work of those who have examined First World War knitting, this reading has generally gone unquestioned; however more recently, Lucy Adlington has addressed this and identified that:

Proper examination of supply and demand highlighted the fact that yes, some men had been 'snowed up' in comforts, as they described it, but others were, literally, left out in the cold. A director general of voluntary organisations was appointed to make sure that there would be a more even spread of donations in the future⁶⁷

The examination that Adlington refers to implies that the issue was identified and smoothly resolved by the War Office. However, as will be shown, events indicate that the War Office did not take quite such a pro-active role. In 1915 the QMG Directors at the War Office were preoccupied with justifying the efficiency of their supply provision; to the extent that they did not acknowledge that there was a problem with effective *distribution*. There was not an examination of the issue of distribution *prior* to the appointment of the Director General of Voluntary Organisations (DGVO) in late 1915. The significance of poor distribution in *causing* the wastage and over-supply of needlework garments in the early war has been underestimated.

It has been shown in this thesis that the first discussions of the QMG Directors in 1914 on the topic of volunteer garment making for the troops were concerned with the logistics of item transportation to the front, and in particular the burden items could have on the postal system and supply lines.⁶⁸ The *quality* of garment production was not discussed in the correspondence between the QMG Directors in

⁶⁷ Lucy Adlington, *Great War Fashion: Tales From the History Wardrobe*, p.107.

⁶⁸ Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, August to December 1914, TNA, WO 107/21.

1914-1915.⁶⁹ Parliamentary discussion was also initially concerned with the *supply* of garments, both War Office issue and those sent charitably. On 10th February 1915, the issue was raised in the House of Commons when MP James Hogge referred to a letter from Lady French:⁷⁰

She asks that there shall be a continuous supply of shirts, socks, underclothing, woollen caps, and gloves, to make good certain wastage. Is it or is it not the fact that our troops at the front are being supplied with a sufficiency of these things now?⁷¹

The response to this enquiry by Harold Baker, the Financial Secretary to the War Office, was that the situation was one of *over-supply* of volunteer made garments:

our most recent information about the supply of those articles at the front was that the quantity was so great that thousands had to be kept in the store. There is an apparent contradiction somewhere.⁷²

Early in 1915, however, Hogge identified the problem as one of garment distribution, but only of volunteer made garments, and asked whether there could be:

some centralisation with regard to the distribution of those comforts which are collected apart from those which are supplied to the troops by the War Office? ⁷³

⁶⁹ Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, August to December 1914, TNA, WO 107/21; TNA, WO 107/14; and TNA, WO 107/15.

⁷⁰ *Hansard* House of Commons Debates, 1914-1918, 10 February 1915, 69, Col. 657-58.

⁷¹ *Hansard* House of Commons Debates, 1914-1918, 10 February 1915, 69, Col. 630.

⁷² *Hansard* House of Commons Debates, 1914-1918, 10 February 1915, 69, Col 630.

⁷³ *Hansard* House of Commons Debates, 1914-1918, 10 February 1915, 69, Col 630.

Although Hogge drew attention to the distribution of items, his suggestion was not taken up by the QMG Directors who continued to investigate and defend their own War Office supply provision.⁷⁴

During this time, personal requests for garments were made by individual soldiers to their families; by officers to charitable organisations; and by officers on behalf of their men. These requests were brought to the attention of the QMG Director Sir John Cowans in early February 1915 (Figure 2.5). Cowans referred these to his counterpart in France, Sir Ronald Maxwell (Figure 2.6), and on 13th February 1915, Maxwell wrote to the 1st Army to inform them that there was no shortage of War Office issue items:

It is thought that officers on leave, without full knowledge of the facts, and without due consideration of what has actually been done in this direction and of the effect of over-loading the troops with things that are not really wanted, make general statements about the various articles which are required at the front. Those statements are taken up and translated into fact by well-meaning people at home.⁷⁵

Maxwell was convinced that the issue for dispute was the *quantity* of garments made ready for the front. He assumes that officers are seeking 'things that are not really

⁷⁴ It should be noted that volunteers could make knitted and sewn garments for the War Office for front-line distribution. This was the case with Queen Mary's September 1914 call for socks and body-belts. Women were also employed to make garments for War Office contracts, including knitting socks with machines, see this thesis, Chapter Two. However, this chapter makes a distinction on the grounds of the *distributing agent*, i.e. whether it was the War Office or charitable enterprises, such as that of Lady French, who were sending garments to the front line.

⁷⁵ Confidential letter to the 1st Army from Lt Gen Maxwell, 13 February 1915, Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, January to June 1915, TNA, WO 107/14.

wanted' and he does not consider the matter to be one of distribution.⁷⁶ Maxwell continued to view individual officers' complaints about the need for clothing at the front as having no basis in fact, and he cast suspicion over the complainants.⁷⁷ Over the course of 1915, the QMG Directors received numerous notifications about front line officers requesting garments from charitable organisations. It was only in October 1915, however, that the issue of distribution was brought to their attention by Sir Edward Ward, newly appointed as DGVO to co-ordinate the war effort of voluntary organisations. Cowans wrote to Maxwell that Ward perceived:

that there appears to be some considerable difficulty in the Government socks reaching the men – whose fault it is we cannot say, but there is no doubt that the shirts and socks, of which we have ample in our stores, do not reach the men.⁷⁸

A month later, Cowans made further enquiries with Maxwell about distribution:

if you are quite satisfied that the system admits of their getting everything they want, there is really nothing more to be said – though it does seem strange that there should be smoke without fire.⁷⁹

In December 1915, after months of enquiries, Maxwell concluded that the:

⁷⁶ Privately to Cowans, Maxwell conceded that: 'it is very difficult to stop fellows from talking when they get home on leave, and if you wait to put in that notice till officers stop talking and writing I fear you will have to wait a very long time'. Letter from Maxwell to Cowans, 13 February 1915. Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, January to June 1915, TNA, WO 107/14.

⁷⁷ When presented with a further request to charitable sources for clothing from an officer in the Royal West Surrey Regiment, Maxwell wrote: 'I think generally speaking the boys who write from the front do not know the circumstances, and I fear that in many cases their correspondents have an axe of some sort to grind [...] in most of these cases we have found the C.O. would not admit there was any deficiency'. Letter from Maxwell to Cowans, 16 March 1915. Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, January to June 1915, TNA, WO 107/14.

⁷⁸ Letter from Cowans to Maxwell, 19 October 1915. Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, January to June 1915, TNA, WO 107/15.

⁷⁹ Letter from Cowans to Maxwell, 19 November 1915. Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, January to June 1915, TNA, WO 107/15.

point is the letters sent home are not complaints against the W.O. arrangements, but are requests for articles of clothing generally made in response to letters from home asking officers and men what they are most in need of.⁸⁰

However, Maxwell's rather inconclusive finding suggests that his singular objective had been to nullify complaints about War Office supplies; yet, in having this one objective, Maxwell failed to recognise and tackle the issue of a lack of systematic distribution of War Office items to the troops.⁸¹ Poor distribution channels would explain the disjointed supply of War Office items *and* the irregular distribution of volunteer sent garments. War Office delays could mean that a volunteer garment producing group, or several, could be asked for items, thus causing an eventual over-supply. A unit could miss a War Office garment consignment due to troop movement; or it might simply not receive items at the time they were most needed. To resolve supply issues, officers made requests directly to charitable initiatives which bypassed the War Office. This created a home front to front line connection between commanding officers and philanthropic women, and indicates that needlewomen, producing and sending garments, were more in touch with front line needs than historians have suggested to date. However, a significant implication of underestimating the impact and influence of the poor distribution of War Office garments is that emphasis has been unfairly placed upon a lack of front line need

⁸⁰ Letter from Maxwell to Cowans, 25 December 1915. Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, January to June 1915, TNA, WO 107/15.

⁸¹ Maxwell's conclusion that soldiers felt obliged to ask for something to please those at home may have seemed far-fetched at the time, as it had already been contradicted by the letter to the War Office from Lady French's son, John French, which insisted that men were asking his mother for things they genuinely wanted. Letter from John French to Cowans, 5 February 1915. Minutes and Correspondence of Quarter Master General Directors at the War Office, January to June 1915, TNA, WO 107/14.

and the prevalence of poorly made home front garments. The evidence of this chapter suggests that poor distribution was a far more serious and relevant issue.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the popular estimation that early war knitted and sewn garments were poorly made on the home front and then sent to the front line is over emphasised in the history of war needlework. Knitting patterns and articles in magazines demonstrate that there were numerous strategies aimed at quality controlling what was produced by both individuals and working parties. However, this literature could cause confusion by omission, and it could misdirect production by its lack of explicit guidance about what was needed by whom and where. In addition, needlework was not an easy or 'natural' activity for many women, and the assumptions of the literature could expose this issue further. The idea that women produced items in an uncontrolled way without direction or organisation has been shown to be flawed. Frenetic or 'frenzied' early war production should not be assigned to a mysterious gendered reaction; rather, women's behaviour was a consequence of the complex, historically-engendered interplay of the urgency of the philanthropic demand for garments; a lack of clarity over garment destination and purpose; and gaps in both needlework skills and the practical advice given to support it. Women sought, followed and critiqued needleworking directions: their behaviour was not irrational.

This chapter has shown how quality controls in needlework production could challenge class boundaries. Women's skills could be prioritised over social status, whilst the middle class charitable enterprise of unpaid needlework could also be

successfully managed by working class women. This changes the dynamics of class philanthropy, as working class women were not necessarily always the recipients of the charitable enterprise, but rather, they could also be the agents of it.

Poor garment distribution, of both War Office and charitably-sourced garments, has been shown to be more influential in causing unsatisfactory front line garment supplies than considered previously by historians. It is argued in this chapter that a lack of attention to distribution issues in the history of war effort garment making has led to an over emphasis on poor production and oversupply, and this has created a distorted picture, where front line needs and voluntary home front garment production are seen to be at odds with each other. However, between August 1914 and September 1915 home front and front line communications between those serving and philanthropic women sought to resolve poor distribution, and in doing so, bypassed War Office communications. Home front needlewomen were thus more in touch with men on the front line than the historic emphasis on unwanted garments suggests. Rather than war effort needlework revealing a divide between (poor) home production and front line needs in 1914-15, there was in fact an organic connection between home and the front line which tried to maintain a necessary supply of garments. The significance and importance of this supply from home to front line is explored further in forthcoming chapters.

Chapter Six

Late war needlework: integration, professionalism, and innovation,

1915-1918

Introduction

In the later years of the war, voluntary needlework for the war effort continued to take place nationally; however, the popular understanding of war needlework as an intense and short-lived phase in Britain and Ireland, mainly confined to the early war, has meant that the period from 1916 onwards has received little attention in needlework histories. The common assumption has been that war needlework was a fashion which either died out in 1915, or was much scaled down. Thus, Richard Rutt's history of knitting does not refer to First World War knitting in the later war years.¹ While Ian Beckett's study of the home front only briefly refers to voluntary garment making taking place in the first two years of the war.² In her study of First World War knitting, Lucinda Gosling focuses on the early war; however, she does record later war events, including the appointment of the War Office's Director General of Voluntary Organisations (DGVO), Sir Edward Ward, in 1915. Gosling notes the importance of this appointment and refers to Ward's request for garments in 1917, which she argues stemmed from the way in which Ward was 'responsible for encouraging the nation's knitters to keep up the momentum'.³ However, Gosling does not examine *how* volunteer garment makers and the DGVO worked together in the later war, and nor does she suggest that volunteer knitters had a significant role

¹ Richard Rutt, *A History of Hand Knitting*, London, Batsford, 1987.

² Ian Beckett, *Home Front 1914-1918: How Britain Survived the Great War*, London, The National Archives, 2006.

³ Lucinda Gosling, *Knitting For Tommy: Keeping the Great War Soldier Warm*, Stroud, Gloucestershire, The History Press, 2014, p.18. Gosling also refers to Sir Edward Ward's wool scheme, p.31; and the DGVO's 1916 film, 'How to Help Tommy', p.61.

in defining, organising and sustaining their own voluntary needlework. Lucy Adlington has carried out a detailed study of the historical context and form of war effort garment making at the beginning of the First World War. She observes that with the appointment of the DGVO in 1915:

it was recognised that for all the mockery, needle-wielding women were playing their own distinct part in the war, none the less important because it was small.⁴

Adlington ends her examination, however, with the appointment of the DGVO in 1915; she does not explore the relationship between War and needlework volunteers, and indeed, she suggests that women moved on from needlework to other war work.⁵ Jane Tynan, in her study of British Army uniform in the war, makes the claim that from 1915 voluntary war needlework was corrected and regulated by the War Office; however, she does not actually study needlework during the late war.⁶ This chapter seeks to redress the absence of historical attention paid to late war needlework garment making. Following the examinations of previous chapters into the form of early war needlework, this chapter argues that, contrary to popular historical understandings, war needlework did not die out or diminish as the war proceeded, but rather, it became more systematic and professionalised to the extent that it was fully integrated into the network of home front charitable war work. This examination expands on the argument that war needlework was not simply a short-lived mania of the early war. The chapter also returns to the subject of the relationship between the War Office and wartime needleworkers, and will argue that from 1915 to the end of the war this relationship took the form of a co-operative

⁴ Lucy Adlington, *Great War Fashion: Tales From The History Wardrobe*, Stroud, Gloucestershire, The History Press, 2013, p.107.

⁵ Lucy Adlington, *Great War Fashion: Tales From The History Wardrobe*, p.108.

⁶ Jane Tynan, *British Army Uniform and the First World War*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p.79-86.

symbiotic synergy between the DGVO and needlewomen which was based upon co-operation, mutual facilitation and flexibility.

The chapter begins with an examination of the formation of the Department of the DGVO at the War Office in 1915. Referring to the *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, it argues that the DGVO did not intervene in voluntary production as a means of controlling or correcting poor production, but rather, to facilitate a co-ordinated channel between garment supply and demand: it joined up the home front producers with front line recipients.⁷ It will be shown that whilst the DGVO provided transport and matched production with front line garment requests, it relied on needlework working parties to organise and quality control their own work.

Examination is then made of Tynan's assertion that the War Office corrected volunteer needlework production by issuing regulatory knitting patterns from 1915.⁸ This chapter will argue that there was not a didactic relationship between the War Office and volunteer garment makers where the DGVO corrected women's 'misguided' production; rather, the War Office outsourced its requirements to needleworkers, recognising that success was dependent upon women's organisations taking the lead with regard to production methods and self-organisation. Referring to knitting patterns, this chapter will show how Queen Mary's Needlework Guild (QMNG) had a formative role in developing the quality controls of the DGVO scheme, including specifying the knitting patterns that the DGVO distributed: needlewomen devised and issued their own war patterns which were

⁷ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort Resulting from the Formation of the Department of the Director-General of Voluntary Organisations*, London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1919.

⁸ Jane Tynan, *British Army Uniform and the First World War*, p.79-86.

then adopted by the DGVO. The chapter will then argue that the patterns adopted by the DGVO in fact opened up access to garment making for the war effort, rather than restricted it, and it will be shown how this ensured that garment making strengthened the connection between home and front line. It is argued that the relationship between the War Office and needlework groups was thus a symbiotic one.

The 1916 DGVO film, 'How to Help Tommy', is then examined to show that, although garment types were specified, the DGVO was not concerned with their stylistic variation.⁹ This, I argue, is because the DGVO scheme sought to personalise the connection between the home front and front line. It will also be shown how the DGVO promoted access to garment making to different classes and ages; however, it left garment quality controls to needleworkers locally. The autonomy of needleworking groups over quality controls and structure is then discussed by referring to the reports made by volunteer working parties to the DGVO at the end of the war. This will demonstrate how the responsibility for defining quality controls and innovating war garments lay with needlework working parties.¹⁰ This level of autonomy enabled them to develop local efficiencies, specialise, or focus their production.

The second half of this chapter examines the way in which needlework working parties in the DGVO scheme sustained their work in the later war years. Referring to working party reports, it will be shown how groups overcame funding issues; materials shortage; and location difficulties in the later war, and that this was achieved with the support of local communities which, it is argued, valued volunteer

⁹ 'How to Help Tommy', 1916. IWM Film 1221.

¹⁰ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort resulting from the formation of the D.G.V.O Department: Being a detailed record of the work of the Recognised Associations, Appendices III and IV*, London, HM Stationery Office, 1920.

needlework as an effective war effort activity.¹¹ This chapter will show that volunteer garment making working parties were a key component in sustaining the charitable network of war effort activity on the home front during the war. Garment making was sustained by fund-raising from other war effort activities, but also, significantly, it supported a number of war charities, thus becoming a key feature in a complex circuit of charitable war work. This key role was recognised and encouraged by the DGVO with the award of a bespoke Volunteer Workers badge; however, despite this recognition, the badge has not received much recognition in the historic record of 'On War Service' badges.

To conclude, the chapter examines the challenges faced by working parties in the later war. In this, I argue that working party members considered their work as a duty and sacrifice for the war. It is suggested that needleworkers considered themselves, and were seen by the community, as necessary contributors to the war. Boundaries between the domestic home front and war service were blurred by understandings of sacrifice and duty, and, expanding on this, the chapter analyses the role of the home to show how it functioned as a site of war production.

The Department of the Director General of Voluntary Organisations at War Office, 1915

In May 1915, with the appointment of a new Financial Secretary to the War Office, Henry Forster, the issue of centralising volunteer garment production was first addressed. Forster asked 'whether or not there was any real waste in connection with the splendid work which people had undertaken', and he conceded that 'there

¹¹ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV.*

was waste of effort on the part of voluntary workers, and, what I thought more regrettable, waste of a great deal of material'.¹² Forster does not elaborate on the reason for this wastage, which could be duplication of effort or poor production, and nor does he identify the issue of problematic distribution. However, he wished to 'see whether or not we could not systematise the whole movement throughout the country with a view to the prevention of waste'.¹³ In September 1915, the War Office appointed a Director General of Voluntary Organisations, Sir Edward Ward, who was tasked with overseeing this systematisation of voluntary work (Figure 6.1).¹⁴

Following enquiries, Ward identified that the problem between home front garment making and front line distribution was the lack of an amalgamated system. He noted that between the outbreak of war and early 1915, various charitable organisations collected garments for soldiers and sailors, including Regimental Associations; the Red Cross, Queen Mary's Needlework Guild (QMNG) and Queen Alexandra's Field Force Fund:

The object of all these Associations was the same, to supply gift articles in response to all applications which reached them personally whether the applications came from officers and men, whether from training camps in this country, or from Armies in the Field, whether from medical officers, matrons, or nurses of our Army Hospitals at home or abroad. There was no system in the mode of application or in the status of the applicants and although the demands

¹² Announcement made by Henry Forster, MP, in the House of Commons on 18th November 1915, quoted in Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity*, Oxford and New York, Routledge, 2014, p.61.

¹³ Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity*, p.61.

¹⁴ Sir Edward Ward, (1853-1928), was experienced in the co-ordination and administration of army supplies from his role in the Army Service Corps during the Boer War, see C Harris, 'Ward, Sir Edward Willis Duncan, First Baronet, (1853-1928)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2008. For biographical details and analysis of Ward's military career see also Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity*, p.61-73.

were met as best they could be by those who received them, there was no regular organization existing dealing with the distribution of gifts.¹⁵

Ward indicates by this that that although garment demand was real, as was the willingness to supply garments, methods of communication were unreliable and no organisation dealt effectively with distribution. It was these two factors, and not poor production, that Ward identified to be the problem with early-war garment schemes, where:

notwithstanding the unceasing labour of societies at home to ensure the supply of gifts equalled the ever increasing demands a great amount of waste of time, labour and money resulted, unsuitable patterns of articles were produced and overlapping became a very serious matter.¹⁶

To remedy this situation, Ward established a system which aimed to join home front supply directly to front line demand. He also initiated the formation of localised centres of production to which existing - and future - garment working groups could join. These were defined on a County, City, Borough or District Association level, and appointed their own committees:

thus securing a uniform system of working, the pooling of resources, and a united movement on well-organized lines with a definite programme applied to the whole country.¹⁷

Ward encouraged the formation of local bodies by writing to 'Lord Lieutenants, Lord Provosts, Lord Mayors, Mayors, Provosts of all Boroughs', and announced the scheme in the press on 11th October 1915. Once working parties had joined these

¹⁵ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.3.

¹⁶ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.3.

¹⁷ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.3.

central bodies, the DGVO would issue garment requests from the front line.¹⁸ Ward claimed that:

In the course of a few months the confusion which previously existed was overcome, and a well-organized scheme was thoroughly established, and the great volume of voluntary effort on behalf of the Troops was working with one object, namely, to secure the largest useful output of standardized gifts with a minimum of waste either in money or labour.¹⁹

Fig. 6.1.



Sir Edward Ward in 1921. Photograph by Walter Stoneman. ©National Portrait Gallery.

¹⁸ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.3.

¹⁹ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.4.

Through the DGVO scheme, Ward therefore gathers together existing working parties under a broad but central local body, to which he would send garment requests received directly from the front line. Duplication of effort is minimised by this arrangement, as Ward defines the producer and destination of each consignment.²⁰

In his study of charitable enterprise during the war, Peter Grant has observed that the DGVO, as an internal War Office initiative, was primarily concerned with: 'the deflection of any criticism that the army was either not doing enough or was failing to coordinate matters'.²¹ Grant suggests that the DGVO:

was a halfway house between unregulated and uncoordinated activity and full legislation. It was designed to solve a specific problem, that of an imbalance in supply of troop comforts, rather than to control the entire voluntary effort of the country. Based as it was on cooperation rather than legislation it was inevitable that it worked well when dealing with well-organised, altruistic groups.²²

Grant has thus identified the key focus of the DGVO scheme to be supplying the front line, but he also notes that its success depended upon co-operation. The DGVO scheme relied heavily on 'well organised altruistic groups' to regulate and co-ordinate their own production effectively. Needlework groups could not present uncoordinated, under-par production for the DGVO to sort out. Indeed, as well as ensuring that their work was self-regulated, this chapter will show how needlework working groups had a significant role in defining and expanding the DGVO scheme.

²⁰ The DGVO scheme also administered a Camps Library; the collection of Sphagnum Moss for medical use; and a Musical instrument collection for the front line. Garment making working parties could assist with these activities, or groups were formed especially for them. However, the majority of working parties under the DGVO scheme were involved in garment-making for the war effort.

²¹ Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity*, p.80-81.

²² Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity*, p.82.

Fig. 6.2.



Stamford Needlework Association with bales of garments addressed directly to the front line in France, care of the DGVO, 1917. ©Imperial War Museum.

By October 1915, Ward had established a 'comforts pool' system, where officers on the front line communicated their needs to Ward and he requested individual working parties to supply these, with many sending the garments directly from needleworking parties to the front. Figure 6.2 shows members of the Stamford Needlework Association in Lincolnshire with bales of garments that they have made, checked, packed, and addressed directly to the front line. At the end of the war, the DGVO scheme registered 267 local central associations, which contained a total of 2,983 working group branches, amounting to approximately 400,000 individual workers.²³

²³ It should be noted that many more volunteers would have been involved in the DGVO scheme over the course of the war and that these figures only represent those still active at the end of the war and registered in 1919. See *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.8.

Demonstrably, voluntary needlework garment making was a national, systematised enterprise in the later war.

Although from October 1915 Ward had initiated the new method of providing garments to the front line, he was nonetheless mindful of the need to continue the role of the existing large charitable garment suppliers: QMNG, Regimental Associations, and the Red Cross. Ward stated that 'In order not to disturb but to effect co-ordination', all of these organisations were to continue their independent work.²⁴ However, this work was by no means external to the DGVO scheme.²⁵ Not only did the DGVO provide garment transport for these independent bodies, but branches of both the Red Cross and QMNG worked for the DGVO scheme, as did Regimental Associations. The DGVO also suggested that QMNG issue a certificate of affiliation to its own branches, whilst he recommended that the Red Cross register its working parties through their Head Office, thereby enhancing the operational cohesion of both administrations.²⁶ The DGVO thus interconnected, facilitated and drew upon the existing charitable organisations and groups concerned with supplying the front line.

However, although the DGVO reformed the system of voluntary garment supply, his influence on garment quality controls was far less substantial. By referring to the detail of knitting patterns, this chapter challenges the assertion that the War Office

²⁴ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.3.

²⁵ DGVO associations could have a multipurpose nature to them, providing equipment, garments, recreation items and medical war supplies, as well as supplying various different causes. This meant that the boundaries between the work of the DGVO and that of the Red Cross and QMNG, the two latter defined as independent initiatives by the DGVO, were, in reality, indistinct. The DGVO needlework working parties could and did supply both of these 'independent' causes if they chose to. For example, see Suffolk West Association, *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.55; Youghal Association in Ireland, *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.63; Roxburgh Association, *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.47.

²⁶ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.4.

exerted correction and control over volunteer needlework by issuing regulatory knitting patterns from 1915. That the War Office corrected women's production with knitting patterns has been stated by Jane Tynan, who has asserted that: 'So widespread was civilian knitting that the state responded by regulating domestic production'.²⁷ To evidence her statement, Tynan refers to the balaclava pattern (shown in Figure 5.7). This pattern, Tynan argues: 'has a very official message for rogue knitters: follow the pattern faithfully so that comforts for British soldiers comply with regulation issue'.²⁸ However, the balaclava pattern and booklet on which Tynan has based her case was published commercially in 1914, and it is quite unrelated to any state or War Office intervention.²⁹ The implication of Tynan's assertion that women's needlework production was in need of correction by the state is of concern, however, as it portrays volunteer needlewomen as a disorganised, but relatively passive entity: they are not seen to take a leading role in defining their own activity, but rather, as in need of correction by the force of the state. This chapter argues, in

²⁷ Jane Tynan, *British Army Uniform and the First World War*, p.79. I have taken Tynan's reference to 'the State' to mean the War Office and government policy more generally.

²⁸ Jane Tynan, *British Army Uniform and the First World War*, p.80.

²⁹ The eight-page pattern booklet, *Woman and War: How to Knit and Crochet Articles Necessary to the Health and Comfort of Our Soldiers and Sailors*, was a commercial publication sold by the needlework supplier Needlecraft Ltd; it was not published, circulated or formally authorised by the War Office. The balaclava pattern that Tynan refers to was updated in 1914 from one of Needlecraft Ltd's existing Boer War patterns. It is quite likely therefore that this pattern was considered acceptable for voluntary garment-making during the Boer War. Tynan's assumption that this pattern was issued by the state appears to be based upon the confident language of the pattern and because it advises the use of khaki wool. She remarks that: 'The publication of patterns eventually brought the civilian knitting project under official control; they instructed knitters to use khaki wool and to confine their creative endeavours to a narrow range of regulation garments'. See Jane Tynan, *British Army Uniform and the First World War*, 2013, p.82. Despite Tynan's focus on this pattern, the colour khaki is not referred to in the balaclava pattern; however, the commercial brand 'Marvel Knitting 4 ply wool, Khaki colour' is recommended for another pattern in the booklet, 'Socks for our Soldiers', see *Women & War: How to Knit and Crochet Articles necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors*, Needlecraft Ltd, 1914, p.5. It should also be noted that it was not unusual for commercial knitting patterns to use authoritative language, including the term 'regulation', early in 1914. See J.J Baldwin's 'Regulation Khaki wool' yarn in *Knitted Comforts for Men on Land and Sea*, Beehive No 17, 1914, p.4; Patons notified readers that it's 'Regulation khaki shade is stocked in all our regular qualities and sizes'. See *Directions for Knitting Soldiers' and Sailors' Comforts*, 1914, p.1; While Weldon's claimed that its 'Ex-Super Khaki Fingering Wool' shade is: 'the same as the approved Khaki Uniform worn by H.M.'s Forces.' *Weldon's Garments and Hospital Comforts for Our Soldiers and Sailors, First Series*, 1914, p.15. These independent publications were not state issued or regulated.

contrast, that needlewomen led the way in defining the form of quality controls in war needlework. Despite Tynan's misattribution and misinterpretation of patterns, her attention to them as potential sources for historical study acknowledges that they form valid documents for historical analysis within academia. As sources, however, patterns are best approached with an associated examination of their historical, cultural, technical and linguistic context. This chapter will now show how the needlework patterns of the DGVO indicate that the relationship between needlewomen and the DGVO was a synergy which took a symbiotic form during the war.

Knitting patterns of the DGVO

Peter Grant has examined the formation, strategy and structure of the DGVO in detail in his analysis of philanthropy and charitable voluntary action during the First World War. In his study, although Grant shows how Ward managed the garments production and distribution scheme during the war, he does not specifically credit women's needlework groups with holding an instructive role in defining the quality controls that the DGVO established within the scheme.³⁰ In particular, Grant suggests that QMNG held a peripheral role in war effort charitable work, where it 'was one organisation that was considered sufficiently independent, or more likely prestigious, to be excluded from the coordinating scheme undertaken by the DGVO'.³¹ This chapter has already shown how QMNG and the DGVO were in fact co-ordinated with one another in garment production and distribution; however,

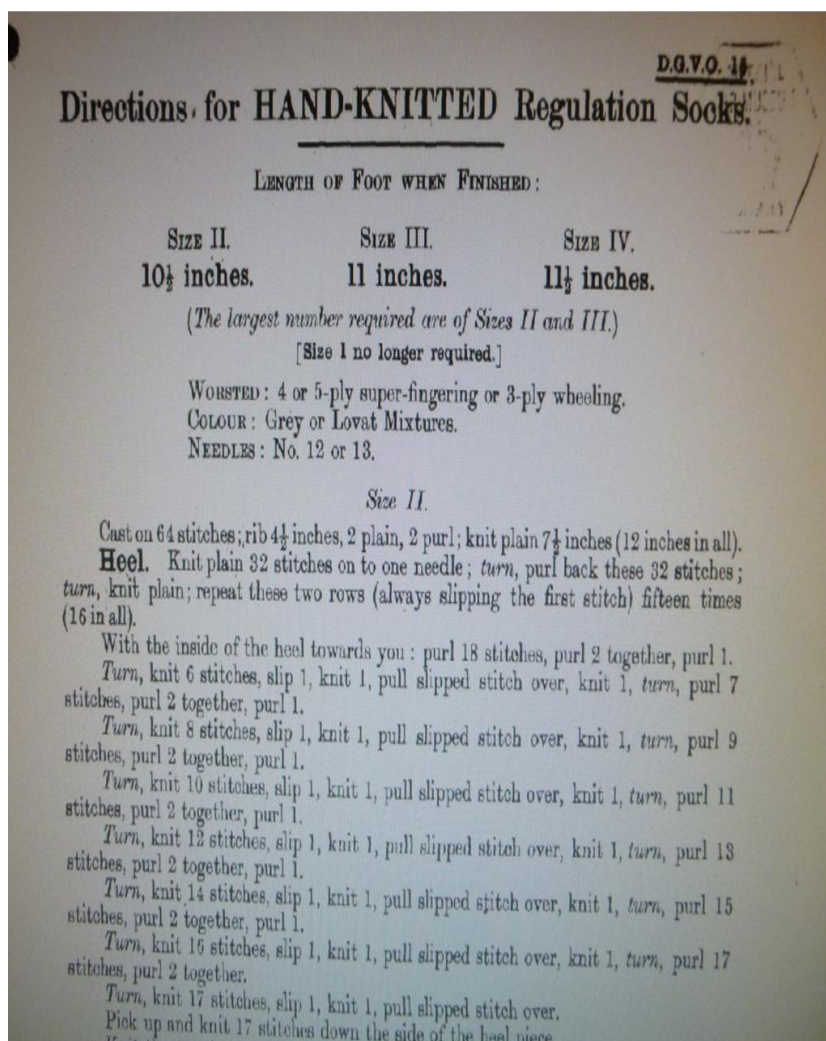
³⁰ Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity*, p.75.

³¹ Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity*, p.39.

QMNG also had a direct role in formulating the quality controls of the DGVO working parties.

From October 1915 one of the patterns issued by the DGVO was for socks. This pattern, shown in Figure 6.3, would have been popular with working parties due to the challenging nature of sock knitting and the need for guidance. The DGVO sock pattern gives instructions for three sizes of sock; it proposes two sizes of needle; and it suggests that 'grey or lovat' colours be used. However, the technical instructions in this pattern from the DGVO are in fact identical to those given in the pattern issued by QMNG in January of 1915, shown in Figure 6.4. QMNG issued this pattern as part of the 'Queen's Gift to the Troops'. What is evident from a pattern comparison is that in October of 1915 the DGVO simply adopted QMNG's existing sock pattern and re-issued this as the DGVO approved pattern for socks. The most likely reason for this pattern to be adopted by the War Office is because it was tried and tested, and importantly, because it originated from needlewomen with expertise in the area.

Fig. 6.3.



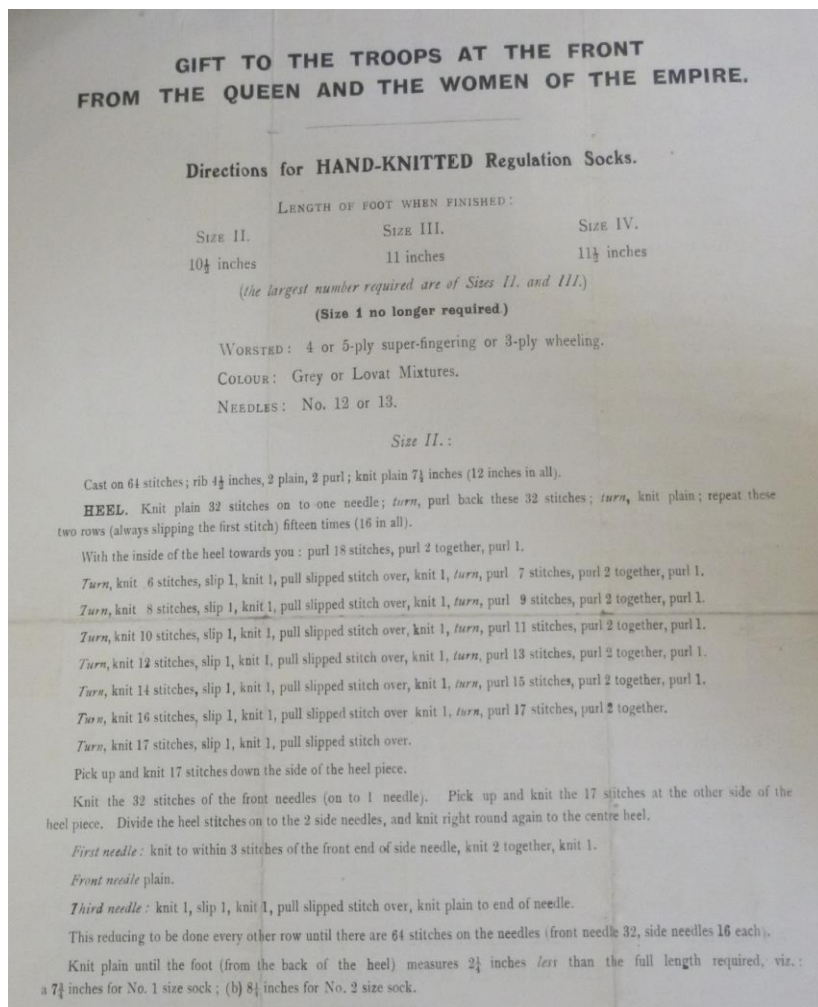
Detail of the Sock Pattern issued by the Department of the Director General of Voluntary Organisations, October 1915. Imperial War Museum, WWC, B.O.1 2/10.

Both the DGVO and QMNG sock patterns use the terms 'Directions' and 'Regulation' in their title; however, in all of the other patterns issued by the DGVO during the war, these terms are not used; rather, garment patterns are titled 'Specification of' or 'Specification for'.³² What this suggests is that these authoritative terms came from

³² Fifteen of the DGVO First World War garment patterns are held in the Women's Work Collection at the Imperial War Museum. These include 'Specification of Cap'; 'Specification of Cardigan'; 'Specification for Making Hose Tops for Highland Regiments'; 'Specification of Mitten', etc. See IWM, WWC, B.O.1 2/10 - B.O.1 2/28.

QMNG and not from the War Office's DGVO; they were simply re-issued by the DGVO. The 'directions' to create 'regulation' socks therefore came *from* the expertise of QMNG's needlewomen. The DGVO pattern should not therefore be considered an authoritarian intervention directed *at* these needlewomen.

Fig. 6.4.



Detail of the Sock Pattern issued by Queen Mary's Needlework Guild, 'The Queen's Gift to the Troops', January 1915. *Imperial War Museum*, Eph.C. Fashion, K86 1062.

In her study of women's voluntary organisations during the First World War, Jacqueline de Vries has described how the formation of the DGVO meant that:

Exact instructions were provided, for example, to the nearly 100 branches of the Queen Mary's Needlework Guild for knitting socks and sewing nightshirts according to military standards (supposedly bringing an end to mismatched regiments).³³

However, QMNG was not subject to the DGVO scheme; whilst the pattern directions for both enterprises actually came *from* QMNG.³⁴ Although de Vries' intends to highlight the way 'Britain relied on its civilians as much as its soldiers to win the first "total war" in history', this intention is undermined by repeating, rather than interrogating, the assertion that women's needlework was in need of correction by a patriarchal authority.³⁵ The patterns issued by the DGVO during the First World War were not dictated by the government, but rather they originated with, and were developed by, needlewomen. This is because the DGVO did not have the technical knowledge to 'correct' women's needlework, this knowledge came from needlewomen. The relationship between the DGVO and needlework groups was therefore one where needlewomen defined quality controls, and as this chapter will show, they also specified local management procedures. The DGVO, on the other hand, facilitated communications, garment requests and transportation. Rather than restrict and control needlework through directives, this chapter will now show how later war knitting patterns opened up access to garment making for the war effort. This, I argue, was to ensure that garment making remained broad and inclusive and the connection between home and front line was emphasised.

³³ Jacqueline de Vries, 'Women's Voluntary Organisations in World War 1', *Women, War & Society, 1914-1918*, Gale Digital Collection, 2005, p.2.

³⁴ To evidence her account that the Director General of Voluntary Organisation's regulated Queen Mary's Needlework Guild through issuing knitting patterns, de Vries refers directly to primary source papers BO2.2 in the Women's Work Collection. However, these papers do not support the sequence of events that de Vries describes as they are solely concerned with describing the work of QMNG.

³⁵ Jacqueline de Vries, 'Women's Voluntary Organisations in World War 1', p.6.

DGVO pattern quality controls and access

An underlying assumption apparent in the work of Tynan and de Vries is that knitting patterns achieved quality controls by correcting and containing women's garment making during the war. However, the sock pattern issued by the DGVO - and by QMNG before it - made garment knitting more accurate by making it *more accessible* and less subject to a myriad of directives. This can be seen in the way the DGVO sock pattern included measurements in inches for achieving the length of the sock cuff and foot. Unlike many First World War knitting patterns, the QMNG/DGVO pattern (Figure 6.3) does not assume that the needle type, wool thickness and number of rows given in the pattern will automatically lead to the correct size. Measurements given in inches assist the knitter in achieving the right size of garment, as they allow the knitter to adapt their knitting and check their results as they go along, rectifying issues with gauge and tension. It gives the knitter a margin for error and size correction. The inclusion of measurements as a standard is a significant regulation, and although garment measurements do not guarantee a good result in knitting, they are of vital assistance. That two needle sizes are suggested also means that the knitter can work out which needle size is preferable for them to achieve the correct result. This pattern therefore incorporates a distinct element of flexibility within the process: it has been designed for ease of use and it enables access, rather than restricts.

Fig. 6.5.



Cover claiming pattern approval by the DGVO. *Leach's More Comforts For Our Men*, Issue No.9, Leach's Home Needlework Series, c.1915. Collection of Joyce Meader.

Over the course of the war, the DGVO approved various commercial patterns. These were also concerned with ensuring flexible access to garment making. Figure 6.5 shows the cover of *Leach's More Comforts For Our Men*, Issue No.9, which claims:

this book contains detailed instructions for making these 22 practical garments, all of which have been submitted to the Director-General of Voluntary Organisations, and approved by him.³⁶

In this edition, patterns include four types of glove design as well as four hat styles.³⁷ The inclusion of more than one version of garment within a type, e.g. more than one style of glove or hat, indicates that stylistic variety within garment type was not a primary concern for the DGVO. This would suggest that the DGVO prioritised ensuring that certain types of garment were made, whilst stylistic variation within type was not only acceptable, it was encouraged. That the DGVO did not seek to standardise garment stylistic details is evident in the film, 'How to Help Tommy', made by the War Office in 1916. This chapter will now examine stills from this film to argue that the DGVO's priority was in fact to promote access to garment making on the home front and thereby strengthen the connection between the home and front line.

Garment variation in the War Office Film, 'How to Help Tommy'

The DGVO's lack of emphasis on stylistic conformity for garments is quickly apparent in the 1916 film, 'How to Help Tommy', which the DGVO released to the public to publicise voluntary work.³⁸ The film begins by showing the way garment requests from the front line are received by the DGVO at his office in London.

Following this, a title card claims:

³⁶ *Leach's More Comforts For Our Men, No.9*. London, Leach's Home Needlework Series, c.1915.

³⁷ Glove patterns include the 'Crochet Mitten'; the "'Tuck-It-In" Mitten'; the 'Shooting Glove'; and a 'Complete Glove'. *Leach's More Comforts For Our Men, No.9*.

³⁸ 'How to Help Tommy', 1916. IWM, Film 1221.

ALL CLASSES ARE HELPING. A soldiers [sic] wife knitting a muffler for her soldier husband.³⁹

Footage then shows a woman knitting a garment, whilst a child plays beside her (Figure 6.6).

Fig. 6.6.



Film still showing a soldier's wife 'knitting a muffler for her soldier husband', 'How to Help Tommy', 1916. *Imperial War Museum*, Film 1221.

This scene then fades into footage of a soldier wearing a knitted scarf (muffler) (Figure 6.7).

³⁹ 'How to Help Tommy', 1916. IWM, Film 1221.

Fig. 6.7.



Film fade into footage of a soldier wearing a knitted muffler, 'How to Help Tommy', 1916. *Imperial War Museum*, Film 1221.

Although the muffler scarf is only seen briefly in the fade-in footage before the soldier buttons his coat, it is evident that it has been knitted in a yarn that is much darker in colour than the yarn the soldier's wife is knitting with. The pale yarn used by the soldier's wife would not be suitable for making a khaki muffler, and obviously this is not the yarn that has been used to make the muffler worn by this soldier. This suggests that the film is less concerned with showing viewers the specifics of accurately made garments, and is more interested in demonstrating the *personal* role that women at home can have within the national garment making scheme.

Another example of garment stylistic variety in 'How to Help Tommy' appears in the footage of 'an East End schoolgirl knitting a muffler' (Figure 6.8). The plaited fringe ends of the scarf knitted by the girl in the film are distinctive; however, amongst the

four DGVO approved muffler patterns in Leach's pattern booklet, *More Comforts For Our Men*, only the pattern for 'A Crochet Muffler' states that 'a fringe may be added if you wish, but it is not required'.⁴⁰ This indicates that the DGVO is encouraging personal variation in garment styles, possibly as an encouragement to knitters that they were undertaking a personalised task. Garment variety would not have been an issue for the reason that the DGVO was able to efficiently match up the garments supplied with demand made by the front line.

Fig. 6.8.



Film still showing 'an East End schoolgirl knitting a muffer', 'How to Help Tommy', 1916. *Imperial War Museum*, Film 1221.

⁴⁰ *Leach's More Comforts For Our Men*, No.9, p.11. On the same page as the 'Crochet Muffler' pattern, the 'Knitted Muffler' has no fringe, and the pattern suggests: 'If you want varied patterns, see No.4 of this series, pages 3, 4 and 10'. The 'Crochet Muffler Helmet' and 'Muffler-Helmet in Knitting' patterns in the booklet do not have fringes, and fringes would not work with this combined design.

Fig. 6.9.



Front line soldiers shown wearing a variety of knitted garments in the film, 'How to Help Tommy', 1916. *Imperial War Museum*, Film 1221.

Figure 6.9 shows that the variety of garments, and specifically the *home-made* look of them, is not problematic in the DGVO film 'How to Help Tommy'. Indeed, the film emphasises the variety of personal connections between home and front line. Rather than defining restrictions on garment production in terms of directing 'uniformity' of garment styles and methods of work, the DGVO film seeks to encourage a personalised form of production. The emotional importance of the relationship between the home front and front line communicated through home-made garments will be examined in detail in Chapter Seven of this thesis. However, 'How to Help Tommy' suggests that the variety of garments is to emphasise the presence of the home on the front line, not to annul it.

Another feature of the DGVO scheme made apparent in 'How to Help Tommy' is a concern with promoting class accessibility and flexible working for those at home. The film shows a 'West End drawing room scene' with 'Officers wives busily engaged in making various articles that are needed by our Tommies' (Figure 6.10); however, the point is also made that 'Girls employed on munition work, even give up part of their lunch hour, to knit articles for the Comfort Fund' (Figure 6.11).

Fig. 6.10.



Film still showing 'Officers wives' making garments, 'How to Help Tommy', 1916. *Imperial War Museum*, Film 1221.

This begs the question, however, of how quality controls were built into the DGVO scheme. Referring to reports made by volunteer working parties to the DGVO at the end of the war, this chapter will now show that quality controls, innovation and invention were the responsibility of needlework working parties themselves, and not the DGVO.⁴¹ There was local autonomy and variation in working groups, as well as access to participate in the scheme for different classes and ages. It is argued, however, that the flexibility of the DGVO scheme, as well as the centralised system of collection and distribution, was crucial to the success of these developments.

⁴¹ These reports were compiled into an Appendix to the DGVO's main report of the scheme of voluntary effort during the war, and they give accounts of needlework working party production and priorities. See *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort resulting from the formation of the D.G.V.O Department: Being a detailed record of the work of the Recognised Associations, Appendices III and IV*, London, HM Stationery Office, 1920.

Fig. 6.11.



Film still showing munitions workers knitting garments, 'How to Help Tommy', 1916. *Imperial War Museum*, Film 1221.

Quality controls, innovation and invention in war needlework, 1915-1918

In a memorandum, dated 1st October 1915 and printed in *The Times*, the DGVO was keen to reassure garment making volunteers that:

the War Office has no desire to interfere with the patriotic efforts of those who have at the request of commanding officers done so much to provide comforts for individual corps, and it is the wish of the Army Council that this particular branch of voluntary effort should not be disturbed. They hope, however, that the efforts of the workers, after they have completed these requirements, will be devoted to cooperation with their county branches under the central organization.⁴²

⁴² *The Times*, 11 October 1915, p.11.

This statement recognises that garment making working parties may have their own local commitments that they would like to serve, including prioritising local regiments or making garments for the local war hospital. Ward, therefore, accommodated local variation and autonomy into the volunteer garment making scheme from the start.

At the end of the war, 267 local associations submitted reports to the DGVO about the voluntary groups under their administration, the majority of which were needlework garment making groups.⁴³ From these reports, it is possible to investigate the local methods of quality control in working parties. At the start of the DGVO scheme, Ward noted that garment inspections were made by members of the Drapers' Chamber of Trade.⁴⁴ The reports by working parties show, however, that they quickly appointed their own experts to check quality controls, and this was quite acceptable to the scheme. Thus, in Sheerness working party, 'Mrs Barber' was 'in charge of the knitting', whilst 'Miss Barling and Mrs Penfold' supervised 'cutting out and shirts'.⁴⁵ Individuals were commonly nominated as quality inspectors in working parties, as in Dunbarton, Scotland, where Mrs J.R Paul 'personally supervised all consignments of goods received' from volunteers.⁴⁶ Some working parties simply report that quality inspections took place as a matter of procedure, as in Nottingham Red Cross and Soldiers' Clothing Depot, where:

Parcels of work were sent out to groups and individuals which when returned were inspected, sorted and stored until ready for packing in bales for distribution.⁴⁷

⁴³ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV.*

⁴⁴ These members would have included individuals involved in garment manufacturing and retail and trade; however, they are likely to have been local people living in towns and villages with working parties. See *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.9.

⁴⁵ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.49.

⁴⁶ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.19.

⁴⁷ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.41.

In Ross, Herefordshire, the responsibility for supervising the working party was rotated, as: 'The President and each member were responsible for certain days in the week, when they supervised and were responsible for their particular work'.⁴⁸

What these reports indicate, therefore, is that working parties appointed members to check the quality of production as part of their system of work. Quality controls were not undertaken by a War Office 'expert'; rather, they took place locally within working parties and were built into the everyday activities of groups.

Garment specialisations and innovations were also reported by working parties. As a feature of the flexibility of the DGVO scheme, working parties could chose to make garments that they felt best suited their skill sets. This led to the development of local specialisms, and a number of the resultant pattern innovations were adopted by the DGVO. Belgravia War Hospital Supply Depot thus made 'the character Belgravia sling' which was 'adopted by the D.G.V.O.'.⁴⁹ Variations in garment types were also encouraged by the DGVO, as seen by its adoption of more than one sling pattern.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, at Streatham Common working party: 'A pattern bed jacket was adopted by the D.G.V.O.'.⁵¹ While, Wallingford working party found that 'Pyjamas were rather a speciality'.⁵² What these pattern developments indicate, is that working parties led the way in refining and adapting garments for war use. Volunteer garment makers were not the recipients of refined patterns from the War Office which corrected their work; instead, they supplied the War Office with increasingly sophisticated patterns.

⁴⁸ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.46.

⁴⁹ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.9.

⁵⁰ Stockton on Tees reports: 'Two patterns of arm sling were approved by the D.G.V.O.'. *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.54.

⁵¹ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.54.

⁵² *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.58.

What is apparent is that the internal structure of the local associations registered to the DGVO scheme were not of a uniform composition: the central geographic association to which working parties belonged could be composed of several different social groups, enabling different forms of work to take place. This was the case with the Norfolk and Norwich Association, which was made up of 91 working parties.⁵³ Due to the varied composition of local associations, methods of garment production and group organisation were often left up to the working parties to arrange locally. The flexibility and inclusivity of the DGVO scheme meant that it was not necessary to specialise in garment types if the working group preferred to offer variety. In this way, Lauder, on the Scottish border, produced a long list of knitted and dress made garments which they made to match their skills and budget.⁵⁴ Renfrewshire, likewise, reported a varied garment list, with 'no particular form being specialised in, and no inventions, &c., were made'.⁵⁵ This indicates that different skill sets and contributions could be utilised by the DGVO scheme which were matched to front line needs.

Some working parties restricted the type of work they did according to costs or circumstances. To aid working party expenses and logistics the DGVO provided garment transportation from local depots and assisted with an affordable wool supply for production purposes. Harrold in Bedfordshire found that 'knitting was more convenient than sewing for some', as they could buy wool at a lower price through the DGVO.⁵⁶ In Dunbarton, in Scotland, some chose knitting over 'very delicate work'

⁵³ These included: hospital supply depots; smaller regional working parties; The Norfolk Needlework Guild; and 'Numerous isolated workers'. *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.40.

⁵⁴ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.33.

⁵⁵ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.45.

⁵⁶ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.27

due to the 'circumstances of workers'.⁵⁷ Sheerness in Kent specialised in knitted garments because no suitable building was found for making hospital bandages and most contributors worked at home.⁵⁸ What this variety suggests is that it was possible for even the most constrained working parties to find ways of contributing to the scheme.

The flexible composition of working parties is evident from the way in which they could be composed of working women, women at home, and people of different classes and ages. Working women and women with day-time commitments were accommodated by The Moray War Work Association in Scotland.⁵⁹ Whereas, one of the working parties at Wandsworth, London, 'was composed entirely of Laundry Girls', who made garments after they had finished a day's work.⁶⁰ The inclusion of working women is significant, as this demonstrates that not only was charitable garment making not simply an activity for women at home, it was also an initiative that working women wanted to take part in, including women engaged in other war work. Working parties were often composed of a mix of classes. In Ely, Cambridgeshire, working party members were 'drawn from all classes, including tradespeople, dressmakers, domestic servants and working women'.⁶¹ The Windsor Association reported that 'All classes came and worked most harmoniously together'.⁶² This interaction between women of different classes suggests that the activity of charitable garment making for the war was one that all classes of women wished to be engaged in. There was also much scope for older people to contribute

⁵⁷ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.19.

⁵⁸ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.49.

⁵⁹ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.39.

⁶⁰ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.58.

⁶¹ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.22.

⁶² *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.61.

to the DGVO scheme. In Chatham, Kent: 'Several invalids and aged ladies of from 70 to 80 years of age have worked continuously, one old lady of 81 years of age having made 140 pairs of socks'.⁶³ The inclusion of older people and school children within the DGVO scheme presents the picture of a broad and accessible home front war effort activity, where people of different ages were encouraged to take part.

The working party reports made to the DGVO thus confirm that the DGVO scheme accommodated flexibility in working party composition, structure, and garment making priorities. This enabled working parties to develop efficient systems of work and specialisations, as well as to meet the demand for garment variety and quality. This thesis has shown that the increased professionalism of garment making in the later war has not received the same emphasis as early-war 'needlework mania' in the historic record; indeed, histories have suggested that war effort needlework died out in the later war. This was not the case, and it will now be demonstrated how voluntary garment making was sustained as a successful charitable war initiative until the end of the war.

War needlework schemes and charitable enterprise, 1915-18

Grant has stated that one of the primary purposes of his history of war charities and philanthropy during the war: 'is to demonstrate that the middle class, sock-knitting image of First World War charity is yet another of the myths that has surrounded that

⁶³ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.13. The working party in the Scottish town of Lauder reported that it was 'interesting to note that one of the workers is an old shepherd in the Lammermoors (73 years of age), who has knitted about one hundred pairs of socks'. *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.33; In Ireland, in Monaghan 'some of the knitters are over 80 years of age'. *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.37.

traumatic period of British History'.⁶⁴ Grant argues that First World War charitable activity has been generalised as middle class sock knitting, and his study sets out to show that this was not the case.⁶⁵ The First World War historian, Gary Sheffield, confirms that it is necessary to extract charitable activity during the war from sock knitting when he states that Grant's research 'effectively consigns the notion that it was all about sock-knitting by upper class women to the wastepaper basket'.⁶⁶ However, this consignment of the 'myth' that charitable volunteering was all sock knitting by the middle and upper-classes, places exactly the same valuation on war knitting as histories have placed on it in general: that it was to be discarded. In seeking to distance the history of First World War charitable enterprise from the activity of middle class sock knitting, the latter is quickly condemned to its own myth as a phenomenon of confused, middle class, poorly-made, early-war charitable knitting which did not have much impact on long-term charitable enterprise during the war. However, Grant's exclusion of middle class sock-knitting from his very thorough history of charitable war activity is an unjustified omission as, I would argue, not enough is actually known about middle class, or indeed working-class, charitable war needlework to discard it from the history of organised war-time charitable endeavour in the later war. As the following examination will show, volunteer garment making - middle class sock knitting - made a key contribution to the complex network of First World War charitable war work, and was a valued charitable war initiative by home front communities. This chapter will also show that voluntary war needlework was recognised by the War Office as a war effort activity

⁶⁴ Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity*, p.3.

⁶⁵ Although Grant identifies the perpetuation of disparaging imagery about charitable sock-knitting in the historiography, he does not question it. See Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity*, p.3.

⁶⁶ Gary Sheffield, foreword in Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity*, p.xiv.

through the issue of a bespoke Volunteer Workers badge; further suggesting that the poor valuation of war needlework came after the war.

Communities sustain war needlework schemes

As the war proceeded, the means by which working parties raised funds to continue their work and buy materials was decided upon according to the resources and preferences of individual working parties. Community fundraising was, however, popular, with many parties choosing to host charitable events. Thus, Sheerness working party staged concerts.⁶⁷ While in West Calder they held 'Flag Days, Sale of Vegetables and Flowers, Whist Drives'.⁶⁸ Similarly, Aberystwyth in Wales raised money by 'garden fetes, concerts, dramatic entertainments, pantry sales and white elephant sales, flag days and donations'.⁶⁹ This community fundraising drew local attention to the cause of garment making for the war effort, raising its profile as a local cause.

Subscriptions were also sought from working party members. Lady Sclater's Workrooms collected money, 'entirely through the workers and other friends of the depot and by private advertisement, no appeal, such as a flag day, having been made to the outside public'.⁷⁰ Self-sufficiency was also preferred by Dewsbury, where all money came from group member subscription.⁷¹ In Ely, Chichester and Plymouth, likewise, working party members all made small contributions.⁷² West

⁶⁷ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.49.

⁶⁸ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.59.

⁶⁹ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.4

⁷⁰ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.49.

⁷¹ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.17.

⁷² *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, In Ely, members contributed according to their means. See p.22; p.14; and p.43.

Hartlepool and Windsor sold teas to members, reinvesting the profits into buying materials.⁷³ Self-funding by working parties therefore indicates that members wanted to show that they were committed to sustaining their own work. However, raising enough money to continue needlework activities did not come easily to some associations. Leyton, which had formed in November 1915, found that from ‘the outset the Committee was hampered by lack of funds, our Treasurer very kindly advancing a loan of £25 so as to make a start’.⁷⁴ This suggests that whilst the DGVO encouraged local associations to form working groups in 1915, their success was dependent upon the management of the local working parties; and fundraising in the community was crucial to build up the momentum to sustain needlework schemes. What these working party funding initiatives suggest, however, is that war effort garment making did not simply hold a supportive role where it contributed to the front line. War effort needlework was *in itself* supported and sustained by associated charitable activities and communities at home. These communities thus considered war garment making to be a valuable and useful war contribution.

As well as becoming self-supporting, needlework activity also supported other war charities in a complex network of wider charitable war work. Working parties contributed substantial support to other war causes. This can be seen by the Bedford working party, which, as well as making garments, ran canteens and entertainments for local troops and raised £520 for ‘the Blinded Soldiers (St. Dunstan’s) Fund, and large sums for other War charities’.⁷⁵ The Abingdon association chose to donate garments and money directly to St Dunstan’s and the local Phthisis Hospital.⁷⁶ While

⁷³ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.59; *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.61.

⁷⁴ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.34.

⁷⁵ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.8.

⁷⁶ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.4.

in an impressive feat of fundraising, Bideford in Devon raised £6274 13s 6d for other war charities, including the Serbian Red Cross; St Dunstan's; the Belgian Sterilizer Fund; the Devon Patriotic Fund and the Y.M.C.A.⁷⁷ Needlework working parties thus made a significant contribution to sustaining other war charities; and they were integral to the wider network of home front charitable war work, which they helped to sustain. This integrated role has been overlooked to date, but it indicates that not only was war effort needlework a feature of war work for the duration of the war, it also held a significant charitable community role.

The Volunteer Worker Badge

A lesser-known feature of organised charitable war needlework is that the DGVO awarded working party members with a bespoke war badge from the War Office. The Volunteer Workers badge was instituted by the DGVO when the scheme opened in November 1915 (Figures 6.12 and 6.13).⁷⁸ The conditions for award of the badge were broadly defined, but they included the need to be registered as a volunteer with one of the local associations within the DGVO scheme. Both men and women associated with the DGVO scheme were eligible for the Volunteer Worker badge, as long as they had volunteered for at least three months. The conditions of that voluntary service, however, were left up to the local associations to define. In giving this freedom, Ward acknowledged that:

⁷⁷ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.9.

⁷⁸ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.6.

The conditions obtaining in the various localities throughout Great Britain made it impossible for me as Director General of Voluntary Organizations, to fix a single standard applicable to every centre.⁷⁹

To receive the badge, volunteers could therefore work from home; they could contribute different quantities and types of work; and they could produce work irregularly. The flexibility of the DGVO scheme made working party comparison and any strict conditions of eligibility impossible. However, volunteer needlework as a war activity was nonetheless competitive, with badges numbered and restricted only to those in current service (Figure 6.13).

Fig. 6.12.



Volunteer Worker badge, 1915-1918, obverse. *Author's collection.*

Fig. 6.13.



Volunteer Worker badge, 1915-1918, verso. *Author's collection.*

⁷⁹ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.6.

At the end of the war, Ward claimed that the badge had been:

the means of securing the regular and continuous support of tens of thousands of voluntary workers in connection with the scheme, with the result that they have been authorized to retain their badges as a memento of their great work in comforting the troops on active service, and ameliorating the condition of the sick and suffering.⁸⁰

The Volunteer Worker badge demonstrates the importance and integrated nature of voluntary garment making during the late war. The badge was commissioned in brass by the War Office and made by one of its military badge makers, J. Gaunt. This would have been prestigious as brass was a restricted metal during the war and David Monger has noted how, in 1917, the Ministry of Munitions refused to release the metal required to make badges to be 'supplied to 'the domestic' for saving food'.⁸¹ Yet, between 1915-1918, brass Volunteer Worker badges were issued to individuals in needlework working parties. This suggests that the DGVO needlework working parties were not considered to be performing a purely domestic war task: they were officially serving the war effort and were recognised for this. This crosses the boundaries between the domestic home front and 'official' war service. Despite its significance to home front history, however, the Volunteer Worker badge has either not received mention in First World War badge compendiums, or it has been misattributed or vaguely described.⁸² This oversight undermines and obscures the

⁸⁰ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.7.

⁸¹ David Monger, 'Tangible Patriotism during the First World War: Individuals and the Nation in British Propaganda', *War & Society*, 37:4, p.252.

⁸² The Volunteer Worker (VW) badge is not referred to in the main reference work on First World War home front On War Service badges: Howard Williamson, *The Great War Medal Collectors Companion*, Ipswich, Suffolk, Anne Williamson, 2011; Jon Mills refers to the VW badge, but only as inspiration for the Second World War 'Volunteer Workers for the Forces' badge. He does not specify the terms of award for the First World War VW badge or any historical background. See Jon Mills, *Doing Their Bit: Home Front Lapel Badges, 1939-1945*, Devizes, Sabrestorm Publishing, 2012, R19.

status that needlework activity held as a home front war service activity in the later years of the war. It adds to the misleading perception of needlework activity as external to professional and organised War Office charitable war work.

In their studies of women's home front organisations, Susan Grayzel and Lucy Noakes have both noted the controversial status of the women's war service badges associated with the uniformed Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), and they have identified the ways in which, by wearing badges with military associations, women's claims to patriotism were unfavourably received on the home front.⁸³ The Volunteer Workers badge is far more ambiguous, however, as it was awarded to both men and women and, unlike WAAC or munitions workers, it was not associated with any other form of clothing. Nonetheless, the Volunteer Workers badge was a symbol of patriotic service, and the fact that it was worn - with official backing - by a large number of women at home suggests that needleworkers were far more integrated into war service activity on the home front than has been previously considered. In issuing the Volunteer Worker badge, the DGVO recognised the importance of working party members to the scheme, and he encouraged their commitment. This chapter will now examine the challenges that working parties faced, and will argue that working party members considered these challenges to be faced as a duty and sacrifice for the war.

⁸³ Susan Grayzel, "'The Outward and Visible Sign of Her Patriotism': Women, Uniforms, and National Service During the First World War', *Twentieth Century British History*, 8:2, 1997, p.157; Lucy Noakes, 'Playing at Being Soldiers: British women and military uniform in the First World War', *British Popular Culture and the First World War*, ed. by Jessica Meyer, Leiden, Brill, 2008, p.123-146.

Challenges of later war needlework garment making

Over the course of the later war, garment making working parties faced several challenges to sustaining their work. Some experienced problems with retaining a central location to carry out and collect work, as depot sites changed, and often the loan of these was subject to local generosity. Thus, in Fareham in 1917 the association had to give up its depot premises, and as no suitable rooms could be found for six months 'Mrs Arnold and Mrs Shakespear hosted knitting parties twice a week'.⁸⁴ Whereas, in Wylam, in Northumberland, needleworkers held meetings in the village institute and carried out packing and storing at the Secretary's house.⁸⁵ It was local beneficence that sustained the Yorkshire, North Riding, association, where the Lord Lieutenant paid the rent on the depot and workers' postage of garments from their homes to the depot.⁸⁶ Depots could also be found unsuitable or uncomfortable to work in, as in Sanderstead, Croydon, which was located in a 'large racquet court', where 'In spite of radiators it was very cold in the winter months, but the members worked splendidly'.⁸⁷ Notwithstanding the potential discomfort and the frenetic nature of central depots, working party schemes were made as accessible as possible to volunteers, and local solutions appear to have been sought to difficulties.

Some needlework parties found that they faced other difficulties, such as a moving population, or restrictions due to the health and availability of voluntary members. Bromley had problems in the later war due to the 'ill health and domestic cares' of group members.⁸⁸ While in Great Yarmouth, the working party noted 'considerable difficulty' due to 'the increased price of materials and the many appeals for financial

⁸⁴ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.23.

⁸⁵ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.61.

⁸⁶ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.63.

⁸⁷ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.48.

⁸⁸ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.11.

aid made by other war charities'.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, it noted that 'it is pleasing to be able to state that no requisition was unfulfilled through lack of money'.⁹⁰ In the later war years, competition from other war charities posed a substantial problem for needlework groups. The Oxfordshire Association reported how, when work began in November 1915, many voluntary workers were already committed to other causes. It also reports, however, that for those who were available, the DGVO scheme 'gave the opportunity they were waiting for'.⁹¹ This shows that despite the attraction of other home front war activities, garment making was still considered to fulfil an important role.

Needlework working parties also experienced the direct impact of war through zeppelin air raids in some locations. Grayzel has pointed out how zeppelin raids 'helped *literally* to bring the war home to non-combatants and to women in particular'.⁹² The Southend association reported that 'All the work of this Depot has been very much interfered with on account of being so much in the air raid zone'.⁹³ In Dover, although:

constant air raids and alarms drove away many residents. The work, however, continued, and no requisitions from the DGVO were ever refused, though the attendance of workers varied greatly.⁹⁴

These associations attempted to overcome the assault of air raids by continuing their war work to provide items for the troops and wounded. In September 1918, Dover

⁸⁹ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.62

⁹⁰ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.62

⁹¹ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.42.

⁹² Susan Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War*, London, University of North Carolina Press, 1999, p.45. (Italics in the original).

⁹³ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.52.

⁹⁴ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.18.

also contributed garments in response to war action experienced in its own town when 'H.M. Monitor *Glatton* was blown up in Dover Harbour'.⁹⁵ In this case:

application was made to the depot for everything which could be spared, with the result that the following message was sent to the Hon. Secretary: "Tell Mrs. Howard that the Dover War Work Depot has saved the position."⁹⁶

What is apparent by these reports is that the women in working parties affected by the zeppelin raids did not consider themselves to be on the periphery of the war and they do not present themselves as providing peripheral items. They saw themselves, and were seen in the community, as necessary contributors to the war, whilst they also experienced something of the fear of military action on their own doorstep. The local association reports of working party activities thus suggest that garment making initiatives made important contributions to the war, but also, were a means by which women could respond to the effects of war. An unstable distinction is thus created between the responsibilities of home front and front line, as women consider their experience of enemy action to be met with duty and sacrifice. To expand on this, this chapter concludes with a study of the extent to which the boundaries of home and front line were crossed by DGVO garment production in the home. I will argue that the DGVO garment making scheme of 1915-1918 significantly blurred the boundaries between home and war work, as official War Office requisitions for front line garments were brought directly into women's homes, where they were fulfilled.

⁹⁵ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.18.

⁹⁶ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.18.

The home in First World War needlework schemes, 1915-1918

Within the DGVO garment making scheme, home workers were considered skilled and efforts were made to facilitate their production. To gather the work of home workers unattached to any specific working party, the DGVO opened a 'Comforts Depot' in Horseferry Road, London.⁹⁷ While in the Chelsea working party, most items were made at home and then distributed by the local depot.⁹⁸ Camberley association states that all its work was done at home as: 'workers were mostly those who could not have attended work parties, but were glad to have the work to do in their own time at home'.⁹⁹ In some areas, giving access to home workers was the priority, and in Jersey the working party was formed especially *for* women at home.¹⁰⁰ The home was the site of production for women who had family duties, but also for women who could work on garments in their spare time.¹⁰¹ Organised production was in this way centred on the home, which contributed directly to the war effort.

Working party reports indicate that for some, the home was where the most proficient needleworkers used their skills to benefit war effort garment making. Thus, in Sheerness, members of the town's working party 'worked at home for various reasons, and sent their work in by friends; some of the very best knitters were amongst these'.¹⁰² The boundaries between home and war front are therefore distorted as the garments worn on the front line have, in many cases, been made in the home. However, the production process also blurs distinctions since the

⁹⁷ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.15.

⁹⁸ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.13.

⁹⁹ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.12.

¹⁰⁰ *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.30.

¹⁰¹ Dunbarton was mainly composed of: 'working women, who have cheerfully attended sewing meetings as well as working in their homes'. *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.19.

¹⁰² *National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort, Appendices III and IV*, p.49.

garments produced in the home are part of an organised War Office system of production, with the home constituting a vital production site. The DGVO scheme of working party production shows that home needlework made a significant contribution to *both* war effort charitable enterprise during the war and to the 'official' response of the War Office to troop supplies.

Conclusion

A primary objective of this chapter has been to demonstrate that First World War needlework garment making did not dwindle or diminish from 1915 onwards. The late war, in fact, saw a sophisticated systematisation and professionalisation of voluntary war needlework. This chapter has shown the formative role that volunteer garment makers took in defining the instructions, controls and innovations of the War Office's DGVO voluntary needlework garment making scheme between 1915-1918. The DGVO did not take a dictatorial role in correcting or instructing women's needlework. This is significant, because it reframes the role of women as autonomous agents in control of their expertise. It challenges the gendered interpretation of women as subservient to a patriarchal knowledge that sought to correct their work, and it resituates knowledge with the creators: needlewomen. The patriarchal role of the War Office needs to be re-assessed in the light of these findings. The DGVO did not take a corrective or instructive role over voluntary needlework, rather it facilitated and co-ordinated home front supply with front line demand. Thus, more emphasis was placed by the DGVO upon accessibility and broadening volunteer participation than on achieving rigid controls over technical and stylistic interpretation in garment making. The DGVO encouraged organisational

flexibility, as well as local autonomy, and this enabled working parties to expand and professionalise the scheme, and thereby to deliver the garment requirements sought by the front line. The relationship between volunteer needleworkers and the War Office has been shown to have worked as a synergy. This is not to say that all departments in the War Office functioned in the same way as the DGVO; however, it suggests that the functioning of the departments of the War Office and their relations with home and front line need to be examined and not subsumed under one category of the 'state'.

This chapter has demonstrated the significant role needlework working parties held within the home front network of charitable war work. The knowledge of needlewomen had a social and political value in the late war, where needlework was considered an important means of contributing to the war effort by both home front communities *and* the War Office. Volunteer garment making groups maintained a locally defined structure and home front relevance whilst they contributed to the national scheme of front line supply. The connections between the home front and the front line were promoted by the DGVO scheme through garment personalisation, yet, it has been demonstrated how this also blurred the boundaries between home and front. This is to the extent that the flexibility of the DGVO scheme saw the home itself as an important production site for making 'official' front line garments. Over the course of the later war, many volunteers and local communities considered war needlework important enough to continue to invest effort, time and resources into it. Change and uncertainty were considered part of the experience of voluntary war effort needlework, as supplies changed, venues changed, and volunteers changed. It has been shown how needlewomen addressed these changes as requiring duty and sacrifice. What the practice and role of later war needlework suggests, is that the war

was considered to be a shared home front and war front experience, and that needlework enabled many women to express their understanding of this. In the next chapter, I will explore further the form of this communication between home and front line and the emotional connections made by the making, sending and receiving of needlework garments during the war.

Chapter Seven

A communication of care: needlework from home front to front line, 1914-1918

Introduction

Over the last twenty years, social and cultural historians have questioned the rigidity of the boundaries drawn between the British home front and the front line during the First World War. These historians have argued that there was a social, cultural, and geospatial interaction between the front line and the home front, which saw boundaries crossed, broken down and restructured.¹ The presence and significance of the home on the front line and of the front at home has been identified by these studies. This chapter follows the course of these perspectives, as it considers the interaction between the home front and front line to be key to understanding the experiences of men serving during the First World War and also of women, both those at home and those engaged in working on the front line. The focus of this

¹ Susan Grayzel has challenged the gendered divide implied by a rigid separation of home and front line and has argued for a continuum of interaction, rather than polarities. Susan Grayzel, *Women's Identities at War: Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France during the First World War*. London, University of North Carolina Press, 1999, p.245; In her research into war and masculinity, Joanna Bourke highlights the way in which men were required to assume domestic roles on the front line, where: 'gender roles were rendered more fluid'. Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, London, Reaktion Books, 1996, p.133; Jessica Meyer has also shown that there are not clear distinctions between men's familial and domestic identities and their front line role as soldiers. Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain*. Basingstoke and New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p.15-16; Krisztina Robert has identified the way boundaries between home and war front were crossed by the militaristic training exercises of the Women's Volunteer Reserve (WVR) in heterotopic geographical spaces in 1914. Krisztina Roberts, 'Constructions of 'Home Front' and Women's Military Employment in First World War Britain: A Spatial Interpretation', *History and Theory*, 52:3, 2013, p.319–343; Emmanuelle Cronier, meanwhile, has shown how the front line was visible in the presence of the wounded on the streets at home. Emmanuelle Cronier, "The Street", *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919*, eds. Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2, 2007, p.83; While Jan R ger has demonstrated the way in which cinema brought the front home. Jan R ger, "Entertainments", *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914-1919*, eds. Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, Cambridge University Press, 2, 2007, p.119; Michael Roper has also questioned the psychological and emotional divide between home and front line. Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*, Manchester University Press, 2010, p.8; While emotion is approached as a category of historical analysis for studying the emotional responses of those at home and at the front in the First and Second World War, in Claire Langhamer, Lucy Noakes and Claudia Siebrecht, *Total War: An Emotional History*, Oxford, The British Academy, Oxford University Press, 2020.

chapter is therefore the role of war needlework in the relationship between the home front and front line. This examination challenges the understanding that home front war needlework was distanced from, or external to, the 'realities' of front line experience. It will be shown that, to the contrary, needlework exchange had a formative role in communicating connections between the home front and the front line. This develops a core theme of earlier chapters in this thesis, which is that home needlework did not take place in polarity to war experience and nor did it distance women at home from fighting men; rather, it expressed and facilitated a connection between home and front line.

This chapter will argue that needlework garments composed a communication of care between the home and the front which was integrated into the logistics of war supply from 1915 by the War Office's Director General of Voluntary Organisations (DGVO), Sir Edward Ward. Within this home front to front line supply system, it will be shown how connections between home communities and the front were strengthened and maintained. However, I also argue here that needlework garments provided a conduit of care not solely from home to the front line, but also *amongst* those on the front line, where the associations of home were sustained.

The chapter begins with an investigation into the history and associations of the term 'comforts' and its use to describe volunteer-made needlework garments during the First World War. Referring to women's needlework magazines and knitting patterns, it will be shown how the provision of needlework garments to those serving was presented to women as a domestic responsibility related to women's familial and social role to provide care. However, through an examination of the dual provenance of the term 'comforts' within women's needlework magazines and women's charitable war knitting in Britain prior to the First World War, it will be demonstrated

that although the term had specific gendered associations, there was an ambiguity to it which served to strengthen, yet could also weaken, the boundaries between domestic home front contributions to the war and the 'official' War Office supplies. This is because a number of essential items, such as socks, mittens, hats and scarves, classified as 'comforts', were grouped under the category of luxuries and gifts by the War Office; however, this classification understated the vital importance of these items to the war, since, in contradiction, the War Office considered their supply to be essential and it maintained the constant urgent production of them from volunteers at home. Referring to the War Office report of the DGVO the chapter will then examine the system of needlework garment supply from the home front, facilitated by the DGVO from September of 1915, to argue that providing comfort through garment supply from home was integrated into the logistics of war supply.² I will argue that the War Office categorisation of 'comfort' garments as 'gifts' meant that war effort needlework was presented as additional and associated with public good will, yet it was also a necessity to supply. Although 'gifting' maintained a distinction between front line necessity and home front luxuries, that the distinction was far less clear in practice.

The chapter will show how the DGVO scheme engineered personal connections between those at home and those serving by seeking out individuals who did not have items sent from home and ensuring that they received garments and home front communication within the DGVO scheme. It is argued here that the DGVO scheme operated with the purpose of both *creating* and sustaining close 'local'

² *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort Resulting from the Formation of the Department of the Director-General of Voluntary Organisations*. London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1919.

connections between the home front and front line. This connection was intended to give mutual satisfaction - or comfort - to those on the home front and those on the front line. Instead of composing an activity which was external to the mechanics of the war, this chapter will show how needlework garment gifting and circulation was integrated into the system of war supply and functioned as a means of providing effective care and comfort to those on the front line, as well as connecting them with the home front.

By examining letters and magazine knitting patterns, the chapter will then explore the evidence for experiences of solace, comfort and discomfort provoked by the making and receiving of garments, and experienced by women and men during the First World War. The chapter will show how knitting provided therapeutic solace for some women, but also how it enhanced feelings of anxiety, responsibility and unrest in others. It will be demonstrated how men, also, could find either comfort or discomfort in receiving garments. It is argued in this chapter that responses to garments were not random or preordained but were related to the specific context of giving. The therapeutic solace experienced from making garments was therefore directly related to whether those garments were to be of use and give comfort to those on the front line. Without this belief and assurance, it will be shown that women did not necessarily find needlework to be a therapeutic activity. In a similar way, men found garments a comfort or discomfort depending upon a number of factors of their receipt, such as seasonality, purpose and home associations.

With reference to letters home from men serving, the chapter will conclude by examining how garments could supply care from the home front to the front line. It will be shown how women at home participated in structuring the supportive relationship between officers and their men by providing garments. It will also be

argued that this care was communicated *amongst* those on the front line, as the garments and their associations were passed from officers to men and also amongst men to their friends. This chapter argues that war needlework formed a *conduit of care* between the home front and front line which then extended amongst those on the front line.

‘Comforts’ in women’s needlework literature

The term ‘comforts’ has been used in women’s needlework magazines to refer to knitted and crocheted garments since the nineteenth century, with these garments often presented as warm accessories such as men’s and ladies’ gloves; hats and scarves; women’s nightwear; and knitted and crocheted garments for babies.³

Knitting pattern booklets dating to the Crimean War, 1853-1856, show that since the mid-nineteenth century the term ‘comforts’ was also used to refer specifically to garments for soldiers and sailors in service (Figure 7.1).⁴ While during the Boer War, 1899-1902, ‘comforts’ was commonly used in pattern booklets to refer to knitted and crocheted garments for troops.⁵

At the start of the First World War *Woman’s Own* did not use the term ‘comforts’ in the garment patterns that it featured for soldiers and sailors. Rather, the first editions of *Woman’s Own* to include war-related patterns in 1914 commonly refer to ‘garments’ for soldiers and sailors, with pattern titles that define the type of item to be

³ See H.P. Ryder, *Winter Comforts and How to Knit Them*, Yorkshire, Bellews and Hurworth, 1876.

⁴ For an example of use during the Crimean War (1853-1856), see Eléonore Riego de la Branchardière, *Comforts for the Crimea: or the Fourth Winter Book in Crochet and Knitting*, London, 1854.

⁵ *Women & War! How to Knit and Crochet Articles Necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors*, Manchester, Manchester School of Embroidery, Needlecraft Ltd, 1900, p.16.

produced.⁶ By January 1915, however, *Woman's Own* started to use the term 'comforts' in its pattern titles, with its Knitting Supplement of 19th January 1915 featuring patterns for 'Warm Comforts for which Soldiers and Sailors will Thank You'.⁷ On 17th April 1915, within the pattern for a 'Quickly Worked Helmet', *Woman's Own* reminded readers that:

People who have provided winter comforts for the soldiers and sailors would do well to remember that some of the garments sent a few months ago, are beyond recognition now. Those who have laboured with their needles for our brave men will be compensated for their trouble by the thought that the garments made have brought warmth and comfort to the men, and our efforts must not be broken off at such a time as this.⁸

In this way, *Woman's Own* associates 'comforts' directly with comfort-giving and with women's commitment and desire to provide this.

⁶ For example, see 'Three Garments that are in Great Demand for the Army and Navy', *Woman's Own*, 5 September 1914, p.5; 'Knitting for the Soldiers and Sailors: A Man's Cardigan', *Woman's Own*, 14 September 1914, p.4; 'More Garments for the Soldiers and Sailors', *Woman's Own*, 3 October 1914, p.32; 'Help the Soldiers: Man's Knitted Sweater', *Woman's Own*, 10 October 1914, p.30; 'Warm Knitted Mittens for Cold Soldiers', *Woman's Own* 24 October 1914, p.3; 'Socks and Mufflers for Soldiers and Sailors', *Woman's Own, Crochet Supplement*, 15 January 1915, p.v. However, comfort is referred to as an objective of knitting in a pattern for a knitted scarf for soldiers, 'Four Garments in One', where using good quality yarn is associated with satisfying the comfort of men in service, see *Woman's Own*, 31 October 1914, p.3.

⁷ 'Warm Comforts for which Soldiers and Sailors will Thank You', *Woman's Own Knitting Supplement*, 19 January 1915, p.iv-v.

⁸ 'Quickly Worked Helmet', *Woman's Own*, 17 April 1915, p.29.

Fig. 7.1.



Knitting booklet with patterns for 'comforts' garments for soldiers during the Crimean War. Eléonore Riego de la Branchardière, *Comforts for the Crimea: or the Fourth Winter Book in Crochet and Knitting*, 1854. Joyce Meader Collection.

From the start of the war, *Woman's Own* featured patterns for soldier's and sailor's garments alongside those for women's and children's wear; as in its Knitting Supplement of 14th November 1914, which included the pattern 'Ideal Presents for Soldiers' alongside patterns for 'A Pretty Boot for Baby'; 'Ladies Gloves and Sports Cap'; a 'Cosy Bolero for Granny' and 'Comfortable Knitted Vests for Children'.⁹ In language similar to that used to refer to garments for the troops, the children's vests are described as soft, warm, easy to make and 'very serviceable'.¹⁰ The publishers of *Woman's Own* did not keep patterns for men in service apart from patterns for

⁹ *Woman's Own*, Knitting Supplement, 14 November 1914, p.i-viii.

¹⁰ *Woman's Own*, Knitting Supplement, 14 November 1914, p.v

women and children, and indeed, by interspersing them it appears that the female audience of *Woman's Own* are expected to find both of equal interest and relevance.

Unlike *Woman's Own*, *The Queen* used the term 'comforts' in its patterns from the start of the war, and the term referred to garments for soldiers and sailors as well as accessories for children.¹¹ Alongside its early war garment patterns, *The Queen* assured readers that:

we are presenting to-day three garments which are in immediate need for the care of the sick and wounded, of approved pattern and assured excellence of cut and shape, so that every stitch put in by loving hands may bear its full fruit of comfort and relief.¹²

The comfort and relief of wounded soldiers is presented as the intention of the loving care invested into garment making. However, in the same period, *The Queen* also presented comfort provision as a social duty of women:

In some towns suddenly invaded by thousands of troops the organisation of a few home comforts is the first duty for women. In one such town several of the leading societies – the Women's Suffrage Society, Women Workers, British Women's Temperance Association and others – have made it their task to supply tents in the camps where they sell tea at cheap rates and gratuitously mend the men's clothes.¹³

¹¹ 'Comforts for Our Soldiers and Sailors', *The Queen*, 15 August 1914, p.297. *The Queen* uses the term comforts in the same way that it did in the patterns it published during the Boer War. *Woman's Own* did not have any previous experience of issuing war time comforts patterns as it was first published in 1913.

¹² *The Queen*, 15 August 1914, p.296.

¹³ *The Queen*, 29 August 1914, p.372.

Here, the provision of comfort is associated with the charitable, social role of women, irrespective of their social class; they are to make an organised and collective response to war, and this social role was gendered as a form of feminine domestic care, of giving and of affective bond-building. In women's magazines during the First World War, comforts for family members - babies, children, husbands, older women - and comforts for men serving are both associated with the provision of women's care, and both are presented to women as items that they are expected to want to create. The use of the term 'comforts' in women's needlework literature thus suggests that women are to provide care assistance to family as well as to soldiers and sailors, where making comforts was an expression of women's familial and social role in providing support and being a source of succour.

Commercial needlework magazines did make a distinction between family comforts and comforts for the troops. This is evident in the publications of Briggs and Co, Needlecraft Ltd, who published a needlework booklet series prior to and throughout the war. During the war, Needlecraft Ltd's *Needlecraft Practical Journal* maintained a 'Comfort Series' which contained garment patterns for children and ladies wear, bed-wear and night-wear (Figure 7.2).¹⁴ This magazine did not include patterns for knitted or crocheted garments for men serving in the war; however, to serve this end, Needlecraft Ltd issued a bespoke series of men's war comforts pattern booklets from 1914 onwards (Figure 5.5). These booklets picked up from the war comforts booklets

¹⁴ For non-war related comforts pattern booklets, see *Needlecraft Practical Journal*, Issue 116, 1914; *Needlecraft Practical Journal*, Issue 123, 1915; *Needlecraft Practical Journal*, Issue 131, 1916; *Needlecraft Practical Journal*, Issue 138, 1917; and *Needlecraft Practical Journal*, Issue 145, 1918. *Needlecraft Practical Journal* also featured a 'Crochet Edgings and Corners Series' throughout the war, as well as a 'Shawls Series' of pattern editions.

that Needlecraft Ltd had issued during the Boer War.¹⁵ Needlecraft Ltd kept their war pattern editions quite separate from their regular household journal editions, maintaining two traditions of ‘comforts’ knitting at the same time. Although both forms of comfort knitting, for troops and family, are associated with warm accessories, they are not cross-referenced in Needlecraft Ltd publications except for the presence of commercial advertisements for soldiers’ and sailors’ war comforts yarns, located at the front and back of *Needlecraft Practical Journal*, and are distinct from the magazine’s editorial and pattern content.¹⁶ However, despite the commercial distinction Needlecraft Ltd makes by publishing two different forms of comforts, the role presented for women as the creators and providers of care is evident in both forms of publication. In *Needlecraft Practical Journal* comforts refer to women’s and children’s domestic accessories, suggesting gendered associations with nurturing, mothering and providing care for the family.¹⁷ While, their troop comforts refer to knitted and crocheted items as: ‘necessary to the health and comfort of our soldiers and sailors’.¹⁸ Commercial needlework booklets thus make a distinction between soldiers and sailors comforts and comforts for family members, as they specialise in pattern sets for each; however, women are expected to convey the same qualities of care and comfort provision by their creative endeavours.

¹⁵ Briggs & Co published *Women & War! How to Knit and Crochet Articles Necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors*, Manchester, Manchester School of Embroidery, Needlecraft Ltd, 1900; and *Women & War. How to Knit and Crochet Articles Necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors*, Manchester and London, Needlecraft Ltd, 1914.

¹⁶ For example, *Needlecraft Practical Journal*, No 117, September 1914, includes advertisements for supplies for comforts for men from Cock O’Th’ North, Ladyship Wool, and Beehive and Patons wool manufacturers.

¹⁷ See ‘Knitted and Crochet Comforts’, *Needlecraft Practical Journal*, No 116, 1914.

¹⁸ *Women & War. How to Knit and Crochet Articles Necessary to the Health and Comfort of our Soldiers and Sailors*, Manchester and London, Needlecraft Ltd, 1914, Cover.

Fig. 7.2.



Cover showing comforts patterns for children. *Needlecraft Practical Journal*, No. 116, Briggs & Co, Manchester, Needlecraft Ltd, 1914.

Throughout the First World War, patterns were issued for both forms of 'comforts', that is for family accessories; and for soldiers' and sailors' garments. Despite magazines and pattern booklets making practical distinctions between these two forms, both were associated with women's roles in the provision of comfort, warmth and care. The use of the term 'comforts' thus originated in a tradition of warm accessories; however, its dual use in women's needlework literature during the First World War, referring to both family and troop accessories, indicates that children and

family members on the one hand and soldiers and sailors on the other were similarly presented as the object and recipients of women's care. This thesis has shown how at the start of the war a controversial situation quickly developed about whether the provision of 'comfort' garments for soldiers and sailors was the responsibility of women's voluntary effort or War Office provision. A key feature of this debate was whether comfort garments were to be defined as a necessity or luxury. This chapter will now show how ambiguity surrounded the definition of comforts in this debate at the start of the war, and it will be argued that this led to the inconspicuous absorption of volunteer-made needlework garments into official war supplies.

The status of 'comforts' garments: gifts or essential items?

On 12th November 1914 the War Office found themselves in an embarrassing position when, in the House of Commons, Sir Harold Elverston, asked the question:

Does the War Office regard these things which are being begged from the public as necessities or as luxuries? Surely they are necessities.¹⁹

The Home Secretary, Reginald McKenna's responded:

They perform a useful function and add to the comfort of the soldier, but they would not in ordinary circumstances be served out as part of his kit.²⁰

In trying to make a distinction which defined comforts as non-essential items, the War Office can be seen to deflect from the awkward and troubling question of the early war which was whether troops were receiving adequate garment supply from

¹⁹ House of Commons Debate, 12 November 1914, *Hansard*, 68, cc143-144.

²⁰ House of Commons Debate, 12 November 1914, *Hansard*, 68, cc144-147.

official supply lines. However, an obvious contradiction is that socks were the primary comfort garment produced by volunteers during the war, and yet they were also considered essential items of War Office supply.

The high-profile charitable organisation Queen Alexandra's Field Force Fund (QAFFF) was one organisation to reason against the claim that its comforts were not essential. Formed during the Boer War to supply items to the troops, QAFFF re-started its charitable work in October of 1914:

to mitigate as much as possible the hardships and discomforts of war for the fighting men of our forces [...] to provide them with such things as may help to keep them in health and good spirits, and to hearten them with the thought that their welfare is not forgotten by those at home.²¹

To achieve this end, QAFFF explained that:

“Comfort” parcels contain underwear, shirts, socks, towels, soap, razors, mufflers, mittens, cardigans, handkerchiefs, and kindred articles. Then there are goods which may be said to come more truly under the title “comforts” – tobacco, cigarettes, pipes, chocolate, sweets, games (outdoor and indoor) &c.²²

The latter goods, it stated: ‘consist mainly of such things as are not included in the equipment and supplies issued by the War Office’.²³ However, QAFFF indicated that it did not consider its clothing comforts to be *inessential*:

²¹ *Report of Queen Alexandra's Field Force Fund: Report and Accounts for 1917*, London, William Brown & Co Ltd, 1918, p.5.

²² *Report of Queen Alexandra's Field Force Fund*, p.6.

²³ *Report of Queen Alexandra's Field Force Fund*, p.5-6.

To term the many hundreds of thousands of articles sent out by the Fund to our troops “Comforts”, is of course to employ that word in a relative sense only, for they would be better described as “*Necessities.*” [italics in the original]²⁴

QAFFF thus adopted a rather inconsistent, yet effective, definition of comforts, as QAFFF claimed to avoid any competition with, or potential criticism of, War Office supplies, yet they did not devalue the essential nature of the items that they sent to the front line.²⁵

Ambiguity in the terminology surrounding volunteer produced garments and other items is evident in the War Office’s *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort Resulting from the Formation of the Department of the Director-General of Voluntary Organisations*. In this report, the DGVO, Edward Ward, uses the term ‘comforts’ to describe the items produced by voluntary effort; however, he more frequently combines reference to comforts under the term ‘gifts’.²⁶ No clear distinction is made between comforts and gifts in the terminology of Ward’s report. Thus, Ward notes that at the start of the war: ‘no societies existed for the purpose of providing comforts *and* gifts for combatant troops at home or abroad’ [my italics].²⁷ However, throughout his report Ward refers to the DGVO scheme to supply and distribute ‘gifts’, under which classification comforts are grouped.

²⁴ *Report of Queen Alexandra’s Field Force Fund*, p.5.

²⁵ In September 1915, following the cessation of her controversial appeals for knitted socks for the troops at the start of the war, Lady French was appointed as Vice President of QAFFF. This placed her philanthropic activity within a recognised charitable organisation which claimed not to compete with the War Office. This appointment would further suggest that by late 1915, there was the hope that comforts supply would no longer cause controversy to the War Office.

²⁶ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort Resulting from the Formation of the Department of the Director-General of Voluntary Organisations*, London, His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1919.

²⁷ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.3.

The inappropriacy of the term 'gifts' to describe volunteer donations becomes more apparent when it is noted that the DGVO scheme included the voluntary production of equipment such as respirators and medical supplies, including bandages, splints and sphagnum moss for wound coverings. These supplies do not easily fall under the category of 'gifts', as medical equipment for the treatment of the wounded would be considered 'essential' supplies. Although knitted and sewn garments could have a more ambivalent status, many of these were also, arguably, of an essential nature as they were for hospital and cold weather wear. However, by defining all of the items produced by voluntary effort in the DGVO scheme as 'gifts', emphasis is directed away from the specifics of the items themselves and towards the action and process of public giving to the front line from volunteers at home. The use of the term 'gifts' by the DGVO avoided competition between the DGVO scheme and general War Office supply. 'Gift' also side steps the unresolved debate waged in the first year of the war as to whether or not comforts were essential items or luxuries, and whose responsibility it was to supply them.

Gifting is the subject of the sociologist Marcel Mauss in his influential study *The Gift*, which describes the act of gift-giving as creating a social practice of reciprocal exchange, which is 'in theory voluntary, in reality obligatorily given and received'.²⁸ Mauss emphasises the process of exchange as one of social obligation, where 'the thing received is not inert. Even abandoned by the giver, it is still something of his'.²⁹ Thus, Mauss argues: 'to present something to someone is to present something of oneself', and the obligation of the recipient is to give a gift back, thereby creating a

²⁸ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Expanded Edition*, ed. Jane I Guyer, Hau Books, Chicago, 2016, p.57.

²⁹ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Expanded Edition*, p.71.

social cycle of obligation and exchange.³⁰ Objects are in this way associated with the giver.

The cultural historian Louise Purbrick has referred to the work of Mauss and the way in which it has been positioned 'to provide anthropological authority for an opposition between gift and commodity'.³¹ Purbrick has argued that there is not such a clear divide, as commodities are also meaningfully significant, and gifts 'are not just expressions of anthropological theory; they are valued objects in everyday life'.³² Purbrick points out that 'it is much more difficult to identify gift exchanges, private transactions of the domestic sphere, than acts of purchase, which are usually public and computerised'.³³ Nevertheless, she argues that:

the users, or consumers, of objects decide their significance; they create the meanings of things but, [...] they do not exert the same kind of control over the types of things that they buy, give, receive and preserve.³⁴

In the case of the gifting of garments from home to those serving, however, the type of object to be gifted is not only defined by the recipient, but it is requested and expected. The distinction between commodity and gift is indistinct. This is because the 'gifts' were commissioned directly by front line troops, via the DGVO, from volunteer working parties.

³⁰ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Expanded Edition*, p.72.

³¹ Louise Purbrick, 'Wedding Presents: Marriage Gifts and the Limits of Consumption, Britain, 1945-2000', *Journal of Design History*, 16:3, The Design History Society, 2003, p.219.

³² Louise Purbrick, 'Wedding Presents: Marriage Gifts and the Limits of Consumption, Britain, 1945-2000', p.219.

³³ Louise Purbrick, 'Wedding Presents: Marriage Gifts and the Limits of Consumption, Britain, 1945-2000', p.215.

³⁴ Louise Purbrick, 'Wedding Presents: Marriage Gifts and the Limits of Consumption, Britain, 1945-2000', p.215.

The 'Comforts Pool' system established by the DGVO in late 1915 required all Commanding Officers on the front line to 'make their wants known direct to the Military Forwarding Officer at the base'.³⁵ The Military Forwarding Officer would then advise the DGVO on 'the nature and approximate quantity of the gift articles' required'. The DGVO would instruct the voluntary working parties at home, 'so as to secure an ample and continuous supply of articles required to meet the estimated demands referred to'.³⁶ On their part, the working parties would 'arrange locally for the making and packing of the maximum number of articles asked for'. They would also advise the DGVO, by fortnightly returns, 'the quantity and nature of gifts available for distribution', i.e. what they had in stock.³⁷ The DGVO told the working party associations the destination of items and arranged transport for them from the local depot 'to convey finished articles from the Depot where they were available direct to the ultimate destination'.³⁸ The DGVO scheme thus created a circuit of 'gifting' which included the production, supply and demand of items between the home front and the front line.

Purbrick has emphasised the need for objects to be kept for them to be defined as gifts, and she suggests that there is an alternative category of 'given things' that are not gifts: 'because there was no agreement to keep them'.³⁹ However, this distinction - that an item needs to be kept to be defined as 'a gift', and becomes a 'given thing' if there is no understanding that it be kept - is not applicable to the gift status of the knitted and sewn garments produced by volunteers during the First World War. For

³⁵ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.4.

³⁶ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.4.

³⁷ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.4.

³⁸ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.4.

³⁹ Louise Purbrick, 'Wedding Presents: Marriage Gifts and the Limits of Consumption, Britain, 1945-2000', p.219.

troops on the front line, or in training, there was no obligation or expectation that garments received from home would be kept by the recipients in the long-term. These garments would be subject to wear and tear during use, and to a large extent their purpose was to 'weather' the worst of the elements, so that the body of the recipient did not have to. However, whether the gifted garments were used and discarded, or kept and, in some cases, deliberately preserved, they embodied something of the hopes and sentiment of the giver and also the meaningful associations of the receiver.

Despite the DGVO's very formal 'gifting' supply arrangements, the gifting of knitted and sewn garments during the First World War would broadly accord to Mauss' principle that gift-giving created a social and reciprocal exchange, and yet with war effort garments the feature of obligation within this exchange is not the return of a physical object as such, but rather, the obligation could be multi-focal and include: a continued commitment to fight on for the giver or for 'home'; a commitment by the receiver to look after themselves and to come home; the acknowledgement of the receiver to recognise the value, affection and esteem in which they are held at home; and more. In this way, the gifting of war needlework garments certainly could create a powerful social obligation, but not one which functioned within formal object exchange, but rather one which embodied a *relationship* of mutual support. Thus, in according gift status to the needlework garments produced by volunteers, the DGVO retained personal connections between giver and receiver; however, these gifts functioned within an organised and commodified supply system. The definition of volunteer produced garments as 'gifts' by the DGVO scheme was an uncontroversial way of satisfying the necessity for supplementing War Office supply with voluntary production. The term gift understates the formality of the supply and demand

transaction that the DGVO initiated between home front volunteer production and the front line. 'Gift' meant that war effort needlework was 'additional' and associated with good will, however, this chapter has shown how the DGVO fully integrated home front gifting into the supply logistics of the War Office, distorting the distinction between voluntary home production and official front line supply. The DGVO incorporated home front voluntary 'comfort' garment giving into a regulated and official system of production, supply and demand.

Personalisation through needlework gifting in the DGVO scheme

Over the course of the First World War over five million men were mobilised in Britain to serve in the armed forces.⁴⁰ For many, this would have been the first time that they had been separated from their family for any length of time; as they left home to attend training camps and to serve overseas. Certainly, very few of these men would have previously been apart from their families and homes for a period of time that was left quite unspecified. Bourke has noted that: 'most of those who fought in this war were not professional servicemen', but enthusiastic volunteers.⁴¹ She has highlighted the increasing significance of letters and parcels as a means of communication between people at home and the men serving, during this separation.⁴² Roper has argued that the strengthening of domestic connections between people at home and those serving, associated with receiving parcels, was

⁴⁰ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, p.15. Bourke notes that this amounted to '22 per cent of the male population' between 1914 and 1918.

⁴¹ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, p.15.

⁴² Joanna Bourke has recorded that in October 1914, the army postal service handled 650,000 letters and 58,000 parcels a week, and that by 1916 this had increased to 11 million letters and 875,000 parcels a week. Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, p.21-22.

important to how men faced their responsibilities as soldiers.⁴³ While Meyer has suggested that it was important for men to retain their domestic identities in order to carry out their war duties. She points out that letters: 'indicate the extent to which men were unable to divorce their identities as soldiers from their domestic identities'.⁴⁴ Significantly, Roper and Meyer both argue that letters and parcels from home directly influenced the way in which men thought about and carried out their war service, which resulted in the blurring of boundaries between men's home and front line identities. Communication with the home front did not just affect the morale and mood of men on the front line: the presence of the home on the front line was influential to how soldiers saw themselves as fighting men and to how they behaved. However, despite historians acknowledging the central role of parcels and letters from home during the war, Roper has pointed out that parcels and letters have not been perceived as 'crucial to survival'.⁴⁵ Indeed, much of the communication between home and the front line has been seen to operate external to, or in spite of, the culture and priorities of men's 'official' war service. In contrast to this, this chapter argues that during the war, a supportive, personalised relationship between those at home and those serving was not only enhanced by the War Office's official DGVO scheme, it was engineered as a necessity.

From the date of the inauguration of the DGVO 'Comforts Pool' system in January of 1916, in addition to collecting and then fulfilling the garment requisition demands of Commanding Officers in the field, the Military Forwarding Officer was instructed by the DGVO scheme to *seek out* those who may be in need of garments. Specifically:

⁴³ Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*, p.96-104.

⁴⁴ Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain*, p.34.

⁴⁵ Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*, p.10.

to distribute any surplus supply of Comforts to Units known to him to be in need of supplies, and especially to those known not to be receiving gift articles from private sources at home. ⁴⁶

The attempt to identify those who were not receiving parcels or gifts from home is significant, as it confirms that a form of proactive proxy care was being provided, via the DGVO scheme, to those who were not receiving personal comforts parcels. What is also noteworthy, however, is that the items subsequently distributed to the individual in need were not characterised as coming from the War Office supply system, but rather they were accompanied by a note with the contact information of the group or individual at home who had made the garments.⁴⁷ The likelihood that these comfort gifts came from volunteers in the soldier's own home county or town is high, since a feature of the DGVO scheme was to encourage working parties to provide items for their local regiments.⁴⁸ Community individuals or groups would thus be identified as the senders of the knitted muffler or the gloves required by the soldier who received no other such personal gifts: garments were personalised as coming from local people at home. This places quite a different perspective on the role and significance of garments produced by volunteers during the war. They cannot be considered as items that were sent from home and received by those on the front line external to, or *in spite of*, the mechanics of the war. Rather, the gifting of needlework garments and the maintenance, and indeed creation, of personal connections between those on the front line and those in localities at home was an

⁴⁶ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.5.

⁴⁷ See 'How to Help Tommy', 1916. IWM, Film 1221.

⁴⁸ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.5.

integral feature of the War Office's DGVO scheme for troop supply and support between 1915-1918.

Maintaining local connections with the front line

In her investigation into a voluntary needlework working party in Aberdeen during the First World War, Susan Pederson suggests that there was a widespread political shift towards the end of 1915, whereby: 'the government and local authorities began to impose a more centralised and less personalised approach to voluntary organisations'.⁴⁹ Pederson suggests that this centralisation led to a curtailment of the ability of the volunteer needlework parties to produce for local causes and a redirection of women's volunteer work towards centralised needs. From late 1915 onwards, Pederson states, garment makers 'would have no say in where their products went', and 'they were no longer able to dictate to whom their work would be sent'.⁵⁰ Pedersen's argument is that the garment production co-ordination scheme of the DGVO led 'towards a more centralised organisation and away from the voluntarist principle'.⁵¹ However, this is not an accurate estimation of the DGVO scheme, which did not centralise production at the expense of volunteer's local

⁴⁹Susan Pedersen, 'A Surfeit of Socks? The Impact of the First World War on Women Correspondents to Daily Newspapers', *Scottish Economic and Social History*, 22:1, 2002, p.4.

⁵⁰ Susan Pedersen, 'A Surfeit of Socks? The Impact of the First World War on Women Correspondents to Daily Newspapers', p.26.

⁵¹ Susan Pedersen, 'A Surfeit of Socks? The Impact of the First World War on Women Correspondents to Daily Newspapers', p.27.

interests, motivations or control; indeed, the scheme operated to the contrary.⁵²

From the start of the DGVO scheme in September 1915, Ward worked to ensure that communications between those at home and local men serving were not only sustained, but were enhanced. The scheme specified:

In order to foster local interest with a view to keeping up supplies of articles regularly, the DGVO to notify all recognised Associations working under the scheme of the names of the Units to whom the consignments actually supplied by the Association are issued, and also to inform Organizations of the issues made through the medium of the "Comforts Pool" to their County or local Regiments.⁵³

Thus, the DGVO recognised the local motivations of working party members, and it asserted a duty to maintain these. The DGVO scheme helped to identify, enhance and channel the local affinities of those at home towards local troops serving abroad. Local connections between those producing items at home and those receiving them in service were crucial to the success of the national scheme to the extent that the scheme instituted a system whereby regimental requests were directed to the association operating in that regiment's home locality, thus facilitating a personalised local response. Rather than the DGVO scheme annulling local interest and

⁵² Susan Pedersen, 'A Surfeit of Socks? The Impact of the First World War on Women Correspondents to Daily Newspapers', p.26. To evidence her argument Pedersen refers to a letter to the editor of the *Aberdeen Daily Journal* from Alice T Gammell, Chairman, and Grace Coltman, Vice-Chairman, of the newly formed County of Aberdeen War Work Association, published in the *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, 11 January 1916, p.2. In the letter, Gammell and Coltman specify that items can no longer be 'earmarked' for destinations by working parties. However, the specifications made in this letter by the County of Aberdeen War Work Association, prioritising responding to DGVO requisitions, were decided upon *locally by that Association*, presumably because the Association found it most straightforward to make this stipulation. The DGVO scheme did not require the curtailment of production for local troops. Pederson has drawn general conclusions from the Aberdeen letter to make inferences which erroneously argue that the DGVO scheme centralised regional activity at the expense of local motivations, connections and interest. It should also be borne in mind that although the County of Aberdeen War Work Association chose to prioritise responding to DGVO requisitions, it is also highly likely that these requisitions would have asked them to produce garments for their own local troops.

⁵³ *Report on the National Scheme of Co-ordination of Voluntary Effort*, p.5.

realigning working parties towards a central, but rather vague, 'war effort' cause, provincial management systems, local volunteer specialisations, and local connections all composed the foundation for the DGVO's national system of centralised co-ordination, and these features remained core components of the co-ordination scheme throughout the war. Centralised organisation was formed *from*, and strengthened by, a *de-centralised* voluntarist principle.

Therapeutic solace and women knitting war garments

Histories of First World War garment making, and knitting in particular, have tended to suggest that war needlework was of most benefit to the person carrying it out. In his history of knitting, Richard Rutt has thus described First World War knitting as a 'war activity for the lonely and worried woman' which 'relieved British women in the terrible days of carnage'.⁵⁴ Rutt perceives that relief and comfort is given to the needlewoman, however, he makes no reference to how knitted garments were received by men serving, with the implication that the needlewoman's relief is independent of the soldier's reaction to her garments. Rutt's observation therefore suggests that women could experience an internalised response to the war, where knitting formed the physical manifestation of this. This thesis has shown how knitted and home made garments have frequently been considered to be inappropriate or, at worse, discarded or unwanted by the front line.⁵⁵ As a result of the accepted ineffectiveness of volunteer produced garments, historians have therefore tended to present the soothing benefits of war needlework *for women* in a compensatory light.

⁵⁴ Richard Rutt, *A History of Hand Knitting*, London, Batsford, 1987, p.140.

⁵⁵ Arthur Marwick, *Women at War, 1914-18*, Harper Collins, London, 1977, p.35.

In his study of separation and support between the home front and the front line, Roper takes this position when he notes that:

Knitting, although sometimes criticised by men at the front (and by Historians too) as a woefully inadequate response to the hardships they endured, could be therapeutic for the waiting mother or sister.⁵⁶

This would suggest that *despite* the inability of garments to provide comfort to the hardship experienced by those on the front line, women still found solace in knitting. The solace experienced by the needlewoman therefore appears unrelated to the comfort her efforts facilitated. Roper refers to Constance Peel's observation that knitting soothed the nerves as it was: 'comforting to think that the results of our labours might save some man something of hardship and misery'.⁵⁷ However, in this observation, Peel herself draws a direct association between the relief of hardship for men and the solace knitting provided for women. That is, Peel suggests that the solace women derived *came from* knowledge or anticipation of providing comfort.

In the following examination, I challenge the assumption that garment making, and knitting in particular, held one-sided benefits as a comfort to women during the First World War. By referring to needlework patterns, magazine articles, letters from and to men on the front line, as well as the writing of Constance Peel, I examine the interrelation between comfort, discomfort and solace in garment production and exchange to argue that the solace women experienced in making garments was *directly* related to whether those garments were considered to be of use, and was

⁵⁶ Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*, p.95.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*, 2010, p.95. Original quote in Constance Peel, *How We Lived Then 1914-1918*, London, Bodley Head, 1929, p.61.

also related to women's understanding, knowledge and expectation of the discomfort men were experiencing.

Magazine knitting patterns: providing comfort to those serving

At the start of the war, women's needlework patterns show that there was uncertainty and apprehension over which war garments women should make for the men that they cared for. This is evident in the patterns designed for 'soldier friends', which suggest a desire to ensure comfort and use. In November 1914, *Woman's Own* Knitting Supplement published two patterns under the title 'Ideal Presents for Soldiers'. These are for a combined hood and scarf and a combined cap and pillow. *Woman's Own* claimed that the 'Comfortable Knitted Cap and pillowcase' can be carried, 'folded across the chest under the doublet to give warmth and this has proved to be the best method of carrying it while on the march'. This suggests a dual use for the item, whilst the hood and scarf were detachable with buttons, indicating versatility.⁵⁸ The uncertainty that women may have felt was therefore answered by a multi-purpose garment with an all-encompassing character: the multi-purpose patterns of the early war indicate a wish to cater for the unknown and all eventualities. The personalisation of the garment was illustrated by a drawing of a soldier reading a letter, presumably from home. (Figure 7.3).

⁵⁸ *Woman's Own*, Knitting Supplement, 14 November 1914, p.vi.

Fig. 7.3.



Pattern for a Combination Hood and Cap and Pillowcase. 'Ideal Presents for Soldiers', *Women's Own*, Knitting Supplement, 14th November 1914, p.vi.

In January 1915, *The Queen*, responded to a letter on the topic of 'Composite Helmets' informing readers that:

Four or five models have been recommended in these columns [...] Therefore, when asking for directions if even with particulars, do not be surprised at not being referred at once to the specimen in your mind.⁵⁹

The Queen presented variety as part of the appeal and personalisation of war garment knitting, and on 5th September 1914, it claimed that:

⁵⁹ Letters, 'To Correspondents. Which One? – Composite Helmets', *The Queen*, 2 January 1915, p.11.

It does not seem really possible to have too many different styles of socks and headgear to suit the fastidious fancies of friends of those going to the front and are not yet accustomed to rough it.⁶⁰

This suggests that comfort was subject to the personal preference of the recipient, and women were offered a range of garments to achieve this. However, although women's anxiety to find a suitable pattern for a particular soldier could be satisfied by variety, this could also lead to confusion over what to choose. Nonetheless, a core appeal of the multi-purpose patterns was that their adaptability meant that they were most likely to deliver comfort in some form to the soldier in question.

Early war needlework magazine articles show that there was a close association between effort, quality and purpose. The satisfaction and peace of mind that women felt in creating garments was directly related to whether the garments were going to be used and valued by soldiers and sailors. This is indicated by an article in *Home Chat* on 19th September 1914, written by a member of a garment making working party. The article refers to the problematic production and distribution of items during the Boer War, and claims that this will be avoided by making things that are of use:

On one point we are all agreed: we will not spend our time in making useless things. For we have heard from those who fought in South Africa of the thousands of wool helmets that were burnt at the end of that war, simply to get them out of the way – helmets on which much time and money had been spent. We don't want our work burnt, so we shall make only such things as are bound to come in (use) some time, even if they are not needed just at the moment.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *The Queen*, 5 September 1914, p.404.

⁶¹ 'Our Working Parties', *Home Chat*, 19 September 1914, p.517.

To be needed was a condition of production for this author.

The therapeutic experience of needlework was also related to the physicality of the task. Nervousness could be taken 'in hand' through the action of knitting, as a repetitive and potentially meditative activity. However, women also recorded that their anxiety was related to the discomfort men were experiencing; where creating garments at once articulated that anxiety, but also served as a means to soothe the discomfort envisaged. Constance Peel suggests this when she observes that it was 'soothing' and 'comforting' to knit whilst thinking of relieving the discomfort of men: 'for always the knowledge of what our men suffered haunted us'.⁶² The relief of the physical discomfort experienced by men was an objective of women's needlework. In January 1916, *The Lady's World Fancy Work Book* published the article *How Tommy Keeps Warm: Home Life in the Winter Trench*, by W.G. Fitzgerald, which informed its readers, in unusually graphic detail, about how harsh winter conditions were in the trenches and what to expect:

As you sit around the fire these dismal nights, and later contemplate a cosy bed, try to realise what life in the trench is like at this season. Day after day in the muddy pit, watched by cruel eyes in the skies that flash signals back to hidden batteries of enormous guns belching every sort of chemical death.⁶³

The importance of socks was emphasised in the article, as it stated that a regular supply of socks was necessary to combat trench foot. Needlewomen were thus encouraged, through their needlework, to contemplate the physical discomfort of soldiers in training and in service, as well as the emotional discomfort of those

⁶² Constance Peel, *How we Lived Then, 1914-1918*, p.60-61.

⁶³ *The Lady's World Fancy Work Book*, No 39, January 1916, p.1. There are no biographical details for W.G. Fitzgerald in the article, but the author speaks of first hand reports received directly from those on the front line.

remaining at home. These two forms of discomfort were, in this way, intimately entwined and were not mutually exclusive.

Comfort and discomfort of war needlework

Knitting and garment making could be frustrating for some women at home, and so carrying out the activity could compound feelings of unrest rather than help to resolve them. Some women felt frustrated by the pressure of time, as shown in the letters of Helen Muriel Harpin, who volunteered as a nurse and in a soldier's canteen. Despite feeling a sincere obligation to knit garments for her sweetheart, 2nd Lt Neville Overton, Helen is frustrated that she could not carry out production quickly, and she affectionately tells Neville that she hopes to keep her status as his own personal knitter:

Your next pair of socks isn't exactly finished yet – I've got a whole n'other one to do yet. I've been awfully busy this week, & now next week it is 'morning duty' at the hospital – I hope you're not in a desperate hurry. I've just got in a good stock of wool, so I hope you'll go on wanting me to supply you with them, and not get tired & want a change of knitter!⁶⁴

Helen's anxiety to remain Neville's personal knitter is related to her knowledge of Neville's discomfort and danger, and in the margin of the letter page, alongside her text on sock knitting, Helen writes:

⁶⁴ Letter from Helen Muriel Harpin to 2nd Lt Neville Charles Overton, 22 March 1918. IWM Documents 3051.

It makes me feel chilly and horrid to think of you in the front line, especially at night – I do it all the time very nearly (unfortunately).⁶⁵

In this letter, the activity of knitting socks is symbolic of Helen's position as primary carer for Neville. However, her anxiety is caused by her inability to produce the socks she promises, to ease his discomfort. This letter shows that garments were created in direct response to understandings of hardship. The women who made them did not necessarily consider them to be a means of fully countering or preventing these hardships; however, the production of garments was directly related to women's knowledge and expectations of the discomfort men were experiencing. Women's anxiety could, therefore, be heightened by feeling inadequate to meet the needs of production.

Before the establishment of the DGVO, this thesis has shown how there was an informal process of establishing demand between the front line and women on the home front. Most needlework producers were not happy to simply make and send things without some indication that these items would be needed and of value. The uncertainty felt by those at home about what might be needed by those serving on the front line was dealt with directly by enquiring about specific needs. Thus, in a letter, dated 7th December 1915, sent by Gunnery Officer Gerald Longhurst, HMS Lion, to Mrs Fox-Boxer, Longhurst thanks her for the offer to supply comforts for his men, but confirms that they are provided for and that she should send nothing.⁶⁶

Once she received a negative reply, Mrs Fox-Boxer did not pursue with garment

⁶⁵ Letter from Helen Muriel Harpin to 2nd Lt Neville Charles Overton, 22 March 1918. IWM Documents 3051.

⁶⁶ Letter from Gunnery Officer Gerald Longhurst, HMS Lion, Battle Cruiser Fleet, to Mrs Fox-Boxer, 7 December 1915. IWM Documents 4891. Whilst serving on H M S Lion, Gerald Longhurst took part in the Battle of Jutland in 1916, for which he received the Distinguished Service Order. See: Commander Longhurst, D.S.O. (Obituaries), *The Times*, Tuesday 1 February, 1921. Issue 42633, Col C, p.12.

production for this destination. To be of use to the recipient was a primary motivation and concern for volunteer garment producers, whether they were making garments for loved ones or for charitable purposes. The therapeutic solace women received from knitting was therefore not distinct from, or unrelated to, their understanding of the comfort men would feel when they received, wore or thought about garments from home. Indeed, women's *most effective* solace was achieved through the act of knitting *only* when it was directly connected to a need for their garments and when these eased the hardships faced by men, that is, when their garments were valued.

One of the main causes of dissatisfaction to men receiving needlework garments occurred when they received items that were inappropriate for the season, as they could neither wear them, nor easily carry them around with them. In March 1917, Private Leslie Wright of the Canadian Army wrote home to thank his family for sending him gloves and he remarked how they are perfect for the current season:

I wore the gloves this morning and they were 'jake'. I wouldn't care for them in the middle of the winter but they are dandy right now.⁶⁷

This suggests that Wright's reception to the same garment would be different, depending upon the season in which he received it. The seasonal appropriacy of comfort garments was also remarked upon by Gunner Leonard Ounsworth of the Royal Garrison Artillery, who returned on a hospital train with other wounded men to Manchester in July 1916. He describes the enthusiastic reception of the crowd of people who were there to meet them:

But you can gauge the hysteria when I tell you they were giving us such things as balaclava helmets in the middle of July. They gave us cigarettes, sweets, all sorts

⁶⁷ Letter from Pte Leslie Wright, Canadian Army, to his family, 2 March 1917. IWM Documents 20162.

of things - enough to stock a shop - but balaclava helmets, I ask you! Of all the stupid things.⁶⁸

There are likely to be two sources of dissatisfaction to Gunner Ounsworth in this: knitted balaclava helmets were not only impractical for the summer season, but they were also less appropriate as a gift to the wounded in hospital, since wounded men were no longer engaged in active service and would have had less need for extreme weather wear. Whether comfort garments were a positive symbol of a welcome war gift was thus dependent upon how appropriate the context of that gift was.

The need to be relevant to the season was made more necessary by the limitations on how much weight men were permitted to carry with them. This led men to be very specific about what they wanted from home. On 11th October 1914, Captain Ted Berryman, 2/39th Garhwal Rifles, had just landed in France from India, and he wrote to his mother:

can you send me 2 pairs of warm drawers, not too thick but thick-ish, short ones reaching to the knee, as I know it will be infernally cold all winter. But don't send too many things, as one's kit is limited in weight of course, and I've got as much warm kit as I can carry, almost.⁶⁹

Out of season garments were not always unwelcome, however, as the weather could be unpredictable. On 29th April 1916, Benjamin Eppel of the Royal Scots Regiment wrote to his mother:

⁶⁸ Quoted in Max Arthur, *Forgotten Voices of the Great War: A New History of WW1 in the Words of the Men and Women Who Were There*, London, Ebury Press, 2002, p.168. Jeffrey Reznick also refers to Ounsworth's quote, which Reznick describes as emphasising 'the apparent insensitivity of the civilians around him'. Jeffrey Reznick, *Healing the Nation: Soldiers and the Culture of Caregiving in Britain During the Great War*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2004, p.139.

⁶⁹ Letter from Captain Ted Berryman, 2/39th Garhwal Rifles to his mother, 11 October 1914. Quoted in Félicité Nesham, *Socks, Cigarettes and Shipwrecks: A Family's War Letters 1914-1918*, Gloucester, Alan Sutton, 1987, p.27.

I received your letter and parcel today and am glad you sent a warm shirt, although the weather here is exceptionally warm just now.⁷⁰

It is the case, therefore, that men could find *either* comfort or discomfort in receiving garments; however, this depended upon the context in which the garments were given.

A *lack* of garments with which to weather the winter season could also be a source of concern and anxiety for some soldiers. On 7th November 1916, Benjamin Eppel writes to his mother and thanks her for: 'the parcel with the handkerchiefs etc but haven't received the one with the socks in it. But I expect to have it before you receive this'. He goes on to describe how:

the weather here is terrible rain every day. Up the line they are up to their knees and waist in mud but where we are isn't so bad. We were dished out with leather coats and gloves last week and that all helps to keep the cold out. Socks are the only thing I need now and thick ones [underlining in the original].⁷¹

The anticipation of relief through receiving warm garments from home could be reassuring. Garments could also fulfil an immediate need, as the practical duties of those on the front line could change daily. On 19th September 1915, 2nd Lt Harold Evelyn Pennington, newly attached to a machine gun unit, wrote to thank his wife for sending a cardigan which: 'will come in usefully [sic] this evening for a compass march, tho I suspect the moon will be a better guide plus the north star'.⁷² The arrival of the cardigan in time for an imminent event suggests that the context of garment

⁷⁰ Letter from Pte Benjamin Eppel, Royal Scots Regiment, to his mother, 29 April 1916. IWM Documents 17618.

⁷¹ Letter from Pte Benjamin Eppel, Royal Scots Regiment, to his mother, 7 November 1916. IWM Documents 17618.

⁷² Letter from Lt Pennington to his wife, 19 September 1915. IWM Documents 15091.

receipt could change daily and unpredictably, influencing whether items would be needed.

The sentimental value of garments from home

For some, it did not matter that garments could not be worn for some time. In a letter to a young girl called Lucy Bateson, Driver Frank Fielder of the Royal Field Artillery thanked her for her scarf, but he lets her know that it is not cold enough to wear it yet:

You perhaps made that scarf months and months ago when it was very cold, but it has only just been handed to me as a gift, the cold weather has at most finished now in any case it is not cold enough to wear a scarf, but I will keep it for luck, and take it to my home in London, when I go home for good, as a souvenir from you, although I have never seen you, I appreciate it very much indeed, thank you again. If you would be so kind as to write me a little letter here is my address.⁷³

This letter indicates that needlework garments were also valued as gifts and souvenirs more than for their immediate practical value. In this case, the garment facilitated personal contact between the soldier and the giver, and it was seen as a symbol of that personal relationship by Driver Fielder. 'Comfort' was therefore given to the soldier through the psychological support he received via the garment, regardless of his practical needs. In its capacity to bring 'luck', it also signalled that gifts from home could act as apotropaic symbols to some soldiers.

⁷³ Letter from Driver Frank Fielder, Royal Field Artillery, to Lucy Bateson, 23 April (no year) c.1916. IWM Documents 9699.

For Private Leslie Wright, socks from home were personally associated with the senders:

As to socks Mother, well, Muriel C. sent a pair, 1 pair coming from Aunt Jean, 1 pair from Aunt Polly. Then the Army issues us some every once in a while, so - so far we have been jake - or OK. One pair Grandma Wright knit is sewed in my overcoat and I've never worn them yet. Keep them for emergency.⁷⁴

Wright attaches such value to the socks that he receives from his family and friends that he asks them not to send any more, as he does not like having to hand them in to receive War Office replacements:

Well, just at present they serve us out a fresh pair every day and we have to hand in a pair every day so you see we get a clean pair every day. But the trouble is we have to hand in our good socks and maybe we don't get as good ones back. So although we have managed to hang onto some of our homemade ones yet, but I don't think there is much use sending any more over. If there is any you haven't sent, of course, we will try to hang onto any that you do send.⁷⁵

In this case, the personal significance of the socks is such that Wright does not want to give them up, and so he would rather not receive them.

The evidence of this chapter therefore suggests that it was by no means an inherent trait or primary characteristic of First World War needlework garments to cause discomfort. Men at the front did not *automatically* consider knitted comforts to be an inadequate response to the discomfort that they were experiencing. Rather, knitted

⁷⁴ Letter from Pte Leslie Wright, Canadian Army, to his family, 17 December 1916. IWM Documents 20162.

⁷⁵ Letter from Pte Leslie Wright, Canadian Army, to his family, 22 January 1917. IWM Documents 20162.

garments were often very much appreciated by men, and in some cases demanded, as a means of ameliorating the physical discomfort of trench life and marching. These garments also provided a physical representation of support and care directly from home to those experiencing physical and psychological hardship on the front line. They were a communication of care, concern, affection and support. The making and receiving of garments only became inadequate when those garments were considered by men to be unnecessary or inconvenient, for example, garments which were sent out of season where there was no means of storing or wearing them. Garments were also considered inadequate when they were not fit to serve the purpose for which they were intended, such as poorly made, itchy shirts or badly made socks. In these cases, garments actually contributed to the discomfort felt by men. It was therefore, *specifically*, once garments enhanced discomfort that they were considered an inadequate response to the hardships men endured; it was not in any way due to a general or innate inappropriacy of knitted and sewn garments to counter the hardship of the front line.

Needlework garments form a conduit of care from home to the front line

In her study of men and masculinity on the front line, Bourke has observed how officers felt the need to carry out a range of domestic duties to care for themselves and the men around them.⁷⁶ Both Bourke and Das have emphasised the importance of emotional support, touch and intimacy amongst serving men, pointing out that this intimacy could construct and challenge the soldier's identity and masculine status.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, p.133-136.

⁷⁷ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, Reaktion Books, 1996, p.133-144; Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p.128-136.

This chapter now turns to consider the ways in which, as well as requesting garments for themselves, officers involved their families in helping them to support the physical needs of the men under them; and it will be shown here how this formed a conduit of care between home and the front line.

On 7th September 1915, 2nd Lt Harold Evelyn Pennington of the Royal Sussex Regiment wrote home to his wife asking for socks 'from size 10 to size 6 in boots' for his platoon, as: 'The govt. socks are atrocious, shrink to nothing and are very thin'.⁷⁸ It is unclear whether this sock order was to be fulfilled with hand-made or shop bought socks, however, since the socks arrived in France one week later it is likely that they were shop bought by his wife. 2nd Lt Pennington shows a preference for the quality of socks sent from a trusted source at home; socks which he knows will be subject to his specification. This he acknowledged on 15th September 1915, when he wrote to tell his wife that the socks were 'quite the bed sock length which is all right'.⁷⁹ Pennington also asked his wife to send branded textile items, including Jaeger blankets.⁸⁰ In one letter, he assured his wife: 'Last night's alarm never came off and thanks to your mattress I slept quite comfortably in my Jaeger blankets'.⁸¹ The reassurance given by a known home brand such as Jaeger or Burberry added to the value of home sent garments, and the expectation was that home would supply both home-made quality and home purchased branded quality. In this correspondence, Pennington also seeks a solution from home to a professional and

⁷⁸ Letter from 2nd Lt Pennington, Royal Sussex Regiment, to his wife, 7 September 1915. IWM Documents 15091.

⁷⁹ Letter from 2nd Lt Pennington, Royal Sussex Regiment, to his wife, 15 September 1915. IWM Documents 15091. The 'bed sock length' was presumably the length of sock 2nd Lt Pennington wanted for wear with army boots, an actual knitted bed sock would not ordinarily have a heel and so would be unsuitable for marching.

⁸⁰ For the history of the popularity of Jaeger woollen garments during the First World War, see Lucy Adlington, *Stitches in Time: The Story of the Clothes We Wear*, Random House, 2015, p.10-13.

⁸¹ Letter from 2nd Lt Pennington, Royal Sussex Regiment, to his wife, 16 September 1915. IWM Documents 15091.

practical problem that he is facing on the front line. He involves his wife directly in the supply and support of his platoon, as he asks her to send treatment for 'corn cures' for his men's feet.⁸² Both Pennington and his wife have the expectation that she will help to supply the needs of his men: 'The best thing you can do for the platoon is socks. Sand bags are said to have been delivered by the million'.⁸³ Pennington is conscientious to ensure that the men under him are adequately supplied; however, it is both he and his wife who take on the duty of providing home-sourced items together.⁸⁴

Lt William Eugene Charles of the 8th Battalion, Bedfordshire Regiment, also sought assistance from his family to help him with the responsibility of providing care to his men (Figure 7.4).⁸⁵ On 20th March 1916, he wrote to ask his sister Doris for ideas about suitable 'comforts', but he ruled out socks as they have enough of these:

I should be glad if you and [...] could think of some comforts for my men. They have plenty of socks and clothing. I think chocolates would be best perhaps you have some ideas. Let me know what you think before anything sent.⁸⁶

In fulfilling their responsibility to look after their men, officers thus drew support from home and family, and particularly female support, to provide garments. This melded domestic roles as it shows that 'home' support through garment provision - looking

⁸² Letter from 2nd Lt Pennington, Royal Sussex Regiment, to his wife, 7 September 1915. IWM Documents 15091. Pennington wryly tells his wife that: 'With the usual brilliant common sense one meets with in this profession all the men were served with new boots just before starting and told to return their old and comfortable ones: hence a plentiful crop of blisters and corns which I had the pleasure of examining yesterday'.

⁸³ Letter from 2nd Lt Pennington, Royal Sussex Regiment, to his wife, 11 September 1915. IWM Documents 15091.

⁸⁴ 2nd Lt Pennington of the Royal Sussex Regiment was attached to the Machine Gun Section as a Platoon Leader during the Battle of Loos, 1915. He was killed on 27th September 1915. He is commemorated on the Loos memorial to the missing as he has no known grave.

⁸⁵ William Eugene Charles was ordained as a priest in 1959 and later became the Vice President of the children's charity, Dr Barnardos.

⁸⁶ Letter from Lt W E Charles, Bedfordshire Regiment, to his sister Dorothy Charles, 20 March 1916. IWM Documents 1875.

after the well-being of men on the front line - could be provided by officers, yet this often took place with the support of their own families. In the case of Lt William Charles, gathering home support was a discursive exercise, where he asked for his sister's advice and he then made the final decision based on this; a decision that she would then enact. It is notable that these personal transactions took place alongside the DGVO scheme of comfort supplies, suggesting that the officers themselves found it supportive to receive the care and support of their own families when fulfilling their responsibility to support the needs of their men.

Fig. 7.4.



Lt William Eugene Charles of the 8th Battalion, Bedfordshire Regiment. *Imperial War Museum, Documents 1875.*

Garment and 'comforts' distribution amongst men

Men could also share garments from home amongst themselves. In March 1917, Private Leslie Wright received a pair of gloves from home for his brother, Elmer, but on finding that Elmer was in hospital he wrote home:

I can't very well send them to him, and they wouldn't be any use anyway in the hospital. So I guess I'll give them to some poor guy who has cold fingers and no mitts.⁸⁷

Private Wright did not want to waste the gloves, but he also wanted to lessen the discomfort of 'some poor guy' who needed gloves, and so shared he shared his own home supply. That men could share in their friends' and associates' support from home is demonstrated by a letter from Pte Robert Stevens to Benjamin Eppel's mother, dated 24th April 1917, which told her that the platoon had shared her parcel as Eppel was in hospital:

I got Ben's parcel from the postman as I was his chum, which I shared with the boys in the platoon to their satisfaction and delight, as you will likely know by this time a parcel always gladdens the hearts of the boys, and on behalf of the platoon I'm writing to thank you.⁸⁸

Items associated with the care and comfort of home could thus retain their value and associations even if redirected to others, and this value could be shared amongst men.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that following the foundation of the DGVO in the War Office in September 1915, volunteer needlework gifting and care giving were fully integrated into the logistics of war supply. In his study of propaganda and women's

⁸⁷ Letter from Pte Leslie Wright, Canadian Army, to his family, 12 March 1917. IWM Documents 20162.

⁸⁸ Letter from Pte R Steven to Mrs Eppel, 24 April 1917, IWM Documents 17618.

roles during the war, David Monger has noted that ‘the pre-eminent validation of all war work’ was to be needed by the army.⁸⁹ However, in the case of women’s voluntary needlework, the extent of this need has been obscured by the discourse of needlework garment definition. Volunteer needlework garments were defined by the War Office as ‘gifts’ which held ‘comfort’ status associated with women’s care. This meant that garment giving retained an unofficial and charitable status during the war; however, this chapter has demonstrated that the War Office considered volunteer made needlework garments to be vital in responding to actual front line demand from 1915, and this is reflected in the way the DGVO systematically facilitated garment production and dispersal. It has been shown how the DGVO scheme constructed ‘care’ into garment production and supply by maintaining local connections between front line recipients and home front producers and, crucially, by ensuring that all men received personal contact from home with a garment. In this way, the ‘official’ transfer of needlework garments between the home front and front line had a significant role in forming and maintaining personal, regional, and national connections with the home front as well as providing what was, arguably, considered to be essential care to men.

This chapter has argued that it is misleading to consider home front needlework as an internalised therapeutic exercise for women which was unrelated to how men experienced the garments that they made. This compensatory role - particularly attributed to war knitting - as an activity primarily of benefit to women during the war is rooted in the dominance of the view that items were unwanted and discarded by those on the front line. Instead, this chapter has shown how comfort, discomfort and

⁸⁹ David Monger, ‘Nothing Special? Propaganda and Women’s Roles in late First World War Britain’, *Women’s History Review*, 23:4, 2014, p.533.

therapeutic benefits received from war effort needlework, for men *and* women, were subject to a complex range of circumstances and associations. These were related to whether garments were of use; relieved discomfort; or were sentimentally valued. The significance of needlework garments for the war effort thus lies in the way in which they embodied a relationship. This relationship communicated understandings of comfort *and* discomfort in war, between women and men and between home and the front line. Thus, needlework production and exchange provided a home front to war front communication of care. The boundaries between officers' war service roles and women's home front roles have been shown to be indistinct, as the families of officers assisted them in the provision of home comforts to the men that they were responsible for. Needlework garments enabled a strong connection between home front and front line: garments could form a conduit of care from home which extended via garment distribution from officers to men, and also amongst soldiers themselves, where the associations of home remained strong.

Chapter Eight

Wounded men's home front embroidery: needlework and masculinity,

1915-1918

Introduction

As the later war proceeded, another form of needlework which became increasingly relevant to charitable war activity on the home front was embroidery for the rehabilitation of wounded veterans. This took place in war hospitals throughout Britain and Ireland, and steadily grew in practice towards the end of the war. It is the role of embroidery war needlework that forms the subject for examination in this final chapter. Throughout this thesis, the way in which needlework formed connections between women at home and men serving has been a key focus of my research, and, as with war knitting, crochet and sewing, this chapter argues that wartime embroidery formed connections between home front women and, in this case, men returned wounded from the war. As with previous chapters, this research seeks to reveal the responses and experience of women on the home front, and argues that the potential of needlework to enable agency remains fundamental. However, the shift in context and roles - where it is men performing needlework on the home front - provides a far more comprehensive examination into the complex and potent role of needlework during the war. First World War needlework should be considered to be men's history too, and this chapter will show how it also provided wounded men with agency.

The chapter begins by demonstrating that very little academic attention has been paid to the role of women in *facilitating* male needlework in the context of rehabilitation during the First World War. Drawing on reports of needlework hospital

programmes, this chapter challenges the prevailing assumption that needlework embroidery was introduced to wounded veterans in hospitals as a reliably preformed therapeutic treatment by the (male) medical community. Instead, this chapter will show that embroidery needlework was first brought into war hospitals by female women volunteers, and that the medical community only began to discuss the potential of embroidery in rehabilitation after observing the success of needlework programmes. I argue that many visiting women introducing needlework programmes in hospitals had a formative and constructive role in war hospital administrations. However, the poor reputation of women visitors to the wounded has formed a barrier to investigating the meaningful role of non-nursing women in hospitals. Using imagery from *Punch* magazine, as well as reports from institutions and women's needlework programmes, this chapter argues that this negative reputation, prevalent both during the war and since, has overshadowed the meaningful and productive connections made between women visitors and male veterans through needlework activity.

The second half of this chapter is concerned with the gendering of wounded men's embroidery. This will challenge the perception that embroidery by wounded men formed a weakened feminised therapeutic stage of occupational therapy within rehabilitation, which was designed to transition men to more masculine vocational therapies.¹ By referring to reports on needlework therapy and the Red Cross report of the war, it will be shown that there is not a clear distinction between 'feminine' occupational therapy and 'masculine' vocational therapy, and that men's embroidery

¹ This projection of needlework as a feminised stage of occupation therapy is made by Ana Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds: Military Patients and Medical Power in the First World War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p.264-268.

was considered to have both occupational and vocational features in hospitals during the war.

It will also be shown how a number of gendered assumptions under-lie the definition of embroidery as a feminising occupation for wounded men. This chapter will provide a theoretical analysis of the gendering of wounded men's activity to argue that, by contrast to concepts of feminisation, wounded men could use embroidery to renegotiate their hegemonic masculine status. The chapter will show how qualities of hegemonic masculinity including: economic status; stoicism; perseverance; and the demonstration of technical skill and professional status could all be performed and displayed by wounded men through their embroidery. I argue that wounded men's social and economic empowerment could be achieved through public sales and exhibitions of embroidery, which made needlework programmes self-sufficient and a means of supporting other war charities. This examination will show that wounded men could demonstrate commercial appeal; technical skill; artistry; and, significantly, their war service status through the 'feminine' design language of embroidery. This chapter therefore proposes a new understanding, not only of the role of women in the history of wounded men's embroidery during the war, but also of how wounded men interacted with that embroidery. It provides a new framework for interpreting the embroidery of wounded men which can be used to expand future research.

Rehabilitation and occupational therapy at the start of the First World War

In her study of disability and rehabilitation in the First and Second World Wars, Julie Anderson has argued that rehabilitation 'was based in medical practice and was a result of new and existing therapies, combined with the need to repair an injured

fighting force as quickly as possible'.² She describes how, although there was not a formal system of rehabilitation during the First World War: 'there were some features that formed the basis of rehabilitation, but I would argue that much of this stayed within medicine.'³ Although Anderson records that co-ordinated rehabilitation did not really begin until the Second World War, and that at that time it relied upon co-operation between doctors, charities and the War Office, there is still a prevalent understanding in histories that rehabilitation, however ad hoc, was formed within medicine and drew upon a medical epistemology during the First World War. As a result of attributing rehabilitation to the medical community in academia, little recognition has been given to civilian women in initiating and developing needlework therapeutic practices for wounded men in hospitals. In her research into occupational therapy rehabilitation during the First World War, Carden-Coyne suggests a continuity between the application of occupational therapy in nineteenth century mental asylums and tuberculosis sanatoria and its use in First World War hospitals. At the start of the war, she states, occupational therapy: 'was easily transferred to military hospitals, as the very idea of the idle wounded was anathema to the military desperate for able bodies'.⁴ Carden-Coyne suggests that this ready-made approach to rehabilitation fulfilled clearly defined objectives where:

occupational therapy was an integral aspect of hospital rehabilitation in Britain, the Dominions and the United States during the war. It aimed to occupy the patient's mind and body while he recovered on the hospital ward, ensuring that he was never idle.⁵

² Julie Anderson, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain: 'Soul of a Nation'*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2011, p.3.

³ Julie Anderson, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain*, p.43.

⁴ Ana Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p.265.

⁵ Ana Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p.264.

Similarly, Jeffrey Reznick has suggested that rehabilitation therapy was largely directed by known practice in medicine during the war.⁶ His study of the culture of care-giving in Britain during the war presents a case-study of the occupational therapy practised at Shepherd's Bush Military Orthopaedic Hospital in London, where:

The efforts of military-medical authorities at Shepherd's Bush to 'reclaim' disabled soldiers involved a diverse range of well-established approaches to treating both physical and mental illness and injury.⁷

Carden-Coyne and Reznick's studies of rehabilitation therefore suggest that there was a purposeful and confident application of 'well-established' rehabilitation strategies by the military-medical community. They imply a moderately well-formed, systematised strategy of occupational therapy, which was designed to achieve known outcomes. By this reasoning, a professional form of occupational therapy could simply be brought to bear and rolled out by the military community in hospitals during the war; with the expectation that it would lead to the re-release of able-bodied soldiers. However, the suggestion that rehabilitation strategies were on the whole pre-formed and understood at the start of the war understates the significant role of the war itself in generating and shaping this therapeutic activity. That rehabilitation strategies were formed *during and by* the First World War is suggested by Jennifer Laws in her history of therapeutic work and occupation.⁸ Laws has argued that in America, the 'professional organization of occupational therapy did not begin until the mass return of shell-shocked soldiers at the end of the First World

⁶ Jeffrey Reznick, *Healing the Nation: Soldiers and the Culture of Caregiving in Britain During the Great War*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2004, p.7.

⁷ Jeffrey Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, p.7.

⁸ Jennifer Laws, 'Crackpots and Basket-cases: a history of therapeutic work and occupation', *History of the Human Sciences*, 24:2, 2011, p.65-81.

War'.⁹ With regard to Britain, Laws refers to the arrival of a professional form of occupational therapy taking place post-war in the 1920s, with the employment of Britain's first qualified occupational therapist.¹⁰ Notwithstanding Law's assumption that the wounded of the First World War only arrived home at the end of the war, her history of occupational therapy suggests that occupational therapy was not a ready-made and clearly defined rehabilitation practice within the medical community, capable of easy application to treating the wounded in the First World War; rather, it was shaped by the war itself. The newly developing form of these rehabilitation strategies was remarked upon in a 1918 report written for the American Red Cross about Britain and America during the First World War by Douglas McMurtie, who was responsible for disabled men:

It is surprising how very recent has been the development of the work of rehabilitating the disabled man. Up to ten years ago absolutely nothing had been done in that direction.¹¹

This indicates that the war itself led to the development of rehabilitation initiatives.

However, an implication of considering rehabilitation to be largely pre-formed within the medical community during the First World War is that the contribution of non-medical practitioners is minimised. With regard to needlework therapies, the role of non-nursing women in actively *forming* rehabilitative strategies during the war has been overlooked. As this chapter will show, however, the development of therapeutic embroidery strategies for the wounded at the start of the war was an experimental

⁹ Jennifer Laws, 'Crackpots and Basket-cases', p.69.

¹⁰ This role was held by a woman, Margaret Fulton, and the professional focus of this occupational therapy practice was the treatment of mental illness with the post based at the Aberdeen Royal Asylum. Laws states that the term 'occupational therapy' was first used in a professional meeting in New York in 1914. See Jennifer Laws, 'Crackpots and Basket-cases', p.69.

¹¹ Douglas C. McMurtie, 'Returning the Disabled Soldier to Economic Independence', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 80, November 1918, p.62.

and organic exercise; one which took shape in community initiatives which interacted with the wounded in hospital environments. Embroidery needlework was first introduced as a therapeutic activity to occupy wounded men by visiting women volunteers. Many of these women came from the local communities that surrounded war hospitals, and they developed and expanded therapeutic needlework schemes alongside a number of other recuperative initiatives. I argue that it was only *following* observation of these embroidery initiatives that rehabilitative needlework therapy came to be recommended for wounded men by medical practitioners. Thus, although the context was a medical one to the extent that the wounded were cared for in hospitals, the form that rehabilitative needlework took was shaped by the outside community; specifically, by women's voluntary initiatives. Some of the same women who were working in knitting and sewing garments for the war were also organising embroidery schemes with veterans. As with previous chapters, it is argued here that the role of these women was constructive and integrated into First World War home front charitable response.

The role on non-nursing women in First World War hospitals

During the First World War, the home front hospitals treating wounded men varied in their organisational structure. They could be military hospitals under the management of the War Office; hospitals established by the Red Cross; auxiliary hospitals, which operated in association with the Red Cross, but were established by local communities; or private hospitals, established and managed by charitable organisations and benefactors. These war hospitals could treat wounded and sick men who were in the early stages of their conditions, whether it was initially serious

or mild, or they could be concerned with later stage convalescence. A number of institutions were also founded to offer targeted rehabilitation in the later stages of recuperation to those who had sustained long-lasting disabilities, such as the loss of a limb or the loss of eyesight.¹² These different hospitals and institutions were located across the country; however, volunteers from local communities had a role in each type of these.

The specific contribution of Red Cross and auxiliary hospitals in the foundation of rehabilitative strategies has not been explored in much detail in the history of rehabilitation.¹³ It was primarily in these hospitals, as well as in independent charitable hospitals, that women held management roles.¹⁴ Over the course of the war, 5,000 buildings were offered to the Red Cross to form auxiliary hospitals for treating the wounded returning from the battlefields.¹⁵ Numerous private hospitals were also opened as charitable enterprises. Although not all of the buildings offered to the Red Cross were found to be suitable hospitals, 'all, as a rule, were passed on

¹² The most well-known independent institution for the rehabilitation of the blind during the First World War was St Dunstan's Hostel for Blinded Soldiers and Sailors, which was founded in 1914 by Sir Arthur Pearson, who was himself blind. Arthur Pearson, *Victory Over Blindness: How it was Won by the Men of St Dunstan's and How Others May Win It*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1919.

¹³ Julie Anderson has focused specifically on sporting programmes devised at the independent charitable organisations of St Dunstan's Hostel for Blind Soldiers and Sailors, and the Star and Garter Home for Disabled Soldiers and Sailors; however, she does not investigate rehabilitation activity at Red Cross hospitals. Julie Anderson, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain*, 2011; Jeffrey Reznick studies rehabilitation during the war at front line field hospitals and at the Shepherd's Bush Military Hospital. Jeffrey Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, 2004; Deborah Cohen gives an overview of the independent charitably founded hospitals, including The Star and Garter Home for Disabled Sailors and Soldiers, St Dunstan's Hostel for Blinded Soldiers and Sailors, Lord Roberts Memorial Workshops, and Queen Mary's Auxiliary Hospital at Roehampton; however, she does not examine Red Cross hospitals. Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939*, California and London, University of California Press, 2001, p.29-37.

¹⁴ Each hospital was overseen by a Commandant and Quartermaster. For non-military hospitals these roles would often be held by females, such as senior VADs, whilst: 'many ladies in the neighbourhood gave part-time services, coming in daily or a certain number of days weekly.' In auxiliary hospitals, paid staff were employed when necessary, such as cooks; however, medical personnel were also local professionals, who, up until 1917, were not formally paid for their services. See *Reports by the Joint War Committee and the Joint War Finance Committee of the Red Cross Society and The Order of St John of Jerusalem in England*, London, 1921, p. 215.

¹⁵ *Reports by the Joint War Committee*, p.211.

by the War office to the Red Cross to be sifted and reported on'.¹⁶ The variety of buildings offered for hospital accommodation therefore included:

Town halls, elementary schools, infirmaries, portions of general hospitals, country houses, large and small, private houses in London and elsewhere, and even cottages, garages and stables.¹⁷

Hundreds of auxiliary hospitals opened across Britain and Ireland during the course of the war, ranging from small houses to large scale institutions.¹⁸ Once a location was inspected for use by the Red Cross and accepted as an auxiliary hospital for the wounded - who were transferred either from military hospitals or directly from the front line - the hospital was then maintained by VAD staff and local volunteers.¹⁹

Auxiliary hospitals were largely self-governed; they were diverse in physical structure and staffing; and they were localised - tied to individual communities.²⁰ Yet, every auxiliary hospital was also attached to a military hospital, which: 'directed the movements of the patients, who remained under Military control'.²¹ What is notable about the auxiliary hospitals, however, is that they were managed by people within the local community.²² Auxiliary, Red Cross, and private charitable hospital environments enabled a role for the community, and this included a role for women in the formation of rehabilitation activity for the sick and wounded. The participation

¹⁶ *Reports by the Joint War Committee*, p.211.

¹⁷ *Reports by the Joint War Committee*, p.211.

¹⁸For a list of auxiliary home hospitals established in England, Wales and Ireland, see *Reports by the Joint War Committee, Appendix III*. For Scotland, see *Appendix VIII*.

¹⁹ *Reports by the Joint War Committee*, p.215.

²⁰ In terms of staffing and supplies, there was not a straightforward distinction between the auxiliary; Red Cross; and military hospitals, as the Red Cross supplied all of them, see *Reports by the Joint War Committee, Appendix III*, p.626.

²¹ *Reports by the Joint War Committee*, p.214.

²²The Red Cross supplied 'stores of various kinds' to auxiliary hospitals; however: 'little difficulty was experienced in respect of funds, local subscriptions and collections of various kinds sufficing to meet the current expenses'. In most cases, local communities sustained auxiliary hospitals through public subscriptions. See *Reports by the Joint War Committee*, p.212.

of women in the various home front First World War hospitals requires more investigation overall to shed light on the variety and extent of their role within these medical and rehabilitative environments; however, this chapter will now show that visiting women were formative in developing needlework rehabilitation activities within all of the forms of home front hospital during the war.

How visiting women facilitated wounded men's embroidery in hospitals

One of the earliest introductions of needlework activity to the war wounded took place at the beginning of 1915 in the British Red Cross Hospital at Netley, near Southampton, Hampshire (Figure 8.1).²³ This hospital was constructed at the start of the war as a series of field hospital huts located in the grounds of the larger Royal Victoria Hospital, which had first opened as a military hospital at the end of the Crimean War in 1856.²⁴ On the 7th November 1914, Sir Frederick Treves, the Vice-Chairman of the Red Cross Council, visited the Red Cross Hospital at Netley and described seeing a "Hut Hospital" of 500 beds, essentially a Field Hospital capable of being readily moved'.²⁵ He noted how the huts were located 'with great formality, in a meadow' behind the Royal Victoria Hospital.²⁶ Although still under construction during Treve's visit, the hospital site would shortly be composed of '45 huts disposed

²³ For a description of this early work, see 'Exhibition for Encouraging Work Done by Wounded and Discharged Soldiers and Sailors, 20th June – 27th June 1917', IWM, WWC, B.O.8. 17/3, p.52.

²⁴ The Crimean War ended on 30th March 1856, and Queen Victoria laid the foundation stone of the Royal Victoria Hospital at Netley on 19th May 1856. The hospital owed its origins to a suggestion made by Queen Victoria that a hospital should be provided for the treatment of the wounded returning from the Crimean War (1854-1856). See, Philip Hoare, *Spike Island: The Memory of a Military Hospital*, London, Fourth Estate, Harper Collins, 2001, p.89.

²⁵ *British Red Cross Society: Summary of Work for the Week Ending 11th November 1914, Appendix*, IWM, WWC, BRCS 1/27. Sir Frederick Treves (1853-1923), was a British surgeon and anatomist who also worked for the War Office as president of the WO headquarters' medical board. See, A. Keith and D.D. Gibbs, 'Treves, Sir Frederick, Baronet, (1853-1923)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2006.

²⁶ *British Red Cross Society: Summary of Work, Appendix*.

as follows: 25 for patients, 9 for nurses, 5 for orderlies, 3 as recreation huts, and 3 for isolation wards'.²⁷ Over the course of the war, many more huts were added to this complex, including a Welsh hospital hut with 200 beds, and an Irish hospital with 10 huts.²⁸

Fig. 8.1.



The Royal Victoria Hospital, Netley, with the Red Cross field hospital huts located in the grounds behind, c.1918. Photographic postcard, author's collection.

Due to their close proximity to Southampton docks, Netley Red Cross and Royal Victoria Hospital, were the first hospitals reached by ships returning with the wounded from the battlefields of France and Belgium.²⁹ The wounded that arrived at Netley could therefore be acute; in many instances it would have been inadvisable

²⁷ *British Red Cross Society: Summary of Work*, Appendix.

²⁸ Philip Hoare, *Spike Island*, p.183.

²⁹ The ambulance rail track to the Red Cross hospital at Netley ran directly from Southampton docks, where the hospital ships disembarked; and it terminated in the grounds of the hospital complex.

and risky to transport the men further inland until their conditions were considered stable. Netley Red Cross Hospital and Royal Victoria Hospital thus formed a first-stop treatment site, and within both institutions there were a high number of bed-bound patients. However, whilst the Red Cross hospital at Netley performed a degree of initial triaging – treating patients with both short and long-term needs, the Royal Victoria Hospital received bed cases whose treatment would often extend over a long period of time.

As hospitals filled with wounded men over the course of the war, female volunteers quickly identified needlework as an activity that men confined to bed could carry out. In early 1915, the first introduction of embroidery in the Red Cross Hospital at Netley was made by visiting women who wished to give the wounded an activity to pass the time. One of these women noted that:

Large numbers of patients pass away the weary hours of hospital life in doing pieces of work, and a very high degree of skill has now been attained and most artistic results have been achieved by those who, up to the time of admission, had never threaded a needle.³⁰

By 1917, a report accompanying an exhibition of work by the wounded soldiers at Netley notes how embroidery and other forms of needlework became ‘an increasing industry’:

managed by ladies connected with the Hospital, who proudly boast that they have never had to appeal to the public for funds and find the sales of work sufficient to cover expenses.³¹

³⁰ ‘Exhibition for Encouraging Work Done by Wounded and Discharged Soldiers and Sailors, 20th June – 27th June 1917’, IWM, WWC, B.O.8. 17/3, p.52.

³¹ ‘Exhibition for Encouraging Work Done by Wounded and Discharged Soldiers and Sailors’, p.52.

Needlework, including embroidery and knitting, was undertaken alongside other activities at the Netley Red Cross hospital; men could choose to take part in embroidery whilst they were also offered 'carpentry and toy making, etc'.³² However, the therapeutic benefits of embroidery were soon observed by medics:

The practical result has been that the men are happy and contented when working, and the beneficial effect, mentally and bodily, is testified to by both doctors and nurses.³³

In the nearby Royal Victoria Hospital, managed directly by the War Office, needlework was introduced in April 1916, 'by a committee of ladies [...] by kind permission of Col. Lucas, C.B., the commanding officer, who graciously found accommodation and a suitable workshop in the hospital'.³⁴ Funds for materials were raised by public appeal, enabling the local community to directly support this therapeutic activity. At first, needlework at the Royal Victoria Hospital was intended 'to give a distraction to the wounded', but, 'it was soon realised there were enormous possibilities in the idea', and a professional needlework teacher was employed.³⁵ A 1917 exhibition report of wounded men's work shown at Sotheby's describes how needlework at the Royal Victoria Hospital was not done to 'wile away' the hours, 'but actually during hours of pain'.³⁶ It explains that the hospital only had serious cases: 'nearly every one is a cot case', since once a wounded man becomes convalescent they were moved away.³⁷ In the Royal Victoria Hospital, 'the effect of light employment is considered by the staff to be most beneficial to the patients' mental

³² 'Exhibition for Encouraging Work Done by Wounded and Discharged Soldiers and Sailors', p.53.

³³ 'Exhibition for Encouraging Work Done by Wounded and Discharged Soldiers and Sailors', p.53.

³⁴ 'Exhibition for Encouraging Work Done by Wounded and Discharged Soldiers and Sailors', p.54.

³⁵ 'Exhibition for Encouraging Work Done by Wounded and Discharged Soldiers and Sailors', p.55.

³⁶ 'Exhibition for Encouraging Work Done by Wounded and Discharged Soldiers and Sailors', p.56.

³⁷ 'Exhibition for Encouraging Work Done by Wounded and Discharged Soldiers and Sailors', p.56.

and bodily condition'.³⁸ This indicates that in the more formal environment of a military hospital, embroidery became a valued rehabilitative activity.

The Royal Victoria Hospital was not the only War Office military hospital which observed the benefits of the needlework schemes introduced by civilian women. The governance of the Welsh Metropolitan Hospital, at Whitchurch near Cardiff, also found embroidery to be popular amongst wounded men who were confined to bed.

At this hospital in 1917, embroidery activities were:

started in the New Year, by a Lady Visitor, as a pastime for the bed-patients, but have become so popular that it was arranged to have the men properly taught by a lady who is paid privately to instruct them every afternoon.³⁹

Once these activities were seen to be beneficial for the bed bound, the hospital made plans to 'organise the scheme on a much larger scale'.⁴⁰ It was therefore visiting women who initiated the therapeutic needlework activity programmes for the wounded at the Netley Red Cross hospital, the adjoining Royal Victoria Military Hospital, and the Welsh Metropolitan Hospital during the war. Following observation of the benefits of needlework activity, which could range from embroidery to knitting, medical support was given to expanding needlework as a rehabilitation initiative in these hospitals. This pattern was repeated in hospitals across the country.

Needlework rehabilitation thus developed as an organic and experimental initiative introduced into hospitals by women in local communities during the war.

The introduction of needlework into hospitals by civilian women did not take place in isolation from broader social and philanthropic movements to develop therapeutic

³⁸ 'Exhibition for Encouraging Work Done by Wounded and Discharged Soldiers and Sailors', p.56.

³⁹ 'Exhibition for Encouraging Work Done by Wounded and Discharged Soldiers and Sailors', p.12.

⁴⁰ 'Exhibition for Encouraging Work Done by Wounded and Discharged Soldiers and Sailors', p.12.

treatments for illness and disability. In her study of occupational therapy in the British Isles between 1938 and 1962, Clare Hocking has shown how therapeutic methodologies were rooted in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Romanticism as well as the early twentieth century Arts and Crafts movement.⁴¹ Hocking points out that the craft process was central to both romanticism and rationality within philanthropic thinking.⁴² What can be drawn from this, therefore, is that there was not a clear line between the development of medical ideas and philanthropic cultural initiatives during the First World War; rather they interconnected, and within this exchange, charitable women were able to make a contribution to rehabilitation.

The reputation of visiting women in home front hospitals during the war

Despite the evidence of women's activities in hospitals in primary sources, histories of First World War rehabilitation have paid limited attention to the extent to which non-nursing women were integrated into the work of treating the war wounded.⁴³ Indeed, a significant barrier exists to examining the role of non-nursing women in hospitals due to the embedded, powerful characterisation of visiting women as irritations to the wounded during the war: as intrusive, ignorant, or self-serving

⁴¹ Clare Hocking, 'The Way We Were: Romantic Assumptions of Pioneering Occupational Therapists in the United Kingdom', *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 71:4, 2008, p.146-154.

⁴² Clare Hocking, 'The Way We Were', p.148-150.

⁴³ Exceptions include Jonathan Davidson's study of the use of embroidery to treat shell-shock during the First World War which refers to the notable role of the embroidery teacher Louisa Pesel in Bradford. Jonathan Davidson, 'Threading the Needle: When embroidery was used to treat shell-shock', *Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps*, published online 6 March 2018, group.bmj.com, p.1-2; Joseph McBrinn also refers to female voluntary teachers of handicrafts and embroidery to wounded soldiers, however, he does not examine the role of these women in depth. Joseph McBrinn, "'The Work of Masculine Fingers": the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry, 1918-1955', *Journal of Design History*, 31:1, 2018, p.6.

visitors to the hospital environment. In his study of the culture of care-giving during the war, Reznick has described how:

interactions with upper-class women who visited the hospital also promoted feelings of assault and insult. Hospital magazines portray these women as purveyors of more irritation than consolation, as persons who tended to gawk at the bedridden soldier.⁴⁴

Women visitors, Reznick notes, asked 'thoughtless questions' of the wounded.⁴⁵ Anderson has also observed how public visitors to St Dunstan's Hostel for Blinded Soldiers and Sailors, in Regent's Park, London, many of whom would have been women, selected the 'type' of ex-serviceman that: 'reflected their personal notions of a blind war hero'.⁴⁶ However, in these studies, neither Reznick nor Anderson have investigated the negative characterisation of female hospital visitors to any extent. Uncritical acceptance of the negative characterisation of female hospital visitors, much of it dating to the war, has overshadowed examples of the complex role that women visitors could play in war hospitals. At present, visiting women appear to be confined to affect an external (and often unwanted) charitable activity on the fringes of medical rehabilitation: they are not seen as agents of integral, 'formal', rehabilitative treatments. I will now show, however, that visiting women made an *integrated* contribution to rehabilitation strategies in hospitals, as they not only introduced therapeutic needlework strategies, but they also contributed to hospital administrations and shaped the form of that rehabilitative practice.

⁴⁴ Jeffrey Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, p.87.

⁴⁵ Jeffrey Reznick, *Healing the Nation*, p.89.

⁴⁶ Julie Anderson, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain*, p.53.

The scope of work with the war wounded undertaken by non-nursing women in hospitals could be diverse and far-reaching. In the First Northumberland War Hospital, at Coxlodge in Newcastle Upon Tyne, the Ladies Committee formed garment working parties in 'surrounding districts', which made 20,000 garments for the hospital.⁴⁷ They also managed an entertainment committee and created a convoy meeting system where women met new patients and provided them with letter-writing materials and tobacco.⁴⁸ In January of 1916 a 'Handicrafts Sub-Committee' was formed:

to provide useful and pleasurable occupation to the patients including Embroidery work, Knitting, Bead making, Carving, Poker and Repousse work, Pen painting, Glass decorating, Basket, Rug and Toy making.⁴⁹

Needlework was thus carried out as a community initiative which engaged with wounded men in a broad system of rehabilitation activity in the hospital. In some hospitals, needlework programmes were so integrated into hospital administration that they operated as a function of the hospital. This was the case at the 2nd Scottish General Hospital, Craighleith, Edinburgh where, in May 1917, a 'Handicrafts Branch' was formed by the 'Territorial Force Nursing Service Comforts Committee'. This aimed to 'provide employment and amusement for the patients'.⁵⁰ According to the Committee: 'It began in a very small way, but under Mrs Macpherson Davidson

⁴⁷ Report of the Northumberland War Hospital, Ladies' Committee, Coxlodge, Newcastle Upon Tyne, c.1919. IWM, WWC, LR 280/1, p.1. In the First Northumberland War Hospital, at Coxlodge in Newcastle Upon Tyne, the work of the Ladies Committee also included the receipt and distribution of tobacco to all military hospitals and convalescent homes in Northumberland and Durham.

⁴⁸ Logan Ewing, *A History of St Nicholas Hospital, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, England, 1869-2001*, AuthorHouse UK Ltd, 2009, p.3. A county asylum at the start of the war, St Nicholas Hospital was requisitioned by the War Office to be a Military hospital in 1915.

⁴⁹ Report of the Northumberland War Hospital, Ladies' Committee, Coxlodge, Newcastle Upon Tyne, c.1919. IWM, WWC, LR 280/1, p.1.

⁵⁰ '2nd Scottish General Hospital, Craighleith, Edinburgh. Report from the Committee of the Comforts Committee'. IWM, WWC, LR 133 5/2, p.2.

soon became very flourishing'.⁵¹ Women members would: 'carry selections of work around the wards twice a week giving help to those who need it, and making suggestions as to different kinds of work'.⁵² This group of women also managed sales of work, many to the wounded men themselves at 'cost price', as well as a comforts work party for mending and making garments for the hospital; a library; a hospital magazine; and a Recreation Hut.⁵³ In this military hospital, therefore, needlework was part of a series of activities which provided support to wounded men, designed and managed by the women's committee. This was not a 'medical' initiative co-ordinated by doctors, and nor was it an activity which operated externally to the hospital system; rather, it was both a community and rehabilitation scheme which was managed by civilian women from within the hospital administration.

The negative characterisation of civilian women as an external, albeit well-meaning but misguided, force in the First World War hospital environment remains a powerful one. It has been influential in shaping the way historians have understood, and hence overlooked, the role of civilian women in hospitals during the war. This characterisation has distinct similarities to that of 'middle class sock knitters' and early war 'needlework maniacs', since in each of these dominant perceptions, civilian women have been seen to act either with self-interest or mistakenly. However, drawing on the wartime imagery of women hospital visitors in *Punch*, as well as reports of women's hospital needlework initiatives, this chapter will now argue that the women who introduced needlework into war hospitals do not fit, nor warrant, the popular definition of unwanted and interfering visitors.

⁵¹ '2nd Scottish General Hospital, Craigleith, Edinburgh', p.2.

⁵² '2nd Scottish General Hospital, Craigleith, Edinburgh', p.2.

⁵³ '2nd Scottish General Hospital, Craigleith, Edinburgh', p.1-2.

Civilian women in hospitals: *Punch*

The poor reputation of women hospital visitors as an annoyance to the wounded is deeply rooted in the popular cultural literature that circulated during the later war years. From early 1916, depictions of the various gaffes and apparently crass behaviour of women visiting the wounded became a favourite subject for cartoons in *Punch*. Indeed, cartoon commentary about women hospital visitors increased in frequency in *Punch* from the end of 1915.⁵⁴ Notably, this increase coincided with a decrease in cartoons parodying women's early war knitting and voluntary committee activity.

Between January and October of 1916, *Punch* published fourteen cartoons which presented the errors, or ignorance, shown by women visiting the wounded.⁵⁵ The first of these was by F.H. Townsend, shown in Figure 8.2, published in *Punch* on 5th January 1916. This shows two fashionably-dressed young women enthusiastically cross-questioning a wounded man about his war experience.⁵⁶ The two women have taken the wounded man to lunch, and one of them asks him how he felt to be blown up. He replies, 'If you'll believe me, ma'am, I was never more surprised in all my life.' This suggests an inquisitiveness in the women and a humorous evasion from the wounded soldier. Figure 8.3, however, depicts an elderly woman misunderstanding what she is being told by a wounded soldier, as he refers to his war experience and 'cold steel', whilst she thinks he is talking about the weather.⁵⁷ Figure 8.4, published on 5th July 1916, presents a far more negative image as it directly implicates female visitors in unacceptable behaviour. 'People We Should

⁵⁴ See this thesis, Appendices A and B.

⁵⁵ See this thesis, Appendix B.

⁵⁶ F.H Townsend, untitled cartoon, *Punch*, 5 January 1916, p.5. This cartoon is actually signed with the date 1915, showing that it was drawn during that year, but published in January 1916.

⁵⁷ H.M. Brock, 'How to Talk to the Wounded', *Punch*, 2 February 1916, p.93.

Like to See Interned' shows a young woman apparently enjoying imagining the more gruesome details of a wounded soldier's experience.⁵⁸

Fig. 8.2.



Two women asking a wounded soldier questions about being wounded. Cartoon by F.H. Townsend, *Punch*, 5th January 1916, p.5.

In his study of First World War language, Julian Walker has shown how older women, in particular, were singled out during the war for what he has termed 'linguistic disenfranchisement', with cartoons and jokes portraying them as misunderstanding what they were being told about the war.⁵⁹ However, in *Punch*, female hospital visitors of *all* ages are shown to misunderstand the experience of wounded soldiers, and by extension, it is implied that they misunderstand the realities of the ongoing war. In this imagery, however, it appears to be the intrusive

⁵⁸ F.H. Townsend, 'People We Should Like to See Interned', *Punch*, 5 July 1916, p.5.

⁵⁹ Julian Walker, *Words and the First World War: Language, Memory, Vocabulary*, Bloomsbury, London, 2017, p.236.

nature of women's questioning that is considered inappropriate and contrary to the way the wounded wished to be understood and treated.

Fig 8.3.



'How to Talk to the Wounded'. Cartoon by H.M. Brock, *Punch*, 2nd February 1916, p.93.

The characterisation of female hospital visitors as out of touch or acting with self-interest was not solely a subject for *Punch*; hospital magazines could also comment unfavourably on women visitors. In October 1915, the journal of St Dunstan's Hostel for Blinded Soldiers and Sailors, *St Dunstan's Revue*, featured an article, 'Visitors', which claimed: 'Visitors to institutions make silly remarks. This nonsensical article is based on some of them'.⁶⁰ The article observes the interaction between a 'V.A.D.' nurse and a visiting 'D.O.L.' (Dear Old Lady), and suggests that the VAD, 'had gone

⁶⁰ *St Dunstan's Revue*, No 2, October 1915, p.15.

through sufficient torture' during the visit, and is, in contrast to the visitor, presented sympathetically.⁶¹ This article also indicates that it was the insensitive questioning of the female visitors which was objected to.⁶²

Fig 8.4.



'People We Should Like to See Interned'. Cartoon by F.H. Townsend, *Punch*, 5th July 1916, p.5.

The 1917 publication, *Women War Workers: Accounts Contributed by Representative Workers of the Work Done by Women in the More Important Branches of War Employment*, gives further insight, however, into which behaviours were and were not acceptable for women visiting the wounded. It was compiled with contributions from women, and it noted how:

⁶¹ *St Dunstan's Revue*, No 2, October 1915, p.17.

⁶² During a tour of the Hostel, the 'D.O.L' makes various insensitive comments about the occupational work of the blind, such as: 'When the mat is finished, what a pleasure it must be for them to see how well they can blend the colours'. See *St Dunstan's Revue*, No 2, October 1915, p.16.

The unofficial Comforteers may roughly be divided into two classes – those whose aim is to entertain the soldiers, and those whose object is to divert themselves.⁶³

This account warns 'the amateur visitor' to hospitals against asking questions of the wounded or showing them pity, and offers guidance on how to dress, speak and behave with the wounded.⁶⁴ There are reports on women's work in munitions and as VADs in this book, however, the chapter on women visiting hospitals offers both a report and issues judgement, followed by advice. It makes recommendations, such as the need to form a 'Committee of Instruction' for visitors.⁶⁵ The (female) author obviously sought to improve women's visiting behaviours; however, the pages devoted to this advice exceed the attention paid to the success of women's hospital needlework support. Needlework schemes are briefly complimented without correction or advice:

A good deal of constructive work is, of course, being done by the Comforteers who, by providing the patients with the materials for embroidery, rug-making, knitting, and so on, are easing their path toward self-support later on.⁶⁶

This indicates that despite the limited attention paid to their work in this account, the women visitors introducing needlework activity *did not* fall into the same category as the women 'Comforteers' who asked questions of the wounded. The women who offered instruction in needlework activities are presented with respect, in a similar position to female staff, and do not come in for the same censure as other female visitors.

⁶³ Gilbert Stone Ed., *Women War Workers: Accounts Contributed by Representative Workers of the Work Done by Women in the More Important Branches of War Employment*, London, George G. Harrap and Company, 1917, p.223.

⁶⁴ Gilbert Stone ed, *Women War Workers*, p.214-238.

⁶⁵ Gilbert Stone ed, *Women War Workers*, p.227.

⁶⁶ Gilbert Stone ed, *Women War Workers*, p.237.

In her case study of disability during the First World War, Wendy Gagen has identified the presence of pity as a key determinant to whether wounded men might accept or reject the interventions of women: 'Disabled men often understood supposed acts of kindness and interest as pity, which was emasculating'.⁶⁷ Joanna Bourke has also suggested that wounded men who felt pitied by women considered their masculine status threatened, as they felt misunderstood and patronised.⁶⁸ However, a significant feature of the relations between wounded men and the women who brought needlework into hospitals is that wounded men consented to the interaction; and they could take responsibility for how that interaction developed. The conditions under which wounded men and these women interacted was therefore characterised by a level of consent on the part of wounded men, and as this chapter will argue, needlework activity in the form of embroidery did not *automatically* challenge the masculine status of wounded men. Firstly, however, it is necessary to address the assertion that embroidery formed an occupational therapy which was distinct from masculine vocational therapies.

Gendering First World War occupational and vocational therapies

Academic studies of wounded men performing needlework in hospitals during the First World War are limited in number; however, Carden-Coyne has presented analysis which argues that there are distinct gendered implications for men practicing needlework embroidery in rehabilitation during the First World War. In her

⁶⁷ Wendy Gagen, 'Remastering the Body, Renegotiating Gender: Physical Disability and Masculinity during the First World War, the case of J.B. Middlebrook', *European Review of History-Revue européenne d'Histoire*, 14:4, 2007, p.537.

⁶⁸ Joanna Bourke, 'Love and Limblessness: Male Heterosexuality, Disability and the Great War', *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 9:1, 2016, p.3-19.

research, Carden-Coyne asserts that the practice of embroidery by wounded men in hospitals comprised a feminising stage in their rehabilitation.⁶⁹ Handicrafts, such as embroidery, she suggests, were regarded as:

psychologically healing, helping the weary and embattled to regain manhood through a transitional state of feminized becoming, beginning with the gentle, womanly arts.⁷⁰

Convalescence was therefore: 'an active process of returning men from an infantilized and inert state through a period of feminine recuperation'.⁷¹ This feminised stage, she suggests, was characterised by performing 'occupational therapy' - activities such as knitting and embroidery - which were then followed by a masculine stage of recuperation, during which wounded took up mechanized or industrial vocational pursuits.⁷² Thus, in defining occupational therapy, Carden-Coyne argues that:

Such therapies were distinct from vocational rehabilitation, which retrained disabled soldiers for civilian re-deployment.⁷³

In this projection, Carden-Coyne situates needlework within a linear evolutionary process whereby it functioned as a means to transition wounded men through a physically weakened feminine state, after which they were to be re-masculinised by more physical 'vocational' training in manly pursuits, such as carpentry, etc.

However, the foundation of the argument that embroidery by wounded men formed a contained feminine stage in rehabilitation is based upon making a clear distinction

⁶⁹ Ana Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p.264-274.

⁷⁰ Ana Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p.266.

⁷¹ Ana Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p.269.

⁷² Ana Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p.269.

⁷³ Ana Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p.264.

between (feminine and therapeutic) occupational therapy and (masculine, skills-based) vocational therapy. As this chapter will now show, this distinction cannot be confidently maintained.

To evidence the distinction between occupational and vocational therapy, Carden-Coyne notes that occupational therapy in nineteenth century asylums and sanatoria can be considered a 'moral rather than disciplinary therapy', and adds that there was a therapeutic value to this activity.⁷⁴ Carden-Coyne does not consider occupational therapy to have had a vocational status. However, an historical distinction between occupational and vocational rehabilitation is not borne out by the recommendations of the Royal Commission in an 1881 report, published in the *British Medical Journal*, which suggested 'treatment' for the mentally disabled in institutions.⁷⁵ This report recorded that:

The occupations which they are best suited for are handicrafts, such as tailoring, shoemaking, mat and brush making, and various outdoor occupations; and in the case of the girls, such pursuits as will tend to their employment, when discharged, as domestic servants.⁷⁶

Results showed that 'physical powers have been strengthened', but also that 'the irritable have become calm'.⁷⁷ This suggests that vocational training for employment was considered to be physically as well as mentally therapeutic, and that it was in fact the *combination* of these two features which led to positive employment

⁷⁴ Ana Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p.265.

⁷⁵ 'The Report of the Royal Commission on Idiots, Imbeciles, and Feeble-minded Children', *The British Medical Journal*, 2:1496, 31 August 1889, p.483-485.

⁷⁶ 'The Report of the Royal Commission on Idiots, Imbeciles, and Feeble-minded Children', p.484.

⁷⁷ 'The Report of the Royal Commission on Idiots, Imbeciles, and Feeble-minded Children', p.484.

prospects. Needlework, both tailoring and the domestic training recommended for girls, was to lead to a skilled vocational *and* mental rehabilitation.

According to the Red Cross, at the start of the First World War, 'practically no provision was made' for discharged men 'either for their treatment in institutions or for their training and re-education when such treatment was necessary'.⁷⁸ As the war proceeded, however, a 'constantly increasing branch' of Red Cross work 'aimed at binding physical and mental welfare together'.⁷⁹ A 'trying stage of recovery' was identified: 'in which some work was essential quite as much from the purely physical as from the mental point of view'.⁸⁰ 'Curative' workshops were opened in hospitals to provide a combination of mental therapy and vocational training. Thus, there was not a clear and automatic distinction between occupational and vocational treatments during the war.

Vocational handicraft schemes for wounded and disabled men, which included needlework initiatives, are evident during the war. Carolyn Malone has shown how these schemes were supported by prominent figures in the Arts and Crafts movement.⁸¹ While the charity, Friends of the Poor, also offered embroidery training and employment to war wounded men outside the hospital environment during the

⁷⁸ Reports by the Joint War Committee, p.239.

⁷⁹ Reports by the Joint War Committee, p.249.

⁸⁰ Reports by the Joint War Committee, p.249.

⁸¹ Carolyn Malone, 'A Job Fit for Heroes? Disabled Veterans, the Arts and Crafts Movement and Social Reconstruction in Post-World War I Britain', *First World War Studies*, 4:2, 2013, p.201-217. Malone records how in 1917, the architect and jewellery designer Henry Wilson and fellow members of the Arts and Crafts movement campaigned for the training of disabled veterans in handicrafts. Under the suggestion of the sculptor George Frampton, this artistic movement recommended training disabled men in the traditional loom weaving of war memorial tapestries. In 1918, the government appointed Wilson and a group of prominent craftsmen and women to advise it on potential handicraft training and employment schemes for the disabled. Despite a long running training programme, the tapestry weaving initiative failed to become established after the war. Malone has argued that this failure was the result of the retrenched economic policy of the post-war government, as well as the ultimately impractical nature of the Arts and Crafts vision. See Carolyn Malone, 'A Job Fit for Heroes?', p.213.

war.⁸² This employment initiative was not just for the duration of war; at the end of the war, the Friends of the Poor incorporated the wartime employment scheme into the Disabled Soldier's Embroidery Industry (DSEI). Joseph McBrinn has recorded the growth of this charitable enterprise, which remained an employment initiative for disabled veterans until 1955.⁸³ McBrinn argues that needlework cannot be excluded from vocational rehabilitative initiatives for men during (and after) the war, and he points to the employment and economic success of the DSEI as an indicator of the vocational strength of the enterprise.⁸⁴ That wounded men's embroidery was a vocational activity is apparent.

It is the exclusion of needlework from vocational rehabilitation activity that provides foundation to the argument that wounded men could transition from (feminine) occupational needlework to (masculine) vocational activity. However, both 'occupational' and 'vocational' therapies, as defined by Carden-Coyne, could be undertaken by the same man at the same time during hospital recuperation, or indeed, one practice could be undertaken without the other ever taking place. Furthermore, men could *choose* whether to engage with needlework activity and they could carry it out throughout their time in hospital. This is evidenced by the activity in the 1st Scottish General Hospital, a Red Cross auxiliary hospital in Aberdeen, where, in the Autumn of 1916, men were offered the 'recreation' activities

⁸² 'Account of the Work of the Friends of the Poor. The Friends of the Poor. Benevolent Organisations', 31 March 1918, IWM, WWC, B.O.8 37. 2/3, p.1-3. Founded in 1906 with the: 'aim of bridging the gulf between the rich and the deserving poor', this charity offered training to boys and girls 'for service and skilled trades', whilst it also assisted the elderly and sick, and provided 'paid needlework for women unable to work outside their homes'. In August 1914, the charity's remit broadened to assist disabled war veterans with the founding the Disabled Soldiers Aid Committee. This Committee provided two 'home industries' for disabled men: envelope making, and embroidery.

⁸³ Joseph McBrinn, 'The Work of Masculine Fingers: the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry, 1918-1955', *Journal of Design History*, 31:1, 2018, p.1-23.

⁸⁴ Joseph McBrinn, 'The Work of Masculine Fingers: the Disabled Soldiers' Embroidery Industry, 1918-1955', p.9.

of both carpentry and needlework by the Ladies Needlework Guild.⁸⁵ A Recreation Room was opened by the Ladies Needlework Guild in which the Needlework Guild installed a carpenter's bench, and they sought instructors in furniture carpentry, fretwork and wood carving. In 1917, when the Recreation Room was converted into a ward, the Committee of the Ladies Needlework Guild:

decided to erect a Workshop in the grounds of the High School Hospital to take its place, carpenters' benches, carving tools, tables, etc., were lent or gifted, and the work was carried on as before.⁸⁶

At the same time:

Embroidery, Knitting, and Chip Carving were taught in the High School Hospital during the winter of 1916-17 to patients in bed. The scheme proved very successful and was found to be of great benefit to the men, from a recreative as well as a medical point of view.⁸⁷

In the 1st Scottish General Hospital, therefore, both needlework and carpentry were offered as 'recreation'; and both activities were established by the Ladies Needlework Guild, and not a medical-military authority.

However, the type of disability that men received during the war would have a significant role in defining the form that their rehabilitative therapy could take. Those confined to bed would not have been as able to engage in activities outside of the ward, whilst the physical immobilisation of men could also be either temporary or long-standing. It is therefore simplistic to suggest that wounded men followed a rigid

⁸⁵ Ladies Needlework Guild, 1st Scottish Hospital, Aberdeen, War Report, The Central Press, Aberdeen, 1919. The Women at Work Collection, IWM, WWC, LR 3/9, p.12.

⁸⁶ Ladies Needlework Guild, 1st Scottish Hospital, p.12.

⁸⁷ Ladies Needlework Guild, 1st Scottish Hospital, p.12.

transition from feminine needlework to masculine activities in a uniform, heavily directed therapeutic process. The characterisation of needlework by wounded men as the performance of a feminised, limiting and vulnerable stage of early rehabilitation is related to an assumption that men could *only* demonstrate masculinity by performing *specific* activities, usually associated with a show of physical strength; i.e., that femininity is intrinsic and fixed within activities such as embroidery, whilst masculinity is likewise fixed in activities like carpentry. As this chapter will now argue, however, the associations of masculinity and femininity are far more fluid, to the extent that embroidery could also provide wounded men with a means of renegotiating their masculinity.

Masculinity, disability and embroidery

In her seminal work on masculinity, R.W. Connell has identified the ideological, social and political framework of 'hegemonic masculinity' which, Connell argues, legitimised patriarchy by asserting a dominant and hierarchical form of masculinity which could subjugate the feminine. In the early twentieth century, the social and political context in Britain and Ireland can be seen to privilege patriarchal hegemonic masculinity, which is associated with the performance of defined 'masculine' traits, including physical strength and holding economic power.⁸⁸ However, Connell also stresses that 'hegemonic masculinity embodies a "currently accepted" strategy', which can be challenged and changed, making it 'a historically mobile relation'.⁸⁹ That is, hegemonic masculinity is not inherent to a set grouping of activities.

⁸⁸ R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1995.

⁸⁹ R.W. Connell, *Masculinities*, p.77.

Indeed, the assumption that masculinity is only demonstrable by activities which perform traditional 'manly' prowess - and so cannot be fully achieved by wounded men, or is diminished by physical disability - has been countered by studies which argue that physical disability does not inherently exclude disabled men from exhibiting masculine status. In their analysis of masculinity and disability, Shuttleworth, Wedgwood and Wilson have pointed out the binary argument that has directed research in the area of disabled masculinity:

A much-cited point by those who study the intersection of gender and disability is that masculinity and disability are in conflict with each other because disability is associated with being dependent and helpless whereas masculinity is associated with being powerful and autonomous, thus creating a lived and embodied dilemma for disabled men.⁹⁰

They suggest that the focus of research has, however: 'been more on masculinity and how it intersects with disability *as an almost generic category*' [my italics].⁹¹

Rather than accepting the universality of disability as emasculating, they argue that different forms of disability - physical and cognitive - as well as 'life phases and cultures' influence the way in which masculinity and disability intersect and invest one another.⁹² There is not, therefore, a simple correlation of opposition between masculinity and disability: disabled men can exhibit masculinity.

Bourke, in her research into disabled men during the war, suggests that the characteristics of masculinity itself require a more complex understanding, as:

⁹⁰ Russell Shuttleworth, Nikki Wedgwood, and Nathan J. Wilson, 'The Dilemma of Disabled Masculinity', *Men and Masculinities*, 15:2, 2012, p.174.

⁹¹ Russell Shuttleworth, Nikki Wedgwood, and Nathan J. Wilson, 'The Dilemma of Disabled Masculinity', p.188.

⁹² Russell Shuttleworth, Nikki Wedgwood, and Nathan J. Wilson, 'The Dilemma of Disabled Masculinity', p.189.

'masculinity is multi-dimensional: fortitude and tenderness coexisted'.⁹³ While Santanu Das has shown how the traditionally feminised characteristics of vulnerability and sensuality were a significant and demonstrable part of men's experience of masculinity during the war.⁹⁴ These studies suggest that the feminine and masculine are alterable, where characteristics are complexly structured: 'fighting' men could exhibit and experience behaviours that are associated with the feminine. In her case study of the First World War disability and masculinity of J.B. Middlebrook, Wendy Gagen has identified the flaws in perceiving hegemonic masculinity as a series of fixed identity traits which could not be demonstrated by wounded men during the war. Gagen argues that hegemonic masculinity should be seen as a more flexible entity, where signifiers such as stoicism, pride and economic independence could be successfully renegotiated and demonstrated by disabled men who could refer to their disability and wounds to renegotiate masculine ideals.⁹⁵ Gagen suggests that the fluidity of hegemonic masculinity goes some way to explain its power during the First World War, since: 'It is precisely this lack of solidity in hegemonic masculinity that is the crucial factor in its dominance in this period'.⁹⁶ Nicoletta Gullace, too, has shown how wounded men could renegotiate masculine status by the public demonstration of war wounds and symbols. In this display, Gullace argues, wounded men were able to indicate a powerful patriarchy which dismissed challenges to their masculinity made by women's white feather giving.⁹⁷

⁹³ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*, p.126.

⁹⁴ Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

⁹⁵ Wendy Gagen, 'Remastering the Body, Renegotiating Gender', p.538.

⁹⁶ Wendy Gagen, 'Remastering the Body, Renegotiating Gender', p.538.

⁹⁷ Nicoletta Gullace, 'White Feathers and Wounded Men: Female Patriotism and the Memory of the Great War', *Journal of British Studies, Twentieth Century British Studies*, 36:2, April 1997, p.178-206.

Masculinity could therefore be renegotiated by wounded and disabled men in complex ways.

This chapter follows the reasoning that wounded men could renegotiate hegemonic masculinity, and it argues that the practice of needlework could form a significant means by which wounded men demonstrated their masculine - not feminine - status. I argue that embroidery needlework could be used by wounded men to achieve self-empowerment; empowerment articulated through the 'feminised' language of needlework design. This chapter will now show how wounded men could use embroidery to re-form the hegemonic masculine characteristics of pride; stoicism; survival and service; economic independence; productivity and skill; artistry and resilience. This renegotiation was achieved through public sales and exhibitions of needlework; by fund raising to self-sustain needlework programmes and other charitable initiatives; and through the demonstration of skill and artistry in needlework design.

A rethink of the 'feminisation' of wounded men by embroidery

In her study of wounded men's embroidery, Carden-Coyne has presented the practice of needlework by wounded men as a resistance to masculinity and an acceptance of feminised vulnerability. She suggests that the refusal of some men to take up vocational, masculine training was related to the destabilisation of gender roles in hospitals full of wounded men, where 'the genderising of therapies and disabled rehabilitation – feminizing and masculinizing' led to an acceptance by wounded men that they were vulnerable, which in turn led them to the situation where 'the wounded man resisted the expectations of stoical, military masculinity

and the coercive culture of cheerfulness'.⁹⁸ However, this reading endows the 'feminine' practice of needlework with set, restrictive characteristics which men are seen to adopt either in resignation or rebellion. This also suggests that whilst performing 'feminine' activities, such as needlework, it was impossible for men to express masculine achievements. This chapter will now show, however, that the wounded men who chose to learn and carry out embroidery needlework were not automatically rejecting stoicism, military masculinity or a culture of cheerfulness: embroidered needlework by war wounded men should not be seen as a display of abjection or rejection.

Public exhibitions of needlework made by wounded men became a regular feature of a number of hospitals in Britain and Ireland in the later war years. These exhibitions showcased both the variety of the needlework men chose to make, as well as the newly acquired skills of wounded soldiers. A sale of works would often follow exhibitions, which often provided a means of generating income to support the continuation of hospital needlework schemes. This can be seen at Netley Red Cross hospital in 1917, where:

Work is carried out on business lines, and orders are taken and executed for the various kinds of work done by the wounded soldiers in this hospital, which consists of 3000 beds, and periodical sales and exhibitions are held to enable the committee to meet expenses, in order to continue this great work so happily begun.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Carden-Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, 2014, p.270.

⁹⁹ 'Exhibition for Encouraging Work Done by Wounded and Discharged Soldiers and Sailors, 20th June – 27th June 1917', IWM, WWC, B.O.8. 17/3, p.56.

It was not unusual for needlework programmes in hospitals to become highly organised and self-sustaining. This was the case in the First Northumberland War Hospital, at Coxlodge, in Newcastle Upon Tyne, where under the Ladies Committee 'six sales and exhibitions were held at which the public were able to view and purchase the work'.¹⁰⁰ The proceeds of these were allocated variously to sustain and encourage further work. Funds paid for the exhibition and also materials for future needlework. Sales also enabled the men to keep work, whilst sale revenue bought prizes for the men; bought soldiers' refreshments at the exhibition; and bought 'a ward prize', chosen by the patients for their wards.¹⁰¹ At the 1st Scottish General Hospital in Aberdeen, men were 'allowed to keep every alternate piece of work done by him, the others being reserved for the Sale of Work to help to pay expenses'.¹⁰² Exhibitions and sales supported and rewarded men for their work; however, they also generated local community support and recognition. The cyclical process of creation, exhibition, sales and investment suggests communal self-empowerment through needlework programmes, rather than men's resignation to an insular dependency.

In several hospitals, the sales of wounded soldiers' needlework supported other war charities. At the 1st Scottish General Hospital, Aberdeen, needlework items were 'sold in aid' of the Scottish Veteran's Garden City Scheme and the Nation's Fund for Nurses.¹⁰³ Thus a reciprocal support was shown by wounded men for both a community initiative and also for the nurses that they depended upon. While, at the

¹⁰⁰ Report of the Northumberland War Hospital, p.2. IWM, WWC, LR 280/1.

¹⁰¹ The prizes for the wards included: 'a portable billiard table, screens, chairs and couches'. See Report of the Northumberland War Hospital, p.2. IWM, WWC, LR 280/1.

¹⁰² *Ladies Needlework Guild, 1st Scottish General Hospital, Aberdeen, War Report*, The Central Press, Aberdeen, 1919. IWM, WWC, LR 3/9, p.13.

¹⁰³ *Ladies Needlework Guild, 1st Scottish General Hospital*, p.13.

Red Cross New Court Hospital in Cheltenham, 700 needlework articles were sold which raised £200 'for various hospitals [...] £112 of which went to benefit St Dunstan's'.¹⁰⁴ In her study of masculinity and disability, Wendy Gagen has referred to the construction of 'hierarchies of disability' during the war, where pity and support offered by wounded men to fellow war wounded was 'an indicator of the humanity of the individual and a way in which to understand one's own disability within a hierarchy of disablement'.¹⁰⁵ However, Julie Anderson has noted that St Dunstan's Hostel for Blinded Soldiers and Sailors held a particular significance, representing: 'heroism, triumph over adversity and the embodiment of restored masculinity'.¹⁰⁶ The wounded men who created and sold needlework may therefore have wished to support the masculine aspiration which 'triumphed over adversity', and as such participate in a network of collective support and self-empowerment. This demonstration of achievement is also stressed in the report of the Red Cross New Court Hospital, which confirmed that amongst the items sold, the needlework done by those with one eye 'is quite up to the standard of the others'.¹⁰⁷

Needlework exhibitions as sites of masculine empowerment

Needlework exhibitions could also promote the work of wounded men as desirable art or decorative home wear. At St Thomas' Bethnal Green and Middlesex Hospital in London the needlework programme was organised by members of the Women's Guild of Arts (WGA) who arranged a travelling exhibition of the finished pieces,

¹⁰⁴ 'Exhibition for Encouraging Work Done by Wounded and Discharged Soldiers and Sailors, 20th June – 27th June 1917', p.60.

¹⁰⁵ Wendy Gagen, 'Remastering the Body, Renegotiating Gender: Physical Disability and Masculinity during the First World War, the case of J.B. Middlebrook', p.537; see also Note 72, p.540.

¹⁰⁶ Julie Anderson, *War, Disability and Rehabilitation in Britain: 'Soul of a Nation'*, p.50.

¹⁰⁷ 'Exhibition for Encouraging Work Done by Wounded and Discharged Soldiers and Sailors, 20th June – 27th June 1917', p.61.

which opened on 10th May 1918 at the Lyceum Club, 128 Piccadilly, London. The artistic merit of the work was championed by the WGA, and under the chairmanship of May Morris (Figure 8.5), they sought to promote the artistic freedom expressed by wounded men's embroidery:¹⁰⁸

The soldiers are taught four stitches only & make their own patterns, & they choose their own colours, which are often highly imaginative & full of artistic suggestion.¹⁰⁹

The President of the Arts and Crafts Society and a campaigner for disabled veterans' handicrafts, Henry Wilson, was invited to attend the exhibition, where:

The work was admired, because it showed the individuality of the worker who is encouraged to work out what he fancies and arrange his own design. This point was much approved of by the various members who were present.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ May Morris, (1862-1938), was the daughter of the Arts and Crafts designer William Morris and she was a professional embroiderer, taking on the Embroidery Department at Morris & Co in 1885. In 1907 she founded the WGA. Morris also taught embroidery at the Central School of Art in London from 1897. See Jan Marsh, *May Morris: Arts & Crafts Designer*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2017.

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Mary J. Newill, Women's Guild of Arts. 'Typescript Notes on Some Wounded Soldiers' Work', IWM, WWC, B.O.8 5/8, p.2.

¹¹⁰ Letter from Mary J. Newill, Women's Guild of Arts. 'Typescript Notes on Some Wounded Soldiers' Work', IWM, WWC, B.O.8 5/8, p.1.

Fig. 8.5.



Photograph of May Morris at her embroidery, c.1890s. ©William Morris Gallery, London Borough of Waltham Forest.

Fig. 8.6.



Portrait of Ernest Thesiger, by William Ranken, 1918. ©Manchester City Galleries.

Whilst on display at the Birmingham School of Art, the work was approved by 'Mr Caterson-Smith (he is the Head of the School of Art and a famous man)'.¹¹¹ The author of this report, and member of the WGA, Mary Newill, also requested that exhibition items be taken to Leicester, where: 'One of the chief men on the Hospital Amusements Committee was immensely pleased with it, he had been bewailing the men did such 'feminine work''.¹¹²

The WGA elevated wounded men's needlework to the status of decorative art, and they appear to have achieved support for this in the artistic community. In doing so,

¹¹¹ Letter from Mary J. Newill, IWM, WWC, B.O.8 5/8, p.3.

¹¹² Letter from Mary J. Newill, IWM, WWC, B.O.8 5/8, p.3.

however, they distanced the needlework from any characterisation of it as a feminine pastime, and aligned the creators with the standing of budding artisans, where association is made with skill, artistry and the demonstration of achievement in the pursuit of a trade. Wounded men taking part in hospital embroidery exhibition programmes were thus able to assert commercial and artistic status, which aligned with hegemonic masculine achievement.

During the war, the professionalisation of wounded men's hospital needlework was a key interest of the WGA, which had a vision for the future employment of wounded men as needleworkers.¹¹³ This vision was shared by the actor and needlework enthusiast Ernest Thesiger (Figure 8.6); however, Thesiger's method for achieving professionalism was a direct contrast to the WGA. May Morris discouraged the design training of wounded men in embroidery and remarked that: 'a good deal of the work was inspired by ordinary commercial examples and did not count'.¹¹⁴

Instead, she argued, men:

fighting against shattered nerves by means of their scraps of embroidery, produced in them work that in our "shop" talk we call "original" that is, work that comes out of their inner selves.¹¹⁵

Thesiger, on the other hand, was appalled by the free-hand 'needlework horrors' he encountered in hospitals, and advocated the use of pattern designs.¹¹⁶ Jonathan Davidson has noted how Thesiger particularly favoured Queen Anne or Chippendale

¹¹³ 'Account of the Development of Craft Work for Soldiers, Women's Guild of Arts, Benevolent Organisations', 1918, IWM, WWC, B.O.8 5/4, p.1.

¹¹⁴ May Morris, 'Embroidery and Free Thought', *The Highway*, 14:107, The Workers' Educational Association, London, 1917, IWM, WWC, B.O.8. 5/6, p.176.

¹¹⁵ Letter from May Morris to Violet Cooper, Undated, c.Autumn 1918, IWM, WWC, B.O.8. 5/12.

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Joseph McBrinn, 'The Work of Masculine Fingers', p.6. Original in Ernest Thesiger, *Practically True*, Heinemann, London, 1927, p.121.

chair designs as these 'would find a ready market'.¹¹⁷ The opposing methodologies of Morris and Thesiger are symptomatic of the wider art versus craft debate that Morris struggled to reconcile.¹¹⁸ However, both of these artists worked towards achieving the professionalisation of wounded men's embroidery within the context of hospital needlework programmes. This, I argue, offered wounded men an active means by which they could renegotiate their masculine status in employment and skills demonstration over the course of the war.¹¹⁹

Feminine design language and empowerment

It was also possible for wounded men to renegotiate masculine status through the 'feminine' design language of embroidery, as this could demonstrate adaptability; over-coming impairment; commercial appeal; and the war experiences of men.

Carden-Coyne has suggested that the embroidery designs worked by wounded men associated with feminine activity and relevance:

In crafting what men affectionately called 'fancy work', they turned their hands to the fragile beauty of butterflies and dainty flowers, the genteel leisure pursuits of middle-class women rather than masculine pursuits.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Jonathan Davidson, 'Threading the Needle: When embroidery was used to treat shell-shock', p.1.

¹¹⁸ May Morris, *Decorative Needlework*, Hughes & Co, London, 1893.

¹¹⁹ Ernest Thesiger (1879-1961), was formative in the foundation of the Disabled Soldiers Embroidery Industry (DSEI), see Joseph McBrinn, 'The Work of Masculine Fingers', p.7-8. The Women's Guild of Arts encountered difficulties in founding the craft villages that they envisaged, and did not fulfill their vision for disabled embroidery craftsmen. For more information on the problems faced by the Arts and Crafts proposals for post-war craft villages, see Tanya Harrod, *The Crafts in Britain in the 20th Century*. New Haven, The Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Yale University Press, 1999, p.28.

¹²⁰ Ana Carden Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p.266. It should be noted that the term 'fancy work' did not originate from wounded men as a means of defining their wartime needlework. The term was in common use in Britain in the early Twentieth Century to describe embroidery. For common usage during the period, see the magazine, *Fancy Needlework Illustrated*, 1914-18.

She describes the way in which designs provided a therapeutic escapism, where, 'Instead of corpse-ridden, dark, muddy terrain was a colourful rainbow embroidered on to sensuous fabric.'¹²¹ However, as this chapter will show, the thematic opposition of traumatic war experience with colourful, floral or pastoral needlework design does not necessarily mean that men's decorative needlework does not provide a commentary on their war experience. It is also important to acknowledge that in stitching regimental badges, wounded men referred directly to their masculine wartime role and achievement. In some cases, embroidering regimental badges was closely associated with defining the war status and allegiance of wounded men. This appears to be the case in the front line Red Cross field hospital in Boulogne when, in 1918, it began to offer 'badge-embroidery' taught by VAD nurses to patients who 'were detained for long periods'.¹²² Each patient made a badge for themselves and a badge for sale, alternately.¹²³ This activity was accompanied by lectures on regimental history, with the badges 'serving as excellent texts'.¹²⁴ In this front line context, needlework by wounded men was closely related to their regimental, and thereby masculine, identities.

On the home front, regimental badges also proved a very popular embroidery subject for wounded men. In July of 1916 *The Times* noted that at Netley Red Cross hospital:

The men were first shown how to work the badges of their regiments, and so quickly this pastime grew in popularity that from regimental crests they soon passed to more ambitious efforts, until now a great deal of beautiful work is done

¹²¹ Ana Carden Coyne, *The Politics of Wounds*, p.266.

¹²² 'Account of Hut Boulogne (No.7 Camp). Reports of VAD Recreation Huts in Convalescent Camps and Hospitals, British Red Cross Society', c.1918, IWM, WWC, B.R.C.S. 12/95, p.2.

¹²³ 'Account of Hut Boulogne (No.7 Camp)', p.2.

¹²⁴ 'Account of Hut Boulogne (No.7 Camp)', p.3.

by those who cannot leave bed, and quite two thirds of the patients have taken it up.¹²⁵

What is notable is that at Netley, regimental badges initiated men into needlework, but they were not considered the most 'ambitious' of designs. In an article in *Home Chat*, 'Needlework for Soldiers: How Wounded Tommies Pass Many a Weary Hour Happily in Hospital', an unnamed author writes of her experience teaching embroidery to wounded men, and recommends working from simple to complex designs, with regimental badges 'a source of the very keenest interest' (Figure.8.7).¹²⁶ However, the most complex design presented by the article was a peacock, and the author writes:

One man, a one-armed soldier, embroidered a most beautiful peacock while he was in hospital. The design was just an ordinary transfer, but he put into it many an artistic touch on his own account, and the blending of the greens and blues, chosen by himself, is truly wonderful.¹²⁷

The achievement of a wounded man with the physical hindrance of only one arm is thus heightened *because* of the decorative format of this design. Complex pastoral, floral or historical designs often required more advanced needlework skills to achieve, therefore their completion to a high standard by wounded men aligns with hegemonic masculinity ideals of overcoming and excelling with skill. The 'feminine' design language of needlework had wide commercial appeal, as the brightly coloured peacocks and floral designs proved saleable. This, too, blurs the distinction

¹²⁵ 'A Land of Healing', *The Times*, 21 July 1916, p.11.

¹²⁶ 'Needlework for Soldiers: How Wounded Tommies Pass Many a Weary Hour Happily in Hospital', *Home Chat*, 2 December 1916, p.365.

¹²⁷ 'Needlework for Soldiers: How Wounded Tommies Pass Many a Weary Hour Happily in Hospital', p.365.

between a feminine therapeutic hobby and a masculine commercial enterprise. Men were proud of completing complex decorative embroidered pieces. Figure 8.8 shows a wounded soldier displaying his embroideries. The designs include (from top left): the Willow Pattern; a Dutch rural scene; a floral and butterfly border; Chinoiserie; a peacock; an Art Nouveau design; and a regimental badge. These are displayed alongside one another, whilst the soldier's wounds are also visible. Regimental insignia and decorative designs thus invest this wounded soldier's statement of achievement and identity.

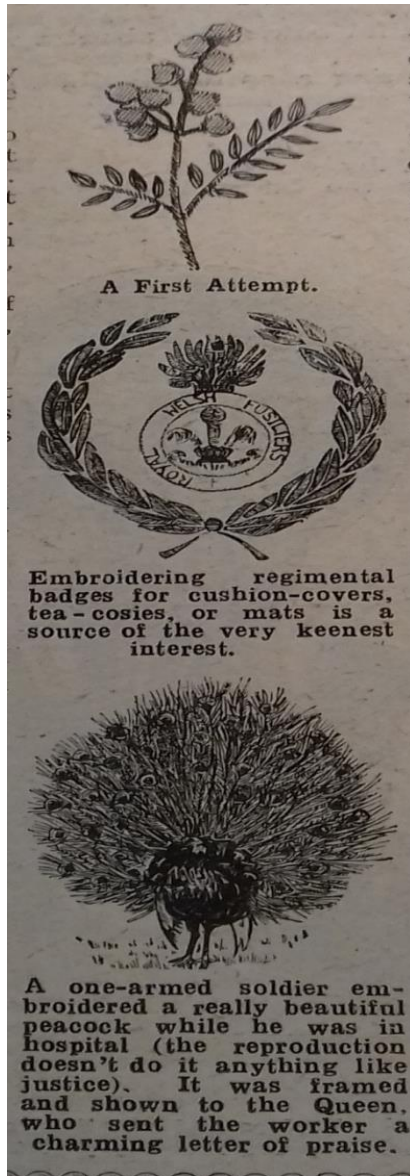
At the 1918 Lyceum exhibition of needlework by wounded men, designs were 'reminiscent of the battlefield admirably worked in colours; others of fair landscapes with figures introduced'.¹²⁸ May Morris remarked that: 'they all showed invention and amusement and desire to "tell the story"; a great many were beautiful in colouring and particularly ingenious in the actual stitching'.¹²⁹ All were, Morris suggested, 'the result of a bloody war and the sad leisure of a hospital bed'.¹³⁰ This chapter has argued that both regimental badges and decorative designs can refer to wounded men's masculine achievements and identity. The choice of decorative, 'feminine', designs does not mean that wounded men were newly confined within a feminine realm; rather, wounded men could use embroidery to comment on their recent masculine experience with designs which demonstrated their ability to overcome and create.

¹²⁸ Letter from Mary J. Newill, Women's Guild of Arts. 'Typescript Notes on Some Wounded Soldiers' Work', IWM, WWC, B.O.8 5/8, p.2.

¹²⁹ May Morris, 'Embroidery and Free Thought', IWM, WWC, B.O.8. 5/6, p.176.

¹³⁰ May Morris, 'Embroidery and Free Thought', IWM, WWC, B.O.8. 5/6, p.175.

Fig. 8.7.



Pattern progression recommended to women for teaching embroidery to wounded men.

'Needlework for Soldiers: How Wounded Tommies Pass Many a Weary Hour Happily in Hospital', *Home Chat*, 2nd December 1916, p.365.

Fig. 8.8.



A wounded soldier displaying his embroidery, location unknown, possibly Netley Red Cross Hospital, c.1916. ©Tony Allen photographic postcard.

Conclusion

This chapter has approached the role of needlework during the First World War from the perspective of the performance of embroidery by wounded men. As with previous chapters, it has demonstrated that women took a far more active role in defining war response initiatives through needlework than has been considered previously. It has addressed the assumption that rehabilitation was an established, well-formed discipline contained within medical practice during the First World War; and it has shown how needlework was introduced into war hospitals as a therapeutic practice, tentatively and experimentally, by women volunteers. The introduction of embroidery for men in First World War hospitals was innovative and organic, with women in local communities providing teaching, guidance, patterns and encouragement. It has been demonstrated here that embroidery schemes grew as a rehabilitative activity through the *interaction* of wounded men and female volunteers.

In identifying the historic barriers to investigating the role of civilian women in war hospitals during the war, this chapter has shown that further research is overdue into the role of these women. Needlework rehabilitative schemes did not lead to a widening in the gap between wounded men and society. Needlework programmes were sustained by communal - hospital and local community - contributions and connections; and rather than constituting a singular activity for men, needlework formed a community initiative which incorporated the public through sales and exhibitions. There was a partnership of production and communication in which both men and women engaged, and this built, rather than polarised, relations between embroidering veterans and people on the home front.

This chapter has challenged a number of gendered assumptions about needlework. It has found that, during the First World War, there is not a clear distinction between 'feminine' occupational embroidery on the one hand and vocational rehabilitation on the other. It has questioned the assumption that rehabilitation activities associated with women's practice, such as embroidery, necessarily annulled and restricted men's masculine status. Instead, it has been demonstrated that embroidery needlework offered men a complex tool of self-expression and empowerment at different stages of their recuperation and rehabilitation. Needlework by wounded men did not simply constitute the expression of a weakened 'feminised' state during the war; rather, it formed a means of enablement and it could be used to renegotiate and present characteristics of hegemonic masculinity.

Embroidery in war hospitals frequently led towards exhibitions, sales or gifting in programmes which were self-sustaining. These programmes did not necessarily lead on to more 'masculine' activities, and although embroidery certainly could be used as a first step towards other activities, men did not automatically stop practicing embroidery when other activities were possible: embroidery by wounded men could be an end in itself. Embroidery was not imposed upon the wounded as part of a strict therapeutic programme, rather it was chosen by men, whilst needlework activity co-existed alongside other rehabilitation activities. There was, however, a movement to professionalise embroidery practice in hospitals on the home front during the war, and an important question for further research is how, after the war, the removal of embroidery from the rehabilitative context, and the change in relations between wounded men and local communities, affected this professional drive.

In this chapter, I have argued that the feminised design language of embroidery could empower men commercially, artistically, and socially. Design features primarily

associated with femininity, such as floral and pastoral decorative arrangements could express men's skill and creativity, and hence demonstrate the hegemonic masculinity values associated with achievement. Embroidery designs could also communicate military experience and identity. This suggests that needlework requires a complex analysis which takes into account the confluence of masculine and feminine associations and the context of activity in the creation of meaning. Embroidery needlework communicated, rather than negated, the complex war experience of wounded men. This, as with previous chapters, argues that the role of needlework during the First World War was intricately interwoven into war experience on the home front.

Chapter Nine

Conclusion

Despite the prolific national undertaking of knitting, sewing, crochet and embroidery during the First World War, needlework has been treated as a relatively marginal activity in the history of the war to date. However, throughout this thesis, I have shown how needlework played an integral social, political, cultural, and economic role during the war. My research not only provides a narrative account of this role, but also proposes new frameworks with which to study First World War needlework. These frameworks combine the approaches of cultural and literary historians to primary sources which consider these sources to play an active part in social discourse and to express understandings of the self. Many of the findings of this research have come from attention to knitting patterns and needlework literature for information on craft technique and process. In combining history of craft analysis with a scrutiny of primary source letters, autobiographies, diaries and organisational reports, this thesis presents a fresh narrative and a comprehensive interpretation of the role of needlework during the war. In this way, it expands on research which seeks to use both craft expertise and historical analysis, and contributes to knowledge in historic craft studies which forefront needlework agency. Primary evidence has been interrogated in this research to question the common assertions about needlework production, skills, motivations, class roles, and longevity during the war. In this study, needlework is approached as a rhetorical tool for the creation of discourse and the expression of agency, and throughout, it is the form and significance of this agency, as it was applied by women and men during the war, that has been identified. Diverse examples and debates have demonstrated the complex and wide-ranging role of needlework during the First World War, as it affected

women's employment, class relations, relations between home and the front, and men and women's domestic and war identities.

This study has shown that at the start of the war the role of needlework was more controversial than has been recognised in previous histories. Needlework, in the form of knitting and sewing garments for the troops, began immediately war was declared on the urging of philanthropic women, who continued a tradition of war response that sought to assist both men and women during war. Despite being rooted in traditional philanthropy, the call to women to carry out needlework caused political friction with the War Office who felt that it implied criticism of war supplies and that it threatened disruption to supply logistics. Far from being a state-sponsored exercise at the beginning of the war, I have shown that charitable needlework was politically controversial, as it challenged War Office supply practices and reputation; whilst it also destabilised the traditional role of philanthropic women, who found - to their surprise - that their needlework enterprises were met with discouragement by the War Office. Nonetheless, needlework immediately enabled women to express their responses to the war, and it was quickly taken up by women as an instant means of engaging actively in war events. This study has found that it provided an outlet to express a diverse range of reactions, including anxiety and apprehension, as well as confidence, patriotism and, conversely, pacifism. From early on, women's magazines were a forum where women could discuss their motivations and satisfaction with the comfort and support that needlework could provide to those serving. At the same time, they could also openly voice difficulties and their dissatisfaction with needlework as an adequate or suitable war activity for themselves. In this way, I have demonstrated that needlework formed a dynamic social tool for women to articulate a complex range of responses at the start of the

war: women used needlework activity to make sense of their wartime roles and expectations, and in some cases, to challenge them.

At the beginning of the war, the adequacy of needlework as a war response was debated in the national press and women's magazines, both of which, however, encouraged women to take part. This thesis has demonstrated that there has been an over-emphasis in the historic record on female knitters and sewers acting irrationally at the start of the war. In contrast, I have shown how the discussion that took place in 1914 associated with 'needlework mania' did not simply suggest that the activity was an irrational frenzied feminine response to war, but rather, it compared domestic production with group work; it queried the response of men to domestic war work at home; and it demonstrated the organisational skills and productivity of needlework groups. Whether needlework formed an adequate response to the war for women has, however, remained relevant to debate over time, with feminist historians arguing that the gendered exclusion implied by the activity of early war needlework constrained women's participation in, and understanding of, the war. In contrast to this perspective, this thesis has shown that knitting and sewing garments for men serving enabled women to question, contest or assert their wartime role; to advocate and demonstrate their understandings of the war; and to express diverse and complex responses to the war. Evidenced by the findings of this study, needlework was not the implement of a patriarchal ideology which extracted women from the war and contained them in a domestic sphere; rather, needlework and women's domestic war activities actively articulated women's understandings and experience during the war. War effort needlework was both a subject and a means for women to debate their roles in the war. This complex use of war needlework was also relevant for one of the most cited critics of needlework as

an inadequate response to war, Vera Brittain. This study therefore supports and significantly extends research that has argued that women exerted domestic agency as a means to negotiate their happiness and to bring about change.¹

War needlework also formed a political and social tool for working women's organisations at the start of the war: they used it to draw attention to the injustice of women's unemployment and they made it central to their wartime employment schemes. The philanthropic practice of needlework came into conflict with the aims and intentions of working women's advocates, who argued that war needlework should be the preserve of working women who needed to be paid for their work. I have shown how war needlework did not cause working women's unemployment; however, it was used as *a cause* by working women's organisations to further the employment interests of women. This adds a new dimension to understanding how politically active women negotiated their objectives during the war. Class tensions were also revealed by these findings, as working women's organisations laid claim to needlework employment, while middle class women claimed the need for charitable war needlework. Although the provision of women's employment in needlework was a priority for *both* of these groups - indicating a philosophical alignment of the two movements when it came to women's employment - working women's advocates strategically undermined middle class women's charitable work, comparing *poor* voluntary needlework with *good* employed needlework production. This thesis has

¹ Joanna Bourke, 'Housewifery in Working-Class England 1860-1914', *Past & Present*, No. 143, 1994, p.167-197; Judy Giles, *Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain, 1900-1950*, Basingstoke and New York, St Martin's Press, 1995, and Judy Giles, *The Parlour and the Suburb: Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity*. Oxford, Berg, 2004; Fiona Hackney, "'Use Your Hands for Happiness": Home Craft and Make-do-and-Mend in British Women's Magazines in the 1920s and 1930s', *Journal of Design History*, 19:1, 2006, p.23-38; Elizabeth Robinson, 'Women and Needlework in Britain 1920-1970', Unpublished PhD, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2012.

argued that this disparaging comparison is not justified overall, as voluntary needlework was subject to a number of quality controls in both private and group production, limiting the potential for poor garments to reach the front line. Furthermore, not all working women, many of whom transferred from other occupations, found that the transition to needlework came naturally to them. However, a consequence of the emphasis on the apparently misguided efforts of middle class knitters in the history of First World War needlework is that it has obscured the way in which voluntary needlework, in fact, crossed women's class boundaries during the war. My research has found that needlework proficiency was prized over social status in the instructions that were issued to working groups by the upper middle class magazine *The Queen*. Evidence shows that working class women could engage in charitable, philanthropic needlework in their own right, as they could contribute to schemes such as Queen Mary's Needlework Guild, or they could form their own community supported and financed initiatives. First World War *charitable* needlework was by no means the sole preserve of middle class women.

The criticisms of middle class women's needlework production have, however, continued to resonate in the historic record due, in some large part, to the success of the arguments put forward by working women's advocates, especially the women's trade unionist Mary Macarthur and the Women's Freedom League representative Nina Boyle. The evidence of this thesis demonstrates, however, that middle class volunteer needlewomen were not stitching without guidance, quality controls or direction. From the first weeks of the war, women's magazines and needlework publications claimed to instruct women in what was needed for the conflict and how to make it; yet these instructions could be vague or contradictory, and the garments featured could be technically or stylistically problematic. Nonetheless, this thesis has

found that at the start of the war it was the *distribution* of needlework garments that was more problematic than poor garment production per se. With this finding, emphasis shifts away from viewing early war needlework garments as poorly made and unwanted, and thus individualising the issue as a matter of blame for the inadequacies of female producers, and instead recognises that needlework garments *were* wanted by the front line, but that they were not distributed equably through the structures and systems that were in place. It is argued in this thesis that home needlework was not at odds with the needs of men on the front line; rather, those needs were not being sufficiently met. This challenges the enduring argument that the front line saw home front needlework activity as a trivialising waste of time and material, and stresses that needlework was valued and needed by men serving.

A large amount of primary evidence counters the depiction of poor needlework production during the war, and this prompts the question of why existing scholarship has refrained from critically reappraising the longstanding judgement that women's home front garment production was so faulty at the start of the war. Inadequacies have been laid at the feet of middle class volunteer female knitters, who have been characterised as farcical and confused in their attempts to make garments, and this has proved a powerfully resilient image. Constance Peel's un-sourced but confident comedy sketch of garments used for alternative purposes by soldiers has been popularly melded in histories with cartoon imagery from *Punch*, particularly that of a young woman struggling with sock knitting by E.H. Shepard, to present a humorous, yet short-lived, history for war needlework. My research suggests that these sources have been presented in a rather formulaic way due to the power of the trope - it still makes a good joke. However, through reappraisal of these sources, I have argued that they evidence a less derogatory history for First World War needlework than the

formula has suggested. Certainly, humour plays a significant part in the history and characterisation of war needlework; however, this study has demonstrated that cartoon imagery in *Punch* did not simply ridicule knitting women; humour in fact created connections and contrasts between home front and front line which identified and built a dialogue between them and shared a joke. For this reason, humour cannot be read as indicating a straightforward (female) home front to (male) front line divide; parodies of home front needlework came from the home front itself, and they were directed at both women and men at home. My research suggests that Peel's references are far more nuanced, while the *Punch* imagery dated only to the first months of the war and should not be taken to define the long-term role of needlework production. The power of the trope of the incompetent middle class sock knitter has obscured a far more meaningful and complex role for war needlework - and for middle class sock knitters.

Late war charitable needlework receives its first comprehensive assessment in this thesis, which demonstrates that over the course of the later war, volunteer needlework became integrated into a network of organised home front charitable war activity as well as into the logistics of the War Office. My analysis shows how voluntary war needlework became systematised and professional, with needlewomen acting as the initiators of a significant number of innovations and developments. To support this, my research has directly associated the award of the War Office Volunteer Worker badge with women and men in voluntary needlework groups, which shows that needlework was not a short-lived fad, but rather, became an officially supported - and relied upon - activity with community status in charitable war work. From the evidence, it has been possible to calculate the first national statistic in this study which demonstrates that over 18.5 million needlework garments

were sent to the front by the volunteer groups working in Britain and Ireland for the Director General of Voluntary Organisations and Queen Mary's Needlework Guild. A more accurate estimate, however, for the number of needlework garments sent to men serving, which would include the items sent privately during the war and those sent by independent volunteer groups, would be 20 million items - at least. The fact that this activity was to a large extent quantified by charitable organisations and the War Office over the course of the war indicates that it was not an ad hoc, ephemeral enterprise. The primary source evidence along with this quantification points towards charitable war needlework being an intrinsic national war activity.

With its focus on *how* needlework activity shaped home front and front line relations, this research contributes to current investigations into how boundaries were constructed, maintained, morphed and broken down between those at home and men serving. It has found that boundaries were constructed and maintained between male war activity and female home front needlework by the classification of needlework items as 'gifts' that could be defined as additional to the needs of men at war. It has also shown, however, that this classification was undermined by the way in which these 'gifts' were not only considered essential supplies for the practical advancement of the war, but were also essential for the emotional stability of men at the front. Garments provided connectivity with those at home, and in some cases, home needlework producers assisted men in carrying out their front line responsibilities, as officers sought garment advice and supplies from home to care for their men. As the war progressed, knitted and sewn garments from home had a multifaceted significance to serving men: as practical items, signs of care, and a means of communication between home and front. My research has found that this role was too important and problematic a subject for senior figures in the War Office

to ignore, and although they were initially reluctant, over time, the War Office bowed to what was a forceful and organic movement of garment exchange and communication between home and the front by fully accommodating needlework production into a system of care giving from 1915. Evidence shows that men in service were far less antipathetic towards needlework garments from home than has been emphasized in subsequent histories, and this thesis has found that when soldiers were dissatisfied with garments, it was for specific reasons related to the seasonal appropriacy, production, or portability of garments, rather than because needlework garments were considered inherently inappropriate or inadequate.

However, a significant feature of the history of First World War needlework is the way in which it - and, by association, the woman who created it - has been positioned in a powerful juxtaposition with the male combatant. The image of women enthusiastically engaged in knitting comfortable (or uncomfortable) garments for soldiers has been starkly compared to the physical pain and destruction of combat warfare on the front line. Both military and feminist theorists have seen needlework as an activity which had the capacity to distance women from engaging with the 'real' war. This study has challenged this perspective and the form of this juxtaposition in the following ways: it has demonstrated that the knitting and sewing of garments could provide a means for women to question and assert their responses to the war; and it has also illustrated how needlework could express understandings of pain, comfort and discomfort. These understandings could be communicated in the sending and receipt of garments. By challenging the division envisaged between knitting women and fighting men, this study has intended to break down one of the most potent polarities in First World War history. It has proposed that the boundaries between home and front, women and men, needlework and fighting, were

transcended and integrated in multiple and complex ways, and that the role of needlework functioned not to abstract or polarize, but rather, to connect. This is because needlework embodied a relationship between women at home and men serving which was concerned with sharing understandings of comfort and discomfort, daily concerns, or forming relations. Women and men could use needlework to articulate their understandings of the war and their role in it, and negotiate this through knitted and sewn garment production; through home to front line exchange; and also in the context of male embroidery in hospitals on the home front. In this way, my research contributes to wider gender investigations of war which have identified how the war front has been gendered male, whilst the home front, including needlework activity, has been gendered female. However, it has demonstrated that although gendered boundaries were constructed and maintained in war, they were also broken down: connections were made and gender relations were actively negotiated using needlework. I have therefore argued that gendered boundaries and definitions were not clear cut but were, instead, fluid, complex and nuanced: needlewomen were figures of fun, but so were men at home; needlework humour was a means of connection, as well as for structuring roles; women criticized other women's needlework activities for the benefit of certain women's causes; and wounded men used 'feminine' embroidery needlework for masculine empowerment.

This research has found that in the popular historical record, women have not only been abstracted from a focused and long-term role in directing the form and quality of the knitted and sewn garments that they produced for those serving, but also from their role organising embroidery needlework programmes for wounded veterans. A trend this research has identified in *Punch* shows that cartoons about women engaged in war needlework featured frequently in the early war but tapered off from

late 1915. These then appear to have been replaced in terms of frequency by late war cartoons featuring civilian women behaving crassly whilst visiting the wounded in hospitals. That *Punch* targeted civilian women and their charitable enterprises as a source of humour is evident; however, I would argue that where the cartoons about early war needlework, although short-lived, were suffused with affection and connections, late war cartoons of women visiting hospitals are bereft of such affection and are clearly antagonistic. There are no cartoons of women teaching or sharing embroidery needlework information with wounded veterans. This thesis has found that the exclusion of non-nursing women from the history of rehabilitation has led to a significant oversight of the way wounded men and women in local communities used needlework to form connections and articulate understandings of men's post-service roles. In the context of embroidery rehabilitation for wounded men, the evidence I have gathered points to the view that women were formative agents in the community and also in war hospitals, where they initiated male embroidery schemes and contributed to the establishment of medical rehabilitation strategies. This study has situated women and women's agency at the forefront of these activities, and it has shown how women participated in the re-connection and re-structuring of male masculinity through needlework activity in war hospitals. The assumption that rehabilitation embroidery needlework restricted men's masculine status has also been challenged by this thesis, which has investigated how wounded men could use the feminised language of embroidery needlework to assert characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, including economic independence and social status. My research shows how the complexity of men's use of embroidery during the war has been underestimated, and that this is in common with the limited way in which women's use of wartime needlework has been perceived. Appraising

the evidence using a framework which considers needlework to be a social and cultural tool for wounded men to renegotiate hegemonic masculinity, opens up the ways in which needlework can be approached in future studies. Further research is needed, however, into how the teaching process and gifting of embroideries formed relations between wounded men and volunteer women on the home front, as this would extend knowledge of how needlework formed a means of social communication.

Due to the broad nature of the research question of this thesis, which has sought to identify the role of needlework during the war, there is still much that remains to be investigated. The complexity of the role of needlework in women's patriotism and pacifism is one example that calls for further study. This research has found that needlework could be adapted to support both causes; however, the question of how the associations and use of needlework in these roles changed over the course of the war remains a topic for further exploration. This thesis has not explored the way in which magazines encouraged women's patriotic crochet of items, including table cloths and tea cosies for the home. The role of these items, both in the home and in the community during women's war work, such as in fundraising activities, would generate further interesting findings. Local and international comparisons of wartime needlework in different communities and countries during the war deserves more research, and I would argue that this will surely reveal further complexities in the role of needlework. A reappraisal of the role of needlework during the First World War has been long overdue. This study has presented new information which fills several gaps, provides alternative interpretations to longstanding assumptions, and applies new theoretical and methodological frameworks to support the argument that needlework held an integrated and complex role in the war.

APPENDIX A: These tables show *Punch* cartoons on the general topic of knitting and sewing (under the Category 'knitting or sewing') and the *Punch* cartoons which are about war garment making knitting and sewing specifically (under the Category 'War effort knitting/sewing'). There are twenty-nine cartoons in total between 1914-1918.

Volume	Year	Month	Day	Page	Artist/ author	Title/ caption	Format (cartoon/ story, etc)	Category
CXLVII	1914	September	16 th	245	Lewis Baumer	'The Last of the Nuts of Sandy Cove; or, How to Make Use of Our Stay-At-Homes'. [women using a 'stay at homes' man as a mannequin for making night-wear for the wounded.]	Cartoon	War effort knitting/sewing
CXLVII	1914	September	30 th	277	G. Jennis	'Mother, Dear! I do hope this war won't be over before I finish my sock!'	Cartoon	War effort knitting/sewing
CXLVII	1914	November	4 th	377	C.A. Shepperson	'My dear! - The Colour! It'll make a target for the Germans! Oh! Then it'll have to do for the stoker'	Cartoon	War effort knitting/sewing
CXLVII	1914	November	18 th	417 full page	E.H. Shepard	'The History of a Pair of Mittens'	Cartoon	War effort knitting/sewing
CXLVII	1914	November	25 th	429	Miss Ruth Cobb	'The Ruling Passion' [Shows waitresses knitting and women knitting at tables. A customer asks for soup and the waitress replies 'Yes, Sir; purl or plain, sir?']	Cartoon	War effort knitting/sewing
CXLVII	1914	November	25 th	446	H.F.C. Skinner	'The Sentamentalist (who has received socks from England) [A soldier unravels a pair of socks and says 'She loves me; she loves me not']	Cartoon	War effort knitting/sewing

Volume	Year	Month	Day	Page	Artist/ author	Title/ caption	Format (cartoon/ story, etc)	Category
CXLVII	1914	December	16 th	503	Harry Rowntree	'The Ruling Passion' [A woman about to jump from a burning building is told that help will be there in five minutes. She replies 'Five minutes? Then throw me back my knitting']	Cartoon	Knitting or sewing
CXLVII	1914	December	23 rd	517	E.H. Shepard	'For All Persons "I knit, Thou knittest, He knits, We knit, You knit, They knit."'	Cartoon	Knitting or sewing
CXLVII	1914	December	30 th	543	E.H. Shepard	'First Old Dame. "Well, My Dear, And what are you doing for the country?" Second ditto. "I am knitting socks for the troops" First Old Dame (robustly). "Knitting! I am learning to shoot!"	Cartoon	War effort knitting/sewing
CXLVIII	1915	January	6 th	6	Miss H. Cowham	[Shows a woman asking for a train to be stopped as she has left her knitting wool on it. The thread is still on board.]	Cartoon	Knitting or sewing
CXLVIII	1915	January	13 th	21	E.H. Shepard	'Gallant Attempt by a Member of the British Expeditionary Force to do justice to all his New Year's gifts'.	Cartoon	War effort knitting/sewing

Volume	Year	Month	Day	Page	Artist/ author	Title/ caption	Format (cartoon/ story, etc)	Category
CXLVIII	1915	January	27 th	65	F.H. Townsend	[Aunt knitting comments in response to nephew's book 'Germany and the Next War' that Germany has its hands full with the present war.]	Cartoon	Knitting or sewing
CXLVIII	1915	February	3 rd	100	P. Fraser	'Not Though The Soldier Knew Someone Had Blundered' [A soldier holds up a small pair of stripey socks and scratches the back of his head. A parcel of woollens is open in front of him and he has another parcel beside him.]	Cartoon	War effort knitting/sewing
CXLVIII	1915	February	10 th	105	Lewis Baumer	'The Refugee' [A young refugee girl is knitting and the boy she is staying with comments that that is all she does and might they have a boy next war. He says this to his mother - who is also knitting.]	Cartoon	Knitting or sewing
CXLVIII	1915	March	3 rd	175	Charles Grave	[Man sitting by the fire with two other old men recounting a conversation he has had about his day's work with a woman in which he tells her he is too old for the army: 'She sez, 'Well, an yer knit?']	Cartoon	Knitting or sewing

Volume	Year	Month	Day	Page	Artist/ author	Title/ caption	Format (cartoon/ story, etc)	Category
CXLVIII	1915	March	21 st	233	George Morrow	'How History Anticipates Itself: Sister Susie Sewing Shirts for Nessus'.	Cartoon	War effort knitting/sewing
CXLVIII	1915	April	14th	286	Ricardo Brook	[Older woman asks a naval man what size socks Admiral Jellicoe takes.]	Cartoon	War effort knitting/sewing
CXLVIII	1915	April (Supplement)	14th	23	C.A. Shepperson	'Our Navy' [Two women knitting, one is knitting a scarlet muffler which the other points out makes the wearer a target: "Oh! Then it'll have to do for the Stoker."]	Cartoon	War effort knitting/sewing
CXLVIII	1915	May	5th	349	C.A. Shepperson	[Vicar's daughter wears mittens that have been sent home by her father at Christmas from the front.]	Cartoon	War effort knitting/sewing
CXLVIII	1915	May	12th	374	E.H. Shepard	'Some of Susie's Sisters Sewing Sand-Bags'	Cartoon	War effort knitting/sewing
CXLVIII	1915	May	26th	406	Ricardo Brook	[Curate has wool wrapped round him with his arms outstretched.]	Cartoon	War effort knitting/sewing
CXLIX	1915	October	13th	307	G.L. Stampa	'Knitting Has Again Set In With Its Usual Severity. The Enemy In Our Midst'. [On older woman sits knitting a scarf which a dog unravels behind her.]	Cartoon	Knitting or sewing

Volume	Year	Month	Day	Page	Artist/ author	Title/ caption	Format (cartoon/ story, etc)	Category
CXLIX	1915	November	24th	434	Arthur Norris	'Scene: War-work drawing room on Sunday. Hostess: "Oh, Shout out, Colonel, if you feel the needles in that thing. It's a pin-cushion during the week"'. .	Cartoon	War effort knitting/sewing
CXLIX	1915	December	1st	441	Ricardo Brook	'The Super-Patriot' [An older man gets wrapped up in wool by an older woman and a younger woman. A book titled 'Knitting Book' lies on the table.]	Cartoon	War effort knitting/sewing
CL	1916	January	5 th	19	R.M. Sargisson	'Getting Even' [A boy put to bed early by his nurse prays, 'Please God, Nurse sewed for her soldier on Sunday!']	Cartoon	War effort knitting/sewing
CLII	1917	May	16 th	325	C.A. Shepperson	[Sgt Major tells soldier building a bivouac that 'I could ha' knitted it in half the time'.]	Cartoon	Knitting and sewing
CLIII	1917	September	19 th	205	F.H. Townsend	'Win-the-War Vice-President of our Supply Depot (doing grand rounds). "Here again is a fifth glaring example. The hem of this bag is an eighteenth of an inch too wide. Get them all remade. We cannot have the lives of our troops endangered"	Cartoon	War effort Knitting and sewing

Volume	Year	Month	Day	Page	Artist/ author	Title/ caption	Format (cartoon/ story, etc)	Category
CLIII	1917	October	17 th	275	H.M.Brock	'A Long-Sighted Patriot'	Cartoon	War effort Knitting and sewing
CLIV	1918	January	23 rd	61	H.M.Brock	"Do you know, Aunty, I can get both my feet into one of these socks you've made for me?" "But surely, my dear, it's not so easy to walk that way?""	Cartoon	War effort Knitting and sewing.

APPENDIX B: These tables show *Punch* cartoons on the topic of women visiting the wounded in hospitals. There are fourteen cartoons in total between 1914-1918.

Volume	Year	Month	Day	Page	Artist/ author	Title/ caption	Format (cartoon/ story, etc)	Category
CL	1916	January	5 th	5	F.H. Townsend	Untitled [Two women have taken a wounded man to lunch. Women ask him how he felt to be blown up and he replies, 'If you'll believe me, ma'am, I was never more surprised in all my life.']	Cartoon	Wounded and women
CL	1916	January	19 th	45	F.H. Townsend	'The Irrepressibles' [A nurse asks wounded men to make less noise in a 'private hospital', 'as the lady next door has a touch of headache.']	Cartoon	Wounded and women
CL	1916	January	26 th	70	G.L. Stampa	'How to Talk to the Wounded' [An older woman asks two wounded soldiers if they've been at the front and they reply 'Bless you, no, mum, we've just 'ad a bit of a scrap together, to keep fit.']	Cartoon	Wounded and women
CL	1916	February	2 nd	93	H.M. Brock	'How to Talk to the Wounded' [A woman talks to a wounded soldier and misunderstands him. He talks about 'cold steel' and she thinks he is talking about the weather.]	Cartoon	Wounded and women

Volume	Year	Month	Day	Page	Artist/ author	Title/ caption	Format (cartoon/ story, etc)	Category
CL	1916	March	8 th	164	G.L. Stampa	Untitled [A well-dressed female visitor asks a wounded soldier what he did when a shell struck him. He replies, 'Sent Mother a postcard to have my bed aired.']	Cartoon	Wounded and women
CL	1916	April	12 th	248	C.A. Shepperson	Untitled [Young woman asks a wounded soldier when he knew he was wounded. He replies 'Saw it in The Daily Mail.']	Cartoon	Wounded and women
CLI	1916	July	5 th	5	F.H. Townsend	'People We Should Like to See Interned' [A woman asks wounded soldiers whether the bullet hurts most going in or coming out.]	Cartoon	Wounded and women
CLI	1916	July	12 th	47	Fred Pegram	Untitled ['A resourceful Tommy (after tea and a dull afternoon)' makes his excuses to an older woman telling her the soldiers need to get back to have their temperatures taken.]	Cartoon	Wounded and women

Volume	Year	Month	Day	Page	Artist/ author	Title/ caption	Format (cartoon/ story, etc)	Category
CLI	1916	July	26 th	80	Bert Thomas	Untitled [An older lady asks a wounded soldier how he won his medal and he tells her 'At a bazaar, mum. In a raffle!']	Cartoon	Wounded and women
CLI	1916	August	2 nd	88	F.J.M. Cole	Untitled [A young woman asks a wounded soldier how many Germans he has killed. He replies that he does not know, but that he had to shake them off his bayonet.]	Cartoon	Wounded and women
CLI	1916	August	30 th	155	Frank Reynolds	'The Convalescent' [A convalescent soldier rows a boat carrying two women, a boy and a civilian man.]	Cartoon	Wounded and women/ civilians
CLI	1916	September	27 th	223	H. M. Brock	Untitled [A chaplain asks a woman if her wounded son is a 'sitting-up case'. She replies, 'yes, but he made them 'uns sit up afore they did 'im.'	Cartoon	Wounded and women

Volume	Year	Month	Day	Page	Artist/ author	Title/ caption	Format (cartoon/ story, etc)	Category
CLI	1916	September	27th	234	Lewis Baumer	Untitled [A woman asks a wounded soldier where he was hit in the head. He replies that his forehead 'didn't half cop it in the neck'.]	Cartoon	Wounded and women
CLI	1916	October	25th	305	G. Jennis	Untitled [A waitress asks a wounded soldier whether his friend, who is covered in bandages has been wounded. The soldier replies, 'Oh no, Miss. He cut 'isself shaving this morning.']	Cartoon	Wounded and women

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