

# **Wait, Weep and Be Worthy? Women and the First World War**

## **A Centenary Public Symposium**

**Venue: Glasgow Women's Library**

**Time: Saturday 14 November 2015, 10.30 (Registration starts 10.00) - 6.30**

**Organised by Laura Rattray and Zoe Strachan (University of Glasgow), Adele Patrick and Laura Dolan (Glasgow Women's Library), Rebecca Dunbar (University of Glasgow, Graduate Co-Ordinator)**

### **Event Description**

Reporting from France for the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1914, journalist Cora Harris concluded: 'What men suffer through war is written in histories...but what women suffer is never written.' This free, public symposium explores the often neglected role, contribution and output of women during the First World War and its immediate aftermath. While the first year of the centenary perhaps inevitably focused on the young men fighting and dying in the trenches, the second year of the centenary offers a chance to turn attention to the other, long neglected side of events and untold stories: the experiences and contribution of women. The event combines talks by well-known speakers, alongside a pageant representing women of the war, a suffragette exhibition, and creative writing and art workshops. Speakers include Kate Adie, formerly the BBC's chief news correspondent, blazing a trail for women in journalism as Britain's leading female war reporter, and Sarah Waters, the award-winning best-selling author of novels including *Tipping the Velvet*, *Affinity*, *The Night Watch* and *The Paying Guests*.

### **Activities and Timings**

**Saturday 14 November 2015: Glasgow Women's Library, 23 Landressy Street, Glasgow G40 1BP**

**10.00-10.30 Registration for morning session Delegates**

**10.30 Procession and Welcome**

**10.45-11.15 'The Impact of the First World War on the Campaign for Women's Suffrage' Angela K. Smith (Plymouth University)**

**11.15-11.45 'Women as Carers in the First World War' Martin Goodman (University of Hull)**

**11.45 Refreshments**

**12 Speaker: Kate Adie**

**1-2.15 LUNCH (provided) and art workshops**

**2.00-2.15 Registration for afternoon session Delegates**

**2.15-2.45 'Transatlantic Literary Women and the First World War' Laura Rattray (University of Glasgow)**

**2.45-3.15 'Women's Poetry of the Great War' Jane Potter (Oxford Brookes University)**

**3.15-3.30 Q and A**

**Parallel Session : 2.15-3.30**

**Creative Writing Workshops, Led by Zoe Strachan (University of Glasgow) and Louise Welsh (Professor of Creative Writing, Glasgow University) \*These must be booked separately, please email [info@womenslibrary.org.uk](mailto:info@womenslibrary.org.uk) or call us on 0141 550 2267**

**3.30-4 Refreshments**

**4-4.30 'Women and War in the Middle East', Lisa Regan (University of Liverpool)**

**4.30-4.45 Q and A**

**4.45 Wine Reception and Book Signing**

**5.30 Speaker: Sarah Waters**

**Talk: 'The Impact of the First World War on the Campaign for Women's Suffrage'**

**Speaker: Angela K. Smith (Plymouth University)**

The talk will explore the inter-relationship between the war and the various branches of the Women's Suffrage Movement. Did women just give up their fight, as is often assumed, and put their energies into the wider national struggle? Or did they turn the situation to their advantage, adopting more subtle strategies to continue their fight? The focus will partly be on the well known protagonists, women such as the Pankhursts, but will also consider the ways in which other suffragists responded to the war, politically or otherwise.

**Angela K. Smith** is an Associate Professor (Reader) at Plymouth University. She specialises in war writing, with a particular interest in the First World War and gender issues. She is the author of *The Second Battlefield: Women, Modernism and the First World War* (MUP, 2000) and editor of *Women's Writing of the First World War: an Anthology* (MUP, 2000). Her

more recent book publications include *British Literature of World War I* (General co-ed. and Volume ed.), (Pickering and Chatto, 2011), *Suffrage Discourse in Britain During the First World War*, (Ashgate, 2005), and *Gender and Warfare in the Twentieth Century: Textual Representations* (ed), (MUP, 2004). Her latest collection, *War and Displacement in the Twentieth Century: Global Conflicts* was published by Routledge in April 2014 and her latest monograph, *Women of the Eastern Front: British Women in Serbia and Russia 1914-9*, will be published by Manchester University Press in 2016

**Talk: 'Women as Carers in the First World War'**

**Speaker: Martin Goodman (University of Hull)**

Lady Astor and the nurses that gathered on her Cliveden estate show one side of women as carers, as they look after Canadian soldiers recovering from gas and other attacks. We also meet Margaret Thomson, a brilliant Scottish writer hitherto hidden behind a pseudonym, with her strong and moving account of caring on the home front in Dunfermline.

**Martin Goodman** is the author of nine books of fiction and nonfiction. He holds the Chair of Creative Writing at the University of Hull, where he is Director of the Philip Larkin Centre for Poetry and Creative Writing. His biography of the great Scot J.S. Haldane, *Suffer & Survive* (Simon & Schuster, 2007) won first prize for Basis of Medicine in the BMA Book Awards 2008.

Martin is the publisher of Barbican Press: [www.barbicanpress.com](http://www.barbicanpress.com).

**Talk: 'Transatlantic Literary Women and the First World War'**

**Speaker: Laura Rattray (University of Glasgow)**

While American involvement in the war is officially dated from 1917, many American women found themselves with front seats at the action at the outbreak of hostilities in mainland Europe, veterans of the conflict long before many of their male compatriots saw fighting. This talk examines the direct war work and industrial-scale fundraising of transatlantic women and the impact of the hostilities on the literature they produced, from fiction, drama and poetry to diaries and correspondence privately interpreting the war to family back home, alongside journalism and propaganda interpreting the war for an increasingly anxious public. At the centre of the talk will be the American writer, Edith Wharton, the relief work for which she was decorated by the French and Belgian governments, and the only novel she published during the war years, a novel she claimed would shock her readership: *Summer* (1917).

**Laura Rattray** is Reader in American Literature at the University of Glasgow. She specialises in American writing of the early twentieth century. Laura has published widely on the period and on the writer Edith Wharton, her books including *Edith Wharton in Context*,

*The Custom of the Country: A Reassessment*, the two-volume critical edition, *The Unpublished Writings of Edith Wharton*, and this year she edited a new edition of the novel *Summer* for Oxford World's Classics, published in August.

**Talk: 'Women's Poetry of the Great War'**

**Speaker: Jane Potter (Oxford Brookes University)**

Whilst receiving some attention from scholars, feminist scholars in particular, women's poetry of the Great War tends not to have been accorded the same cache as the work of the male 'soldier-poets' who largely make up the canon of war literature, as well as dominate the school curriculum. Jessie Pope is often invoked first, derisively so for her patriotic and doggerel verse that incited Wilfred Owen's anger in 'Dulce et Decorum Est', followed perhaps by Vera Brittain or May Wedderburn Cannan. This talk will highlight the work of Pope, Brittain and Cannan, amongst others, to demonstrate the range of the female poetic output of 1914-1918. At the same time, it will attempt to define and to broaden the concept of 'women's war poetry of the Great War'.

**Jane Potter** is Senior Lecturer in Publishing at the Oxford International Centre for Publishing Studies, Oxford Brookes University, where her teaching focuses on book and literary history. Her monograph *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print: Women's Literary Responses to the Great War 1914-1918* (OUP, 2005) was joint winner of the 2006 Women's History Network Book Prize and she has published widely on many aspects of women's war literature, First World War poetry, and book history. Recent publications include *Three Poets of the First World War: Ivor Gurney, Isaac Rosenberg and Wilfred Owen* (Penguin, 2011), edited with Jon Stallworthy, *Wilfred Owen: An Illustrated Life* (Bodleian Library Publishing, 2014) and, with Carol Acton, *Working in a World of Hurt: Trauma and Resilience in the Narratives of Medical Personnel in Warzones* (Manchester University Press, 2015). She is currently editing a *New Selected Letters of Wilfred Owen* for Oxford University Press, which will be published in 2016.

**Talk: 'Women and War in the Middle East'**

**Speaker: Lisa Regan (University of Liverpool)**

When we think of the First World War and the Middle East, it's perhaps Lawrence of Arabia who first springs to mind – that legendary figure celebrated for his part in the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire. But women too played their part in this particular theatre of war, not least the intrepid traveller Gertrude Bell, whose in-depth knowledge of this region proved crucial to British military intelligence. This talk considers Bell's instrumental role in establishing the new nation state of Iraq after British troops took Mesopotamia in 1917, and considers her war work alongside that of other British and American women in the Middle East. Finally, I turn to consider how the Middle East was imagined on the home front during

the war and in the immediate postwar period, and why this gives rise to a new kind of novel for women readers, the desert romance, the most notorious of which was E.M. Hull's *The Sheik* (1919), which became a transatlantic phenomenon in 1921 when Rudolph Valentino starred in the Hollywood blockbuster.

**Lisa Regan** is a Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Liverpool with particular interests in women's travel and empire narratives, as well as intersections between middlebrow and modernist cultures. She has published on the interwar feminist writer and social reformer, Winifred Holtby: *Winifred Holtby, 'A Woman in Her Time': Critical Essays* (Cambridge Scholars, 2010) and *Winifred Holtby's Social Vision 'Members One of Another'* (Pickering and Chatto, 2012). Extending her research on Holtby's travels to South Africa, she has also considered women's travel between the wars more broadly in her chapter 'Women Writing Empire' in *The History of Women's Writing, 1920-1945*, vol. 8, edited by Maroula Joannou (Palgrave, 2013), and her current work focuses on British women travellers to North Africa and the Middle East.