

The 'responsible' woman: the BBC and women's radio 1945-1955

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**THE ‘RESPONSIBLE’ WOMAN: THE
BBC AND WOMEN’S RADIO 1945-1955**

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**PhD
2010**

THE 'RESPONSIBLE' WOMAN: THE BBC AND WOMEN'S RADIO 1945-1955

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ABSTRACT

The BBC's women's radio in the British post-war period (1945 – 1955) is still a very much neglected area of historical research, although the BBC after the Second World War continued to produce many talks and programmes that were specifically aimed at women, such as the factual *Woman's Hour* (1946) and the fictional *Mrs. Dale's Diary* (1948). By building on archival research conducted mainly at the BBC Written Archives Centre, and further work carried out at the Mass Observation Archive, this thesis addresses the production side, as well as the text, and the audience; in a sense a very multifaceted approach. Focus has been laid on women's programmes such as *Woman's Hour* and *Mrs. Dale's Diary*. But other talks and discussions have also been considered not necessarily with just a focus on women. Throughout the research the editorial process has been of major interest; the thinking behind; the production process. The thesis will demonstrate the importance played by BBC women's programmes in this period but also in the general development of British broadcasting. The thesis also offers a detailed insight into the *internal culture* of the BBC, and its women's programmes, at a time when questions about culture and taste were surfacing. The thesis will therefore be an original contribution to knowledge to British broadcasting history, but due to its interdisciplinary nature using radio as a 'Historian', this work is further challenging previous assumptions about the post-war housewife, and the perception of the immediate post-war years as a particular stifling and conservative period, with no feminism.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Kristin Skoog, hereby declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

INTRODUCTORY NOTE	1
CHAPTER ONE: Post-war Britain Revisited: an overview	4
Post-war Britain	4
The reassessment of the Post-war Woman.....	23
Media, Women and the Domestic.....	33
Conclusion	65
CHAPTER TWO: Researching Broadcasting History?.....	68
From the Specific to the Multifaceted.....	69
Research Questions	79
In the Archive	80
CHAPTER THREE: Getting it wrong, getting it right: Housewives on Air	90
Putting the Housewife into Focus	95
The Citizen asks.....	112
Conclusion	120
CHAPTER FOUR: The Voice of the Post-war Woman: <i>Woman's Hour</i>	130
A Strive for Autonomy and Recognition	137
Neither Worker nor Housewife but Citizen	155
The Woman's Hour Listener.....	170
Conclusion	180
CHAPTER FIVE: Mrs. Dale's Diary: between Art and Life	187
Female Taste and Drama Standards.....	192
Radio Addicts	197
Private and Public Worlds	213
Conclusion	229
CHAPTER SIX: Conclusions and Afterthoughts	235
APPENDIX.....	247
SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY	251

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

In 1956, Janet Quigley, the former editor of BBC's *Woman's Hour*, now the Chief Assistant in the BBC Talks Department, organised the annual conference of the *International Association of Radio Women*, which was held in London at the BBC.¹ While preparing the programme for the conference various discussion subjects were proposed; there was for instance a proposal on 'service talks' and 'listener participation', or, a discussion on the 'effect of radio and television on political publicity'. One other item had the title – 'The changing audience (as a result of women going out to work etc.)'.² This proposed discussion, on 'the changing audience', signifies an important feature of the development of the BBC's women's radio in the immediate post-war years. The ten year period following the Second World War, would see considerable change and re-definition within the BBC of what radio for women ought to – or should be about.

This thesis focuses on women's radio and women broadcasters in this ten year period. Studies within general and women's history have shown that the British post-war woman was considered a significant citizen, crucial for the rebuilding of Britain, both as a worker and as a mother, which consequently led to debates about a woman's role in society. Radio as a public medium situated in the private makes it perfectly positioned as a focus for exploring the changing boundaries between public and private life – particularly if we attend to issues such as work versus family, equality between the sexes, and implications of public policy. The BBC and its relationship to women - as members of an audience or broadcasters - in this particular period, however, is a fairly

¹ The organisation was founded in 1949 by Willemien Hendrika P. van der Goot (1897- 1989), who was a Dutch feminist, economic historian and later a peace activist (see: Biografisch Woordenboek van het Socialisme en de Arbeidersbeweging in Nederland (BWSA). <http://www.iisg.nl/bwsa/bios/goot.html> [accessed 2 June 2010 via Google translator]). The association still exists today under the name: *The International Association of Women in Radio and Television* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Association_of_Women_in_Radio_and_Television [accessed on 2 June 2010]). Janet Quigley had been a member since 1954 and in 1956 the association included women broadcasters from twenty different countries including the USA and Japan. The conference organised in London in 1956 was a success with eighteen women broadcasters, from over nine different countries participating. Apart from Britain, for instance the USA, France, Holland, Sweden, West Germany and Belgium ('International Association of Radio Women Annual Conference', 19 October, 1956; [see delegate list 15 October, 1956] BBC WAC R49/983).

² Minutes of meeting held on May 8th to discuss 1956 Conference of International Association of Radio Women: October 11th – 16th, The BBC Written Archive Centre, Caversham Park, Reading (hereafter BBC WAC), R49/983.

under-researched area. What follows, then, is therefore an in-depth analysis of the BBC's post-war women's radio; programmes such as *Woman's Hour* (1946), and *Mrs. Dale's Diary* (1948), but also other programmes and discussions. But before the archival material is further explored it is, however, necessary to spend a little time on the background and context.

The thesis will therefore open with a chapter discussing the post-war period itself; the main historical events and themes emerging from the historiography. A discussion of the more political history is followed by a closer discussion of the post-war woman and women's history - themes such as work, home, and motherhood are further explored. The final section focuses on media, and its relationship to the domestic setting, and women. Media history i.e. magazines and novels, film and finally radio are fully discussed. This might seem to be a lengthy diversion from our topic – women's radio - but the historical context is crucial if we are able to understand how women's radio was shaped and challenged in this particular period.

The outline of the rest of the chapters is as follows: in *chapter two* I discuss methodology, the research questions emerging, and the chapter provides a discussion of key developments within media history, for example the shift from the specific to the multifaceted. The chapter also outlines the archival sources used, and challenges faced doing historical research. *Chapter three* provides an analysis and discussion of other programming (not necessarily 'women's programmes') which featured housewives on air. The chapter argues that the BBC struggled at points to 'get it right', and it also investigates the more 'serious' side to the popular, domestic and 'feminine' Light Programme. *Chapter four* concentrates on *Woman's Hour*, where it will be demonstrated that the programme had the ability and desire to educate women in almost a 'Reithian' fashion. It will further be demonstrated that the programme's focus and insistence on public matters reveal an enormous effort and desire to widen women's horizons and nurture women as citizens. The producers frequently listened and responded to listeners' letters and worries, and many items featured *ordinary* housewives, from all over Britain, therefore offering women a public space. This is an example of women creating their own media space, which, as will be argued, had a feminist agenda. But, as will be made evident, catering for such a wide audience was not always easy. In *chapter five*, I provide a thorough examination of the daytime serial, *Mrs. Dale's Diary*. This chapter includes a discussion of the programme's development,

internal critique, and worries about ‘radio addicts’. The chapter draws on sources exploring American sociologist critique of the 1930s and 40s, and its similarities to how the serial was viewed in Britain within and outside the BBC. The chapter also argues that the programme offered an important space where women’s experience of the changing post-war period could be explored and ‘worked at’. But, as will be shown, the serial would provoke questions of ‘taste’ and ‘culture’, and thus consequently move towards a more ‘public’ and ‘responsible’ form (rather than just pure escapist and feminine). Just as in *Woman’s Hour*, the ‘responsible housewife’ or citizen can be traced. Finally *chapter six* provides a concluding discussion on women’s radio in the British context, but also of the further implications that emerge from this research.

CHAPTER ONE

Post-war Britain revisited: an overview

Pat Thane complained recently that, ‘there has been so little historical analysis of the social and cultural history of the nineteen-fifties and so much polemical stereotyping of the decade as dull, static and uniformly conservative.’³ This image is changing as the period between 1945 and 1955 is undergoing a historiographical revision. This revisionist project can be traced in political, women’s and media history and I will examine these strands further below, and thus argue that the period should be seen as one of transition, negotiation and change. However, another purpose of this chapter is to further argue that to better understand this complexity, we should turn to the domestic setting, and explore this period through the medium of radio. Women were crucial as mothers and workers, and in this period the home became a much more politicised setting. It was here that the boundaries between the private and the public were negotiated. Radio - for and by women - was a central feature in this negotiation. Radio offered a space where themes such as work, motherhood - the ‘double burden’ - and civic responsibility, would be apparent and thus shape programme content and policy. This chapter will begin with a discussion of the British post-war period 1945-1955, and the existing body of historical writing with the aim of introducing the reader to the historical context and the themes emerging.

Post-war Britain

It is important to ask first, in what kind of Britain did post-war radio exist? At one stage the answer would have been quite simple: a country in the grip of austerity, where women who had been out at work in the war were now returning to domestic life – an era condemned by a generation of feminist writers as oppressive and stifling. But a growing body of work on the British post-war era has complicated this image

³ Thane, P. M., (2003). ‘What difference did the Vote make? Women in public and private life in Britain since 1918’. *Historical Research*, 76, 192, pp. 268-285. p. 278.

considerably. In this section, I will review this recent historiography, and, in the process, indicate some of the issues it raises for my study.

One theme, however, stands out above all others in the historical revision of this period: a re-examination of the notion of 'consensus'. The first task, therefore, is to identify the background or rather the aspects of political and social life which have spurred the historical debate. Here, key authors such as Paul Addison, Peter Hennessy, Ben Pimlott, Ross McKibbin, and others, have recurrently identified key issues that would influence and shape the period between 1945 and 1955: the welfare state; the election of Labour in 1945 and the Conservatives in 1951; economic and financial depression; an apparent shift from austerity to relative affluence; the Coronation and the 'New Elizabethan Age.'⁴ The period saw a range of legislation being implemented that would have great impact on the British people. These events are therefore of considerable importance in understanding the period itself and the ways in which it has been re-interpreted by historians.

The introduction of the welfare state and the election victory of Labour in 1945, have been identified as two key events in British post-war history. However, these were two issues that were both taking shape during the war. In December 1942, after being commissioned by the government to report on the future of Britain's post-war social security and re-construction, William Beveridge published what was to become the famous Beveridge Report. His 'Five Giants' - want, sickness, squalor, ignorance and idleness - would all be abolished on the basis of three assumptions: a family allowance, a national health service, and full employment for all. He proposed a *universal system* that would cover everyone. The report proved to be hugely successful. It sold around 630,000 copies and in 1943 a public survey showed 86 per cent for it and 6 per cent against.⁵ The report was followed by several White Papers on post-war reconstruction. Some of the more important were the 1944 White Paper on employment policy that stated the government's commitment to maintain full employment, and in the same year

⁴ Addison, P. (1975). *The Road to 1945*. London: Cape; Addison, P. (1995). *Now the War is Over. A Social History of Britain 1945-51*. London: Pimlico; Hennessy, P. (2006a). *Never Again: Britain 1945-51*. London: Penguin. (First published by Jonathan Cape Ltd. 1992); Hennessy, P. (2006b). *Having It So Good. Britain in the Fifties*. London: Allen Lane, Penguin Books; Pimlott, B. (1988). 'The Myth of Consensus' in L.M Smith (Ed.). *The Making of Britain: Echoes of Greatness*. London: LWT A Channel FourBook/Macmillan; McKibbin, R. (1998). *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951*. Oxford, Oxford University Press; Conekin et.al, (Eds.). (1999). *Moments of Modernity. Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964*. London: Rivers Oram Press; Francis, M. and Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I. (Ed.). (1996). *The Conservatives and British Society 1880-1990*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

⁵ Hennessy, op. cit. p. 76. (2006a).

R.A Butler's Education Act, which created free grammar schools. Moreover, in June 1945 the Family Allowance was introduced.

The consequences of the war - with thousands of houses destroyed, families separated, and the country's finances drained - would also prove to have an impact on party politics. In July 1945 the Gallup polls had predicted a victory for the Labour party, but 'nobody took any notice of them' and the result 'startled virtually everybody'.⁶ Labour won with 47.8 per cent of the votes against the Conservative's 39.8 per cent. The Labour Party's manifesto *Let us Face the Future*, tied in with much of the Beveridge Report; it promised to keep the commitment to full employment; it also promised a new national health service; new and better housing, which at this time was a major problem that needed urgent attention; and there was also a plan to nationalise various industries. Once Labour was in power, the party introduced the National Insurance Act (1946) where a flat-rate contribution to the state would be returned in benefits. This new scheme was accompanied in 1948 by the National Assistance Act, which sought to help those most in need and not able to contribute. This was again a measure taken to prevent poverty rising to the levels of the 1930s. Then on the 5th of July 1948 the new National Health Service came into reality.⁷ From previously being a patchwork of private, voluntary- run and national- and charity hospitals, the new NHS was nationalised under the government, providing a free and universal service for all. But the victory of the Labour party was not to be continued. In 1951, the Conservatives came to power: six years later, the prime minister was declaring that 'most of our people have never had it so good'.⁸

All through this period the British economy was under severe pressure. To keep the balance of payments and improve the dollar deficiency, Labour continued with strict controls and rationings. But Britain in the 1950s would experience an increase in disposable incomes and the rise of consumer durables. Living standards would also gradually improve. The Conservative government would ease wartime and post-war controls, with the aim of safeguarding private enterprise and individual freedom – to, as they put it: '*set the people free*', from state control and restrictions. 'Voters were presented with a more dynamic and socially conscious Conservatism in 1951, but one

⁶ Ibid. p. 65.

⁷ The Act was passed in 1946.

⁸ The British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in a speech from July 1957. Hennessy, op. cit. p. 1. (2006b).

which was anti-socialist and distinctly Conservative.’⁹ By 1953 the party fulfilled its promise of housing when 300 000 new homes had been built - many this time by private builders.¹⁰ There was also a move towards the denationalisation of steel. Although there was an increase in defence spending and rearmament due to the war in Korea (1950-1953), economic stability from 1953 enabled the Conservative government to maintain social reforms such as the NHS and other public spending. The years 1952 to 1956 were according to one historian, Britain’s ‘most serene ‘‘having-it-so-good’ period’.¹¹

During this ten year period, Britain also faced several broader challenges: the loss of empire¹² and the deliberate intention to stay out of the newly formed European Coal and Steel Community; the dependency on American aid: ‘by 1945 more than two-thirds of Britain’s export trade had been lost and the British had incurred the largest external debt in history’¹³; and the beginnings of the Cold War. Fear of a new war and an attack from the Soviet Union led the Labour government to prioritise the production of British nuclear weapons in 1947. With the Berlin blockade in 1948 and the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949, the Cold War culminated during these years in 1950 with the war in Korea. The Conservatives would continue the development of British nuclear weapons; 1952 saw the first British atomic bomb test. During his time as Prime Minister (1951-1955), Winston Churchill would continue to work for a summit between the US and the Soviet Union, the ‘last throw of Churchillian global statesmanship’.¹⁴ Anthony Eden replaced Churchill but Eden’s premiership was to be short-lived; after the political disaster that was the Suez crisis in 1956, Eden would shortly resign.¹⁵ ‘What Suez demonstrated with brutal frankness was that Britain was no longer in the great-power league’.¹⁶ In the late 1950s a growing public fear of nuclear war was gathering momentum with the creation of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in 1958. A struggling economy, Cold War, high defence spending

⁹ Jones, H. (1996c). ‘The Cold War and the Santa Claus Syndrome: Dilemmas in Conservative Social Policy-Making, 1945-1957’, in Francis, M. and Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I. (Eds.). *The Conservatives and British Society 1880-1990*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press. p. 247.

¹⁰ According to Dilwyn Porter (1997) the major difference between Labour and Conservatives on housing was the Conservatives’ emphasis on the private sector. In 1951 completion of new houses by private builders was 12%, this figure in 1953 was almost 20 % (p. 108). (Porter, D ‘‘Never-Never Land’: Britain under the Conservatives 1951-1964’ in Nick Tiratsoo (Ed.). *From Blitz to Blair: a new history of Britain since 1939*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson).

¹¹ Hennessy, op. cit. p. 245. (2006b).

¹² India in 1947 and Palestine in 1948 was just the beginning of a de-colonisation.

¹³ Addison, op. cit. p. 1. (1995).

¹⁴ Hennessy, op. cit. p. 134. (2006b).

¹⁵ Due to ill-health and loss of political credibility, due to the crisis, Eden resigned in 1957.

¹⁶ Clarke, P. (2004). *Hope and Glory Britain 1900-2000*. London: Penguin Books. p. 263.

and financial crisis in both 1947 and later in 1949: as Asa Briggs put it, ‘these were years when the word “crisis” became one of the most overworked words in the language.’¹⁷ Besides economic and political crisis there was also a question over national identity. Due to the economic boom and need for labour, the late 1940s would see the beginning of immigration from the Commonwealth, particularly the West Indies and later in the 1950s India and Pakistan. This was the beginning of a multicultural Britain. Racial tensions would surface and lead to violence in 1958 with the Notting Hill riots taking place in London.

Historians have identified that full employment and a re-distribution of national income, during and after the war, led to the relative improvement in the position of the working-class population.¹⁸ ‘It was argued that a new kind of working man had emerged, one who deliberately chose higher pay over job-satisfaction. This was the “affluent” worker’.¹⁹ The middle-classes also had more money to spend, and in 1954 the Conservative government lifted the last restrictions; rationing was to be replaced by consumption. A consumer boom and a rise in advertising were followed by the passing of the Television Act in 1954 which would introduce the first commercial television in Britain. Consumer durables, such as televisions, refrigerators, and American rock n’ roll music started to become more widely available in the British market. ‘The roaring of the American boom rang round the Western world where everyone in every hard-pressed country saw the new world as an Aladdin’s cave of American goods, American entertainment and the American style of living.’²⁰ As Peter Lewis has noted, ‘by the time the decade [1950s] ended self-indulgence was almost the orthodoxy.’²¹

The final theme of interest is the representation of a ‘new’ Britain: with a prosperous future lying ahead, rather than a nation in economic and colonial decline. The Labour party’s attempt to raise the mood was the Festival of Britain in 1951 – described as a ‘tonic for the nation’.²² It was, however, soon overshadowed by the Coronation of Elizabeth the second in 1953 (which was broadcast to millions around the world). This new ‘Elizabethan Age’ represented the future, a new era in British life, a televised one,

¹⁷ Briggs, A. (1979). *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom. Volume IV. Sound and Vision*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 11.

¹⁸ McKibbin, op. cit. p. 118. (1998).

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 132.

²⁰ Lewis, P. (1989). *The Fifties. Portrait of an Age*. London: The Herbert Press Limited. (First published in 1978 by William Heinemann, London). p. 9.

²¹ Ibid. p. 39.

²² As described by the Labour politician Herbert Morrison, who was indeed the father of the event.

a new modern Britain. Adding to this, the very same day, a British Commonwealth Expedition reached the top of Mount Everest. For Hennessy: ‘juxtaposing the Coronation and Everest’s conquering, was exactly the kind of fusion that made even a six-year-old in north London come to think quite naturally that his country was different and special.’²³

This is the historical backdrop, these are the events, or rather the key aspects that would shape and form post-war Britain, and in doing so epitomize the image we have of the period today. Moreover, the themes will also shape the nature of debates within British broadcasting. But what further complicates things and makes these ten years of British history particularly interesting is that the *interpretation* of these events has been varied and is still under debate.

Challenging the notion of a post-war consensus

Michael Sissons and Philip French observed in their early attempt at post-war history that ‘this was an exciting time, with a strong flavour of its own.’²⁴ This ‘strong flavour’ has now been tasted, and dissected in the varied literature that is now covering British post-war society and politics. The general election of 1945 has become, for example, one of those highly debated moments in British history. In this debate Paul Addison and Peter Hennessy are two dedicated advocates who have argued for a political consensus emerging in the interwar years and further developed during the war.²⁵ Addison who firmly believes that there was a genuine feeling of agreement argues that:

In the summer and autumn of 1940 there began to form in Britain a broad alliance of forces in favour of social reform. Though the alliance depended very much for its influence on the power of organised labour, it was never the property of a single party. Socialists were active in the campaign, but so were non-party reformers such as Sir John Reith, Liberals such as J.M. Keynes, and a minority of forward-looking Conservatives such as R.A. Butler.²⁶

²³ Hennessy, op. cit. p. 234. (2006b).

²⁴ Sissons, M. and French, P. (1963). *Age of Austerity*. London: Hodder and Stoughton. p. 9.

²⁵ Addison first coined the idea of a ‘consensus’ in his book: *The Road to 1945*, (1975, London: Cape). For a good overview of the debate also see: Addison, P. (1996). *British Historians and the debate over the ‘Post-war Consensus’*, Austin Texas, The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

²⁶ Addison, op. cit. p. 9. (1995).

Addison suggests that even if there were differences in how far the state should intervene, a common belief among this ‘elite’ was social reform. In support of this argument is the notion that much of the reforms and social legislation that came about after the war, had already been implemented or had ‘been agreed’ before Labour came to power. By 1944 the ‘New Jerusalem’ vision of a welfare state was fast becoming the new political consensus and commitments to full employment, a national health service, Butler’s education Act, family allowances – were all made before Labour’s July 1945 election victory. Hennessy also believes that between 1940 and 1943 there was a change in mood and politics that would later particularly benefit Clement Attlee and the Labour party in 1945.²⁷ He argues that the combination of common experience shared by all classes under the stress of total war and the Coalition Government’s acceptance of responsibility for what, in Disraeli’s time, was called the “‘condition of England”’ [...] changed [...] the political direction of Britain.’²⁸ Though Hennessy in his later account of the 1950s, acknowledges that perhaps a political consensus did not fully dominate party politics, he, strongly argues that on the welfare and full-employment front a particularly high level of agreement did exist.²⁹ Similarly when it came to the Conservative era, after 1951, some contemporaries felt that the parties were not so different. In 1954 *The Economist*, coined the phrase ‘Butskellism’. Suggesting that the economic policy between the Labour Chancellor, Hugh Gaitskell (1950-51) and his opponent R.A. Butler (1951-55) was similar, and thus a political ‘consensus’ on economic policy continued.

However, the idea of a political consensus has not stood without its criticism.³⁰ Ben Pimlott was one of the first to point out that perhaps the notion of a post-war consensus

²⁷ Hennessy, op. cit. (2006b).

²⁸ Hennessy, op. cit. p. 71. (2006a).

²⁹ Hennessy, op. cit. p. 3. (2006b).

³⁰ There are other interesting accounts that point to a slightly different experience of wartime Britain and the idea of a consensus. For example Sonya O. Rose (2003) has recently argued that during the war a certain rhetoric dominated public and political culture; heroic and utopian ideas of national identity and citizenship, but as Rose argues these did not have singular meanings, rather they were interpreted differently depending on class and for example gender (Rose, S. *Which People’s War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press). Another earlier discussion on wartime Britain is Angus Calder’s (1992) account, which suggests that the shared experience or ‘togetherness’ that events like the Battle of Britain, Dunkirk and the Blitz, produced, is merely a created myth. That in fact Britain was still a much divided place and that the ‘shared experience’ that Hennessy for example praises, did not fully exist. Panic, depression and anti-social behaviour was part of daily life, and as bluntly as it is stated on the back cover of the book, ‘Britain was not bombed into classless democracy’, he might just have a point. Calder believes that the myth of the Blitz was a creation, a media event, and even though it should be seen as an attempt in strengthening moral, he would argue that the events should be looked at from more than just one perspective (Calder, A. *The Myth of the Blitz*. London: Pimlico).

should be re-valued arguing that ‘the assumption of harmony in the past is a way of underlining the gulf that is believed to exist in the present’.³¹ Pimlott’s critique prompted other historians to contribute to the debate. Dennis Kavanagh and Peter Morris suggested some sort of consensus did exist in five areas: the mixed economy; full employment; conciliation of the trade unions; welfare and retreat from Empire and Britain’s nuclear development.³² In the 1990s a new line of historians, such as Harriet Jones and Martin Francis, continued to question the assumption about a post-war consensus. Jones suggested that the wartime experience alone was not enough to explain the notion of a post-war consensus and she also highlighted the fact that increased availability to archival resources made the picture of post-war Britain ‘far richer and more complex.’³³ Instead she suggested that a ‘number of factors were at work to explain the genesis of policies.’³⁴ Jones for example argues that internal debates within the Conservative party on Britain’s post-war future eventually led to a majority in the fiscally ‘liberal’ camp who were determined to see a return to a free market after the war. ‘Social reform and Beveridge, it was argued, were dependent upon prosperity and no clear promises could be made until prosperity had been achieved.’³⁵ Thus a focus on consumerism, the free market and means-tested social services continued to be developed. The neo-liberal wing of the Conservatives maintained a strong influence on policymaking and ‘the party merely adopted new tactics in this period to confirm and uphold its traditional and familiar objectives.’³⁶ Francis also argues along the lines of Jones: ‘the Conservatives were actually much less collectivist in the late 1940s than they had been in the 1930s, as is obvious from Churchill’s war cry of “set the people free.”’³⁷ But he further says that after 1945 you get the new self-conscious label ‘New

³¹ Pimlott, op. cit. p. 135. It is worth remembering that the ‘consensus’ debate gathered momentum during the Thatcher era.

³² Kavanagh, D. and Morris, P. (1994). *Consensus Politics from Attlee to Major*. Oxford: Blackwell, Second Edition. (First published 1989). pp. 4-5.

³³ Jones, H. (1996a). ‘Introduction’, in Jones, H. and Kandiah, M. (Eds.) *The Myth of Consensus. New Views on British History, 1945-64*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd. p. xvii.

³⁴ Ibid. p. xv.

³⁵ Jones, H. (1996b) ‘A Bloodless Counter-revolution: The Conservative Party and the Defence of inequality, 1945-51’ in Jones, H. and Kandiah, M. (eds.) *The Myth of Consensus. New Views on British History, 1945-64*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd. p. 5.

³⁶ Jones, H. (1996c). ‘The Cold War and the Santa Claus Syndrome: Dilemmas in Conservative Social Policy-Making, 1945-1957’, in Francis, M. and Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I. (Eds.), *The Conservatives and British Society 1880-1990*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press. p. 252.

³⁷ Francis, Martin. (1996). ‘“Set the people free”? Conservatives and the state, 1920-1960’ in Francis, M. and Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Ina. (Eds.), *The Conservatives and British Society 1880-1990*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press. p. 59.

Conservatism’ which ‘reflected a promise to break with a past which was now seen as an electoral handicap’.³⁸ This meant that the Conservative’s commitment to the welfare state was based on the expectations of an electorate who wanted something different, rather than ‘consensual politics’. They could not entirely remove all the policies implemented by Labour on, for instance, social security and health, without committing an act of political suicide.

The idea of Labour’s commitment to social change has also been questioned by Hennessy, who admits that although the Labour party promoted and implemented socialist ideas, such as nationalisation of the main industries, the NHS and so on, they did not remove public schools or institutions and systems that still upheld the traditional class system and thus a class based society. The new Education Act did ensure that all pupils would go through to secondary school, either through a grammar school - (often associated with the middle classes) and the route to higher education and better jobs - or a modern secondary school, which would lead to the more traditional working class jobs. There was also a limited number of technical schools and, of course, the exclusive and highly privileged option of the public school. Hennessy calls this the Labour party’s political ‘paradox’ and refers to Ross McKibbin who further reinforces this:

Anyone who visited England in 1939 and then in 1950 would have been astonished at the political transformation [...] But the visitor would have found the institutions of civil society almost wholly recognizable and the old “ideological apparatus of the state” largely intact. Outside the realm of social services or nationalized industries the visitor would have not observed a social democracy.³⁹

The system of secondary modern, grammar and public schools, as Marwick has observed, still ‘replicated the division’ in society between the classes.⁴⁰

There is, then, a difference in emphasis to be recognised. Addison and Hennessy have argued for a common belief in social reform as the driving force within an ‘elite’ of reformers inside and outside of politics; Pimlott has worried about an overtly nostalgic approach and prompted historians such as Jones and Francis to re-interpret Conservative

³⁸ Ibid. p. 60. Depression and economic slump in the interwar period was still in memory, and much associated with the Conservative party.

³⁹ McKibbin cited in Hennessy, op. cit. p. 7. (2006b).

⁴⁰ Marwick, A. (2003). *British Society since 1945*. London: Penguin. Fourth Edition. p. 36.

motives. In this respect, the importance of the ‘consensus’ debate, is not so much whether an agreement has been met among historians, but the value and depth it has added to the historiography of the post-war period. As Addison suggests ‘the debate over consensus has given us a more extensive vocabulary with which to describe the harmonies and discords of British politics.’⁴¹ These early debates have acted as a springboard for a new generation of historians to work from. To confirm this, a range of work has sprung up highlighting new perspectives that are particularly useful for this study. These recent studies identify that perhaps it was not just on a political level, that the post-war world was being tried and contested. It was in the field of ‘ordinary life’ – suburban, family, domestic, ‘feminine’ – that changes in post-war Britain can best be seen and understood.

New perspectives

The nature of these new perspectives is exemplified in the work of Becky Conekin et al., in which we see the concept of modernity being deployed to examine the tensions between ‘tradition and innovation’.⁴² The work is ‘centrally concerned with the extraordinary contradictory impulses towards the modern as they were expressed within British society in the period.’⁴³ In the collection, Peter Bailey’s autobiographical account of growing up in the 1950s provides a fine example of the complexities of post-war society. Coming to terms with his working class background, growing up in Coventry (which itself was going through ‘modernisation’, after being bombed in the war) and dealing with new influences such as American music and popular culture, Bailey asserts that his experience, ‘was fuelled by fantasies from the hyper-modern other world of America, yet contained by the claims and dependencies of welfarism, and its own strongly self-regarding national culture.’⁴⁴ Additionally, Lawrence Black et al., have provided a fresh angle on post-war Britain through focusing on the role of the state and its relationship to the people.⁴⁵ In the foreword McKibbin, makes a crucial suggestion: he posits a model of post-war Britain as ‘a society where there is a wide

⁴¹ Addison, op. cit. p. 13. (1996).

⁴² The Coronation in 1953 is given as a prime example of this; a spectacle that represented something new, a fresh start, seen through the most modern of mediums, television. At the same time the Coronation with its ‘set’ rituals and symbolism represented the past – and tradition. Conekin, et al. op. cit. p. 2.

⁴³ Ibid. pp. 2-3.

⁴⁴ Bailey, P. (1999). ‘Jazz at the Spirella: Coming of Age in Coventry in the 1950s’ in Conekin, et al., op. cit. p. 40.

⁴⁵ Black, L., Dawswell, M., Doye Z., Drake, J., Homer, A., Jenkins, J., Minion, M., Powell, G., Tracey, L. (2001). *Consensus or Coercion? The State, the People and Social Cohesion in Post-war Britain*, Cheltenham: New Clarions Press.

consensus about fundamental values and the legitimacy of the state in the broadest sense, but where there is much less agreement about subordinate values and a good deal of social conflict.’⁴⁶ A good elaboration of this is Andrew Homer’s chapter on British new towns. Homer has looked at the consequences and debates surrounding the New Towns Act that was passed in 1946. Labour had a vision of building new, communities with quality housing and a ‘classless mix’. The Act sought to provide new towns with a social policy of encouraging different classes to live together. However, he argues that this encouragement was rejected by the working and middle classes and this ‘raises important questions about attempts to encourage social cohesion and class consensus within British society.’⁴⁷ Homer further concludes that this project failed because it did not ‘take account of class prejudice and culture.’⁴⁸

Another research focus has been on Britain’s economic decline throughout the post-war period. The most influential critique of Labour’s prioritisation of the welfare state has been by Corelli Barnett, who regarded it as a prime cause of future industrial and economic failure.⁴⁹ However, Dilwyn Porter observes that, ‘perceptions of Britain in decline have coexisted with perceptions of personal well-being’⁵⁰ and Jim Tomlinson points out that:

Ever since 1951 some commentators have characterized the politics pursued under Attlee as major causes of Britain’s post-war ‘decline’. Against this view, defenders of the government see it as having created the full employment and more equal welfare state of the 1950 and 1960s which greatly benefited the mass of the population.⁵¹

Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton have recently highlighted the paradox of a nation in decline but a population of people individually better off. They argue that historians need to shift the focus from an international perspective (away from decline in economy

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. vii.

⁴⁷ Homer, A. (2001). ‘Planned Communities: The Social Objectivities of the British New Towns, 1946-1965’ in Black et al. op. cit.

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 135.

⁴⁹ This argument was very much supported by Corelli Barnett (1986) who particularly criticised the politics of the Labour government in 1945 for failing to address the need for technical advancements such as investments in technical schools and education. Instead the resources ‘had gone towards the *social* miracle of New Jerusalem’ (p. 304). (Barnett, C. (1986). *The Audit of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a great Nation*. London: Macmillan).

⁵⁰ Dilwyn, P. (1997). ‘“Never-Never Land”: Britain under the Conservatives 1951-1964’ in Tiratsoo, Nick. (Ed.), *From Blitz to Blair: a new history of Britain since 1939*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson. p. 103.

⁵¹ Tomlinson, J. (1997). ‘Reconstructing Britain: Labour in Power 1945-1951’ in Tiratsoo (Ed.), *From Blitz to Blair, A New History of Britain since 1939*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson. p. 77.

and empire) to a *domestic* one. And by using the notion of ‘affluence’ instead of ‘decline’, a more positive outlook of a dwindling Britain would emerge.⁵²

A turn to everyday life

Two aspects are thus emerging from the growing historiography. First, as already mentioned, a significant revision of the post-war period is clearly taking place. It is now suggested that Britain in this period was a place where conflict and division were present - in politics *and* in everyday life. We can thus see a more nuanced image of the immediate post-war years which is in need of further exploration. The second point is that scholars such as Bailey and Homer both show that to better understand some of the complexities we need to look at the domestic, everyday life. In Bailey’s case, his account of his childhood shows how, on a personal level, tradition and change were being dealt with, and further, Homer’s study demonstrates the failure of Labour in their understanding about class: even if politicians liked to think they created a new society, with new ‘mixed’ housing, class prejudice was still prevalent.

The private sphere of the home, the family, people’s domestic settings, were central as a battleground where change and tradition were negotiated and perhaps it is here in the everyday, where our interest should lay. There has, of course, been a long-term shift to an interest in ‘ordinary experience’ in historical research for several decades. This is reflected in historical literature that has shifted its focus from the political to the everyday and ordinary people.⁵³ Indeed, David Kynaston’s recent history of post-war Britain (1945-1957) uses a range of personal material such as interviews and diaries and makes particularly good use of material from the Mass Observation Archive.⁵⁴ This gives a good insight into the daily life of ordinary and public people; housewives and civil servants - through *their* experiences we learn about government policy and post-

⁵² Black, L., and Pemberton, H. (Eds.). (2004). *An affluent society? Britain’s post-war ‘Golden Age’ revisited*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

⁵³ For example, since the 1960s there has been a gradual shift from a political history to a social history, or, a ‘history from below’. For example, influential work such as E.P. Thompson’s (1963) *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Victor Gollancz. Also see influences by the French *Annales School*, and its ‘history of mentalities’. And see Peter Burke’s (2004) description of this ‘cultural turn’ in, *What is Cultural History?* Cambridge: Polity.

⁵⁴ Kynaston, D. (2007). *Austerity Britain 1945-51*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.; Kynaston, D. (2009). *Family Britain 1951-1957*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. Another good example of this is noted in Simon Garfield’s account of post-war Britain, based on diaries from the Mass Observation Archive, which gives a very personal insight into the daily lives of several people in various places in Britain (Garfield, S. (2004). *Our Hidden Lives: The Remarkable Diaries of Post-war Britain*. London: Ebury Press).

war recovery. The key point, then, is that we should shift our focus on to the domestic, *ordinary* and *everyday life*.

Indeed, 'ordinary experience' was itself a theme of post-war cultural interest as in the classic writings by Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (1957) and Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society* (1958) ordinary people were 'discovered.'⁵⁵ The post-war period was a defining moment in thinking about people and culture. Free from necessity, with post-war affluence and the NHS, people *were* better off and for many, lives were changing. Discussing Williams' work, Paddy Scannell notes, 'it was the beginning of the realization of the full meaning of democracy, and in that beginning was the end of the masses.'⁵⁶ The key issue here is that people's lives in Britain were changing so dramatically that the actual *thinking* about people, class and culture, within certain academic schools, such as history and sociology, changed. With the consequence that, *the culture of everyday life*, was becoming uncovered. As Peter Burke has highlighted: 'There has been a gradual shift in the use of the term "culture" by historians in the last thirty years or so. Once used to refer to high culture, the term now includes everyday culture as well, in other words customs, values, and a way of life. In other words, the historians have moved closer to the view of culture held by anthropologists'.⁵⁷ Many of the changes and developments that were taking place in post-war Britain, that Hoggart and Williams picked up on, were experienced in the home: from austerity to affluence, the growth of the welfare state and developments of new housing, for instance. After all it was in the domestic arena that the new policies and decisions made were mostly felt and practiced on a daily basis, *and* often, done so by women.

Deirdre Beddoe has made the important point that a large segment of the lives of women has been spent in the domestic sphere and it should thus be studied. Secondly she argues that the private sphere cannot be separated from the public, rather 'the study of the private sphere has ramifications for the study of the public world.'⁵⁸ In a similar

⁵⁵ Scannell, P. (2006). *Media and Communication*. London: Sage. Scannell has traced the developments of the sociology of mass communication in America in the 1930s, and what would become cultural studies in Britain from the mid 1960s. Scannell has showed how certain historical moments have helped to shape the thinking thus the formation about media and argues that these moments are crucial in understanding the developments within the academic fields.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 116.

⁵⁷ Burke, P. (2004). *What is Cultural History?* Cambridge: Polity. p. 33.

⁵⁸ Beddoe, D. (1998). *Discovering Women's History A practical guide to researching the lives of women since 1800*. 3rd edition. London: Longman. p. 5.

fashion Judy Giles has also made the point that there has been a tendency to see politics as divorced from private life so that : ‘what people do and think in their everyday lives is rarely linked to the making of national or international policy.’ The assumption, indeed, she continues, is that people’s ordinary lives ‘are influenced by the consequences of high policy but so-called ordinary people do not themselves shape either the thinking or the effects of this through their quotidian experiences.’⁵⁹

It is within this context that historians have identified the woman as a central figure for understanding post-war Britain. Yet, as Melanie Bell has observed: ‘this decade is lodged in the popular consciousness as a period of gender conservatism’.⁶⁰ Indeed the image of the typical 1950s housewife is still one who is constantly reproduced in stereotypical fashion in contemporary discourse. The lives and experience of the post-war woman is still a fairly under-researched area. Some attempts are now being made to address this gap. There is currently an increasing body of work looking at this period which is specifically dedicated to women.⁶¹ By exploring this period from the perspective of women, we might just better understand and identify the practical implications of politics and how these were dealt with, understood and negotiated.

The post-war woman: at the centre of debate

It has been suggested that in Labour’s landslide victory in 1945, ‘women provided a higher proportion of the popular vote for Labour than did men.’⁶² Historians such as Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Pat Thane and Gerry Holloway have therefore identified the women’s vote in the post-war period as powerful and important to the major parties. Zweiniger-Bargielowska has studied austerity in Britain, and her work looks at the relationship between gender, consumption, government policy and party politics.⁶³ She emphasises how austerity became an important issue for politicians and observes that

⁵⁹ Giles, J. (2004). *The Parlour and the Suburb. Domestic Identities, Class, Femininity and Modernity* . Oxford: Berg. p. 23.

⁶⁰ Bell, M. (2010). *Femininity in the Frame Women and 1950s British Popular Cinema*. London: I.B. Taurus. p. 1.

⁶¹ For example the *Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)*, is currently funding a seminar series (2009-2011) on ‘Women in 1950s Britain’, organised by Dr. Claire Langhamer (University of Sussex), Dr Penny Tinkler (University of Manchester), and Dr Stephanie Spencer (University of Winchester), which aim is to further highlight and explore the lives of British women in the 1950s.

⁶² Thane, op. cit, p. 277. (2003).

⁶³ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I. (1996). ‘Explaining the Gender Gap: The Conservative Party and the Women’s Vote, 1945-1964’, in Francis, and Zweiniger-Bargielowska, (eds.), *The Conservatives and British Society 1880-1990*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press; and Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I. (2000a). *Austerity in Britain: rationing, controls, and consumption, 1939-1955*. Oxford : Oxford University Press.

‘during this period, the regulation of consumption became a major element of the relationship between the state and British society.’⁶⁴ This assumption, she argues, further challenges the notion of a political consensus between the parties:

The analysis of post-war austerity should be set alongside the customary emphasis on the Attlee government’s achievements and underlines the absence of a party political consensus in a major policy area. The post-war debate about austerity, consumption, and living standards signified a fundamental conflict between Labour and the Conservatives with regard to the role of the state in the economy and society.⁶⁵

More importantly, Zweiniger-Bargielowska further argues that men and women responded differently to austerity culture and life, ‘since women in their role as housewives were primarily responsible for implementing the policy on a daily basis.’⁶⁶ She suggests that this frustration with austerity and state control became a very political issue particularly among women who, fed up with rationing, longed for consumption and the freedom to have choice. Meat, bacon, butter, sugar, eggs, tea, cheese, milk, sweets, clothes, petrol were all still restricted. In February 1946 new cuts were made on poultry and eggs. During the war, bread had never been rationed. It was, however, in 1946, for two years, to help prevent starvation in Asia and Germany. Bread rationing would cause an outcry, particularly from housewives, as Hennessy writes ‘the celebrated British Housewives’ League was already becoming a thorn in ministerial flesh.’⁶⁷ It was this fallout, Zweiniger-Bargielowska argues, that led to political change since many women turned to the Conservative party. Their election victory in 1951 became for many a statement of discontent with Labour.⁶⁸ As one woman expressed it, ‘the last election was lost mainly in the queue at the butcher’s or the grocer’s.’⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 1. (2000a).

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 2. (2000a).

⁶⁶ Ibid. pp. 1-2. (2000a).

⁶⁷ Hennessy, op. cit. p. 276. (2006a). In February 1947, to make things just a little bit worse, Christian Dior, launched his new collection in Paris, the ‘New Look’, which introduced flowing skirts with tight waists. The New Look was to become a controversy with the British, not just for its traditional, feminine look, but because it was a temptation at a time when material and clothing were scarce and had to be saved. Women in Britain just had to wait for this flowing fantasy.

⁶⁸ However, this has spurred a historical controversy where Zweiniger-Bargielowska has been challenged by James Hinton (2004) who argues that it was working class men who turned away from Labour, not willing to support austerity culture where “‘nation before husband” became the trend (p. 103). (Hinton, J. (2004). “‘The Tale of Sammy Spree:” Gender and the Secret Dynamics of 1940s British Corporatism.’ *History Workshop Journal*, 58, pp.87-109).

⁶⁹ Cited in Pugh, M. (2000). *Women and the Women’s Movement in Britain*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd. p. 291.

It has often been assumed that a decline in organised feminism occurred in the immediate post-war years, but scholars like Thane and Holloway have showed that the campaign for equal pay took a new turn during the war and this continued in the post-war period becoming of interest to the political parties whose competition for the female vote would focus on the issue of equal pay. Women activists within the civil service, the teaching sector and larger organisations such as the Townswomen's Guild and the Fawcett Society were continuing to support women combining family and paid work, and the issue of equal pay.⁷⁰ As Thane has argued, 'women's activism was more muted [...] but it did not disappear.'⁷¹ The Royal Commission on Equal Pay that was set up by Churchill during the war, reported in 1946, and was in principal in support of equal pay for women within certain sectors, as was the Labour party. But due to the weak economy and the risk for inflation it was not implemented. Inflation was the main reason used by both Labour and later the Conservative Party, for not introducing equal pay, although the Conservatives, as Zweiniger-Bargielowska has observed, were keen to show that they supported equal pay to gain and keep the interest of female voters.⁷² As Thane further argues, 'the Conservative government clearly took the influence of female white collar workers seriously enough to give way on equal pay, in the face of the strong lobby in their party which was hostile to any but a domestic role for women.'⁷³ In 1955, equal pay was eventually introduced in the public sector, in teaching, the civil service and local government.

Women were clearly important as consumers and voters but they were considered crucial as mothers and wives too. Much of the academic literature on post-war women is written in the context of a perceived 'reconstruction' of the relationship between the nation and the family. Women were seen as being the 'backbone' of the nation but with more women working, particularly married women, questions would rise as to what implications this would have on the nation, and consequently what function or role women should play in post-war British society. We can thus see how the role of the mother - and the home, essentially family life, became of increasing interest to politicians and psychologists, who would worry about falling birth-rates, a rise in divorces, and 'maternal deprivation'.

⁷⁰ Holloway, G. (2005). *Women and Work in Britain since 1840*. London :Routledge. p. 195; Thane, op. cit. p. 278. (2003).

⁷¹ Thane, op. cit. p. 277. (2003).

⁷² Zweiniger-Bargielowska, op. cit. p. 196. (1996).

⁷³ Thane, P. (1994). 'Women since 1945' in Johnson, P. (Ed.) *20th Century Britain: Economic, Cultural and Social Change*. London: Longman. p. 404.

The inter-war years had seen a falling birth rate and a move towards smaller families. Women were marrying and having children at a younger age and the spacing of children was more concentrated and within a shorter period. This raised worries about the growth of the population and consequently the nation's future. These were serious concerns that continued during the Second World War, and were also reflected in the Beveridge Report in 1942 with its proposals for better housing, welfare for everyone and a family allowance. Although Britain experienced a baby boom in the post-war period, which in itself resolved some of the worries, the war had also brought disruption and anxieties affecting family life. There was a huge rise in divorce and illegitimacy rates, and marriage breakdowns.⁷⁴ Consequently after the war followed an emphasis on the family and particularly motherhood to encourage larger families and family stability. And with the rise of child psychologists warning about the dangers of maternal deprivation, 'work by psychologists on children deprived of their parents during the war, either by death or as a result of evacuation, helped to bring home to a wider audience the idea that the mother was crucial to the child's normal development.'⁷⁵ Books such as John Bowlby's, *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (1953) became a popular and influential bestseller.⁷⁶ The key issue now was to rebuild the nation and doing so by rebuilding the family. Thus as Claire Langhamer has argued, the 'home' was 'represented as the symbolic, and actual, centre of post-war reconstruction.'⁷⁷

One of the first pieces of new social security legislation - a key point of the Beveridge Report - the Family Allowance, was put through by Churchill's 'caretaker' government. It was payable (without a means test) to all families, no matter what income group, for the second and subsequent child, and it was paid to the mother, which Marwick states was a 'very rudimentary sign of feminist influence on social legislation, which recognised women's role as childrearsers.'⁷⁸ But social security and the welfare state was

⁷⁴ Although some of this was due to a back log of divorce cases interrupted by the war, for people at the time, however, it appeared to be an increasing concern and worry. Hennessy (2006b) briefly discuss the important point of ex-servicemen and mental health. For many servicemen returning to civilian life after the Second World War proved particularly difficult, and sometimes resulting in depression or other medical or social behavioural problems (op.cit. pp.130-131).

⁷⁵ Lewis, J. (1992). *Women in Britain since 1945. Women, Family, Work and the State in the Post-war Years*. Oxford: Blackwell. p. 18.

⁷⁶ Kynaston, op. cit. pp. 570-571. (2009). For a examples of women's feelings of guilt, and "separation anxiety", see p. 579.

⁷⁷ Langhamer, C. (2005). 'The Meanings of Home in Post-war Britain'. *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40, 2, pp. 341-362. p. 342.

⁷⁸ Marwick, op. cit. p. 29. (2003).

also built on certain assumptions about women. For example, Kynaston sees one of Beveridge's assumptions as striking:

there was Beveridge's assumption that married women would – following their wartime experience – return to and stay at home, given that their prime task was to “ensure the continuation of the British race”, which at “its present rate of reproduction [...] cannot continue”. In administrative terms this meant that a married woman would be subordinate to her husband, with benefits to her coming only as a result of his insurance.⁷⁹

In contrast to Beveridge's assumption, in the post-war period *more* married women started to work. During the war there had been an increasing need for labour, which resulted in the mobilization of women. Holloway has noted that most single women were in paid work and to encourage married women into employment a range of services such as nurseries were implemented. But according to her, the most important and successful adjustment was the introduction of part-time work in key sectors.⁸⁰

Married women were also able to take up work due to a significant wartime change: the abolishment of the marriage bar. Previously this had meant that upon marriage a woman would usually leave her paid employment never to return, and instead focus on her family.⁸¹ However, with the marriage bar removed it now meant that women could ‘take time off’ to raise their young children and then return to work when they were old enough. Women could now combine a long term working career with marriage. In the post-war period, these crucial changes, the introduction of part-time work and the removal of the marriage bar, stayed. Subsequently, ‘after 1945, most working-class women rejected large families and the burden of the kind of life their mothers had often lived. Both men and women had material and emotional expectations for better standards of living and a working wife could add considerably to achieving those goals’.⁸² According to Joanna Bourke, between 1931 and 1951 the proportion of married women in employment rose dramatically from 16 per cent to 40 per cent and continued to rise.⁸³ Between 1947 and 1949 the government actually campaigned to

⁷⁹ Kynaston, op. cit. p. 25. (2007).

⁸⁰ Holloway, op. cit. p. 13.

⁸¹ There would of course have been exceptions to this ‘rule’ depending on class and occupation. It was widely practiced though within the Civil Service and Teaching professions. But as Elizabeth Roberts highlights due to financial necessity some women were forced to work outside the home (p. 20). Roberts, E. (1995). *Women and Families An Oral History, 1940-1970*. Oxford: Blackwell.

⁸² Smith-Wilson, D. (2006). ‘A New Look at the Affluent Worker: The Good Working Mother in Post-War Britain.’ *Twentieth Century British History*, 17, 206-229. p. 217.

⁸³ Bourke, J. (1994). *Working Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960. Gender, Class and Ethnicity*. London: Routledge. p. 100.

encourage women to come back to paid employment. Even though the campaigns mainly focused on older women they did however also approach women who were married.

As Holloway has pointed out, women were now acknowledged as playing an important part within the nation's economy, and taking up paid work - whether you were single or married, working or middle-class - was now accepted. This 'consequently crushed the hackneyed legend that a women's place was solely in the home'.⁸⁴ In effect, as a woman you were faced with a dual role of how to serve the nation best. Holloway continues that, 'this need for women's labour during the war threw up some difficult contradictions for a society wedded to the belief that a woman's place was in the home'.

⁸⁵ The discussion clearly continued in the post-war period where particularly the issue of working married women was heavily debated. For instance in 1952 an aspiring Margaret Thatcher urged women to "wake up" to the new Elizabethan age and to take up work. She further argued that, 'the idea that the family suffers is, I believe, quite mistaken. To carry on with a career stimulates the mind, provides a refreshing contact with the world outside – and so means that a wife can be a much better companion at home'.⁸⁶

To summarise, from the literature surveyed there are three key aspects that provide a relevant context for my discussion of women and radio. First, Sissons and French were right in saying that the post-war period had a 'strong flavour of its own'. The late 1940s and the 1950s may lack the cultural and sexual revolutions of the 1960s but the emerging picture is far livelier and nuanced. Second, following this historical revision, it becomes clear that the boundaries between the public and the private in the post-war period were less defined than previously assumed. The point therefore is the identification by historians of the importance of the domestic setting, and the everyday. The home and the world of work and politics were becoming rather close, connected, and interlinked. Rationing, austerity and affluence, and public health were all issues that were dealt with in the private but also on a public, political level. The recovery and reconstruction of Britain was not just a political issue, *it was worked out and experienced on a daily basis in the home*. Psychologists and politicians were all

⁸⁴ Holloway, op. cit. p. 193.

⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 13.

⁸⁶ Cited in Smith -Wilson, op. cit. p. 219.

interested in the state of the family. Naturally the final key aspect is the crucial role of women. Historians have identified the post-war woman as being at the centre of Labour's 'New Jerusalem'. She could now enjoy social security, and health. And she played a key role in the post-war recovery as being in the centre of the home. However, she was also confronted with the policies on rationing and consumption, making her an important electoral target. The private world of women was now political. What follows is an attempt to tease out in more detail the specific aspects that are relevant to the issue of women and radio in the British context; a deeper exploration on the tension between work and home; and a closer look at the perception and meanings of domestic life.

The reassessment of the post-war woman

Within women's history, the post-war period, in comparison to the heydays of the suffragettes and the women's liberation movement of the 1960s appears, through much of the published literature to have slipped into the shadows as a static and particularly oppressive time for women. The late 1940s and 1950s is much associated with the submissive housewife. The American feminist, Betty Friedan's interpretation of the period in the classic *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), was particularly critical to the post-war period and the idealisation of the housewife, and this came to be replicated in much of the subsequent literature. She believed that mass media together with psychologists created this image of a woman who would only be fulfilled by staying in the home; and that the reality was the creation of millions of deeply un-fulfilled, housebound women. Even though Friedan mainly criticised and focused on American society, her work has been influential for feminism worldwide and Giles, whose challenging work I will discuss later, observes that Friedan 'spoke directly to numerous "ordinary" women in Britain'.⁸⁷ For a long time within British women's history, the late 1940s and the 1950s did not attract a great deal of attention. It seemed that the domesticity with which the period has been so much associated and the housewife - so criticised by Friedan and other feminists - were not important issues on the agenda of women's history. What seems to have been problematic for feminists and women's historians in the past was the assumption that women willingly accepted the economical divide and gendered division between men and women in the late 1940s and 1950s. Scholars have expressed disappointment that women (and perhaps men) at the time did not question the ideas

⁸⁷ Giles, op. cit. p. 144. (2004).

and the ‘double burden’ of being a devoted mother and housewife often combined with paid work, that there was a lack of ‘feminist consciousness’. For instance, Janet Finch and Penny Summerfield observed, when writing about the post-war idea of the ‘companionate marriage’, that ‘no-one questioned the sexual division of labour: power in the home and shifting its balance were not on the agenda’.⁸⁸ There was a clear distinction between the function of the husband as the ‘breadwinner’ and the wife, who would solely focus on the home and the children.⁸⁹

In the late 1970s, however, scholars ‘struck by the absence of feminist writing of that period’, began questioning what feminism in the 1950s really was.⁹⁰ Elizabeth Wilson was one of the pioneers, who studied the welfare state and its impact on women.⁹¹ She argued that there was ‘more than one “society” and many moods in Britain between 1945 and 1968’.⁹² Wilson set out ‘to discover why there was no feminism between 1945 and 1968’ but instead she discovered that she was ‘studying the creation of myth and ideology’.⁹³ She argued that the stereotypes - part of the myth - of the 1950s needed to be revised and she further suggested that the feminist movement was not dead: instead it took a different turn, more silent and isolated, to be understood by studying the context and the society in which it was created. Her intention was to describe how ‘a particular coincidence of economic and political forces in that period created a “culture” (for want of a better word) in which it was difficult to articulate or to know about any oppression of women’.⁹⁴ Wilson was one of the few who at an early stage highlighted women’s position in British post-war society, with its ambiguities, and a growing body of work has followed focusing on a period which has been referred to as the ‘nadir of British feminism’.⁹⁵ Indeed, historians such as Gerry Holloway, Martin Pugh, Pat Thane, and Jane Lewis have identified key themes associated with this period. These are issues related to work and to the home, or rather the tension between the two. Concerns

⁸⁸ Finch, J. and Summerfield, P. (1991). ‘Social reconstruction and the emergence of companionate marriage, 1945-59’ in Clark, D. (ed.), *Marriage, Domestic Life and Social Change. Writings for Jacqueline Burgoyne 1944-88*. London: Routledge. p. 10.

⁸⁹ I would like to make clear that I do not say that these accounts are not valid or important, they are, indeed. However, I would argue that the question is perhaps *why* women did not question this ‘double burden’? The historical context; the contemporary debate and women’s *experiences* are crucial in understanding why these gendered divisions were not challenged.

⁹⁰ Birmingham Feminist Group. (1979). ‘Feminism as Femininity in the nineteen-fifties?’ *Feminist Review*, 3, p. 48.

⁹¹ Wilson, E. (1977). *Women and the Welfare State*, London: Tavistock.

⁹² Wilson, E. (1980). *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Post-War Britain 1945-1968*. London: Tavistock. p. 2.

⁹³ Ibid. p. 2

⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 207.

⁹⁵ Pugh, op. cit. p. 284. (2000).

about marriage, motherhood, childcare, domesticity and work, all affected the post-war woman and gave her a central role in the re-building of British post-war society. One achievement of this more recent work is to ‘unpack’ the changing patterns of work and domestic life as experienced by British women.

When the war ended many women returned home, voluntarily, as Britain was experiencing a baby boom and the urge to get back to normality and enjoy marriage and family life was strong. The assumption that many women were forced back into the homes is not entirely correct. First of all, most women now had the choice to stay in employment or not. Secondly, many remained in work, and in fact many married women remained in the work force. According to the literature the figures of how many women were in paid employment seem to vary⁹⁶ but Holloway argues that by the end of 1947 the numbers of women in employment were higher than in 1939.⁹⁷ It is now clear that due to fears of labour shortages and the reality of an economically destroyed Britain, women were needed in the work force. Interestingly, what scholars have observed though, is that there seemed to have been a preference for certain kind of work. The government campaign to get women back into employment concentrated on key industries such as clothing, textile, and agriculture, iron and steel. But many women were fed up with the typical dirty, low-skilled work, associated with war work, common in factories and the textile industry. Even domestic work, which before the war employed many working class women, declined from 24 percent in 1939 to 11 per cent in 1951.⁹⁸ At the end of the war new opportunities had risen and with the building of the welfare state, and later the lurking booming economy of the 1950s, more ‘glamorous’ jobs such as office work and retail jobs were now available. Women, it seemed, now had more choice in the labour market. Pugh has pointed out that, ‘women were willing to work after marriage but not on any terms’.⁹⁹ And Holloway also makes the observation that women wanted ‘clean, respectable work with a reasonable wage’ and this led to an upsurge of women in clerical work and secretarial jobs.¹⁰⁰ The weight of academic literature now suggests that after the war a new life cycle was emerging where women could combine a long-term career with motherhood.

⁹⁶ Pugh states that women as a percentage in the labour force rose from 28.9 per cent in 1931 to 30.8 per cent in 1951 (Ibid. p. 288).

⁹⁷ Holloway, op. cit. p. 186.

⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 184.

⁹⁹ Pugh cited in Holloway, op. cit. p. 190.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 191.

Even though the changes were perhaps not dramatic they were subtle and influential. The increase of working women and particularly mothers and married women also sparked a debate about consequences. This new cycle of working married women coincided with a rise of Freudian child psychology, which became extremely popular both in the press and on radio. Finch and Summerfield argue that the radio broadcaster D.W. Winnicott who was a keen speaker on the topic, saw this as natural and something every mother would want. 'He depicted the marital home as a private, emotional world in which mother and child were bound to each other and in which the mother had control and found freedom to fulfil herself'.¹⁰¹ The writings of John Bowlby stressed the dangers of leaving youngsters, with the consequences of juvenile delinquency or 'latch-key' children. Jane Lewis states that these thoughts were picked up by social workers and guidance counsellors and considered central even outside the world of psychology.¹⁰²

Inevitably, people became exercised by the apparent tension between outside work and such nurturing roles. As Sheila Rowbotham put it succinctly, was a woman 'to be regarded as a producer or a reproducer?'¹⁰³ Women themselves had strong views on the issue. According to Thane, 'government social surveys in 1943 and 1947 indicated that 58 per cent of women believed that married women (with or without children) should not "go out to work"'.¹⁰⁴ As one woman in 1944 told a Mass-Observation panel, 'I am longing for the time when I can stay at home and I know many married women who, like me, are doing a war-job, and would be only too pleased to give up their jobs when the war is over, providing their husbands can provide for them comfortable of course'.¹⁰⁵ Not all women shared this view. Another woman who was questioned by the same panel had this to say:

I hope the return of women to the home will not be made a grave issue after the war. Speaking for myself, I shall be sorry to leave my job, and the part-time hours I work could be continued ad infinitum as far as I am concerned. I have

¹⁰¹ Finch and Summerfield, op. cit. p. 11.

¹⁰² Lewis, op. cit. p. 18. (1992).

¹⁰³ Rowbotham, S. (1997). *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States*. London: Viking. p. 245.

¹⁰⁴ Thane, op. cit. p. 395. (1994).

¹⁰⁵ Married woman, company secretary, aged 28, Purley. The January 1944 'Directive' to the members of Mass Observation's panel asked this question: 'should married women be able to go out to work after the war?' (p. 217) (Cited in Sheridan, D. (1990). *War-time Women a Mass-Observation Anthology*. London: Phoenix Press).

not enough to do to occupy me intelligently in the house, and after years of voluntary “good works” a small regular pay packet is very welcome.¹⁰⁶

The issues of work and home, which prompted such differences in opinions, were explored at the time in Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein’s book, *Women’s Two Roles*, published in 1956 but based on research made in the 1940s.¹⁰⁷ Myrdal and Klein encouraged women to work up until their first child and then stay at home to focus on marriage and motherhood. After the children had left school she could then return to work. They wanted to create a model that would combine work with marriage and motherhood. They were influenced by worries about the problem of a declining population but they also believed in women’s personal fulfilment and talent.¹⁰⁸ Lewis who has written in more detail about Myrdal and Klein’s work, writes that when the book was published the model they suggested was already the approach that was being used widely in reality.¹⁰⁹ However, Myrdal and Klein have been criticised by feminists who dislike their emphasis on the woman and ‘their tendency to problematize women rather than men’.¹¹⁰ They also did not see a problem in the ‘double burden’ that women were facing by doing both paid work and unpaid domestic work. Here, again, I have to point to Lewis who perceptively argues in referring to their work, that ‘the idea that women should not necessarily have to choose between paid work on the one hand and unpaid work and motherhood on the other was potentially radical, especially in the context of the 1950s’.¹¹¹ She further argues that:

Myrdal and Klein had to confront a postwar society in which concern about the level of the birth rate had not yet been overtaken by evidence of a baby boom (just as married women’s work had not yet been legitimised by evidence of the increasing numbers of wives engaged in it); in which doctors, social workers, social scientists, magistrates and politicians all expressed their desire to see the family ‘rebuilt’ on traditional lines; and in which academics led the way in condemning the effect of married women’s work in children’s development.¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ Housewife with one child, temporary radio valve maker, aged 45, Wembley, 1944 (Ibid. p. 215).

¹⁰⁷ Undoubtedly, the other classic work in the same period is Simone de Beauvoir’s, *The Second Sex*, which was published in 1949 and translated into English in 1953.

¹⁰⁸ Myrdal, A. and Klein, V. (1956). *Women’s Two Roles*. London: Routledge.

¹⁰⁹ Lewis, op. cit. p. 24. (1992).

¹¹⁰ Lewis, J. (1990). ‘Myrdal, Klein, Women’s Two Roles and Postwar Feminism 1945-1960’ in Smith, H. L. (Ed). *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*. London: Edward Elgar. p. 169.

¹¹¹ Ibid. p. 167.

¹¹² Ibid. p. 178.

For a period assumed to have had no feminism this is a crucial statement that shows the importance of the historical context. Recent scholarship shows that as a worker or mother, the post-war woman was an extremely important citizen. As for the implications of this historiographical revision, these have been indicated by recent work from Stephanie Spencer, Claire Langhamer and Judy Giles. Building on existing knowledge of the period, these scholars have tried to penetrate further into specific areas such as the meanings or values associated with women's domestic role, or, the home, in this period. The domestic setting and its relationship to women as a place where a sense of control could be achieved; generational change or modernity experienced. These studies suggest that far from being seen as an isolated place, the home should be considered as a place where the 'new' world could be experienced. This, then, will be of interest in our understanding of women's radio in the post-war period.

The importance of the home

The domestic role presented to women has, for instance, been examined by Spencer, who has studied the various roles of adult females that were presented to young girls in the 1950s.¹¹³ By approaching a range of sources, such as social policy documents, employment manuals, career novels, magazines and interviews she shows that the domestic role presented to women was not always looked upon as oppressive at the time, rather it apparently gave women a high status. Spencer suggests 'that being a housewife was in many cases constructed as a job [...] and offered a full time career in itself'.¹¹⁴ She further argues that 'women's domestic activity as a wife and mother was variously described as; "natural", "a job", "a career" and "a vocation" and the diverse nature of these various interpretations made occupational choice a difficult undertaking'.¹¹⁵ It is in this context that the work of Bowlby can be reconsidered as having given 'mothers a vital status within the community'.¹¹⁶ Spencer also points out that employment for women in combination with domesticity was presented as something important, and that women were not just seen as a 'spare workforce'. Instead, 'career's advice placed emphasis on the process of choosing suitable paid work which could be interrupted, not terminated, by a domestic interlude'.¹¹⁷ And, further,

¹¹³ Spencer, S. (2005). *Gender, Work and Education in Britain in the 1950s*. Palgrave: Macmillan.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. p. 187.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p. 26.

¹¹⁶ Birmingham Feminist Group, op. cit. p. 56.

¹¹⁷ Spencer, op. cit. p. 79.

that ‘girls and women’s participation in the work force was seen as part of their duties of citizenship and social responsibility’.¹¹⁸ This argument shows that girls were presented with a role of an adult woman who could combine paid work with domesticity: the ‘dual role’ gave women a sense of autonomy with the assumption ‘that work and home were complimentary’.¹¹⁹ Spencer discovered that ‘images of women in different communities abounded in the *media*; one woman could be employed worker, mother and wife’.¹²⁰

Spencer is not alone in questioning prevailing assumptions about the post-war period.¹²¹ Another set of historical revisions revolve more generally around the significance of the ‘home’. In Langhamer’s study, for instance, domesticity can be ‘viewed as a rational choice for women, a possible source of delight and an opportunity to exercise real skill’.¹²² She observes that the home played an important function in re-building the country and the need for housing even became a political issue as the war ‘fostered both an intensified romance with home life as well as pressing practical needs which demanded political solution’.¹²³ The Labour party and the Conservatives treated the housing problem as a critical issue and Langhamer shows how the home came to represent so much more than just a roof over one’s head. Thus it was for many a realisation of ‘dreams and aspirations first formulated in the 1930s’.¹²⁴ On domesticity she observes that ‘women contested and refined it to suit their own conception of “home”’.¹²⁵ More importantly she suggests that just as young girls in the 1950s might

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p. 80.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. p. 86.

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 41. (My emphasis).

¹²¹ Louise Tracey (2001) has in her essay looked at the welfare state and the ideas that arose at the time about the significance of the family and she gives a fresh account of the main concerns regarding the health and development of children. Tracey, among other things, discuss the set up of two committees, in 1943 and 1944, by the Ministry of Health and Education whose focus was to rebuild the family with ‘the teaching of parentcraft’. She points out that ‘the use of the term “parenting” in these committees was important. The increase in concern for the emotional and mental health of the child meant that fathers could be further involved in child care’ (p. 141). Although the main carer of the child was the mother, Tracey observes, that there was a change in the use of the term ‘mothercraft’ to ‘parentcraft’, and this she suggests took place in the early 1940s. What were crucial in the teachings of ‘parentcraft’ were the physical as well as emotional needs for a child’s well-being and development. A father’s role may have been secondary but he was not excluded. She suggests that the father was brought further into the family in the post-war period and his key duties were to provide economical and emotional support. Tracey also argues that although the teaching of ‘parentcraft’ was mainly aimed at women, much of the education came itself from women (Tracey, L. (2001). ‘Reconstituting the Family: Education for Parenthood and Maternity and Child Welfare, 1945-60’ in Black et.al. (Ed), *Consensus or Coersion?* Cheltenham: New Clarion Press).

¹²² Langhamer, op. cit. p. 357. (2005).

¹²³ Ibid. p. 348.

¹²⁴ Ibid. p. 342.

¹²⁵ Ibid. p. 357.

have taken a position against domesticity in later life, girls who grew up in the 1930s or 1940s desired privacy and a home of one's own and therefore opted for smaller families, which gave a 'sense of control over that home', and by doing so making sure they were, 'escaping the fate of the mother'.¹²⁶

The idea of smaller families represented a break from the experience of previous generations. Hence Giles argues 'the home may be understood as both constricting and fulfilling' and that "'home'" is both a historical and a social construct'.¹²⁷ She further argues that the influence of feminist writings in the 1960s and 1970s has for a long time cast a shadow on women's domestic experience: 'at its best this assumption that domesticity is *always* monotonous and *always* stifling for all women has led to a lack of sufficient willingness to confront what it is about housework and homemaking that gives pleasure to many women'.¹²⁸ Giles's study of women, identity and private life, shows that particularly working-class women's memories and experience of inner city slums and suburban homes in the 1920s and 1930s had an impact on what they desired. She argues that:

It was within the context of this urban topography and the stories told about it that many working-class women in the first half of the twentieth century sought to define themselves and to construct for themselves hopes and dreams of a better future, dreams that expressed themselves in the terms of "'a home of our own'".¹²⁹

In her more recent work, Giles challenges modernity's focus on the public world associated with masculinity and politics, with the sphere of the home symbolised as a private, gendered feminine space not linked with modernity.¹³⁰ She argues that 'the home, far from being simply a haven from the demands of modern life or a stifling place from which to escape, became central to the modernity of British life mid-century'.¹³¹ One of the main points that she makes is that this feminine experience of the modern was class specific and therefore understood differently within different groups of women. For example before the Second World War domestic work was seen as a respectable employment for working class women occupying a large part of the

¹²⁶ Ibid. p. 359.

¹²⁷ Giles, J. (1995). *Women, Identity and Private Life in Britain 1900-1950*. London: Macmillan. p. 3.

¹²⁸ Ibid. p. 19.

¹²⁹ Ibid. p. 65.

¹³⁰ Giles, op. cit. (2004).

¹³¹ Ibid. p. 60.

female workforce. However due to the changes that took place during and after the war, availability of other jobs for working-class women such as factory work, retail and office work became more attainable. This meant that a domestic re-organisation took place. As Giles argues, ‘by the 1950s middle-class women were running servantless houses and working-class women were in the process of acquiring their own homes at the same time as benefiting from the variety of jobs open to them’.¹³² Middle-class women found new voices and roles in the re-inventing of their identities as modern housewives, as in *professional* home makers. This domestic re-organisation also led to changes in the relationship between middle-and working class women where previously this relationship had taken place within the home. Now with the growth of consumerism and particularly department stores (or chains like Marks & Spencer and Woolworths in the suburbs) women from different backgrounds and classes were ‘mixing’ in public, forming new modern female identities.

In her analysis Giles has used a wide range of sources, from literature, film, and women’s magazines to advertising, BBC radio and oral history. One of the most relevant aspects of her analysis is her discussion on suburbia where she looks more closely at some of the criticisms and fears of ‘the masses’ as expressed in George Orwell’s book *Coming Up for Air* published in 1939.¹³³ Orwell and other intellectuals (both men and women) saw suburbia and its association with everyday life, often linked to femininity, as something degrading. Suburbia was lowering and cheapening, in contrast to the modernity of the urban, masculine ideas about the city. But Giles argues that for many, especially for lower middle - and working-class women, suburbia did give a sense of modernity. It represented something better. She tells the account of Joyce Storey, a working-class woman from Bristol who moved into a new council house after the Second World War. Her encounter with the modern was the experience of a bathroom. A luxury she had never had before and this, Giles explains, symbolises a distance from Joyce’s past. Suburban modernity offered something new, and she argues that it was just as important as the vote in ‘enabling people to see themselves as full members of a modern society’.¹³⁴

¹³² Ibid. p. 67.

¹³³ Ibid. pp. 39-47.

¹³⁴ Ibid. p. 49.

Giles makes a final observation showing that contrary to the belief in the passive housewife, much described and discussed in Friedan's work, she argues that middle-class women did find a voice as housewives. She argues that 'the fact that domesticity was such a key issue in the late 1940s and early 1950s enabled many middle-class women to speak "as housewives and mothers"'.¹³⁵ As we have seen earlier, women (such as the British Housewives League) were protesting against rationing and showing their dislike with austerity culture; women were also seen as playing a crucial part in post-war reconstruction as mothers and wives. Indeed, Maggie Andrews's study of the National Federation of Women's Institutes argues that an organisation like the NFWI should be seen as a social movement and that in the 1950s when its popularity peaked, although it was less radical, its feminism consisted of improving women's lives and re-evaluating domesticity.¹³⁶ Andrews argues that 'there is a real problem in the assumption that, unless an organisation rejects domesticity it can not be feminist'.¹³⁷

To conclude, in contrast to the belief that women were forced back into the homes after the war, historians have shown that actually more married women started working, and perhaps more significantly they now had the *choice* to take up work or not. It became more accepted for a married woman to work and the cycle of combining part-time work motherhood was for many seen as the 'ideal' solution, as theorised at the time by academics such as Myrdal and Klein. As Spencer pointed out, this flexibility gave women a sense of freedom. The issue of employment was also heavily debated among women themselves, where sometimes a clear division between those who wanted to continue work and others who believed in a woman's role as home maker only, was present. The impact and influence of child-psychologists and doctors should not be underrated. As the literature shows, being a mother, and fulfilling your 'duty' as home maker was still for many the main option. The housewife played a key part and as shown she was perhaps less 'passive' than previously assumed. Scholars such as Langhamer and Giles have identified the importance of the post-war home and the ideas associated with it. This collective re-evaluation of the domestic and the housewife should thus give us further insight and understanding as to what domesticity really meant to women: the reality of a dream, a home of one's own; becoming a modern 'professional' *with a voice*. Above all, it is clear that we should recognise women as

¹³⁵ Ibid. p. 162.

¹³⁶ Andrews, M. (1997). *The Acceptable Face of Feminism The Women's Institute as a social movement*. London: Lawrence and Wishart. p. 147.

¹³⁷ Ibid. p. 8.

having played an important part in re-building the nation. This is confirmed by the campaigns to get more women into industrial work initiated by the government, or seen by the level of discussion and debate present in work and talks by psychologists like Winnicott and Bowlby. These issues further demonstrate the importance of the private – and its complex relationship - to the public. The thoughts and ideas suggested by the studies reviewed, clearly suggest that the post-war period, far from being a period oppressive to women and with no feminist agenda, is now looking more *complex* and *ambiguous*, and the revised post-war woman, more intriguing.

Media, women and the domestic

The emerging image of post-war womanhood is complex. On the one hand women were keen home makers and devoted mothers; and on the other an increasing number of women opted for smaller families and many took up paid work. This suggested, as Bell has observed, that: ‘the contours of normative femininity were clearly under pressure, being transformed and rendered increasingly ambiguous by the greater economic, social and sexual freedoms that many women experienced.’¹³⁸ As noted earlier by Spencer, in the *media* one woman could be employed worker, mother and wife. One way then to understand this negotiation or construction of womanhood is to turn to the media. In her study of national identity and citizenship in wartime Britain, Sonya O. Rose explored, ‘how wartime experiences were filtered through the available public culture of the time’.¹³⁹ To do this Rose studied for example newspapers (local, regional, national), popular magazines, Mass Observation, books, film, novels, radio and so on, suggesting that: ‘Novels, films, posters, and radio programmes [...] were – contributions to the cultural representations and meanings that were available to the people at the home front.’¹⁴⁰ The revision of the post-war period in general, has then consequently raised questions about women’s representation in films, novels and magazines. And by studying public culture such as magazines, novels, films and radio, we might then be able to understand how post-war femininity or womanhood was constructed in this period; in other words, what kind of cultural representations or meanings about womanhood were produced and re-produced in public culture?

¹³⁸ Bell, op. cit. p. 10. (2010).

¹³⁹ Rose, S. (2003). *Which People’s War? National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain 1939-1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 26.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 27.

Recent studies have, for example, emphasised portrayals of strong independent women. Sue Harper pointed out that ‘melodrama like all *genres*, is historically specific’.¹⁴¹ And further concluded that the ‘depiction of women in the 1940s, reveals, in feature film, the uncertainties of a society moving toward a more liberal, feminist perspective, but unsure how this was to be compassed within a world of conservative constraints’.¹⁴² It has further been observed that indeed, ‘girls reading the women’s magazines would have been aware of the apparent clash between images of domestic bliss and those of financial independence’.¹⁴³ The domestic sphere, again, has proven to be a very fruitful and a lively area of research. As suggested by Spencer, ‘despite the depiction of 1950s Britain as a period of consensus, stability and tradition, any reading of contemporary material suggests quite the opposite’.¹⁴⁴

Furthermore, it is around this period that the formation of the sociology of mass communication, both in Britain and America was taking place.¹⁴⁵ In the 1930s and 1940s, Paul Lazarsfeld and Theodor Adorno investigated the impact of mass communication. Culture mattered, and the ‘effects’ or impact of mass media had started to interest the educated. Herta Herzog, for example studied why American women were listening to daytime serials. In 1941, she observed, ‘most of all, one would have to check periodically, with a great variety of listeners, to see whether there are any changes in their way of thinking and living which could be traced to the programmes’.¹⁴⁶ American critique of radio broadcasting and in particular the soap opera genre will be further explored in chapter five. Content and reception was linked, and what was being broadcast or shown in the cinema could potentially contain hidden ‘messages’ or meanings. It is fair to say that women in the post-war period were consuming various media to quite an extent. The question then, is this: did representations of women in the media matter?

¹⁴¹ Harper, S. (1987). ‘Historical Pleasures Gainsborough Costume Melodrama’ in Gledhil, Christine, (Ed.) *Home is where the Heart is, studies in Melodrama and the Woman’s film*. London: BFI Publishing. p. 167. (Emphasis original).

¹⁴² Harper, S. (1992) ‘The representation of women in British feature film, 1945-1950’. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 12, 3, p. 228.

¹⁴³ Spencer, op. cit. p. 154.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 134.

¹⁴⁵ Scannell, op. cit. (2007). The American tradition around the 1930s and 40s. In Britain more notably in the 1950s when Richard Hoggart (1957) and Raymond Williams (1958) wrote their classics.

¹⁴⁶ Herzog, H. (2004). ‘On Borrowed Experience: An analysis of Listening to Daytime Sketches’ [From *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science, 1941*], in Durham, Peters, and Simonson, Peter, *Mass Communication and American Social Thought. Key Texts, 1919-1968*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. p. 140.

By surveying the academic literature on mid twentieth century media, it becomes clear that if we are to focus our attention on post-war politics and social change at the domestic level, and as negotiated by women, the most appropriate medium to explore would be radio. This, indeed, will be the main focus of the following section. However, very few women listening to radio (or producing it, for that matter) did so without also reading books and magazines, or going to the cinema. Their ‘consumption’ of radio has to be placed and understood as part of an experience with other media. Therefore, before tracing the literature on radio itself, I intend to establish briefly the broader ecology of media consumption by British women in the period 1945 to 1955, an ecology of which radio was an integral part.

Reflecting contradiction and tension: women’s magazines and popular literature

According to a Mass Observation report in 1949, 18 per cent of girls interviewed said that reading was their most popular leisure activity.¹⁴⁷ At its peak one woman’s magazine would be read by five out of six women in Britain weekly, and others would read three or more.¹⁴⁸ Popular novels by Mills and Boon, aimed towards women, were read in their millions.¹⁴⁹ The growth and expansion of women’s magazines in Britain had started in the 1920s and the 1930s but reached an audience in the millions during the post-war period. During the Second World War magazines like *Woman* and *Woman’s Own*, had become hugely popular despite rationing and restrictions, and in peacetime editors enjoyed a sense of freedom without the constraints and pressures from commercial interests.¹⁵⁰ However, the economic growth of the 1950s would make the magazines into a highly profitable market, hugely attractive to advertisers. The influence of commercial interest is a key point in understanding the development of these magazines. For example *Woman*, in 1946 cost 3d, had twenty pages and sold a million copies. In 1951, the pages were doubled, the size increased and sales were now around two million.¹⁵¹ These magazines were extremely lucrative for advertisers and as

¹⁴⁷ Langhamer, C. (2000). *Women’s Leisure in England 1920-1960*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. p. 86.

¹⁴⁸ White, C. L. (1977). *The Women’s Periodical Press in Britain 1946-1976*. London: HMSO. p. 9.

¹⁴⁹ McAleer, J. (1990). ‘Scenes from Love and Marriage. Mills and Boon and the Popular Publishing Industry in Britain, 1908-1950’. *Twentieth Century British History*, 1, 3, pp. 264-288. This figure is based on one author, Mary Burchell, and her career, and she was according to the article, ‘popular but not a top author’ suggesting the figures could be higher (p. 273).

¹⁵⁰ White, op. cit. p. 8. (1977).

¹⁵¹ Winship, J. (1987). *Inside Women’s Magazines*. London: Pandora. p. 40.

consumption grew the content of the magazines became more and more focused on domesticity and the housewife.

Novels grew in popularity in similar fashion. As Niamh Baker has observed:

Women not only wrote stories, they also probably comprised considerably more than half the readership. Fiction had become more accessible than ever through private and public lending libraries, through cheap reprints by book clubs, by being serialised in popular women's magazines and made increasingly available in paperback, and even read on the radio.¹⁵²

The growth in libraries and books during this period is quite astonishing. In 1924 the number of books in library stock was 15 million, this figures rose to 42 million in 1949 where 12 million readers borrowed almost 300 million books per year.¹⁵³ For instance, the success of popular novels by Mills and Boon whose sales to commercial libraries such as Boots and W.H. Smith could comprise of up to five hundred copies per title.¹⁵⁴

Due to the sheer scale of the magazine and the popular book market, several scholars have suggested that their various representations of women would have been reflected in shaping popular attitudes. Dolly Smith-Wilson's article on the working mother in post-war Britain notes: 'in the late 1940s, *Woman*, *Woman's Own* and *Good Housekeeping* urged bored wives without children to beat the "brides' blues",¹⁵⁵ by going back to work. Yet, she further notes, *Woman's Own* also urged women to stay home if husbands objected, rather than risk the 'happiness of your life together'.¹⁵⁶ What representations of women did these magazines and books really promote? This section will first look at women's magazines and then briefly at women's fiction.

The main chronological developments of women's magazines in Britain have been outlined by Cynthia White, Janice Winship and Marjorie Ferguson. Collectively they have shown three key issues that stand out. The first is the impact of advertising and commercial interest on the industry and its consequences on the actual content of the

¹⁵² Baker, N. (1989). *Happily Ever After? Women's Fiction in Postwar Britain 1945-60*. London: Macmillan. p. 21.

¹⁵³ McAleer, J. (1992). *Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain 1914-1950*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. p. 49.

¹⁵⁴ McKibbin, op. cit. p. 490. (1998).

¹⁵⁵ Smith-Wilson, op. cit. p. 213.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

magazines. Second is the idea that these magazines created a separate world for women, where domesticity was seen as a 'career' and in one sense magazines acted as a job manual. The final issue is the range of tensions that can be traced in these magazines of a society slowly coming to terms with change and a changing role for women.

Moreover, research on magazines in this period has identified the immediate post-war years as more progressive with the potential to offer something more to its readers, but as the 1940s moved on, the idea that a woman's magazine could be anything but domestic, seemed to have faded away. This 'failing' has been identified by White, whose work has mapped out the growth and development of magazines in this period.¹⁵⁷ White argues that during the war all magazines changed and widened their editorial scope beyond domesticity, and magazines like *Good Housekeeping*, *Everywoman* and *Housewife* continued this trend after the war covering issues of wider social interest.¹⁵⁸ But in the beginning of the 1950s most magazines took on a more domestic role; White cites Mary Grieve, the editor of *Woman*: '*Woman* should concentrate on those interests which are generally held, rather than on minority interests. And sad though it is, there are fewer women strongly drawn to subjects like equal pay'.¹⁵⁹ White observes that this was due to social pressures and growing economic interests from advertisers who would come to use the ideal image of the housewife and 'exploit it as a selling device'.¹⁶⁰

A more recent generation of writers has done little to alter this fundamental critique, though both Pugh and Winship have drawn out the more general political implications. Pugh points out that 'amid the trend towards marriage and the baby boom the women's magazines threw themselves back into the task of discouraging women from seeking careers'.¹⁶¹ Pugh has further criticised the women's press for favouring the politics of the Conservatives by celebrating women as consumers and focusing on the materialistic side of home life.¹⁶² The focus on consumption has also been pointed out by Winship who, in her study, highlights that femininity was *defined* through consumerism.¹⁶³ She notes that the femininity that was offered in the 1950s was less outward looking

¹⁵⁷ White, op. cit. (1977); White, C. L. (1970). *Women's Magazines 1693-1968*. London: Joseph.

¹⁵⁸ White, op. cit. p. 9. (1977).

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ White, op. cit. p. 145. (1970).

¹⁶¹ Pugh, M. (1990). 'Domesticity and the Decline of Feminism, 1930-1950' in Harold L. Smith (Ed). *British Feminism in the Twentieth Century*. London: Edward Elgar. p. 162.

¹⁶² Pugh, op. cit. pp. 289-293. (2000).

¹⁶³ Winship, op. cit. pp. 39-43. (1987). The influence of advertising in this period has also been discussed by Ross Ballaster et.al. (1991). *Women's Worlds, Ideology, Femininity and the Women's Magazine*. London: Macmillan. pp. 115-122.

compared to the 1940s: women now needed advice and help as *consumers* and this became the main motivation of the magazines.¹⁶⁴ They had an educational role, in teaching women about womanhood, and how to be the perfect housewife: ‘in the 1950s, with the proliferation of goods and brands and varieties of each item, buying increasingly became a process of decision- making’.¹⁶⁵ Winship continues, ‘making the right choice, according to the ads, brought you success as housewife and mother... [and] ...the right choice also improved your class status’.¹⁶⁶ In other words, to be successful on the ‘home front’ you needed to be a successful consumer.

The other important point she makes is the idea that these magazines also offered a sense of belonging or community.¹⁶⁷ This has also been observed by other scholars. Marjorie Ferguson for instance, in her content analysis of women’s magazines also notes what she calls, a ‘cult of femininity’.¹⁶⁸ The magazines promoted a certain ideal of how to be a woman and how to be part of this ‘cult’. In this, domesticity was central, and the magazines acted as a means of ‘secondary socialisation’.¹⁶⁹ It was the duty of every woman to conform to this idea of womanhood and this was in a way a career in itself, something that had to be worked on. However, Ferguson also shows the contradiction in this ideal: ‘it reveals a disjunction between the social facts such as increased female participation in the labour force and their cultural reflection within the beliefs and practices of the cult’.¹⁷⁰ The magazines it is implied did not address fully the changing roles of women. In her study the top three representations of women were, ‘wife’, ‘marriage fixated female’ and ‘mother’; representations of a career type or any other working woman were very low.¹⁷¹ This poses a question of the validity of these magazines as speaking for women’s experiences at the time.

A whole range of scholars have re-iterated this theme.¹⁷² But a note of caution has been sounded by Thane:

¹⁶⁴ Winship, op. cit. p. 43.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 60.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 60.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 66.

¹⁶⁸ Ferguson, M. (1985). *Forever Feminine. Women’s Magazines and the Cult of Femininity*. Aldershot: Gower.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 68.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 77.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. p. 63.

¹⁷² For further questioning of women’s representations in magazines in this period see Joanne Meyerowitz (1994a) discussion on women’s magazines in America. Meyerowitz is highly critical to the influence of Betty Friedan on American historiography and she shows in her discussion the ambivalence these magazines portrayed regards to domesticity and women’s roles in American post-war society (pp. 229-

Further apparent evidence of the narrowly domestic horizons of postwar women has been derived from studies of magazines and other sources (such as advertisements) which stressed fashion, beauty and consumerism. Yet such texts are far from easy to interpret if we are using them as a source for exploring women's expectations and motivation.¹⁷³

One re-interpretation is by Spencer who makes the point on the study of magazines, that 'it is easy to be distracted by the sheer quantity of the "happy young housewife" representations into an assumption that this reflected everyday practice, although of course it is well nigh impossible to know how the readers received and interpreted these images'.¹⁷⁴ Her analysis on the representation of adult female identities in the 1950s looks at three magazines and her observations confirms earlier studies; adult femininity and being a woman was presented as a 'career' and that the magazines created a sense of community; a 'trade paper for women in their "job" as housewife and mother'.¹⁷⁵ This she argues was a two-way process, a construction, 'it was "women" who created "woman"'.¹⁷⁶ Although she concludes that the overall message for women was to *first* consider their duty as housewives, and focus on domesticity as a full-time job, she does also make clear that this assumption of domestic womanhood was not an un-contested one. It might have been the dominant theme but it was challenged.

Letters from readers in the magazines and correspondence on readers' problem pages confirms that the 1950s was, as Spencer argues, 'indeed a transitional phase in patterns of female employment, and that women were constantly being asked to revise their original expectations'.¹⁷⁷ She further observes that magazine features (as opposed to advertisements) did recognise the change in attitudes. That full-time domesticity might not provide complete 'job satisfaction' for women in late 1950s society' and subsequently, 'girls reading the women's magazines would have been aware of the apparent clash between images of domestic bliss and those of financial independence'.¹⁷⁸ This is a crucial observation since it suggests that magazines,

253). (Meyerowitz, J. (1994a). 'Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958' in Meyerowitz (ed.) *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Post war America 1945-1960*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press).

¹⁷³ Thane, op. cit. p. 409. (1994).

¹⁷⁴ Spencer, op. cit. p. 134.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 156. The three magazines Spencer analysed were *Girl*, *Housewife* and *Woman*.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 156.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 151.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 154.

although associated with the ‘happy housewife’, did contain contradictory messages about the changing role of women in this period. For instance, *Woman* ran a regular feature on women readers who had unusual or glamorous jobs, (though Spencer points out they were constructed as departing from the normal).¹⁷⁹ And one letter from a *Housewife* reader, said, ‘my experience was, that by the end of a year at work, divided authority began to play havoc with the children’s behaviour [...] so I gave up my job. Of course I missed the mental stimulation and the money, but I can get those later when the children are grown up’.¹⁸⁰ Spencer also cites a London psychologist who commented on the role of women in a regular feature in *Housewife* in the 1950s: ‘she is still living in a world which is mainly designed for the comfort and convenience of men. Whether a woman chooses the path of domesticity, a career, or a combination of the two, she is likely to find some part of herself sharply frustrated, and resentment follows’.¹⁸¹

Reading habits also encompassed romantic novels, ‘written exclusively for women almost exclusively by women, of which almost countless examples were read by lower-middle-class and upper-working-class women.’¹⁸² Books published by Mills and Boon can be categorised as conservative and traditional in flavour, often in support of strong moral and conservative social values, where marriage and motherhood was a woman’s priority.¹⁸³ But this, too, is a picture that has been complicated by recent research.

Baker’s discussion on female novelists like Barbara Pym, Kate O’Brien and Elizabeth Goudge, argues that women’s popular fiction did question ideas about domesticity, marriage and motherhood. Baker argues that ‘in the pages of these novels we can find women who do not fulfil the stereotypes, who strive towards self-realisation and who find marriage and children less fulfilling than the dream would have them’.¹⁸⁴ These women were not only found in the backdrop of stories; they sometimes played key parts. In one chapter she examines what she calls ‘odd women’; singles, spinsters, widows or women who did not choose marriage, and who was often publicly ignored in

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 152.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 154.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. p. 154.

¹⁸² McKibbin, op. cit. p. 488. (1998).

¹⁸³ McAleer, op. cit. pp. 274-288. (1990). It has been said that in a period of change, famous novelist Barbara Cartland refused to let go of her strict moral values and insisted to portray women as ‘virginal’, which led to her abandonment of contemporary romance and has since 1948 set all her novels in an earlier historical period (cited in MacAleer, op. cit. p. 280. (1990)).

¹⁸⁴ Baker, op. cit. p. 21.

this period.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, she argues these pages were the only place in which ‘odd women’ found representation.¹⁸⁶ She also suggests that even if novels had traditional narrative ending, invariably with marriage, they had often portrayed the journey leading up to that decisive moment as a journey of doubt.¹⁸⁷ Smith-Wilson suggests that the middle-brow books Baker mentions, had their circulation overshadowed by the more popular romantic fiction of, for example, Mills and Boon, which represented stereotypical gender roles for men and women.¹⁸⁸ Again, it is impossible to judge the precise impact these novels would have had on their readers but Baker’s study still shows that there *were* voices that broke the mould.

Overall, then, we can conclude from the literature on reading material, two key points. First that the fact of women’s representations in stereotyped roles does not necessarily mean they were *accepted* as such. Women’s frustration or confusion about their allotted role crept into the letter pages of the magazines; in some magazines features; and in characters in the novels. Counter representations, to a happy and content, full-time housewife, did exist. It is right, as Thane commented, that just looking at the pages of housewives does not necessarily reveal what women felt at the time. Nor does it tell us about the *pleasure* women might have enjoyed in reading these magazines; offering advice, entertainment or helpful hints. The literature points to the representations of women in women’s magazines and novels as one of tension and contradiction. Nevertheless, the second key point is that magazines especially represented women as *consumers*. This consequently led to a focus on domesticity and home-life over a more diverse and progressive agenda. Women were considered mainly as home makers, and domestic bliss and womanhood as things that needed to be worked on; the magazines would help in making the right choice. The commercial imperative was important and it did have an editorial influence over the content of these magazines. As Ferguson observed, the magazines did not acknowledge fully the changing roles of women; especially the fact that more married women were working. Instead, the purchasing power of the magazine readers was more valued than their experience as citizens going through social change.

Cinema

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. pp. 66-86.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. pp. 83-85.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 174.

¹⁸⁸ Smith-Wilson, op. cit. p. 213.

The significance cinema played in women's lives in the 1940s and 1950s, has been highlighted in the work of Jackie Stacey. As one woman in her study responded: 'We would rather have gone without food, and often did, than miss our weekly visits.'¹⁸⁹ Stacey further argues that cinema-going was the most popular leisure activity in this period: cinema admissions peaked in 1946 at 1,635 million and did not drop below 1,000 million between 1940 and 1955.¹⁹⁰ The popularity of films, British and of course American was naturally not devoid from scrutiny. McKibbin notes, 'contemporaries thought the cinema was a uniquely powerful medium. The country's elites were persistently worried about its potentially subversive effects on England's politics and morality'.¹⁹¹ Did Hollywood have an impact on women's behaviour? Sociologist Pearl Jephcott said, 'one begins to realise when talking to these girls the amazing extent to which the minutiae of the clothes and hair arrangements of an American actress may affect the spending habits of a child in a mining village in Durham or a girl in a tenement in central London'.¹⁹²

Cinema-going was cheap, pre-dominantly a working-class activity, and a popular leisure activity among women, since it fitted within the domestic routines.¹⁹³ Young girls would attend the cinema more than once a week and according to a survey made in 1946, 63 per cent of adult cinema goers that year were adult women.¹⁹⁴ The British love for American films, and its dominance worried the British elite, and women were seen as being more influenced than men.¹⁹⁵ The popularity of Hollywood among women was without a doubt due to the 'glamour' and the 'Stars' it offered. Going to the cinema was an escape¹⁹⁶ from everyday life as emphasised by the librarian who confessed that she 'sit and sigh for the kind of clothes Ginger Rogers and Lana Turner wear and would

¹⁸⁹ Stacey, J. (1994). *Stargazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. London: Routledge. p. 81.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 83.

¹⁹¹ McKibbin, op. cit. p. 455. (1998).

¹⁹² Pearl Jephcott cited in McKibbin (Ibid. p. 432).

¹⁹³ Ibid. p. 421.

¹⁹⁴ Langhamer, op. cit. p. 165. (2000).

¹⁹⁵ Swann, P. 1987. *The Hollywood Feature Film in Post-war Britain*. London Sydney: Croom Helm. p. 42.

¹⁹⁶ Stacey (1994) explored issues of escapism and the use/influence of consumption, in regards to British women and Hollywood movies. Hollywood offered British women an *escape* to a better world full of materialism and glamour. It was far from the dreariness of austerity Britain, women were in a sense transported into this fabulous world. It was a way to perhaps in a sense deal with reality. She also suggests that gradually as goods were swarming the British market in the 1950s, women could identify with the stars more fully, and transform their self-images. The ideals and images they longed for in the 1940s, could now be realised, 'similarity became an imaginable possibility through consumption' (p.223) (Stacey, op. cit.).

also be influenced by the Hollywood home with the pretty curtains and marvellous kitchens'', if only the Chancellor of the exchequer, Hugh Dalton, would have let her.¹⁹⁷

Hollywood films, offered an apparently classless society, a world of materialism, clothes, make-up, and excess. One alleged consequence of this impact was that 'women became more Americanised than men'.¹⁹⁸ But even British films were popular, and attracted large female audiences. Two examples of this popularity were *The Seventh Veil* (1945) *The Wicked Lady* (1946) which starred Margaret Lockwood the most popular actress in 1946.¹⁹⁹ As to what kinds of representations of women existed on most films seen in this period, there is a broad consensus among historians, as there now is in relation to magazines and novels, that they were ambiguous, indeed contradictory. As McKibbin highlights:

what English women identified with was the power of certain American stars. While Lana Turner, Ginger Rogers, and Veronica Lake were admired for their glamour, they were usually socially passive; they acted out in luxurious surrounding's women's conventional roles. But the stars of the great Hollywood melodramas, especially Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, and Barbara Stanwyck, represented aggression and independence [...] they portrayed women who forsook conventional "happiness" for domination.²⁰⁰

The so called women's film, often known as Gainsborough melodramas, was placed back into British film history by feminist historians in the 1980s and 1990s, who identified the ambiguity of films of the 1940s. Work by Sue Aspinall and Marcia Landy showed how these melodramas specifically spoke to women and should be valued and recognised just as much as the realist dramas often associated with this period.²⁰¹

Aspinall argued that film which portrayed 'real life' tended to have a more conservative attitude towards women and marriage, while the melodramas tended to be more open: 'more unstable in their attitudes to women's sexuality and role in life'.²⁰² These were also the films that attracted a female audience. Landy's study of British cinema from the

¹⁹⁷ Cited in McKibbin, op. cit. p. 432. (1998).

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 434. McKibbin argues women as a whole were more exposed to American culture than men due to first of all, Hollywood cinema, then through music and dancing which they enjoyed more than men. He further says that women tended to have a more 'idealized' picture of America in comparison to men who either 'liked or disliked'.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 441.

²⁰⁰ Ibid. p. 432.

²⁰¹ For a discussion on melodrama and realism see, Landy, M. (1991). *British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930-1960*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. pp. 1-21.

²⁰² Aspinall, S. (1983). 'Women, Realism and Reality in British Films 1943-53' in James Curran and Vincent Porter *British Cinema History*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson. p. 273.

1930s to 1960s, is particularly useful because it shows the diversity of cinema and British society in this period and its inter-relationship.²⁰³ She is also critical of the negativity towards genre film for being trivial and sensationalist and demonstrates instead that these films do reveal 'the contradictory aspects of consensus'.²⁰⁴ Discussing the woman's film of the time she argues it represents suppression of female sexuality as well as resistance to dominating powers.²⁰⁵

This contradiction has been traced specifically in film such as, *The Wicked Lady* (1945), *The Seventh Veil* (1945), *Brief Encounter* (1945), *Bedelia* (1946), *The Loves of Joanna Godden* (1947), *The Red Shoes* (1948), and *Black Narcissus* (1948).²⁰⁶ Many portray strong, independent women. In *The Wicked Lady*, Margaret Lockwood plays the bored Lady Skelton who becomes a highroad robber, takes a lover and delves into gambling and murder; in *Black Narcissus* female sexuality and desire is tested as a group of nuns, isolated in the Himalayas, encounter emotional upheaval. Some films show frustration towards domesticity 'in *The Red Shoes* it was family life, with its suffocatingly mean horizons, which defeated artistic creativity'.²⁰⁷ Sue Harper has made the point that films, like *The Wicked Lady*, 'contained females who risked everything for emotional fulfilment'.²⁰⁸ But, she continues, 'the women failed, finally [...] the films suggested, in a high Romantic manner, that real life became an anticlimax once fantasy had been totally achieved.'²⁰⁹

The extent these films can be seen as feministic and progressive is of course debatable. One could argue that 'Laura Jesson', the married middle-class wife in *Brief Encounter*, did after all return to her husband and did not give in to her own personal fulfilment. But it has also been pointed out that Laura's return to her husband and family was ambivalent and troublesome.²¹⁰ Indeed it is precisely this contradictory tendency that makes cinema in this period so intriguing. As Tony Williams argues many of the films in the post-war period 'reveal a complex array of tensions and dislocations [...] various

²⁰³ Landy, op. cit. p. 14.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 5.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 194.

²⁰⁶ For a closer examination of some of these films see Landy, op. cit. pp. 189-236. Also, Perkins, T. (1996). 'Two weddings and two funerals: the problem of the post-war woman' in Gledhill, Christine *Nationalising Femininity, Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. pp. 264-281.

²⁰⁷ Harper, op. cit. p. 227.

²⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 223.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Aspinall, op. cit. p. 275.

British contemporary genres such as costume melodrama, film noir, social melodrama, and crime thriller echoed the uneasy situation of a society in which things were felt to be changing'.²¹¹

A subtle shift can also be observed between the late - 1940s and early – 1950s. Again, the years before the 'angry young men' and 'Kitchen Sink' realism of the late 1950s and 1960s have according to Ian Mackillop and Neil Sinyard, 'commonly been stigmatised as conservative and dull'.²¹² However, they suggest that the success stories of the 1960s came out of the 'rich soil' that was the 1950s.²¹³ A growing body of research on the decade has re-discovered women's representations in 1950s film, and its complicated nature.²¹⁴ Kerry Kidd for instance has analysed the film, *Women of Twilight* (1952), which was adapted from the play by Sylvia Rayman.²¹⁵ The film is a portrayal of women, unmarried and pregnant, who are shunned by society and unable to find homes or shelter. She argues that on the one hand the film has a progressive agenda that is, 'attempting to present a realistic and unsentimental view of contemporary Britain, and critical of the suffering imposed on young girls by society's attempt to preserve respectability at all costs'.²¹⁶ But it also tends to support a more moralist view:

²¹¹ Williams, T. (2000). *Structures of Desire, British Cinema, 1939-1955*. Albany: State University of New York Press. p. 97. Williams also points out that this affected males on film. And further Martin Francis whose article explores aspects of male identity in post-war Britain, points out that for men, the adjustment to peace and 'normality' was not always easy; adventure and comradeship did not go down too well with the ideal of a domesticated husband. Francis argues that the 'service camaraderie', or male bonding, experienced during the war was something men longed for but, 'this was most likely to take place at the level of (individual and collective) fantasy, transposed into the cultural artefacts of popular film and literature' (p. 168). This is confirmed by the increasing popularity and success of war films in this period. His argument supports the idea that this was a time of transition and negotiation, not just for women, but also men (Francis, M. (2007). 'A Flight from Commitment? Domesticity, Adventure and the Masculine Imaginary in Britain after the Second World War', *Gender and History*. 19, 1, pp.163-185).

²¹² Mackillop, I., and Sinyard, N. (2003). 'Celebrating British Cinema of the 1950s' in Mackillop and Sinyard (Eds.), *British Cinema of the 1950s: a Celebration*. Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York. p. 2.

²¹³ Ibid. p. 10.

²¹⁴ Melanie Bell-William's (2007) case study of *Young Wives' Tale* (1951) is a good example. A marriage comedy that according to Bell-Williams was a box office failure because it projected modernity and a challenge to traditional gender roles, something she believes the audience in post-war Britain was not entirely ready for. The film was one of many comedies in this period featuring heterosexual marriage with its ups and downs and its projection of the 'companionate marriage'. But Bell-Williams argues that the film fails to find a balance between tradition and modernity and it is further 'the men, not the women, [that] are satirised and undermined' (p. 239). This somewhat radical approach was not received well (Bell-Williams, M. (2007). 'Gender and Modernity in Post-war British Cinema; a case study of *Young Wives Tale*.' *Women's History Review*. 16 (2), pp.227-243); also see her latest book which looks at women and popular films, and women film critics, in the 1950s (Bell, M. (2010). *Femininity in the Frame Women and 1950s British Popular Cinema*. London: I.B. Tauris).

²¹⁵ Kidd, K. (2003). 'Women of Twilight' in Mackillop and Sinyard (Eds.), *British Cinema of the 1950s: A Celebration*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

²¹⁶ Ibid. p. 128.

references to rape were cut out, and, in the end, the main character has her baby adopted to give it a respectable life.²¹⁷

Further constructions of femininity in 1950s cinema have incited scholars such as Melanie Williams to “look back in gender”.²¹⁸ Williams studied the ‘social problem’ films made by J. Lee Thompson in the 1950s, before he left for Hollywood, and points out that his films ‘feature women as their central protagonists and address, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, the enormous problems these women face in trying to fit in with the contemporary ideals of feminine behaviour’.²¹⁹ Her study focuses on three of his films: *The Weak and the Wicked* (1953) about women’s prisons; *Yield to the Night* (1956) which tells the story of Mary Hilton, a working class girl, who commits murder and is sentenced to be hanged; and finally *Woman in a Dressing Gown* (1957), which features a frustrated housewife. All of these films dealt with a femininity that did not conform to the norm. *The Weak and the Wicked*, portrayed strong female friendship and Williams argues that it also ‘ironically conveys the idea of a certain kind of liberation from having to answer to men’.²²⁰ *Yield to the Night*, starred the less than discreet Diana Dors, as a working class girl ‘striving for more from life’. To Williams she is an “angry young woman”.²²¹ But perhaps most interesting is her analysis of *Woman in a Dressing Gown*. The film takes place in the home of ‘Amy’, a middle aged woman aspiring to be the perfect housewife. Her frustration and inability to keep her home ‘under control’ leads the film to suggest, as Williams argues, ‘the difficulty of housework’ and the idea of Amy as a “domestic prisoner”.²²² This was as Williams observes six years before *The Feminine Mystique*, and the film was one of the most popular and financially successful films in that year.²²³ What is also notable is the fact that all of these films were actually made. Clearly, Williams, argues ‘there was thought to be a potential audience for these films that evoke so eloquently women’s containment and entrapment’.²²⁴

²¹⁷ Ibid. p. 129.

²¹⁸ Williams comment refers to the dominating histories, which features the ‘Angry Young Men’. A notion often associated with playwright John Osborne and his play *Look back in Anger* (1956), which sparked a line of challenging and controversial playwrights and novelist (Williams, M. (2002). ‘Women in Prison and Women in Dressing Gowns: rediscovering the 1950s films of J. Lee Thompson.’ *Journal of Gender Studies*. 11, 1, pp. 5-15, p.13).

²¹⁹ Ibid. p. 6.

²²⁰ Ibid. p. 8.

²²¹ Ibid. p. 9. Williams refer to the play *Look Back in Anger* that was first performed in 1956, same year as *Yield to the Night*, and would pave the way for many ‘Angry Young Men’.

²²² Ibid. p. 10.

²²³ Ibid. pp. 10-13.

²²⁴ Ibid. p. 13.

Cinema, then perhaps even more so than popular literature, shows women who did not live up to the normal expectations of a happy wife. Some representations were even quite progressive. There *are* subtle undertones of change and tension. However, many of these films had an escapist nature, women watching could live out their dreams. Going to the cinema offered a couple of hours of entertainment, glamour and escapism. And in Hollywood films, American wealth and 'luxury' was often featured, in clothes and make up, again, promoting a culture of materialism and by doing so, a consumer identity.

In magazines, novels and films we can see how the social changes taking place were reflected and negotiated. But were these cultural representations in themselves forces for change? This is perhaps an impossible question to answer. We *do* know that more married women were taking up work outside the home, and after the initial 'baby boom', women opted for smaller families, suggesting women took control over their own lives.²²⁵ Stacey has highlighted that British women did not just admire Hollywood stars for their feminine beauty and glamour, some spectators admired the qualities some stars, for example Bette Davis and Katherine Hepburn, portrayed such as confidence and independence: 'I liked seeing strong, capable and independent types of female characters mostly because I wished to be like them.'²²⁶ Another viewer said: 'I preferred stars who were unlike women I knew. They were better dressed and looked much more attractive. They gave me the ambition to do more for myself.'²²⁷ And as discussed earlier, Spencer highlighted a woman reader of *Housewife* who expressed her disappointment when giving up her job. As Bell has observed in her study of 1950s films, that mainstream cinema 'was engaging with, negotiating and working through, social change as it related to femininity.'²²⁸ By exploring the public culture we can

²²⁵ Thane for example mentions a Mass Observation survey from 1944, which examined the lower birth-rate. Most of the women surveyed suggested that the choice of having fewer children were to be able to improve the lives of their children, opting for smaller families offered children a better future in terms of education and materialism. A few middle class-women hinted that they did it to be able to broaden their own horizons, but most of the respondents gave the answer that it was for their children's benefit rather than their own. But as Thane observes these mothers therefore, 'aimed to encourage higher *expectations* in their children [...] Daughters grew up with more confident hopes than their mothers of their capacity to control their own lives, within a new, securely established demographic regime' (p. 132, my emphasis). (Thane, P. (1999). 'Population Politics in Post-war British Culture' in Conekin et. al. (Eds). *Moments of Modernity Reconstructing Britain 1945-1964*. London: Rivers Oram Press).

²²⁶ Stacey, op. cit. p. 154.

²²⁷ Ibid. p. 158.

²²⁸ Bell, op. cit. p. 174. (2010).

perhaps further explore the context in which meanings and ideas about post-war femininity and womanhood were produced.

Radio listening and women

But this public culture was interesting, above all, because of its exploration of the *private*. Radio being a medium enjoyed and listened to in the private sphere of the home therefore demands attention. There are thus several aspects of interest that I will examine further in more detail. First, radio's relationship to the home, the domestic setting, and subsequently to women's private lives. Second, the 'public' responsibility of broadcasters. And finally, scholars identifying the post-war period as a time of change and transition for the BBC.

The wireless was mainly listened to in the home and thus consequently by women. The different attitudes to the wireless, between men and women, was discussed by a female columnist in the *Wireless Magazine*, who in 1925 wrote: 'to women wireless is a joy, a distraction, a companion, or an excitement; but it is never what it is to men – a toy'.²²⁹ Shaun Moores has noted how in the 1920s the wireless set was seen as a 'gadget' mainly used and controlled by the man in the family but this changed in the 1930s, when the daily activities of women - housewives and mothers - would be the base of broadcasting practices.²³⁰ This unique relationship between women and radio has been identified by historians such as Kate Lacey and Michele Hilmes, whose two different but equally important accounts have argued that women and the domestic sphere were influential in shaping radio's development in general.

Lacey has observed the ability of radio to link the private and the public, radio as a public medium entering the private sphere:

Acting as a bridge between public and private, broadcasting has been intimately involved in the processes of modernisation over the last eight decades. And for

²²⁹ Scannell, P., and Cardiff, D. (1991). *A Social History of British Broadcasting Volume 1, 1922-1939*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell. p. 358.

²³⁰ Moores, S. (2000). *Media and Everyday Life in Modern Society*. Edinburgh University Press. pp. 43-56.

the same reason it has been intimately involved in the process of democratisation and the integration of women into the public sphere.²³¹

The housewife was the listener isolated in the home, but unlike other mass media radio had the potential to reach these women in the home and in doing so, she argues, radio brought the modern, the public into the private.²³² A theme then, emerging from Lacey's work is, that, even though in the early years of radio women were scarce behind the microphone, 'women were significantly present in the discursive construction of the audience, and at least at certain times of day represented the majority'.²³³ Radio followed the rhythm of the housewife, and this made radio a particular 'feminine medium' since it was useful for women who were alone in the home. For Lacey, its intimacy and blindness 'can validate or innovate feminine styles of verbal communication'.²³⁴

In her study of German radio, from 1923 to 1945, Lacey argues that different regional stations all assumed that broadcasting could have an impact, a progression, on women's experience in the changing relationship between public and private life. She discusses the arrival of radio and mass-communication at a time when women had gained the right to vote and were thereby entering the public sphere of politics. In Germany, she notes, radio for and by women - the 'Frauenfunk' - was intensively developed during the Weimar Republic. It consisted of programmes aimed towards women in the home, and the style was friendly and 'gossipy'. But instead of educating women in politics and by doing so introducing them into the public arena, the 'Frauenfunk' quickly became 'predominantly a space for women as housewives, consumers and mothers, categories derived from an understanding of women's intransient identity formation within the private sphere'.²³⁵ Later when the Nazis came to power, she argues, this network of women's programmes, provided a route into the home, a system already developed and now ready to be used for propaganda purposes.

²³¹ Lacey, K. (2005). 'Continuities and Change in Women's Radio' in Crisell, Andrew, (Ed.) *More than a Music Box: Radio Cultures and Communities in a Multi Media World*, Oxford: Berghahn. p. 153.

²³² Lacey, K. (2000) 'Towards a Periodization of Listening: Radio and Modern Life'. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 3, 2, pp. 279-288. p. 287.

²³³ Lacey, op. cit. p. 148. (2005).

²³⁴ Ibid. p. 150.

²³⁵ Lacey, K. (1996). *Feminine Frequencies: Gender, German Radio, and the Public Sphere, 1923-1945*. University of Michigan Press. p. 244.

Leaving aside the obvious differences between Nazi Germany and post-war Britain, I would argue that Lacey's idea of radio as a tool to analyse wider historical issues is particularly useful. She points out that the period in question was, 'a period in which the succession of profound political and economic crises provoked a series of challenges to the conventional concept of gender roles and a period in which radio clearly came to play a meaningful and indispensable role in the lives of many women'.²³⁶ German radio, from its start, saw women as a *distinct audience group*. She further argues that in times of crisis ideas about the family and security come to the fore and women as mothers and wives take on a central role. She argues that 'the myth of femininity [is] revived as a symbol of *constancy, stability, and permanence*' and she further shows how radio in Germany was caught up in this.²³⁷

This discursive contribution has also been explored in the American context by Hilmes, who has argued that 'women in fact invented and sustained some of broadcasting's most central innovations and served in key decision-making roles, and furthermore participated in the development of entire genres that spoke to them as a specific group about the interests and concerns of women's lives'.²³⁸ In common with Susan Smulyan, she emphasises that it was housewives who had the purchasing power and therefore became one of the most important groups for advertisers and sponsors.²³⁹ The daytime hours became a key point in targeting the female audience, and subsequently radio programming was developed to respond to and fit women's needs and interests. Their purchasing power led to the dramatic rise in 'soap operas' and serials, which proved to the sponsors and advertisers a very lucrative and popular piece of radio output. By 1939, the daytime serial drama dominated US schedules, with over 40 different 15-minute serials daily aired across all four networks.²⁴⁰

Hilmes shows how gendered the nature of programming was and the tensions facing the networks between programmes for profit - which in most cases were daytime, serialised dramas aimed at women - and programmes for public profile (in some ways representing a public service duty), which was represented by a more cultured high

²³⁶ Ibid. p. 4.

²³⁷ Ibid. p. 53. (My emphasis).

²³⁸ Hilmes, M. (1997). *Radio Voices American Broadcasting, 1922-1952*. London: University of Minnesota Press. p. 132.

²³⁹ Smulyan, S. (1993). 'Radio Advertising to Women in Twenties America: 'A latchkey to every home.' *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 13, 3, pp. 299-314.

²⁴⁰ Hilmes, M. (2007). 'Front Line Family: 'Women's Culture' comes to the BBC', *Media Culture and Society*, 29, 1, pp. 5-29. p. 8.

brow style, more ‘masculine’, in the night time.²⁴¹ She argues that ‘under the cover of daytime, women addressed the issues confronting them during the conflicted decades of the 1930s and 1940s, especially the tension between the enforced domesticity of the 1930s and women’s increased frustration with this limited role’.²⁴² The ‘cover of daytime’ also led women producers to innovate and develop new radio formats such as ‘magazine’ programmes.

Radio in the British context: social responsibility and citizenship

Although many of these aspects arose from America’s distinctly *commercial* system of broadcasting. There *are* parallels to be found in the literature on British radio history, at least in identifying distinctly ‘feminine’ aspects to its form. Scannell and Cardiff, for instance, observe that, ‘the radio in the living room had become, by the end of the thirties, part of the furniture of everyday domestic existence. It was in this context that the broadcasters recognized their audience, not as an aggregated totality (a mass audience) but as a constellation of individuals positioned in families.’²⁴³ The interwar years saw social and economical changes; the growth of suburbia and the move towards smaller families led to people becoming more home-centred, ‘privatised’. Indeed, in this, radio filled an important function as a source of leisure, companionship, and relaxation.²⁴⁴ This is further emphasised by Moores who has written about the ‘domestication’ of radio in the 1920s and 1930s and shows how it turned from a novel gadget, mainly used by men, into a ‘good companion’ enjoyed by the whole family.²⁴⁵ Radio became part of daily life and especially the daily life of the mother or the housewife who had a central place in the home. Moores shows how radio’s relationship with women changed in the 1930s: it ‘would symbolically reposition them at the heart of the intended audience, and this transformation proved pivotal to radio’s capturing of time and space in the home’. He notes that radio transmissions changed from being a mix of broadcasts into a fixed schedule which was based on daily life and domestic

²⁴¹ Hilmes, op. cit. pp. 151-229. (1997).

²⁴² Ibid. p. 154.

²⁴³ Scannell and Cardiff, op. cit. p. 14. (1991).

²⁴⁴ This is an observation made by Scannell and Cardiff, who suggests that radio embodied this new way of living. The emergence of radio in the 1930s coincided with the growth of suburbia and the social changes that were taking place. As they argue: ‘Radio as part of the emerging modern way of life – mobile, family-centred, suburban, classless – was deeply implicated in its normalization’ (Ibid. pp. 367-369).

²⁴⁵ Moores, op. cit. pp. 43-56.

routines, ‘and especially the imagined activities of the housewife’.²⁴⁶ Therefore radio became not just a medium of entertainment and pleasure in the home it also nurtured the *appeal* of the home, as a place to be, suggesting that there were ‘‘homes both sides of the microphone’’.²⁴⁷ Radio offered women company, it was a link to the outside world, and at the same time it also offered space for women. This gendered or feminine nature of radio and its place as a centre piece in the home, is therefore of interest.

When the British Broadcasting Corporation was founded in 1927 – evolving out of the company founded in 1922 – 2, 178, 259 licence-holders existed in Britain. By the outbreak of war in 1939, there were 9,082,666.²⁴⁸ By 1937 Listener Research figures suggested that women formed the majority of the radio audience, daytime as night time.²⁴⁹ Sian Nicholas has further identified the importance of the home in times of crisis. During the Second World War women became increasingly important as members of an audience in keeping up morale on the home front. Nicholas in her study of the wartime BBC describes the various programmes that were aimed towards the female audience.²⁵⁰ In a time of crisis a programme like *The Kitchen Front* was listened to regularly by women and the programme did establish ‘a new kind of informational broadcasting of the most straightforward and practical kind’.²⁵¹ *The Kitchen Front*, had a regular audience among housewives: circa 55 per cent listened regularly, and the audience consisted in high numbers of working-class women.²⁵² Stephen Barnard has suggested that ‘the idea of a diligent, houseproud, housebound wife running a household and taking on the day-to-day responsibility of bringing up children dates in BBC terms from the immediate post-war period’.²⁵³ From these other histories, however, you get a sense of the foundations of radio as a domestic, feminine medium,

²⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 47.

²⁴⁷ Maggie Andrews whose research interests include early British broadcasting, highlighted in a recent conference paper (unpublished) how the BBC in the 1930s were influenced by the imagined female listener, which resulted in a broadcasting talk that used a ‘language’ linked to domesticity, presenting itself and broadcasters in a ‘homely’ manner. She exemplified this by referring to a cartoon in *Radio Times* from 1938 (November) which showed, ‘a somewhat domesticated Broadcasting House’ completed with washing-line, and climbers and plants, and the editor explained: ‘‘there are homes both sides of the microphone’’ (Andrews, M. (2009) ‘Homes both sides of the Microphone’. *Women’s History Network 18th Annual Conference. Women, Gender and Political Spaces: Historical Perspectives*. St. Hilda’s College, Oxford. 11-13 September 2009).

²⁴⁸ Briggs, A. (1965). *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: The Golden Age of Wirelss*. Volume II, London: Oxford University Press. p. 253.

²⁴⁹ Hilmes, op. cit. p. 12. (2007).

²⁵⁰ Nicholas, S. (1996). *The Echo of War. Home Front Propaganda and the Wartime BBC, 1939-45*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

²⁵¹ Ibid. p. 84.

²⁵² Ibid. p. 83.

²⁵³ Barnard, S. (2000). ‘Mother’s little helper: Programmes, Personalities and the Working Day’ in Mitchell, C., (Ed.), *Women and Radio. Airing Differences*. London: Routledge. p. 126.

from the 1930s.²⁵⁴ It is also possible to see the way in which BBC radio reflected that role identified by Lacey, of bridging the private *and* the public. Radio therefore not only fits into a domestic routine; it has also served a public responsibility.

Scannell, in his important work on public service broadcasting argues that radio brought public life into the private sphere and in doing so made the outside world accessible to all.²⁵⁵ He sees radio (and later television) as playing an important part in the democratization of society and public life in the way it has 'given voices to the voiceless.'²⁵⁶ In doing so radio had a social responsibility, 'the linking of culture with nationalism – the idea of a national culture – was given new expression in broadcasting'.²⁵⁷ Thus there was an emphasis on the listener as playing a part in a larger community contributing to the general state of the nation:

the "listener-in" was recognized as carrying a range of social and cultural needs and interests, as having domestic and social responsibilities both in the home and the local community; and beyond that as having a role to play – a more public role as citizen – in the larger community of public affairs and national life.²⁵⁸

One example of this was the introduction of the King's Christmas Day speech in 1932 which came to represent an analogy of the family where the, 'Christmas Day broadcasts unobtrusively underwrote a particular version of society; of Britain as a nation of families, fundamentally all alike, and bound together from top to bottom by a newly familiar monarchy as its focus and epitome'.²⁵⁹ In this new home-centred life, women were seen to be at the heart of the family thus the family and its wellbeing were in the hands of the mother. As Moores explains, 'daytime radio features addressed the woman

²⁵⁴ According to Lewis and Booth (1989) a *Women's Hour* existed in the first years of the London Programme broadcast from Savoy Hill and there was also a Women's Advisory Committee between 1924 and 1925, however the programme and the Committee was fairly soon abandoned (p. 60) (Lewis, P. and Booth, J. (1989). *The Invisible Medium. Public, Commercial and Community Radio*. London: Macmillan). Furthermore, Briggs (1961) has observed about the women's committee, that 'in September 1925 the members were politely informed that as only one women's talk was then being given in the afternoon and as the title 'Women's Hour' no longer existed, the need for an advisory committee to meet regularly had disappeared, 'except when special cases of policy arose'' (p. 245) (Briggs, A. (1961) *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: The Birth of Broadcasting*. Volume I. London: Oxford University Press). It is clear though that the development of radio as a particularly suited media to address women was observed in the 1930s.

²⁵⁵ Scannell, P. (1989). 'Public Service Broadcasting and Modern Public Life'. *Media, Culture and Society*, 11, pp. 135-166.

²⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 142.

²⁵⁷ Scannell and Cardiff, op. cit. p. 10. (1991).

²⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 15.

²⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 283.

as *monitor of the private sphere*, issuing her with information on childcare techniques or advice on home management'.²⁶⁰ The nation was run by a nation of homes and private households, and thus by women. Moores gives a few examples how this relationship between the mother and the nation was further encouraged through the radio. A pamphlet for mothers was published by the BBC, entitled '*Choosing the right Food*', and the Minister of Health delivered a radio talk: 'Motherhood and a Fitter Nation'.²⁶¹ What Moores suggests is that the mother was chosen as the main reformer of the household. He notes, 'she could be understood as the *state's* "*delegate*" responsible for the physical and moral welfare of her husband and children'.²⁶² This notion is also supported by Michael Bailey, who in his discussion of BBC's inter-war programming suggests, that the BBC helped to 'regulate' organisation of family life. By doing so, 'reinforcing demarcations between the spheres of public and private', and thus, 'establishing the home as a site *for cultural governance*'.²⁶³

Nicholas notes that registration for war work for women from March 1941 spurred the BBC to focus on women who worked outside the home. Programmes like *Mostly for Women* (from mid-1942) and *Woman's Page* (1943) were supported by women's organisations. The aim in both cases was to broaden the horizon for women.²⁶⁴

Nicholas argues how programmes like *The Kitchen Front* and others, changed in nature, 'from centring on women in the home to recognising the needs and wishes of women as citizens in their own right, with particular, but by no means marginalised interests'.²⁶⁵ In her observation of wartime women's programmes, she suggests that the programmes changed from being entirely domestic in focus to being more outward looking, noting that:

they aimed neither at the career woman nor the housewife, but sought to inform and broaden the outlook of each in a way that would also interest the other.

²⁶⁰ Moores, op. cit. p. 51. (My emphasis).

²⁶¹ Ibid. p. 52.

²⁶² Ibid. p. 52. (My emphasis). And various talks aimed towards women existed throughout the 1930s, for example one series had the title, *Housewives News*. Please see, Leman, Joy. (1983). *Capitalism and the Mass Media. Case study of Women's Magazines and Radio Programmes 1935-55*. Unpublished MPhil Thesis, University of Kent. p. 134.

²⁶³ Bailey argues that the BBC addressed its women listeners mainly as mothers or housewives, given them a lesser role outside the home or in the public sphere. Broadcasting, as he argues, 'regulate[d] and direct[ed] women's behaviour and conduct for patriarchal reasons of state' (p.63). (Bailey, M. (2009a). 'The Angel in the Ether: early Radio and the constitution of the household' in Bailey (Ed.). *Narrating Media History*. London: Routledge).

²⁶⁴ Nicholas, op. cit. p. 123. (1996).

²⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 139.

Woman's Page in particular deliberately steered clear of “domestic” subjects, to discuss, for instance, “Equal Pay for Equal Work”, careers for women after demobilisation, even the ordination of women.²⁶⁶

It appears that the BBC regarded itself as holding a social responsibility. Listeners played an important role as citizens and thus an important part of the larger community. However, Nicholas is fairly critical of the outcome of these changes in the long-term, as having no real impact on programmes for women in the post-war period. Instead she claims that post-war women's radio *reverted*: ‘the BBC's main post-war contribution to women's programming would be *Woman's Hour* (complete with male compere), a return to the pre-war character of ‘women's radio’.²⁶⁷ Nicholas concludes that the impact of wartime programming therefore did not have a lasting effect, ‘with serious talks for women reincorporated into general programmes, women's interests once again became defined around fashion, celebrity news, and the home’.²⁶⁸ Women's post-war programming was, according to Nicholas, back to stereotypical representations of women.

McKibbin, has further argued that ‘whereas the tendency of wartime programmes had been social or collaborative, the tendency of post-war productions was domestic and individual. They were designed not for women at war, but women at home’.²⁶⁹ He then additionally points out that the whole of the Light Programme was “feminized” [...] and the ‘atmosphere’ [...] middle-classish, feminine and domestic’.²⁷⁰ According to McKibbin, the Light Programme was a BBC success, with regularly two-thirds of the listeners. Programmes like *Housewives Choice* (1946), *Woman's Hour* (1946), *Mrs. Dales's Diary* (1948), were all part of the Light Programme's output.²⁷¹ Notably all of these are typically women's programmes, which, McKibbin says, were ‘well crafted and shrewdly produced but not especially innovative’.²⁷²

Post-war reversal?

²⁶⁶ Ibid. p. 123.

²⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 139.

²⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 139.

²⁶⁹ McKibbin, op. cit. pp. 471-472. (1998)

²⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 472.

²⁷¹ Ibid. p. 471.

²⁷² Ibid. p. 472. According to him, in comparison to the comedy programmes that were broadcast in the same period.

McKibbin and Nicholas are, then, slightly dismissive of some of the developments taking place in the BBC in the post-war period. They do however hint at certain changes, related to the domestic and to women: a 'feminized' Light Programme and a more home-centred women's programme. These issues have been further explored by Hilmes and Philip Rayner who both give a somewhat different interpretation of this 'feminization' and 'home-centeredness'.

Hilmes argues that it was during the war, that 'women's culture', as in soaps and serial dramas, 'came' to the BBC.²⁷³ In a recent article, she shows how - despite fierce resistance from BBC management, especially the Head of the Drama Department, Val Gielgud - Britain's first soap opera, *Front Line Family* made its debut in 1941. It was first broadcast on the BBC's North American Service, and reflected the life of an ordinary British family during wartime. Ernie Bushnell, the North American Programme Organizer, later said 'what we were trying to do was to drag America into the war'.²⁷⁴ The series was extended to the Overseas Service, and became hugely popular among British audiences abroad, and due to its popularity it was introduced in 1945 on the Light Programme as *The Robinson Family*. In 1946 *The Robinson Family*, had the highest rating of any BBC daytime programme, 3.5 million listeners, and its popularity would pave the way for serials such as *Mrs. Dale's Diary* and *The Archers*.²⁷⁵ However, this success was not without its struggle. Hilmes notes that by the late 1930s, in America soap operas were the most successful format but they were also heavily criticised. Daytime serials were considered sensational, vulgar, and in bad taste. This is also why there was such a resistance for 'American-styled' serials at the BBC. Hilmes cites Val Gielgud who in 1945 wrote a lengthy memo on the idea of adding a 'soap opera' to the Light Programme schedule:

A programme of this kind, which is deliberately constructed to hit the very centre of the domestic hearth by playing variations upon the theme of all kinds of *domestic trivia*, is bound to achieve a quite unreasonable influence [...] my view is that if the suggestion is implemented we shall be creating a Frankenstein monster whose influence upon programmes will be bad, though its popularity may be immediately good.²⁷⁶

²⁷³ Hilmes, op. cit. (2007).

²⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 14.

²⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 21.

²⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 21. (My emphasis).

In offering such a quotation Hilmes shows the ambivalent nature of the BBC in taking on 'women's culture'. To be more specific, she identifies how, 'notions of "quality" and public service were both gendered and linked to notions of national identity, and, conversely, how popular yet 'feminine' and 'American' form like the domestic serial drama challenged those important cornerstones of the BBC ethos'.²⁷⁷

The problem of the 'popular' has further been examined by Rayner, who suggests that if one looks in particular at the BBC Light Programme, the content can be seen as distinctly *secondary, feminised, entertaining and working-class* in character in comparison with much other output.²⁷⁸ He is aware that some of these changes were already in place, for example the idea that listening was a particular domestic, feminine activity, (as already established), dates back to the 1930s, but Rayner argues that it was in the post-war period, that it was fully established.²⁷⁹ Programmes like *Housewives Choice* and *Music While you Work* were continued since work was not only taking place in the factory but also at home.²⁸⁰ And programmes like, *Morning Story*, *Woman's Hour* and *Listen with Mother* also helped, to build into the schedule, fixed points during the day. Rayner also notes that the Light Programme was rarely reviewed or discussed in for example *The Listener*, and if it was, it was often done in a lowering way. He quotes one reviewer, Martin Armstrong, whose review of *Morning Story*, was rude and paternalistic: '[*Morning Story*] addressed largely to the housewife at her elevenes [...]. Consequently it must be something simple and easily digestible. Small wonder, then, that it does not invariably appeal to the sophisticated palate of the critic'.²⁸¹ Rayner argues that critics like this one, reflected wider assumptions within the BBC in regards to the Light Programme audience, and these he argues to some extent reflected the social changes that were taking place in Britain as a whole.²⁸² He talks about the period as being one in transition in terms of popular mass-entertainment, but concludes that 'the BBC attempted to address a mass audience, albeit a mass audience that it *did not*

²⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 6.

²⁷⁸ Rayner, P. (2001). 'When Radio was King: the BBC Light Programme, Listenership and Taste 1945-1955', unpublished PhD Thesis, Cardiff University.

²⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 39.

²⁸⁰ This argument is also suggested by Christina Baade (2007), whose article on *Music While You Work* and Women Listeners, argues that 'MWYW smoothed the way between the two spheres of women's labour, as well as between war- and peacetime' (p. 337). (Baade, C., (2007) 'Between Factory and Home. *Music while you work* and women listeners at the wartime BBC', *Feminist Media Studies*, 7,3, pp.334-338).

²⁸¹ Armstrong cited in Rayner, op. cit. p. 180. (*The Listener*, No.1170, 1951).

²⁸² Ibid. p. 181.

really understand'.²⁸³ His argument thus show that women, as listeners, continued to play a significant part in the development of radio and television.

Women's radio in post-war Britain

One implication of Rayner is that we need to understand more the internal culture of the BBC itself. Unfortunately the general area of women's radio history has been under-investigated particularly in the British context. Caroline Mitchell's book is so far the best attempt to put together a history of women and radio.²⁸⁴ However, it is not complete. The post-war period is more or less nonexistent, the only insights being from an extract of Olive Shapley's autobiography (she worked as a presenter for *Woman's Hour* between 1949 and 1953) and an anecdotal history about the programme in Sally Feldman's chapter on *Woman's Hour* in the 1990s.²⁸⁵ These limitations are of course not due to Mitchell herself, there is simply not enough academic work on women's programmes in the period. However, the little work there is, has tended not surprisingly to concentrate on *Woman's Hour*, a key asset within the Light Programme, which had two-thirds of the listeners and the majority of whom came from a working-class background.

In the 1980s for instance Joy Leman researched women's magazines and radio between 1935 and 1955.²⁸⁶ She identified *Woman's Hour* as the main (if not only) women's radio programme in the post-war period. Leman was interested in the effects of capitalism on the mass media. Mostly interested in ideology and class, she came to the conclusion that *Woman's Hour* did not differ from the women's magazines. They both promoted the same idea: 'their common ideological concern with the family and the repositioning of women within the domestic context'.²⁸⁷ She is fairly critical of the programme and argues that the programme more or less never reached beyond the horizon of domestic life: 'in a similar way to the magazines and for similar reasons,

²⁸³ Ibid. pp. 142-143. (My emphasis).

²⁸⁴ Mitchell has argued, 'women are rendered invisible through omission, or because their work is hidden, considered inferior or in the background. Occasionally we get a glimpse of women's broadcasting work: a name here, a footnote there' (p. 11). (Mitchell, C. (2000). (Ed.), *Women and Radio. Airing Differences*. London: Routledge).

²⁸⁵ Shapley's account can be found on pp. 29-41, and it is taken from her biography: Shapley, O. (1996). *Broadcasting a Life: The Autobiography of Olive Shapley*. London, Scarlet Press. And Feldman discusses the early days of *Woman's Hour* on pp. 66-67.

²⁸⁶ Leman, J. (1983). *Capitalism and the Mass Media. Case study of Women's Magazines and Radio Programmes 1935-55*. Unpublished MPhil Thesis, University of Kent.

²⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 228.

radio “ducked out” of the issues which most directly affected most women at this time – post war employment, bad housing, low wages, unequal pay, violence in the home, contraception, abortion etc.²⁸⁸ She points out that the tone was mainly middle class even though there was a huge working class audience.²⁸⁹ Leman looked both at some of the output and also some of the production. Her research appears to judge the programme with hindsight. *Woman’s Hour* is not placed in a wider context, for example she criticises the tone of the programme, as being too middle-class, while this was typical of the whole of the BBC, which was very much still middle-class even in this period. I would also argue that by only looking at the ideology of the programme, questions of what it really meant to its listeners are not addressed.

By way of contrast, Anne Karpf draws attention to the programme’s reputation as being pioneering and controversial.²⁹⁰ The programme, she notes was ‘braving the airways with frank talk of abortion, contraception, divorce, and other hitherto taboo subjects long before other media – let alone the evening programmes – took them up’.²⁹¹ Feldman, has also recently highlighted the programme and its 60th anniversary in an issue of *Feminist Media Studies*.²⁹² In the article she gives a partial insight over the past decades of the programme’s history and highlights the special relationship it has had to its listeners over the years, providing companionship and advice. ‘Women have written to thank it for saving their lives, for making them feel less alone, and for motivating them to do something about their situation’.²⁹³ Just as in Karpf’s study, Feldman briefly explores the programme’s early days, highlighting the domestic approach and emphasis on housework but also controversial issues covered such as Equal Pay. She refers to two books that have been published celebrating *Woman’s Hour*.²⁹⁴ These highlight the programmes 50th and 60th anniversaries and thus have a popular, nostalgic feel. Both books describe the programmes development, and publish scripts and other material. In

²⁸⁸ Ibid. pp. 217-218.

²⁸⁹ Leman (1987) also came to a similar conclusion in a study of 1950s British television where she argues the mode of address was upper-class, and no sign of social change or challenges to domesticity were present, instead women were placed at the centre of the family (Leman, J. (1987) ‘Programmes for women’ in Baehr, H., and Dyer, G. (Eds.) *Boxed In Women and Television*. London: Pandora).

²⁹⁰ Karpf, A. (1987). ‘Radio Times – private women and public men’ in Davis, K., Dickey, J. and Stratford, T. *Out of Focus. Writings on Women and the Media*. London: The Women’s Press. p. 175.

²⁹¹ Ibid. p. 175.

²⁹² Feldman, S. (2007). ‘Desperate Housewives, 60 Years of BBC Radio’s *Woman’s Hour*, *Feminist Media Studies*, 7, 3, pp. 338-341.

²⁹³ Ibid. p. 340.

²⁹⁴ Murray, J. (1996). *The Woman’s Hour: 50 Years of Women in Britain*. London: BBC Books; Murray, J., et al. (2006). *Woman’s Hour: From Joyce Grenfell to Sharon Osbourne Celebrating Sixty years of Women’s Lives*. Foreword by Jenny Murray. London: John Murray.

doing so they reveal that in the 1940s and 1950s *Woman's Hour* covered issues such as the menopause, sexual relations, child-birth and domestic violence. But although the books are useful in setting the scene, giving insight into the history of the programme, they do not look at the production process or indeed the wider context of women's programmes at the BBC.

As the above studies show, women's programming in the post-war period is mostly associated with *Woman's Hour*. These studies, though, have not looked at the programme in detail. Nor have they placed it in a wider context of other programming. For example, Chambers' et al. study of the history of women and journalism in America and Britain also mentions *Woman's Hour* in its section on women journalists in post-war Britain.²⁹⁵ But it omits women such as Audrey Russell who became the BBC first female correspondent during the war and whose biography gives a detailed insight into the struggles a woman commentator endured in the post-war period, fighting against male prejudice.²⁹⁶ There were also other prominent women who made their mark during this period: Mary Somerville who joined the BBC in the 1920s pioneered educational and schools broadcasting and became Controller of Talks Department in 1950, the first time a woman became controller of a department. Another woman who broke new ground was Mary Adams, who became Head of Television Talks in 1948.²⁹⁷ There are other women radio producers of interest and who have not yet received first-scale biographical study. Nesta Pain²⁹⁸, who joined the BBC in 1942, was a keen features producer, who together with Jennifer Wayne, and Marjorie Banks, would create successful and groundbreaking features within the Features Department in the post-war period.²⁹⁹ And Isa Benzie, a talks producer who started in overseas programming and then became a specialist on health talks, who together with Elisabeth Rowley and Janet

²⁹⁵ Chambers, D., Steiner, L., and Fleming, C. (2004). *Women and Journalism*. London: Routledge

²⁹⁶ Russell, A. (1984). *A Certain Voice*. Bolton: Ross Anderson Publications.

²⁹⁷ And of course Grace Wyndham Goldie who started work in the Talks Department in 1944 as a Talks producer mainly producing items on current affairs. She moved into television in the late 1940s where she pioneered television coverage of the general elections in the 1950s, and she helped develop television news. She became Assistant Head of Television Talks in 1954 and Head of the Current Affairs Group in 1962. It has also been suggested by her biographer, John Grist (2006) that she was not particularly supportive to other women staff: 'the question of women on the screen was never important to her' (p. 214). (Grist, J. (2006). *Grace Wyndham Goldie: First Lady of Television*. Authors On Line).

²⁹⁸ For example, in Nesta Pain's obituary her work was described as having 'considerably enlarged the range of the BBC's programming and the confidence with which she approached scientists, psychologists and historians enabled her to widen the depth and content of her writing' (Obituary, *The Independent*, July 27 1995).

²⁹⁹ Thomas, J. (1994). 'A History of the BBC Features Department 1924-1964', unpublished PhD Thesis, Oxford University.

Quigley, set up the *Today* programme in 1957.³⁰⁰ Quigley's important work for the Corporation during wartime, has been identified by Leman who shows how Quigley fought her bosses to broaden the aim of the programme, *Women at War*, to include all women workers not just the ones working in the forces.³⁰¹

Leman argues that Quigley possessed a better understanding and awareness than some of her colleagues and her persistence resulted in a new version of the programme that addressed 'a unified body of women working across class divisions towards a common goal in the war effort'.³⁰² Both Nicholas and Leman show how wartime programming was forced to re-address the female audience. They both also identify Janet Quigley as a crucial person in the development of wartime radio. Quigley left the BBC in 1945 but came back as Editor on *Woman's Hour* in 1950 and, as mentioned, was part of the birth of the *Today* programme.

The post-war period also saw a development of programmes of a more popular nature: *Housewives Choice* (1946),³⁰³ the 'serial' *Mrs. Dale's Diary* (1948), eventually billed as a 'British domestic equivalent to American radio "soap opera"',³⁰⁴ and, following the '*Dale's*', *The Archers* (1951).³⁰⁵ In the late 1990s Tim Crook highlighted the overall neglect of radio drama, describing it as 'the most unappreciated and understated literary forms of the twentieth century'.³⁰⁶ If radio drama has been neglected, the 'domestic serial' or radio 'soap opera' is, severely even more undervalued.³⁰⁷ The serial form is very briefly discussed in John Drakakis survey of radio drama, where its success is highlighted, being one of the only forms of drama that has persisted and become an important feature of modern media.³⁰⁸ David Wade's text on 'Popular radio drama' in

³⁰⁰ The *Today* programme's biographer, Paul Donovan has pointed, in regards the female trio, that 'women were thus quite capable of exerting influence in the BBC before equal opportunities and gender targets' (p. 22). (Donovan, P. (1998). *All Our Todays. Forty Years of the Today Programme*. London: Arrow).

³⁰¹ Leman, J. (1996). 'Pulling our Weight in the call-up of women': Class and Gender in British Radio in the Second World War' in Gledhil, and Swanson, (Eds.), op. cit. pp. 109-119.

³⁰² Ibid. pp. 114-117.

³⁰³ *Housewives Choice* was a music request programmes, broadcast on the Light Programme in the mornings.

³⁰⁴ BBC Yearbook. (1952). p. 136.

³⁰⁵ *The Archers* was first introduced on the Midland service in 1950, before it moved to the Light Programme in 1951.

³⁰⁶ Crook, T. (1999). *Radio Drama Theory and Practice*, London: Routledge. p. 3.

³⁰⁷ In an online article, Crook gives a good introduction to the BBC's relationship to the serial format from the 1930s and onwards, but the discussion is fairly limited. (Crook, T. (1999) 'British Radio Drama-A Cultural Case History', <http://www.irdp.co.uk/britrad3.htm> [accessed 19 February 2010]).

³⁰⁸ Drakakis, J. (1981). (Ed.). *British Radio Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 10-11.

his search for a definition what constitutes a ‘popular’ programme, made the important point about ‘accessibility’; that popular drama when dealing with social or moral issues presents it in a way that is accessible to the audience. The construction of language and characters are familiar, often set in a recognisable setting.³⁰⁹ In both Drakakis and Wade’s account, *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* is mentioned, but a more profound or meaningful discussion of the serial is absent. It seems as if the ‘domestic serial’ never earned its place as a ‘drama’. This is partly due because at the time it was seen as denigrating by personnel within the BBC Drama Department. In his survey on British radio drama, Val Gielgud spent a only few paragraphs discussing serials such as *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* and *The Archers*.

Broadcasting historians such as Hilmes and Briggs have both given *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* some attention. Hilmes for example made the point that the editorial policy of the serial stated that the family (or the characters) possessed certain symbolic functions and were therefore not allowed to change or develop. She further notes that this became ‘unworkable’ and eventually the policy was changed so that characters could progress in various ways.³¹⁰ There is not however the space in Hilmes’s study to explore why this happened or what it was that led to a change of policy. Furthermore, Briggs gives minor details about the serial, mostly noting its success and popularity, and the fact that it was loathed by the Head of Drama Department, Val Gielgud, who thought the serial, ‘soul-destroying to the actors, authors and producers concerned’.³¹¹

Mrs. Dale’s Diary has also been highlighted as an early ‘pre-decessor’ to British television soap operas. Informative but to the point is Hendy’s account of the origin of the ‘soap opera’ in America and Britain, and he highlights: *The Plums* (1937), *Front Line Family* (1941), *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* (1948) and *The Archers* (1951), as all playing a part in the development of the British radio serial.³¹² Furthermore, in her study of British soap operas Dorothy Hobson highlights *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* as the ‘first long-running series’ and she further makes the important observation that the programme was very middle class.³¹³ ‘Mrs. Dale was middle class. She was so middle-class that most of what she spoke about and her lifestyle was completely alien to many of the

³⁰⁹ Wade, D. (1981). ‘Popular Radio Drama’ in Lewis, P. (Ed). *Radio Drama*. London: Longman.

³¹⁰ Hilmes, op. cit. p. 23. (2007).

³¹¹ Briggs, op. cit. p. 699. (1979).

³¹² Hendy, David. (2003). ‘Televisions pre-history: Radio (The Origins of the Soap Opera)’ in Hilmes, Michele, (Ed.) *The Television History Book*. London: BFI. pp. 4-9.

³¹³ Hobson, D. (2003). *Soap Opera*. Cambridge: Polity. p. 9.

listeners to the programme. She had a daily help and a gardener, and her family was exotic to working-class listeners'.³¹⁴ Hobson continues that 'Mrs. Dale' always worried about her husband or her family, and that she represented a typical middle class housewife: 'she may not be like your mother, or indeed like anyone you knew, but she had the same job, to be a wife and mother'.³¹⁵ By doing so Hobson argues, she reflected the cultural norm that prevailed in the 1950s. Hobson, omits addressing whether this representation was realistic or whether it was appreciated by listeners. Instead the middle-class portrayal is again re-emphasised: 'No serial has ever been so unashamedly middle-class as *Mrs. Dale's Diary*, and the later move into working-class and lower middle-class representation, which has since dominated British soaps, reflected the changes in cultural awareness within all areas of art and popular entertainment'.³¹⁶ But is it perhaps just because it was *so* middle-class in tone and style that it has been forgotten? It was not part of the wave of 'social-realism' that occurred in the late 1950s and 1960s that is now so celebrated. What these very short and sporadic descriptions of the serial tell us is that there actually *is* something interesting about *Mrs. Dale's Diary*. It suggests that issues of policy, taste, class and representations of women, were prevalent and *are* therefore worth further investigation.

When turning to the wider context of programmes across the Home Service and the Light Programme, the most inclusive history of the BBC in this period is without question Asa Briggs' fourth volume on British broadcasting.³¹⁷ Briggs' history, meticulously researched and valuable as background, tends to be political and institutional in focus. The volume provides thorough detail on the many challenges facing the BBC at the end of the war: the resurrection of television, the Broadcasting Committee on the renewal of the Royal Charter (The Beveridge Committee 1949-1950) and the eventual end of the British monopoly. As Briggs highlights, 'taken as a whole, the ten years from 1945 to 1955 were far more difficult for the BBC than any earlier years in its history, for there was never any real sense of security for the Corporation'.³¹⁸ Briggs does therefore give a good insight into the general status or position of the BBC in 1945 and the years ahead.

³¹⁴ Ibid. pp. 9-10.

³¹⁵ Ibid. p. 10.

³¹⁶ Ibid. p. 10.

³¹⁷ Briggs, op. cit. (1979).

³¹⁸ Ibid. p. 23.

The Corporation had entered the war with a staff of 4899 and 23 transmitters, broadcasting 50 hours a day. In 1945 the staff figure was 11,417, and it had 138 transmitters, broadcasting 150 hours per day.³¹⁹ A bigger and bolder BBC emerged from the war; its reputation as a national broadcaster and its cultural status was improved. Developments within war reporting and the introduction of more popular, 'lighter' programming, made it reach not just a wide audience within Britain but also abroad. At the end of the war, the BBC saw innovation in both its structure and in programme styles. In 1945, the Corporation divided itself first into two services, the Home Service and the more popular, Light Programme. In September 1946 the cultural and 'intellectual' Third Programme began. The three Services were supported by material and producers from 'supply' divisions, such as Entertainment (which for example included Drama Department, Music, Variety and Features Department), or Talks (which included School Broadcasting) and News. Due to further re-organisation, News and Talks together with School Broadcasting would later come under the division of the 'Spoken Word'. This meant that in practice the same Talks producer could for instance produce talks both for the Light Programme but also the Third. The three services or 'programmes', the Home, Light Programme and Third were thus in direct competition with each other, and there was no centralised planning. As Briggs notes, this was however abandoned in 1948 when it was felt that the competition aspect had not really improved the output, or benefitted the listeners in terms of providing a service with a "cultural mission". As Director General William Haley argued: "The BBC is a single instrument and must see that the nation derives the best advantage from this fact."³²⁰ Better co-ordination and planning between the three Services were needed to ensure that the BBC fulfilled this mission.

The 'tripartite' system recognised different listener groups and needs and is often attributed to Haley, Director General (1944 – 1952) who has been described as 'the last paternalist'³²¹ and his creation of the Third Programme is often described in the literature as his greatest contribution. The three programme services suggested a 'cultural pyramid' where the Light Programme lay as its base and the Third Programme at its top, encouraging the listener to 'climb' (or listen) its way up. This system would provide 'something for everyone' but not necessarily in one programme, instead it gave

³¹⁹ Ibid. p. 27.

³²⁰ Haley cited in Briggs. Ibid. pp. 80 – 81.

³²¹ Michael Tracey does not only call him the 'last paternalist' but also describes Haley as 'neo-Reithian' (p. 66). (Tracey, M. (1998) *The Decline and Fall of Public Service Broadcasting*. Oxford: Oxford University Press).

listeners choice.³²² In the words of James Chapman: ‘the BBC had to be able to demonstrate that it was capable of meeting the demands of its national audience on the one hand (whose preference was strongly in favour of light entertainment) whilst maintaining its commitment to public service broadcasting and proving that it was a responsible broadcaster on the other.’³²³

In his account of post-war broadcasting, Briggs does mention programmes such as *Woman’s Hour* and women like Mary Somerville, Audrey Russell, Jean Metcalfe, and Janet Quigley. Women are not totally *excluded*; though clearly, when Briggs wrote this volume, women’s history was not yet a developed area of academic interest. Briggs points out in his second volume that ‘women, indeed, were employed at many different levels of the BBC, far more than in comparable organizations. No history of the BBC would be complete without reference to the key part they played in the daily running of the organization’.³²⁴ However, after pointing out women’s significance to the Corporation and mentioning a few, he fails to respond to his own call throughout his epic. We can say then, that while there are comprehensive histories of the BBC (and radio) in general, there is a lack of work looking at the post-war period and particularly women’s programmes.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the main context and background to my research on women’s radio and the BBC. One theme that recurs strongly is a *revision* of the period as complex and ambiguous. Scholars within political and women’s history have shown that the post-war period is a lively area of research, and should be seen in a new light. One key aspect identified in the literature is the role of the post-war woman as a *mother*, *worker* and *voter*. The home and the domestic emerge as a central feature for our better understanding of the period. The post-war woman, as the key purchaser of food and clothes, became a direct participant in the immediate post-war austerity and therefore an

³²² Jean Seaton has also made the interesting point that the BBC’s tripartite system that was introduced after the war, imitated the education system in the sense that it was based on the class system: the Light Programme was aimed towards the broader, working class audience, the Home Service the more educated middle brow and finally the Third Programme was enjoyed by the upper class: the culturally educated and intellectual listener (pp. 151-159). (Curran, J. and Seaton, J., (1997). *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain*. 5th ed. London: Routledge).

³²³ Chapman, J. (2006). ‘‘Honest British Violence’’: Critical responses to Dick Barton – Special Agent (1946-1951). *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 26, 4, pp. 537–559.

³²⁴ Briggs, op. cit. pp. 456-457. (1965).

important member of an audience for politicians to reach out to. She was crucial as a devoted mother, but needed as a worker. Thus dramatically conflicting messages about a woman's role were heightened.

By studying the main literature on women's magazines and novels, and cinema in the period, it is clear that *representations* of women were more nuanced than previously assumed. Historians have identified conflicting messages and images of women, in novels and readers' pages in the magazines. However, women's magazines, due to commercial pressures appear, to have constructed mainly a consumer identity for women, or, as in the case of cinema, an escapist world.

In the domestic sphere, as I have demonstrated, the radio was a key feature. It was mainly listened to by women. The wireless had, in the 1930s and in wartime, become a permanent member of nearly every home. By 1945, over 10 million licenses had been sold, and this represented a large majority of the households within all social classes.³²⁵ The BBC, even though it did not have to rely on commercial funding, saw women, from the 1930s, as an important target audience. As Scannell, Moores and Nicholas have shown, the BBC assumed a *moral* and *social* responsibility. Radio, as a key feature in the domestic sphere, had the potential to act as a bridge between the public and the private, and in doing so, blurring the boundaries between the two. Two aspects of this general context require particular attention.

First, the BBC as a public service broadcaster felt it had a very particular responsibility to its audience. Historians have identified the broadcaster's public duty as emerging throughout the 1930s and further during the war. In the post-war period, this continued: women were considered crucial as citizens and the home was a central feature. This was a time of social change and upheaval: rationing, austerity, Cold War, affluence, and the introduction of a welfare state. Taking the issues above into account, the neglect of radio in this period is curious. Radio, as a domestic and 'feminine' medium, was the perfect channel of communication, reaching into the heart of the audience. But it was also a site or a medium for the playing-out, or testing of roles or representations. I hope to show that this is not just a feature visible in hindsight, but one that was acknowledged by broadcasters at the time.

³²⁵ McKibbin, op. cit. p. 457. (1998).

Second, as discussed, in the post-war period the BBC introduced a range of new women's programmes such as *Housewives Choice* (1946), *Woman's Hour* (1946), *Mrs. Dale's Diary* (1948) and *The Archers* (1950). The female audience clearly mattered. Hilmes has suggested that it was in this period that 'women's culture' finally came to the BBC, and other scholars have described it as a 'feminisation' of programming. The particular dismissal of women's radio in the post-war period or the view that it was a failure needs to be further investigated. The argument that women's radio reverted from having been more outward looking, to the return of typical 'women's interests' such as beauty and the home, needs to be re-assessed. As discussed, it has been identified that for instance the nature of *Woman's Hour* was contradictory. But what made it such? What does it actually say about the historical context itself, or the culture in which it was produced? These issues pose the crucial question: did the BBC as a public service broadcaster reflect the changing role of women differently to commercial media? Can the complexity of the post-war period also be traced in radio output? These are all important questions. But after surveying the existing literature on the period none of these have been fairly answered. I would argue an important piece of historical research on this period is therefore missing from the literature. These are issues that need to be further explored and investigated. The next question is then, how does one approach this topic?

CHAPTER TWO

Researching broadcasting history?

The BBC is, or ought to be, a researcher's dream. Obsessed with monitoring its own performance, minuting every stage in its decision-making processes, punctilious in time-tabling its programmes, and accountable for its lightest actions to bureaucratic audit, the Corporation has generated a vast amount of paperwork, keeping a record of everything, it seems, from performance chits to CVs.

Raphael Samuel³²⁶

Broadcasting has reflected our preoccupations and anxieties in soap operas and dramas, formed musical tastes [...] told us how to raise our children.

Jean Seaton³²⁷

The previous chapter mainly mapped out the secondary sources used such as books on the post-war period and the various range of historical literature. The secondary material has all been used to gain importance insight – ‘historiographically’ - and to provide a backdrop to the developments and themes of women’s radio at the BBC, 1945 - 1955. This has been crucial in gaining an understanding of the time itself, and to identify issues and questions that became the main enquiry for this study. But this project relies on another set of sources: programmes, memos, minutes of meetings, press-cuttings, just to name a few; the material produced at the time. What Marwick has called, ‘witting’ and ‘unwitting’ testimony: material that was planned and intentional, and material that was the opposite: accidental - not deliberate.³²⁸ It is both what was being said or broadcast and what was *not* that is of great interest, for the unintentional or unconscious might be just as revealing as the intentional.

³²⁶ Samuel, R. (1998, (1999)). ‘The Voice of Britain’ in Light, A. (Ed.), *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain: Theatres of Memory Volume II*, London : Verso. p. 186.

³²⁷ Seaton, J. (2004) ‘Writing the History of Broadcasting’, in Cannadine, D. (Ed.), *History and the Media*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 146.

³²⁸ Marwick, A. (2001). *The New Nature of History: Knowledge, Evidence, Language*. Basingstoke: Palgrave. pp. 172-174.

In this chapter I will therefore discuss the material used: mainly the archival sources accessed at the BBC Written Archive Centre but also selective use of the Mass Observation Archive. Before I set out to explore the primary sources, however, a note needs to be made about one of the key developments studying and writing broadcasting history, which offered an important framework for pursuing this research project: the move from the specific to the multifaceted.

From the specific to the multifaceted

There is no specific formula for how to write broadcasting history. There has however, over the years, been a move - within media history in general - towards a more multilayered approach, rather than a strict focus on the medium or institution itself. This has also forged a more interdisciplinary study where historians of radio not only look to the institution or medium but the wider social, cultural, economical and political context. There are therefore several authors and studies, whose ideas and thinking about broadcasting (and media) history, have been influential in the approach taken - or executed - in this thesis. I shall discuss them below.

The need to adopt a more interdisciplinary study of the media was already highlighted in 1980 by Briggs, in his reflection of his (by then) four volumes of *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*. Although his volumes have been critiqued for being too institutional and focused on policy making³²⁹, Briggs did make clear that, ‘the relationship of broadcasting to society as presented in my *History* is never one of foreground to background’.³³⁰ He emphasised the need to look beyond broadcasting and how its study demands an interdisciplinary approach, which can only be accomplished if the broadcasting historian also is, ‘a social and cultural historian interested in other forces in society and how they operate’.³³¹ Moving forwards to the turn of the twenty-first century Tom O’Malley established that this method of working had become the norm: ‘after a great deal of thinking on what was, and how to study, media history, the

³²⁹ Raphael Samuel was particularly critical, arguing that Briggs histories are too much ‘top to bottom’, as he writes: ‘Not broadcasting but policy-making is the true subject of this work, and the unifying thread of the five volumes, leaving little or no space for the initiatives which welled up from below, or which flourished on the peripheries’ (p. 188). (Samuel, op. cit).

³³⁰ Briggs, A., (1980). ‘Problems and Possibilities in the writing of Broadcasting History’, *Media Culture and Society*, 2, pp. 5 - 13. p. 10. (Emphasis original).

³³¹ Ibid.

underlying interdisciplinary nature of the field stood out as the dominant paradigm, not least of all because the objects of study were multi-faceted, evolving social phenomena with wide-ranging implications'.³³² The study of mass media has according to O'Malley developed out of various fields, such as history, sociology and media studies, and has therefore raised various issues of how media history should be studied and written.

Around the same time as O'Malley, media history was also described by James Curran who saw the developments and current status of media history as six competing narratives: the liberal narrative; the feminist narrative; the populist narrative; the libertarian narrative; the anthropological narrative; the radical narrative.³³³ In a later version he also added a seventh narrative: technological determinism.³³⁴ Curran argued that each of these narratives had its flaws and limitations, but each also held 'an important element of truth' and that collectively these narratives would shed light on the development of media in modern society.³³⁵ He suggested that the fragmentation of media history, posed several problems. For instance, it was too much 'medium history'; historical accounts of an individual medium, i.e. the press, film or radio. A second problem was that it was too 'media centric', focusing on content (film histories) or institutions and policy (broadcasting histories). Finally, he argued that British media history had thus failed to incorporate the general history i.e. society itself and its connections to media. Curran therefore suggested that the best way to write a history of British media was to 'offer a general account of the development of modern British society, in which the history of the British media is inserted'.³³⁶

Curran was asking for a more multi-layered and interdisciplinary approach to media history. A recent example of this is Hendy's history of Radio Four, which is, as he says, 'a *cultural* history by necessity', dealing with not just all aspects of the BBC and Radio Four (i.e. the content, the institution, internal politics, policy, the listeners, etc.) but also British society itself.³³⁷ Hendy, for example, describes the turmoil of the 1960s: the 'summer of love'; cultural, moral and political issues; campus sit-ins, civil-rights and

³³² O'Malley, T. (2002). 'Media History and Media Studies: aspects of the development of the study of media history in the UK 1945-2000'. *Media History*, 8, 2, pp. 155-172. p. 170.

³³³ Curran, J., (2002a). *Media and Power*. London: Routledge. Also see: Curran, J. (2002b). 'Media and the Making of British Society, c. 1700-2000'. *Media History*, 8, 2, pp. 135-154.

³³⁴ Curran, J. (2009). 'Narratives of Media History revisited' in Bailey, M. (Ed.), *Narrating Media History*. Oxon: Routledge.

³³⁵ Curran, op. cit. p. 149. (2002b).

³³⁶ Ibid.

³³⁷ Hendy, D. (2007). *Life on Air a History of Radio Four*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 8 (Emphasis original).

anti-war protests. Britain itself was seeing social change, it was not only the BBC and what would be Radio Four that was developing: ‘In an era of rapid cultural change, many of those building the new Radio Four knew that their greatest challenge was to keep something of the Home Service heritage whilst moving with the times’.³³⁸ Thus the question that he then asks is, how did the BBC and Radio Four position itself in all of this? A similar dilemma has been identified in my literature review: the changing image and role of women, and the domestic sphere, in the post-war period and the debate that followed. The question is again, what was the BBC’s position in this? Did the Corporation lead or follow these changes? Is the media a mere reflector or an actor in social change? Hendy, in common with others, such as Scannell, Curran and Jean Seaton, suggests that it is always both.

Finally, a slightly different point, made by Lacey in her thought - provoking article on the future of radio studies, was to think of radio ‘as both “History” and “Historian”’.³³⁹ She suggests that radio can be used as a tool (as she puts it) to unfold other histories and questions about society in general, since the programmes themselves and their content reveal prevailing attitudes, values and mentalities present at the time. As Marwick has stated, when discussing the media: ‘these sources are very rich for attitudes, assumptions, mentalities, and values’.³⁴⁰ The starting point for this study, the literature review, was divided into three sections covering, three areas of historiography: first the general, more political history of post-war Britain and particularly the notion of a post-war ‘consensus’. The second strand is women’s history and the revision of the post-war woman, suggesting that the period was more complex than previously assumed. The final part covers media history and specifically radio. These three frameworks really helped to develop my ideas and to raise further questions about women’s post-war radio and as in this case, the BBC in the post-war period.

The degree to which media history now encourages this multifaceted approach has been articulated in a list of recommended areas of research identified recently by Seaton. You need to look at the history and the events themselves, i.e. the historical context. Then the broadcasting institution itself: from the inside. What were, for example, the

³³⁸ Ibid. p. 35.

³³⁹ Lacey, K. (2008). ‘Ten Years of Radio Studies: the Very Idea’. *The Radio Journal – International Studies in Broadcast and Audio Media*, 6, 1, pp. 21-32. p. 27.

³⁴⁰ Marwick, A. (2001). *The New Nature of History: Knowledge, Evidence, Language*, Basingstoke: Palgrave. p. 168.

relationships between the producers and management, within the institution? You want to get a feel for what it was like working there. But the outside is just as crucial; how did the institution relate itself to the world outside, for instance to politics? Finally, the creative part, the programmes, as Seaton writes, ‘how does good broadcasting get made?’³⁴¹ She continues: ‘you see how broadcasting makes arguments, how styles develop, how it addresses audiences’.³⁴² By bringing all these aspects together the history becomes multi-faceted and it is just as much about radio as society itself.

This study, then, though primarily concerned with broadcasting history - more specifically the BBC and its women’s radio and its relationship to listeners – the study is also interested in aspects of women’s history. Looking at women’s radio experience, as listeners and broadcasters, the nagging question then is, how (and if) the BBC reflected the changes that were taking place in British post-war society in regards to the roles of women? In this sense, the intention is to contribute towards work within women’s history. So it is therefore worth mentioning a few methodological ideas and thoughts from work that has focused on women.

Women’s history and media history

Though media history is, of necessity, multifaceted, the focus of this particular study remains the role of women and women’s radio in the post-war era. The growth of women’s history and its development as a field of interest has been described as an ‘evolution from feminism to women to gender; that is, from politics to specialized history to analysis’.³⁴³ While women’s historians in the 1970s and 1980s were struggling to establish women’s history as an academic field in its own right, and battled with how to meet the challenge of re-writing women’s history so as to insert it into general, mainstream history, one of the main debates within the discipline in the 1980s and 1990s was the introduction of ‘gender’ as a separate category for analysis.³⁴⁴

Joan W. Scott argued, in her now famous work, that it was not enough to look at women’s experiences on their own, or just use ‘women’ as a category. Instead, gender

³⁴¹ Seaton, op. cit. p. 153. (2004).

³⁴² Ibid. p. 156.

³⁴³ Scott, J. W. (2001). ‘Women’s History’ in Burke, P. (Ed.), *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*. Cambridge: Polity. p. 44.

³⁴⁴ For a further discussion of the debates and developments see Scott, op. cit. (2001); also Morgan, S. (2006). (Ed.). *The Feminist History Reader*. London: Routledge.

should be used. Gender, she argued, is something socially and culturally constructed: male and female identities therefore change over time and place. Scott further explained that, ‘gender offers both a good way of thinking about history, about the ways in which hierarchies of difference – inclusions and exclusions – have been constituted, and of theorizing (feminist) politics’.³⁴⁵ Scott’s thinking was very much influenced by the turn to language (inspired by Michael Foucault and Jacques Derrida), which, ‘was a response that cut across disciplines in the humanities to what came to be known as “poststructuralism”’.³⁴⁶

Gender analysis has had a huge influence on women’s history but it also caused much concern and debate. For example, given that the term gender is relational, as Scott highlighted, ‘one could not conceive of women except as they were defined in relation to men, nor of men except as they were differentiated from women’.³⁴⁷ This raised worries among women’s historians who felt that once again the subject of ‘women’ were put to the side and this would therefore undermine the study of women’s history. As June Purvis and Amanda Weatherill made clear; “gender” becomes an academic euphemism for “women”, making it more ‘acceptable’ within the academic world.³⁴⁸ There was a fear that gender history was another way of writing a ‘male’ history, thus the need to still focus on women’s history and women as subjects. Purvis and Weatherill argued that using gender as the category diminished the experience of women, ‘struggling to define themselves and better their lives in particular historical contexts’.³⁴⁹ It is now clear that the fields of women’s history and gender history are both flourishing and very much alive. That, today there is an interchange rather than a rivalry between the two. As Joanne Bailey, says: ‘the crucial point is that if students engage in gender history they engage in women’s history and vice-versa’.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁵ Scott, J.W. (1988). *Gender and the Politics of History*. New York: Columbia University Press. p. 10.

³⁴⁶ Melman, B. (2001). ‘Changing the Subject: Women’s History and Historiography 1900-2000’ in Zweiniger-Bargielowska, I. (Ed.), *Women in Twentieth Century Britain*. London: Longman. p. 27.

³⁴⁷ Scott, op. cit. p. 56. (2001).

³⁴⁸ Corfield, P. J., Purvis, J., and Weatherill, A. (2006). ‘History and the Challenge of Gender History’, in Morgan, S. (Ed.), *The Feminist History Reader*. London: Routledge. p. 126.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Bailey further observes how the boundaries between women’s history and gender history are becoming even more blurred and that this is evident in journals and other secondary material, as she says: ‘Widely used textbooks with gender in their titles are in fact frequently organised around women, their life cycles and their concerns. The reading lists of courses on gender history, for which such textbooks are intended, are made up as much from studies of women as from those of masculinity, or theoretical and conceptual works. Monographs and edited collections regularly use both ‘gender’ and ‘women’ in their titles and thus reviewers frequently discuss developments of both fields of history in thematic reviews.’ In a sense the two fields are complementary and Bailey argues that more collaboration is needed to make women in history visible and to promote new ways of enquiry (Bailey, Joanne. (2005). ‘Is the rise of gender history

While my focus is mainly women - this study is solely based on empirical research and situated within historical debates rather than a 'theoretical' or gender framework - the idea of 'construction' as highlighted within gender theory is useful.³⁵¹ The thesis is discussing the changing 'roles' of women or womanhood, and this deals with constructions; the idea of how gender roles, or as in this case, womanhood in post-war Britain was constructed by and through the BBC. As I discussed in chapter one, magazines tended to represent (construct) women as consumers. So how did the BBC, a public service entity, construct post-war womanhood? What did it mean, according to the BBC to be a woman at this particular moment? One of the main themes emerging from the research is the deliberate construction by the BBC, or, at least many of those working at the Corporation, of a 'responsible woman', which will be discussed throughout chapters three, four and five.

Additionally I would claim that it is also a piece of feminist research, since as Purvis and Wheatherill argue, not all women's history is feminist, but what unites all feminist histories is a desire to:

make women visible where they had been hidden in the "male" view of the past; an intention to challenge the traditional ways in which women had been represented stereotypically as wives and mothers who are supportive towards, and supported by, their menfolk; to present women as individuals in their own right, active agents in the making of history; to question the concepts and analyses of mainstream history [...].³⁵²

Does the research therefore fall within Curran's definition of the feminist narrative within media history? In 2002 Curran acknowledged that there were huge gaps in feminist media history, 'save for film and women's magazine history'.³⁵³ However in his more recent account of the state of media history, he makes the crucial observation

'hiding' women from history once again?'. *History in Focus*, 8, Spring.
<http://www.history.ac.uk/ihr/Focus/Gender/articles.html>, [accessed 11 June 2009]).

³⁵¹ The influence of theory has not only been noticed within women's history, but in history in general, and it has also raised questions within media history where the debate about its place is still taking place. For a general discussion of theory's place in history please see Burke, P. (2005) *History and Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity. For a discussion of social theory and media history please see O'Malley, op. cit., who explains that this tension lies in the origins of the two subjects, 'history' and 'media studies', since history has tended to be empirically based and media studies influenced by social theory.

³⁵² Corfield et. al, op. cit. pp. 124-125.

³⁵³ Curran, op. cit. p. 44. (2002a). For a critique of Curran's discussion of the feminist media narrative see Maria Dicenzo's response to Curran's article (2002b). (Dicenzo, M. (2004). 'Feminist Media and History: a response to James Curran'. *Media History*, 10, 1. pp. 43-49).

that the feminist narrative is now the fastest emerging form of media history. And over recent years the ‘pioneer version’, as Curran calls it, of the feminist narrative - which argued that popular media upheld and supported patriarchy – is now being challenged by a ‘revisionism’.³⁵⁴ This revisionism argues that women have been active in developing and creating their own media and that representations of gender have changed, following changes in society and, that although not a new observation, the ambiguity or “textual tension”, of media texts, is now given more attention.³⁵⁵ Some of these arguments have already been discussed in the literature review in the section on media history, so there is no need to repeat them here. But it is important to highlight Curran’s final observation. He says: ‘In short, a new way of viewing the media’s evolution has come into being that takes account of one of the most important social developments of the last 150 years – the advance of women. It requires media history to be rewritten’.³⁵⁶ This observation takes into account what has been the main drive within women’s history for the last thirty or forty odd years or so, to write women back into history.³⁵⁷ And this is one of the main motivations behind this thesis. Women broadcasters and women’s radio in post-war Britain is still one area whose history is missing and is thus important to recover, making visible what has been hidden. As Hilmes has argued ‘it is history writing that has consigned women to the sidelines, not historical events themselves.’³⁵⁸

As we have seen, the historiography on women and the media in the post-war period is going through a revisionist stroke, and therefore it is hoped that this study will be a valuable contribution to what Curran identified as feminist media history. The focus on women enabled me to concentrate the study on women’s programmes and talks or discussions that *featured* or were *produced* by women, and were related to women’s issues. I also decided to give special attention to women broadcasters. Thinking specifically of women and radio, there is then a third cluster of literature that has proved influential and useful for this thesis: existing histories of women’s radio and women in radio broadcasting. These have been discussed in chapter one in terms of their narrative

³⁵⁴ Curran, op. cit. p. 6. (2009).

³⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 7.

³⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 9.

³⁵⁷ For a further in depth discussion of the evolution of women’s history and the impact of feminism see for example Offen, K., Pierson, R. R., and Rendall, J. (Eds.) (1991). *Writing Women’s History. International Perspectives*. Basingstoke: Macmillan; Zinsser, J. P. (1993). *History and Feminism. A glass half full*. New York: Twayne Publishers Maxwell Macmillan International; also see Chapter Nine in Spongberg, M. (2002). *Writing Women’s History since the Renaissance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; and, Morgan, S. (Ed.) (2006). *The Feminist History Reader*. London: Routledge.

³⁵⁸ Hilmes, op. cit. p. 132. (1997).

content. Here I will extract a few of their methodological lessons that I have sought to work with in my research.

A few models on women and radio

There is a contradictory tension at the heart of much radio history. And this is best illustrated perhaps, by subtle differences in the work of two American scholars, Michele Hilmes and Susan J. Douglas, who have both looked at early and post-war American broadcasting, and developed different, but equally important perspectives, on the social effects of radio.³⁵⁹ Hilmes has explored the nature of radio as reinforcing the differences between us, such as race and gender, while Douglas proposes the power of radio to overturn and to be subversive. These two perspectives highlight what Susan Merrill Squier has called, 'the double-valenced nature of the radio medium itself: its power to enforce the status quo (especially consumerism and stereotyping of race, gender and ethnicity) and its capacity to provide a voice of resistance and critique'.³⁶⁰

Studies made looking at the American context suggest a choice of approaches. First, that we can think about radio as *text*, how radio programmes can help as a social document.³⁶¹ The second aspect is *production*: the idea of production and editorial decision making as a site of contest. One study that highlights the importance of the text in revealing attitudes and assumptions in society is McCracken's analysis of 1940s radio thrillers. According to her argument, the success of thrillers such as *Suspense* was in their ability to reflect the anxiety that was experienced during the war and later in post-war America. For McCracken, the Cold War 'made the home and the body sites of

³⁵⁹ Hilmes, M. (1997). *Radio Voices American Broadcasting, 1922-1952*. London: University of Minnesota Press; Douglas, S. J. (1999). *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination*. London: University of Minnesota Press.

³⁶⁰ Squier, S. M. (2000). *Communities of the Air: Radio Century, Radio Culture*. London: Duke University Press. p. 6.

³⁶¹ A good example of the importance of analysing the text is Lance Pettitt's article on the serial drama *The McCooeys*, broadcast on the Northern Ireland Home service between 1949 and 1957. His study focuses on 'Derek' one of the main characters, who was 'coded culturally as "queer" and was performed aurally in camp fashion' (p.207). In an attempt to create Ulster 'normality' a character like 'Derek' posed problematic and was eventually dropped from the serial. Pettitt shows how - even though the serial was a success - in a time of post-war morality and standards of wholesomeness, a character hinting sexual taboos was not acceptable. Indeed the author was urged to get back "en famille" (p.216). Again the historical context and circumstances are crucial to understand the development of a serial like *The McCooeys* and Pettitt shows how this was contested and tried on radio (Pettitt, L. (2005). 'Queering Broadcast Boundaries: an episode in Northern Ireland's radio history', *Media History*, 11, 3, pp. 207-224).

ideological warfare'.³⁶² Thrillers featured hysterical women, femme fatales, and housewives possessed by evil spirits; storylines implied domestic unhappiness, and fears of the 'career woman'. McCracken points out the importance of the historical context in analysing the text of these thrillers: the increase of women in the labour force during the war, and the heavily promoted domestic ideal of the housewife at home that followed. She says 'while the patriotic woman doing a temporary job was okay, the career woman was not'.³⁶³ McCracken shows that American radio and particularly the thrillers depicted the tensions present in society; the working or career woman set against the housewife; the adjustment back to post-war 'normality'. Her study also demonstrates that a richer analysis of female producers, the female audience and women's programmes, show that radio can work as a social document capturing the mood of the time. She concludes that 'the popularity of these programs suggest both the power of radio's domestic audience in shaping broadcasting content and the appeal and relevance of such dark stories for female audiences'.³⁶⁴ This approach suggests that a close analysis of the *text*, a programme itself, can reveal clues and give fruitful insight about attitudes and values at the time.

As for the second aspect, production, in her analysis of the thrillers McCracken touches upon one of *Suspense* female writers, Lucille Fletcher who wrote what has become one of the most successful radio dramas of all times, *Sorry, Wrong Number* (1943). The importance of women in radio, as writers or producers, has been highlighted by Hilmes who has looked at women's programmes in America in the 1930s and 1940s. Hilmes argues that in histories of broadcasting production has almost always been male dominated, or as she says 'so we are led to believe'.³⁶⁵ As it happens, women in America were interested and involved from the beginning in the development of radio.

By looking closer at three women broadcasters - Bertha Brainard, Irna Phillips and Mary Margareth McBride - one a head of commercial programming at NBC, one a innovative and successful serial writer and the last, an innovative magazine presenter and producer - Hilmes shows how by examining these women in detail we get a clue as to how radio was dealing with women and gender roles at the time. It also reveals that

³⁶² McCracken, A. (2002). 'Scary Women and Scarred Men: Suspense, Gender trouble, and Postwar Change' in Hilmes, M. and Loviglio, J. (Eds.) *Radio Reader: Essays in the Cultural History of Radio*. London: Routledge. p. 200.

³⁶³ Ibid. p. 193.

³⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 205.

³⁶⁵ Hilmes, op. cit. p. 131. (1997).

women as producers and broadcasters were very much involved in decision making and in the general development of radio as a tool of communication, information and entertainment.³⁶⁶ Hilmes argues that, ‘female writers and producers such as Phillips opened up a space on the public airways for a feminine subaltern counterpublic to emerge, who responded to the serials’ attempts to open up the restricted sphere of public discussion to topics usually dismissed as “women’s issues.”’³⁶⁷ Furthermore, by focusing on McBride and her career, Hilmes not only shows how her innovative style and nature developed the magazine format – something which would later inspire formats on American television - but also McBride’s close relationship to her audience as something that women’s radio in America in general pioneered.

Therefore in my own study it was obvious that neither the women nor their production culture within the BBC should be left. A focus on programmes gives valuable clues, as had been shown by academic such as McCracken; but the editorial and the production process, as Hilmes shows is just as important. A focus on individuals not only gives an insight into the industry but also the historical context in the way that it reveals assumptions about women as producers and women as audience members.

To summarise it is clear that the study needed a multilayered, interdisciplinary approach, as suggested by Briggs, Curran and others. But it has also been necessary to take into account wider events and developments taking place in post-war Britain during the period of interest so as to ‘connect’ British life to broadcasting and vice versa, as argued by Hendy and Lacey. The BBC and its programmes do not exist in some kind of vacuum: they are shaped by, and arguably, shape society. The study of women’s history enabled the thesis to adapt certain elements methodologically such as

³⁶⁶ For example, Brainard began her career in 1922 announcing for WJZ and later ended up being the stations manager. She eventually became director of commercial programming at NBC in the 1930s. Hilmes argues that Brainard early realised the potential in the female audience and she quotes Brainard who said that “because most women have the opportunity to listen in more hours every day than most men, I consider that their opinions on broadcasting are very important” (p. 138). And Brainard urged her superiors to realise that it was in the daytime that money from advertisers would be made. Hilmes further shows how Brainard’s expertise of the female audience did influence the development of commercial radio. In a memo to NBC Head of Sales division Brainard wrote, “I am looking forward to the day when you and the sponsors realize that the daytime hours are our more important selling times” (p. 139). Hilmes, op. cit. (1997).

³⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 160. Phillips claimed that her serials had a sense of realism, and that this was ‘inspirational, not depressing, to her listeners’ (p. 158). Her serials followed the suggested moral guidelines but Hilmes demonstrates that in these serials, ambiguities are present and even though the plot line resolves often following and endorsing traditional views on marriage and femininity, there is no doubt that they also possessed questions and opposition about a woman’s role (pp. 162-163). See Hilmes example of Phillip’s serial *Today’s Children*, which shows a rather reluctant acceptance to marriage by the main female character.

the aspect of ‘construction’, and to develop the main subjects under study: radio for and by women. The American models further demonstrate that both text and production should be examined and analysed, and questions about individual producers and textual meanings should be explored. In a sense the method or approach taken needs to be one which moves focus from the bigger broader issues and events, to the smaller details (individuals, programmes, departments etc.) and back out again. What follows is a discussion of the research questions and the archival sources.

Research Questions

The research questions for this project deal not only with the *specifics* of broadcasting, but also with the wider post-war period itself. The first set of questions is more related to radio and broadcasting practices. As identified in chapter one, scholars have suggested that women’s post-war radio ‘*reverted*’ in the post-war period, from having been more outward looking, back to stereotypical ‘women’s interests’. Is this a fair description? It was also highlighted by scholars that commercial media such as the women’s magazines tended – due to their commercial nature and reliance on advertising – to portray women mainly as *consumers*; women’s purchasing power was valued and women were thus guided in their role as home makers. Therefore, being a *public service broadcaster*, did the BBC represent women in a different way from commercial media at the time?

The literature discussed in the first chapter also identified changes in women’s life patterns. More married women were working outside the home, and part-time work became more popular; this alongside the abolishment of the marriage bar, gave women a greater choice to take up work. How was the issue of the working woman dealt with inside the BBC itself? Did a male or female working culture exist? Was there a debate within the BBC on policies regards to working women?

Because there has been so little research academically on post-war British radio and particularly key women’s programmes such as *Woman’s Hour* and *Mrs. Dale’s Diary*, we know very little of how these programmes contributed to or fitted in to the general development of British broadcasting, in terms of broadcasting practices or broadcasting’s relationship to the listeners. As was evident in American radio, the women’s audience, due to its spending power, helped to shape and develop the daytime

serial and the magazine format. But little is known about the impact of the British female radio audience or the programmes mentioned above. This poses the inevitable question, what *role* (if any) did women broadcasters and women's programmes in the post-war period play in the general development of radio and the BBC?

Finally the second aspect that the thesis addresses is with the wider context of the post-war period and some of the issues identified in chapter one. The overarching question is whether the complexity of the post-war period, as identified within other media histories of this period (of magazines, film and literature) can be traced looking at the BBC? Did the BBC *accurately reflect* the issues and debates with regard to working women and domesticity that were present in post-war society? This question would also serve to 'test' radio's potential to work as a 'social document' as discussed in the previous section. The purpose of the more specific questions to do with broadcasting practices and the wider question to do with the post-war period will enable me to produce new knowledge on women's radio and women broadcasters in the post-war period, and the development of the BBC, but also throw further light on women's role in post-war society in general.

In the Archive

My main method of enquiry has been archival research. Overwhelmingly this has been undertaken at the BBC Written Archives Centre (BBC WAC) in Caversham because the central focus of my thesis is on the thinking inside the BBC. But additional work has also been carried out at the Mass Observation Archive (MOA) in Brighton. Adding to the archival material are memoirs, and other literature from the period, which not only provides a vivid context but also personal details and nuance. It has been important to gain 'access' to the world inside the BBC, but also the world outside. Besides archival material, oral history has also been used. This was however never going to be a major part of the project, mainly due to the problem of age and health: many of the women who would have been useful to talk to are, unfortunately, now dead.

Given the scale of the BBC's own archival collection, selectivity has been vital. Building on the model suggested by Seaton I have selected a cross section of material that would cover a 'top down' *and* 'across' approach. The idea has been to think of the thesis as covering two areas that all focused on women and women's programmes:

‘journalism’ and ‘drama’. Since my main focus has been ‘women’ and women’s programmes, evidently it has been crucial to investigate programmes that were directly aimed towards the female audience, such as the factual *Woman’s Hour* and the serial or ‘soap opera’ *Mrs. Dale’s Diary*. What I was particularly interested in was if there were differences in the representations of women between the two programmes, one being a more factual/topical programme and the other complete fiction. The two programmes were also set within two different or separate production departments; *Woman’s Hour* was placed as a ‘Unit’ within Talks, while *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* was part of Drama. The possible departmental dynamics and impact on the programmes were therefore of further interest.

But to get a wider sense of the representation of women it was also necessary to investigate other programmes and more ‘general’ talks where topics related to women were discussed, or talks or discussions which featured women. Therefore more ‘topical’ programmes, features and talks were examined as well as some News files. For instance I worked through individual programme files for factual and topical programmes such as, *Focus*, *Questions of the Hour*, and *Friday Forum*. The programme files were extremely useful in giving an insight into the daily production routine and editorial process. They reveal the production and development of programme items, what was broadcast, and what was not. The files covering *Woman’s Hour*, *Focus* and *Mrs. Dale’s Diary*, proved to be particularly interesting and indispensable containing detailed memos and correspondence, valuable documents that have given a fascinating insight into the production: for instance memos between the individual producers as well as directives from management.

The individual programme files have turned out to be very useful in my research but the programmes were not produced within a separate entity; individual programmes were part of departments, for example Talks or Drama. So it was also necessary to look more closely at these and examine policies within departments. As will be discussed in chapter four and chapter five, the development and outcome of *Woman’s Hour* and *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* were heavily influenced by departmental policy issues, for example competition for staff and financial resources, and editorial freedom. As will be evident, in chapters four and five, internal dynamics within Departments did have a direct impact on the output. Therefore a great deal of time has been spent on going through policy files, editorial meetings, current affairs meetings, specifically within the Talks

Department and Drama. Furthermore, programmes like *Woman's Hour* and *Mrs. Dale's Diary*, were both broadcast on the Light Programme, so material that covered the Light Programme was also consulted, again as will be evident in chapter five for example Light Programme policy clashed with ideas and views within the Drama Department on what a piece of radio drama should really constitute. I also looked at various series of the R34 Policy files, which covered both individual programmes and departments but also the different services (i.e. the Light Programme).

Programmes need to be understood within the context of departments, then. But, in turn, the departments work under even broader hierarchies and groups. So to further get a sense of the 'institution' and the 'top' part of the Corporation, files such as the R1 series: Board of Government Papers, and R2 series: the Board of Management were examined. These files gave a broader insight into some of the 'bigger' issues that were facing the Corporation in the post-war years, such as how to deal with post-war austerity, political broadcasting, and the advent of British commercial broadcasting. Further, worries about communism and the Cold War were also traced. So these files were useful in getting an overall view or sense of what the BBC was going through in this period as a public broadcaster. Together all of the various material examined has been extraordinarily detailed; the richness gives a real sense of the working practices of the BBC, illustrating the *thinking* within the Corporation. Memos do not just give you an insight into the working practices and the decision making, they also convey emotions and personal experience.

To get a better insight into the *people* working at the BBC or taking part in programmes, contributor - and personnel files have been examined. The BBC WAC holds files on various contributors, for example in chapter three, Florence Hancock and Sir Stafford Cripps are discussed and their files reveal valuable information about the programme they were taking part in, such as its format and purpose. Also, discussed in the same chapter, *Focus* producer Marjorie Banks' 'contributor file' gave detailed information about her career, information I was not able to get elsewhere. These types of files together with the personnel files, were extremely useful: unveiling personal information on individual staff, such as how they progressed within the Corporation and how other workers perceived them, which consequently also disclosed information about employment in general at the BBC.

It was also important to get the *response* to the output, and the view from the ‘outside’, to see whether broadcasters were in tune with listeners’ needs and demands, whether programmes were popular or loathed. For example in chapter three, as will be explored in more depth shortly, it was clear that listeners did not always like what they were being told as with the programme *Focus on the Housewife*, an example where the BBC got it wrong. The type of issues that listeners also complained about, as evident in chapter five for example that Mrs. Dale was not ‘real’ enough also reveal or measure what was expected of a middle-class woman. The BBC did do its own listener research, thus, time was spent looking at files within the R9 series (Audience Research) and R41 series (Correspondence), and adding to these newspaper cuttings accessed at the BBC WAC, which included articles, opinion pieces and various examples of ‘letters to the editor’.³⁶⁸ The press cuttings for *Woman’s Hour* and *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* for example has not just enabled me to get an idea of how a programme was perceived and how they progressed in the view of the audience, it has also provided other material such as photographs and images, interviews with the producers or actors, and fan mail and correspondence. This has all added to the bigger picture of what went on behind the scenes of both programmes, the immense popularity of *Mrs. Dale’s Diary*, the worry about women ‘radio addicts’, and how the two programmes offered listeners companionship. There was also a number of listeners’ letters and comments found within the programme files themselves that allowed ‘voices’ from individual listeners to provide qualitative evidence of audience reception. Other sources that offered further qualitative information about the Corporation in this period have been used, material such as BBC’s staff magazine *Ariel*, *Radio Times* and the *BBC Yearbook*, and *BBC Handbook*.

Access has been granted to all material I requested. The period under scrutiny (1945 - 1955) was a time where most (if not everything) ever written or produced - anything that came in contact with the BBC no matter if it was producers’ memos, notes on sick leave, scripts or letters from various Ministries - was kept on file. As much as the BBC WAC archive contains records of a more ‘public’ nature - official documents, published reports and papers – that might speak in the voice of the ‘institution’, there is of course

³⁶⁸ Susan J. Douglas has made the important point when discussing her own use of radio magazines in the 1920s that for example, ‘letters to the editor’ are already selected and therefore offer a potentially biased sampling of opinion, however, they can still be of value since as she says, they still, ‘convey the multiple and sometimes conflicting attitudes toward radio programming, how the device was and should be used, the tensions between the desire for local versus national programs, and the like’ (p. 9). (Douglas, S.J. (2010). ‘Writing from the Archive: Creating Your Own’. *The Communication Review*. 13, 1, pp. 5-14).

more personal and individual material that steps away from the ‘public’ and the official; material that makes you, as the historian, an ‘unintended reader’.³⁶⁹ Small personal remarks, or everyday memos and correspondence: just ‘routine’ notes and communication that in the aftermath provide us with a resemblance of what daily happenings and procedures occurred. Therefore the bulk of the archival material itself has been very rich in quality and has given a very detailed insight into the daily workings - a *sense* or ‘flavour’ of what production and employment at the BBC would have been like at the time.³⁷⁰

Due to the sheer amount of material, however, and the selection process that unfolds, there are bound to be gaps. One such gap was created by restrictions on access to the personnel records. I was able to access some interviews from the BBC Oral History Project and a few personnel files (Mary Somerville, Janet Quigley and Isa Benzie). These files are usually limited by a thirty year restriction due to their personal content.³⁷¹ There was also the problem that some women, for example Jonquil Anthony - script-writer for *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* - were not senior figures and therefore no files existed or were no longer kept. This is also the problem with the actual *recordings* of the programmes. There are some examples left in the BBC Sound Archive, for example a few episodes of *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* and also extracts from *Woman’s Hour*, for example specific talks, which I have been able to listen to; but overall not many have survived.³⁷²

As mentioned earlier, besides archival sources, oral history has also been used – though much more selectively. As Seaton has argued, ‘Interviews animate the files, explain the real story and give you a flavour of the people and their concerns’.³⁷³ Many of the women who would have been of key interest have unfortunately already died. Therefore this was never going to be a major part of the project. Nevertheless I managed to speak

³⁶⁹ As Carolyn Steedman makes clear, ‘the Historian who goes to the Archive must always be an unintended reader, will always read that which was never intended for his or her eyes’ (p. 75). (Steedman, C. (2001). *Dust*. Manchester: Manchester University Press).

³⁷⁰ Having said that, this does not suggest a ‘superior’ insight and a perfectly accurate representation of events since that would probably be a first in historical writing (I will come back to this point further below).

³⁷¹ For example to see a personnel file the subject of interest has to have been dead for at least thirty years and there are also issues to do with data-protection if requiring access, which can pro-long the process of vetting.

³⁷² *Woman’s Hour* was transmitted live so hardly any whole recordings of programmes exist from this period instead mostly extracts of individual talks are left. Not many programmes were kept of *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* either, and the few that do exist are mostly incomplete. The transcriptions of both programmes have survived though and are nearly complete which has enabled me to get a sense of what content was covered and what the programmes were like.

³⁷³ Seaton, op. cit. p. 155. (2004).

to a few women who were working in Talks and Drama at the time. One of these was the former Controller of Radio Four, Monica Sims, who started her career at the BBC in 1953 as a Talks Producer on *Woman's Hour*. Her first hand experience of working for the BBC in the 1950s and particularly on a women's programme made her an obvious person to speak to. Her memories of the show and the period in general proved to be very useful and even though one testimony is not representative enough or sufficient to draw out any major conclusions, the interview still provided direction and added support to emergent findings. There was a better response in terms of finding people with connections to *Mrs. Dale's Diary*. I met with Kay Ennals who started to work for the BBC in 1944 and worked as a Studio Manager on the serial doing sound effects; various noises that would accompany the scripts (for example as she commented there was a lot of tea drinking in the serial). Adding to the interview with Ennals was also Betty Davies who started working for the 'diary' as Assistant Producer in 1953 and became the main Producer in 1955 when Anthony Kearey left. Both Ennals and Davies gave good detailed insight into the production of the serial, in terms of production and scriptwriting. Shirley Dixon played a character in *Mrs. Dale's Diary* in the 1960s and meeting her also provided an insight into the later part of the serial, its development in the 1960s before it came to an end.

To add a non BBC perspective further work was carried out at the MOA. The archive contains a vast collection of material mostly generated through social research conducted from 1937 to the early 1950s - such as surveys, questionnaires reports, and diaries - which was particularly concerned with British everyday life. Material found in the 'File Reports' and the 'Topic Collections' were of great interest. The File Reports are based on surveys and contain both the questionnaires (with questions and answers) and the written-up report by the researcher with a summary of findings. The Topic Collections are boxes containing a range of material (surveys, pamphlets etc.) on certain topics. For example I examined one on 'Radio' and one on 'Food' and the Food box contained various surveys on issues related to food and rationing. Questions were asked such as: '*What do you think of the Labour Government so far?*' or '*Do you feel you are getting enough of all the essential foods or not?*' and '*Which ones aren't you getting enough of?*'³⁷⁴ There are, some reservations to be made in using this material: some of the surveys used are quite small and thus not representative of the rest of the country.

³⁷⁴ Extracts from the Mass Observation Archive are reproduced with the permission of the Trustees of the Mass Observation Archive, University of Sussex (hereafter MOA). TC, Food 1937-1953, 6/6A, 18.2. 46.

But still there is no doubt that the material does give a sense of the mood and a taste of ordinary people's everyday life. MOA collections include raw material such as, personal writings by volunteers (as in diaries or day surveys), or, for instance observational work made by paid investigators. In comparison to the listener reports and research conducted by the BBC - which are more instrumental or functional, since the questions were asked to improve broadcasting - the value of the MOA and its archival material is that it offers a rich, qualitative 'non-institutional' record, and the material specialises on British everyday life.

Problems and critique: archival sources and historical writing

Using archives as the main source of material does pose its difficulties for historians since there is always, as Ina Bertrand and Peter Hughes point out, the disadvantage that records might be incomplete.³⁷⁵ Or there is the question of taking the material at 'face value', whether sources can be trusted or in a sense represent the 'true' version of events, and there is also the issue of selection. This is always a dilemma for the researcher relying on records and documents created in the past. Several responses have been offered to these criticisms.³⁷⁶

Marwick, for instance, argues that the way to look at history is to recognise that what historians produce about the past, 'is knowledge (open to discussion and debate as all knowledge is)'.³⁷⁷ He suggests that historians do not 'show us the past' or 'reconstruct the past', what they present is 'knowledge about the past'.³⁷⁸ Indeed, Marwick further argues that, 'everything written pertaining to history, secondary or primary, must be approached with scepticism and caution'.³⁷⁹ Or, as a historian you are, as John Lewis Gaddis has expressed it, 'mapping the past', i.e. 'the past is a landscape and history is

³⁷⁵ Bertrand I. and Hughes, P. (2005). *Media Research Methods: Audiences, Institutions, Texts*, Palgrave: Macmillan.

³⁷⁶ Also see Nicholas Garnham's response to post-modernist critique of history in chapter two, 'Media Histories, Media Theories, Modernity', in Garnham, N. (2000) *Emancipation, the Media, and Modernity. Arguments about the Media and Social Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³⁷⁷ Marwick, op. cit. p. 29. (2001).

³⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 40.

³⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 36. Marwick further suggest for example seven steps one should consider when analysing Primary sources: 1. Authentic? Is it what it purports to be?; 2. Date? When was this source produced? Relate to the time/topic/events of investigation?; 3. What type of source is it? A private letter? Official report?; 4. How did the source come to existence? For what purpose? What basic attitudes, prejudices, vested interests is the person likely to have? Who was it written for?; 5. Is the author of the source in good position to provide reliable information?; 6. How exactly was the document understood by contemporaries? What, precisely does it say?; 7. How does the source relate to knowledge obtained from other sources, both primary and secondary?(pp. 180-182).

the way we represent it'.³⁸⁰ No research claims to be definitive, it is always cumulative and provisional. As Gaddis further put it, 'historians have no choice but to engage in these manipulations of time, space, and scale – these departures from literal representation – because a truly literal representation of any entity could only be the entity itself, and that would be impractical'.³⁸¹

Investigating the quest for 'truth' and 'truthfulness', Bernard Williams, has pointed out that historical accounts in the past that claimed to tell the truth were undeniably 'biased, ideological, or self-serving'.³⁸² As a historian, you have to make sense of what there is; you have to interpret and analyse the material, you have to make do of what historical evidence exists. Williams answer is that there is no single 'truth' about the past. But, he adds, this does not mean 'there are no truths about the past, and it does not mean that interpretations, whatever they may be, need not be responsive to the demands of truthfulness'.³⁸³

It is not possible to go through every programme broadcast or minutes of meeting held during the period of investigation due to the sheer quantity of material held in the BBC WAC – there simply is not the time or space for it - selection is thus necessary. There is also the possibility that records are incomplete. It is thus perhaps impossible to get to the 'truth', however, as Williams argued, as a historian you have to make do with what you got, and do your best to be responsive to the demand of 'truthfulness'. Fortunately, the material examined at the BBC WAC has provided rich and detailed records, which do offer a unique insight and will therefore hopefully uncover as fully as it is possible a truthful interpretation of the BBC in the post-war period.

The time period

Why study the BBC between 1945 and 1955? Why these specific years? The period has a 'natural' start and end in the sense that in 1945, the war was over, and a new government had been elected. The victory of Labour sees a new era, with new legislation and policy. Even if the government was changed in 1951, with the

³⁸⁰ Gaddis, J.L. (2002). *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 33.

³⁸¹ Ibid. p. 26.

³⁸² Williams, B. (2002). *Truth and Truthfulness an Essay in Genealogy*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press. p. 1.

³⁸³ Ibid. p. 258.

Conservatives winning, these years are associated with austerity. There were still shortages and controls over consumption, and although the economic situation improved from 1953, rationing was not ended until 1954. As Zweiniger –Bargielowska has observed, the election in 1955 ‘was the last to be dominated by policies and rhetoric which originated during and immediately after the Second World War.’³⁸⁴ The year 1955 is often considered a ‘breaking point’ with a new Conservative government and a more ‘affluent’ society taking shape, and as Briggs notes, writing about the growth of youth-culture, pop music, and the arrival of angry young men: ‘after 1956 “things were not what they used to be”’.³⁸⁵ There is therefore a sense of continuity in terms of politics and events i.e. economical crisis, state control etc. But towards the end of the period there is also gradual change in terms of loosening of restrictions and a growth in consumption.

This is also a specific time period for the BBC. Briggs’ fourth volume spans the same years; it starts with BBC’s post-war reconstruction in 1945, and ends in 1955 with the arrival of commercial television which would see the end of the monopoly. During this period the emphasis was mostly on radio, particularly during Haley’s time as Director General, 1944 - 1952 (he was not in favour of television in stark contrast to his replacement Sir Ian Jacob who from 1952 would place greater emphasis on television in terms of resources and general development). In this period radio was still dominating – within the BBC – but also in terms of listening, which therefore made it the sole focus for this thesis. Television sales, and combined radio and television licenses would increase over the period and by the later part of the 1950s television had established itself.

To be able to focus on different aspects such as ‘journalism’ and ‘drama’, and to gain a fuller insight of the key programmes, the shorter time period allowed me to look at things widely but still be able to add depth. By 1955, a kind of ‘maturity’ has also set in the programmes I have looked at such as *Woman’s Hour* and *Mrs. Dale’s Diary*. Both programmes have by the mid 1950s become fairly established within the BBC. The period 1945 to 1955 therefore seem to be a useful and valid framework to work within.

³⁸⁴ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, op. cit. p. 242. (2000a).

³⁸⁵ Briggs, op. cit. p. 18. (1979).

So what then is the result? Rather than writing in a complete chronological narrative or base the chapters entirely on themes, the end result presented here, is based on the programmes. The reason for doing this was that I have wanted to put into the public domain a fuller picture of, almost an immersion in, each of the programmes examined, such as *Woman's Hour* and *Mrs. Dale's Diary*. To really get a sense of the departmental dynamics and the programmes' internal and external outlook, their content, the programmes' sense of working; daily routines, editorial, policy making and so on. I have wanted to explore these issues within each programme in depth. The chapters could of course have been structured in a thematic way. However, the risk in this was of losing a sense of the wholeness of the programmes and their development. Chapter three however is to some extent thematic since it looks women's representation on non-women's programmes. It also deals mostly with the earlier period, whereas the following chapters span the mid 1940s to the mid 1950s exploring the time period fully. Therefore a *sense* of chronology, or forward momentum, is also offered.

CHAPTER THREE

Getting it wrong, getting it right: Housewives on air

I note the obvious success of the recent type of “audience participation broadcast” which the BBC has developed. This reacts not only on actual transmission spectators but on listeners too. Transfer the lesson of this type of broadcast to the economic series. If the series could start, the entire public thinking “What a problem! but at least I know my part of it. I can get on with my bit of it. At last I see that I, personally, can do something to get us all out of this mess”. That is the thought which would breed the happiness and enthusiasm which are necessary to get us out of this mess. We will not emerge from this by remaining miserably fearful about the present position [...]. Sparks start forest fires and the country is in an inflammable state.

Unsigned BBC document on the economic crisis in Britain, 1947³⁸⁶

“A Housewife replies” – Must we have Joad? His latest rubbish that housewives have nothing to do because they do not draw water from wells or spin cloth is marvellous. Does the same reasoning apply elsewhere? Do farm workers sit and twiddle their thumbs because they have tractors, and do clerks do nothing because they use typewriters and adding machines?

Housewife (Purley), in *Radio Times*, 1945³⁸⁷

Nicholas has argued that during the war the BBC came to shift its focus from being a ‘provider of private or familiar enjoyment and self-improvement to a vital instrument of public information and entertainment.’³⁸⁸ Consequently the BBC had to adapt to the various tastes of the audience: it was no longer about one audience but about *several audiences*. This it was suggested resulted in a more ‘democratic’ service forcing a shift towards more popular tastes, more informal broadcasting and radio that reflected a

³⁸⁶ Unsigned document on the economic crisis in Britain in 1947, ‘Re. BBC Broadcast series on economic position’, 17 March, 1947, BBC WAC R51/55. (Emphasis original).

³⁸⁷ *Radio Times*, VOL 89, No. 1154, November 9, 1945.

³⁸⁸ Nicholas, S. (1999). ‘The People’s Radio: the BBC and its Audience, 1939-1945’ in Hayes, Nick and Hill (Eds.). *Millions like us?*. Liverpool University Press. p. 63.

range of voices, as opposed to just speaking for one part of society.³⁸⁹ It is possible to argue that in the post-war period the BBC further developed the more public and democratic approach that had begun during the Second World War. At a time of austerity, various fuel and dollar crises and the Korean War, the evidence examined suggests that to reach an audience – already exhausted and tired from information overload - the BBC had to develop new ways of communicating so as to be able to *engage* its listeners in public and political matters. This was particularly noticeable on the Light Programme, which has previously been known more for being the BBC's post-war outlet for popular culture and entertainment. What will be evident is that in the post-war period the Light Programme undoubtedly featured a lot of popular programmes but it also possessed a serious tone throughout the period under examination. Consequently the post-war years saw the development of new formats and new ways of radio broadcasting, many of which would feature ordinary people, and which attempted to keep listeners switched on to the BBC and particularly to the more serious programming still present and important in the post-war period. As emphasised in 1947 by the then Director General, Haley: '*We should remember we are broadcasting to ordinary people and as often as possible we should seek to use ordinary people.*'³⁹⁰ This meant that the deliberate strategy was often to feature 'normal' people talking about everyday life and by doing so encouraging the listeners to identify with the voice on air and therefore seek to be involved or take responsibility in public matters. It has been said that Haley had great admiration for the former Director General, John Reith, and his public service values.³⁹¹ The television pioneer Grace Wyndham-Goldie also said about Haley that he had a 'strong sense of moral

³⁸⁹ It is fair to say though that even if the BBC did include a range of programmes that featured 'ordinary' people, or working class voices, the service was still very middle class in tone.

³⁹⁰ 'Private and Confidential', P.5/47, 'The BBC and the Crisis' Note by the D.G, 30 September, 1947, BBC WAC R51/55. (My emphasis).

³⁹¹ Gorham, M. (1952). *Broadcasting and Television since 1900*. London: Andrew Dakers Limited. p. 233. Sian Nicholas has also written about Haley: 'His reorganization of the corporation in 1947 was the most wide-ranging since 1933, recentralizing important aspects of its administration and creating a new central board of management, which historians later came to consider one of the most important institutional developments in the BBC's history. He also set his stamp on the corporation's post-war output. No director-general since Reith had believed so forcefully in the cultural importance of broadcasting, but Haley recognized the need to maintain the BBC's wartime popularity even while answering widespread criticism that the wartime BBC had become too populist' (Sian Nicholas, 'Haley, Sir William John (1901–1987)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40156>, accessed 30 March 2010]).

responsibility.³⁹² The examples to be discussed clearly demonstrate this desire by the BBC to educate listeners and inform them of a sense of duty and social responsibility.

One implication of the use of ‘ordinary people’ was that women, as housewives, were often present on air - not just in programmes aimed at the female audience but in other programmes covering political, public and current affairs. The home or the domestic sphere was becoming politicised - but it could also be argued that the reverse was also happening; politics was becoming domesticated influenced by the home, the personal, everyday life. In the 1930s, as Moores has observed, housewives became ‘monitors’ of the private sphere,’ or were seen as the ‘state’s delegate’. It could be argued that in the post-war period it was the housewife impacting on politics. Paul Betts and David Crowley who studied the post-war home in Europe, point out that post-war expectations about domesticity and the home were further stimulated in Europe during the war, ‘as symbols of longed-for normality and prosperity became even more precious amid consumer rationing and wartime hardships.’³⁹³ Thus, there are important links and connections to be made between domestic life and political culture in Europe after the war: the outcome was that the domestic sphere and the world of politics were becoming intertwined, and boundaries between the public and the private were becoming more porous.

The chapter thus sets out to examine the representation of women in ‘non-women’s’ programmes.³⁹⁴ The examples tell us something about the BBC’s representation and construction of the post-war housewife. What follows is a discussion of the portrayal of women as ‘responsible housewives’, or kinds of citizen housewives who actively took an interest in public life. The housewife was frequently present in the BBC’s post-war service as a representative or voice speaking up for women’s experiences. For instance, in the year of crisis, 1947, she appeared in various talks and discussions. One of these entitled ‘Ways and Means. Shopkeeper and Housewife’ was looking at the situation

³⁹² Goldie who clearly admired Haley could therefore not understand his resentment of television which during his time as Director General strived for recognition (p. 45). (Wyndham-Goldie, G. (1977). *Facing the Nation Television and Politics 1936-1976*. London: The Bodley Head).

³⁹³ Betts, P., and Crowley, D. (2005). ‘Notions of Home in Post-1945 Europe.’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40, 2, pp. 312-236. p. 222. Betts and Crowley therefore makes similar conclusions to Langhamer, and her idea that that the home was crucial in post-war re-construction.

³⁹⁴ The definition or category used here, ‘non-women’s’ programmes, is perhaps slightly misleading, since the use of words might suggest that women were not the main target audience for these, or that they did not feature women. This is not the intention. What I mean is that these programmes were not advertised or billed *as particularly* for women, as ‘women’s programmes’, as such, rather they were programmes listened to by men and women, and aimed at both sexes.

from a consumer's point of view and featured a Mrs. Winbourne who talked of her shopping habits and experience of finding food. The programme also featured her daughter, Mrs. Burrows, who is also introduced as a housewife but who also works in a factory. She talked about the problems of finding food when, due to factory work, one can only shop on Saturdays.³⁹⁵ During the post-war period, many housewives became members of various women's organisations. The National Federation of Women's Institutes and The Townswomen's Guilds grew in size.³⁹⁶ As Giles argued women could speak politically as *housewives* thus giving them a certain status.³⁹⁷ This is very much apparent in the programmes examined. As will be demonstrated, radio offered a public space where women's voices could be heard; as housewives, women were given a voice on a public medium. However, having 'a housewife' on air clearly roused a set of problems. The perception of the housewife was sometimes demeaning. Some attempts clearly underestimated the intelligence of the housewife portraying her as a woman in need of education, and the *working woman* was also striving for recognition. Thus, the examples suggest the importance of letting women *speak for themselves*.

The first example discussed in detail is an episode from *Focus*, which was a new series - a dramatised construction of factual events first broadcast on the Light Programme in October 1946. Its transmission time was 9.30 p.m. and it lasted for half an hour. Described in a press release to *Radio Times* as, 'a new series spotlighting key topics of the day, presenting in radio dramatic form, subjects like oil, bread, coal, the Press, which affect the daily life of every citizen', the first programme was on 'Drink'.³⁹⁸ The episode examined here, *Focus on the Housewife*, was broadcast in January 1948, and covered problems and obstacles that the housewife had faced over the years and asked what the new year 1948 would hold for her. The second example is a series of three programmes broadcast in October 1948 on the Home Service, *How are we Doing?*,

³⁹⁵ Programme As Broadcast Transcript, 'Ways and Means. Shopkeeper and Housewife', 19 June, 1947, Home Service, BBC WAC.

³⁹⁶ Hinton, J. (1994), 'Militant Housewives: the British Housewives' League and the Attlee Government', *History Workshop Journal*, 38, pp. 129-156. p. 131.

³⁹⁷ I have already discussed Betty Friedan's particularly critical view of the housewife. In the British context, in the 1970s, sociologist and feminist Anne Oakley's work raised similar debates about women's relationship to the domestic. Oakley early highlighted women's own feelings toward housework; the dissatisfaction and monotony. Oakley further emphasised that women's domesticity was associated with low-status work and that this gendered division upheld women's oppression and therefore the housewife had to be liberated. The label 'housewife' did have a negative connotation which, had to be rejected (Oakley, A. (1974a) *The Sociology of Housework*. New York: Pantheon Books; Oakley, A. (1974b) *Housewife*. Penguin Books. (First published by Allen Lane)).

³⁹⁸ Memo from R.D. Smith to D.F, 5 September, 1946, BBC WAC R19/377/1.

which was a public discussion between members of the public and political or public figures, therefore allowing various voices to be represented and heard.

The two chosen studies are both interesting from a broadcasting perspective in the sense that *Focus* was an attempt by the Light Programme to introduce topical issues and explain them in an easy way; it was aiming for the ‘less educated’ listeners. *How are we doing?* was introduced as a new experiment or format, to keep the interest of the listeners in the state of the nation. They are both good examples of what appears to be an attempt by the BBC to introduce more serious programming to popular networks. These two examples were both transmitted in 1948 and dealt with aspects of the economic crisis and austerity. Although different in style – one a scripted dramatisation and the other a non-scripted public discussion – they were both responses to the need to explain and deal with the austerity and economic decline of the post-war period. One, a broadcast on the ‘lighter’ service the other on the more ‘serious’ Home Service, their tone and style is naturally different. But they both offer topicality, and they both aimed to engage listeners, making them part of a public debate.

The chapter therefore not only discusses the role and representation of women in such programmes, but also demonstrates how the BBC dealt with the challenges caused by austerity. It is an example of radio’s role as a public forum where important issues could be openly discussed and listeners’ voices heard. The material, however, also reveals questions of a political consensus, or rather the role of the BBC in supporting policies set out by the Labour government. Rather than emphasising the discontent, for example, felt by middle-class housewives on rationing (since the post-war experience was different depending on class) the BBC reinforced the notion that for most people the situation was better. This is not to suggest that the BBC was in favour of the Labour government as such. *Rather*, it suggests a notion of public service broadcasting as it was pro-claimed in the 1920s and 1930s by its first Director General John Reith: to unite social classes, and maintain stability, to work in what it understood as the *national interest*.³⁹⁹ During the General Strike in 1926, Reith declared: “‘Since the BBC was a national institution and since the Government in this crisis was acting for the people [...] the BBC was for the Government in the Crisis too.’”⁴⁰⁰ In a time of crises such as the immediate post-war years, it appears that the BBC was aligned with the government.

³⁹⁹ Scannell and Cardiff, op. cit. pp. 1-19. (1991).

⁴⁰⁰ Reith cited in Curran and Seaton, op. cit. p. 120.

The material reveals the role of the BBC as a national broadcaster trying to maintain social stability.

Putting the housewife into focus

Focus was a weekly series first broadcast on the Light Programme in 1946. It highlighted topical issues and current affairs. *Focus* was, according to Briggs, together with *Radio Newsreel* and *Curtain Up*, an attempt by the Controller of the Light Programme, Norman Collins, to introduce a more serious element to the network.⁴⁰¹ In 1949, T.J. Waldron, a features producer made a crucial note about the programme series in a memo addressed to ‘All Features Producers’ about the general aims of *Focus* as a programme: ‘The important thing is that it should be of wide general interest, preferably with a strong controversial element, and in some way or other affecting the majority of people.’⁴⁰² The series was thirty minutes in length, broadcast in the evening and presented in a *dramatic* form: actors were used to enact real life situations. Often, too, a narrator was used. Being a dramatic feature, although topical – including current affairs items - the series was produced by the Features Department (rather than the Talks Department).⁴⁰³ Although dramatic in form, it was clear that the programmes emphasis was on *fact* rather than drama. For instance, the BBC Yearbook outlined its aims: ‘to present the essential facts of matters of topical interest so as to afford a basis for informed argument by the ordinary citizen.’⁴⁰⁴ This notion was further reiterated by *Focus*’ script editor, Dennis Barden who in a report on the series made clear, ‘the need to inform should come first; the temptation to “dramatise” second.’⁴⁰⁵ The weight was on getting accurate and well-prepared information out to the public. Barden in the same report gave a very good insight into the job of the editor in the production process:

1. Sifting the many suggestions which reach the Focus office and seeking approval for those that appear to be suitable.

⁴⁰¹ Briggs, op. cit. p. 61. (1979).

⁴⁰² Memo from Mr. T.J. Waldron to All Features Producers, 21 March, 1949, BBC WAC R19/377/6.

⁴⁰³ The radio ‘feature’ had represented a more creative way of exploring and portraying reality, than a ‘straight’ talk. For example in the 1930s people like D.G. Bridson in his industrial feature *Steel* pioneered the combination of actuality, music and poetry. The Features Department was part of the Drama Department until 1945 when the two were separated and Features was made into its own department. The radio ‘feature’ was according to Laurence Gilliam (Head of the Department in 1945) ‘Owing something to the radio play, something to the radio talk, it is a synthesis different in essence from either’ (Gilliam cited in Briggs, op. cit. p. 702. (1979)).

⁴⁰⁴ BBC Yearbook. (1949). p. 125.

⁴⁰⁵ ‘Report on Focus series’ October 1949 - March 1950, 31 March, 1950, BBC WAC R19/377/8.

2. Exploring agreed subjects – by initiating research, and by discussions with organisations and individuals.
3. Briefing the author on the ground to be covered, and inviting him to submit a synopsis.
4. Discussing the synopsis with the producer and giving the author the go-ahead.
5. Checking the script for fact and balance and passing to the producer.
6. On the day of production, the Editor is at hand to make any alterations or cuts. He makes a last minute check to ensure that no facts in the script have become out-dated.⁴⁰⁶

Because the series needed confirmation of accurate information it had to constantly be in contact with – and rely on – outside organisations, both private and public. As noted by Barden: ‘*Focus* is a documentary with immense influence, and many organisations and political parties watch it with an eagle eye; Each [sic] programme involves so much detail that a routine by which a producer accepted a script from the author and put it on the air would be dangerous.’⁴⁰⁷ In the same report it was also noted that the programme did not make good use of actuality but it was highlighted that there was a lot of potential to include it in the series.⁴⁰⁸ This seems to have been the case and it seems as if in 1951 experiments were made to address the issue of actuality. For instance, the series had done a programme on ‘Meat’ and it was noted from the Controller of the Light Programme, Kenneth Adam, that he thought the programme was ‘first-rate’, and that ‘the real people were such a nice change from the hack actors.’⁴⁰⁹ In the same file there is evidence that suggests that they had recorded actuality in the regions for this particular programme; a farmer in Scotland; in Birmingham a Mrs. H. Henson; a farmer in Manchester, but these recordings also seem to have been mixed with a cast, since a list of actors for the programme does exist.⁴¹⁰ Individual *Focus* programmes were rehearsed the same day as transmission and broadcast ‘live’ (noticeably following a script) on the transmitted time.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ The use of ‘actuality’ had been pioneered in the North Region and particularly Manchester before the war, by producers such as Olive Shapley who set out in a recording van and recorded ordinary people and their experiences. For further discussion of her work and impact on the development of feature making, see Shapley, O. (1996). *Broadcasting a Life: The Autobiography of Olive Shapley*. London: Scarlet Press; Scannell and Cardiff, op. cit. pp. 333-355. (1991).

⁴⁰⁹ Memo from Controller, Light Programme to AHF, 21 February, 1951, BBC WAC R19/377/10.

⁴¹⁰ Note from Drama Booking Manager, 21 February, 1951, BBC WAC R19/377/10.

⁴¹¹ This seems to have been the case with *Focus on the Housewife*, which I will analyse below. There is a note on the transcript that rehearsals took place on the same day from 3 p.m. onwards and transmission was in the evening at 7.45 p.m. Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Focus on the Housewife*, 23 January, 1948, BBC WAC.

Focus covered many different topics, for example, ‘Coal’, ‘Milk’, and ‘Immigration’ (1947); ‘Civil Service’, ‘Defence’, and ‘Public Houses’ (1949); ‘Psycho-Analysis’, ‘Thrillers’, ‘Mental Homes’, and ‘Communism’ (1950); clearly dealing with issues topical at the time.⁴¹² Although it did feature the occasional programme on international topics, *Focus* seems to have concentrated or been concerned more with domestic issues, in comparison to topics discussed on the Home Service which often dealt with foreign affairs.⁴¹³

It therefore clarifies the different approaches taken by the Light Programme and the Home Service: the Home Service audience were seen as more educated or middle-brow, the Light Programme audience as consisting mostly of lower middle-class and working-class listeners.⁴¹⁴ Overall, the Light Programme was listened to by the majority of listeners, so its programming was aiming towards a broader, less educated ‘mass-audience’. This ‘mass-audience’ also happened to consist mostly of women. In a Mass Observation report made in 1949 it was suggested that, ‘in the great majority of households, and under almost all circumstances, women are shown to be the main radio listeners.’ The exception was the Third Programme, where listening was evenly divided between men and women. The report also noted that the majority of weekday listening took place in the evenings.⁴¹⁵

Nevertheless, *Focus* seems to have covered topics both ‘light’ and ‘heavy’, whatever the topic, it meant that it had more responsibility to be informative and educational. A good example of this approach was *Focus on General Election* (1950) which presents a very detailed description of the whole election process – from who can stand for Parliament - to what happens at a polling station. ‘That’s how things happen at a General Election. [...] Of course there are different political principles and Party programmes at stake every time, and that’s what really matters. All we’ve tried to show you is how the

⁴¹² ‘Focus Programmes: Subjects (From October 1946)’, undated, BBC WAC R19/377/8.

⁴¹³ See Talks Home Service Minutes File, BBC WAC R51/234/1.

⁴¹⁴ Curran and Seaton (1997) suggest that the expected listening groups based on the population in the post-war period would divide into the three Programmes: the Third Programme: 6%; the Home Service 20%; and the Light Programme: 74% (Curran and Seaton, op. cit. p. 159).

⁴¹⁵ The scope was to conduct an enquiry into the radio listening habits of certain households in Nottingham and Plymouth with special reference to the “rediffusion” system available in those towns. Various districts and income groups were used (MOA FR 3105, ‘A report on radio listening and attitudes towards “Rediffusion” in Nottingham and Plymouth’, April 1949).

machinery works and how strictly everything is regulated.’⁴¹⁶ This educational approach was appreciated by listeners. It was expressed in one Listener Research report that, ‘the “Focus” method was an enjoyable, entertaining, and easy way of acquiring knowledge.’⁴¹⁷ According to the BBC it was seen as a successful programme: ‘Indeed, the immediate success of such a series as “Focus” [with] “its intelligent discussion of questions of the day, is sufficient indication that the public is by no means so sleepy and woolly-witted in the evenings as some people would have us imagine.”⁴¹⁸

The *Focus* programmes often featured various representations of women. Housewives, particularly, were often heard. For instance in the programme on ‘General Election’, a Mrs. Thompson was asked the ‘woman’s view’ of the suggested (fictional) candidates.⁴¹⁹ In another *Focus* episode on ‘The Cost of Living’, the narrator explained to a housewife the difference in the cost of living and the standard of living, but in the same episode a factory girl is also featured.⁴²⁰ This was not the only examples, for instance, in a proposed script on the ‘Civil Service’ for the Light Programme it was suggested it would open along these lines with, ‘preferably a woman – a housewife, taxpayer etc’:

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| Enquiring Person: | So you’re a Civil Servant, are you? I’ve been reading a lot about you in the papers lately and, as a housewife, there are lots of questions I’d like to ask you. |
| Civil Servant: | I’ll do my best to answer any questions you may care to ask. Perhaps the more you know about the Civil Service the better you’ll be able to understand its problems. |
| Housewife: | Everybody talks about Civil Servants – but what exactly is a Civil Servant? ⁴²¹ |

The presence of the housewife is not strange considering her ability as a ‘character’ on radio - able to link to or identify with the female members of the audience. It also suggests the importance that was placed on her, as playing a wider part in society. But as the extracts above illustrates the programmes offered a rather patronising representation of the housewife as a person in need of education, someone who needed

⁴¹⁶ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Focus on General Election* (1950), 31 January, 1950, BBC WAC.

⁴¹⁷ LR/50/606, 3 April, 1950, BBC WAC R19/377/8.

⁴¹⁸ BBC Yearbook. (1947). p. 36.

⁴¹⁹ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Focus on General Election* (1950), 31 January, 1950, BBC WAC.

⁴²⁰ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Focus on the Cost of Living*, 12 December, 1950, BBC WAC.

⁴²¹ ‘Suggested Treatment for Civil Service Script’, [no date], 1948, BBC WAC R19/377/4. This was possibly for a *Focus* production since the item was found in *Focus* programme files.

explanation – who could not tell the difference between the ‘cost of living’ and the ‘standard of living.’⁴²² What follows is a closer examination of the first example, *Focus on the Housewife* investigating both the reception of the programme, script itself (the text), and the production process behind it.

Unconvincing and unrepresentative

In 1948, three years after the end of the war, for many civilians the situation was just as bad as during the war. For women, daily life consisted of endless queues, counting points and coupons, and the introduction of ‘exotic’ food such as whale meat, and a strange, tasteless fish from South Africa, ‘Snoek’, which did not prove popular with the public. The previous year, 1947, had also seen one of the worst winters in Britain, a combination of shortages of coal and bad weather having created what was to be called the ‘Fuel Crisis.’ The BBC was during this time very much aware of the build-up of discontent among the public and it broadcast several programmes on the ‘Crisis’. In a ‘Special Board Meeting’ on the ‘BBC and the National Crisis’, held in September, 1947, one of the BBC Governors, Lady Reading had stressed, ‘the importance of explaining the crisis to the ordinary people and telling them what they personally could do in the way of food preservation, salvage, and national savings and how important such individual action was.’⁴²³ Another Governor, Miss Ward, suggested that ‘encouragement and enlightenment were needed, particularly on the world food situation, inflation, coal and incentives.’⁴²⁴ *Focus*, which in 1947 dealt with various issues related to the ‘Crisis’ was in one sense a response to this editorial ‘steer’.⁴²⁵

Focus on the Housewife was broadcast on Friday the 23rd of January, 1948. The billing in *Radio Times* read, ‘perhaps more than any other individual today the housewife has been praised, blamed, criticised and exhorted. It is around her that the family life of the

⁴²² This rather patronising treatment was also prevalent in other programme material (not just within *Focus*). For example in 1946, producers working on the topical *Questions in the Air*, proposed a discussion on ‘Inflation’ or the ‘Cost of living’. Speakers suggested were for instance, ‘a woman who does not pretend to know the facts about inflation and the cost of living, but who is concerned about the rumours she has heard, and desires information’. It is difficult to believe, after years of rationing and continued austerity in the post-war period, that women often in charge of the household shopping would have been ‘in need’ to find out information about inflation and cost of living (Memo from Godfrey James to Mr. David Bryson, 6 May, 1946, BBC WAC R51/435).

⁴²³ ‘BBC and the National Crisis’, Minutes of Special Board Meeting, 18 September, 1947, BBC WAC R1/15/1.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Mr. Norman Collins to DG, ‘Crisis material in the Light Programme’, 17 September, 1947, BBC WAC R34/454/2.

nation revolves. This programme examines her achievements, her problems and tries to discover what 1948 holds for her.⁴²⁶ The programme contained a range of voices, mostly women, discussing their experiences of austerity and rationing. It also featured extracts from speeches made by Churchill and Attlee, and information on the food and dollar situation. Programmes in the *Focus* series were heard by a listening panel⁴²⁷ which, on average awarded *Focus*, an ‘appreciation’ index figure of 64 (where anything above 70 was considerable excellent). Tonight’s episode was, however, less than well received. According to the listener research report, members of the listening panel thought the programme disappointing: overall it scored the lowest figure in the series at that point: 49. The report included the observation that: ‘although a small group thought the acting natural, the large majority complained that the dialects were not genuine or that the housewives were unconvincing.’ One listener said that it ‘sounded like members of the “Rep” playing the parts’ and a pharmacist wrote: ‘the first production of this type and series that I have really suspected the non genuineness of the characters.’ The report further read that the reaction to the script was below average and even though few of the listeners had thought the points brought up successfully chosen, many others were disappointed, ‘at the aspects not covered and the opportunities missed.’ There were further complaints of the ‘strong flavour of propaganda’ and this helped to make - in the view of the listeners - the programme even more unconvincing and unrepresentative. ‘Some thought that the programme was merely used as a vent for grievances and were not impressed by statistics or the condescending attitude of the man replying to the housewives’ complaints.’ One member of the panel, a teacher said, ‘I do think you tried; but don’t think you succeeded in getting the housewife into “focus”. I expect they all feel that you only tried to flatter and cajole them into fresh effort.’⁴²⁸ The transcript was introduced by a Narrator, who started by saying:

Perhaps you may be wondering why, in a news top-heavy world, it is the inoffensive housewife that we’re trying to get into focus at this particular time.

⁴²⁶ Billing, BBC WAC R19/377/4.

⁴²⁷ According to R. Silvey (1974) after the war, the BBC’s Listener Research Department set up six regional listening panels, representing each region with 600 members in each. The members of these panels were recruited through announcements on air or in *Radio Times*. The panels would then be sent questionnaires in regards to the listening (Silvey, R. (1974) *Who’s Listening? The story of BBC Audience Research*. London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd). The report concerning *Focus on the Housewife* was based on 721 questionnaires returned by listeners ‘who heard all or most of the broadcast’ and another 108 questionnaires by panel members who had listened to half or less of the broadcast (LR/48/144, 5 February, 1948, BBC WAC R9/54/7).

⁴²⁸ LR/48/144, A Listener Research Report ‘Focus on the housewife’, 5 February, 1948, BBC WAC R9/54/7.

Is it because she, too, is headline news? No – she has been “news” ever since 1939 when the British public wonderingly handled their brand-new ration books for the first time. Yet this is an excellent time to talk about the housewife. It’s the beginning of a new year – a significant year, as we know, for both Britain and the world – and therefore it’s the traditional time to take stock; to remember the triumphs of the past; to consider its failures; to speculate and to hope about the future, the obstacles it will undoubtedly present, and the prospects of contentment and prosperity which it may hold. How many housewives must have sat down quietly during the first few days of January to examine their problems and to wonder, how 1948 will compare with 1947.⁴²⁹

This clearly shows the importance placed on the domestic sphere and the housewife at this time as a morale booster. The programme appears to have been an attempt to brighten up the day and the future prospects of the next coming months.

But what was it about the broadcast that was so bad? Why was the programme in the listener’s view such a failure? Answering this involves, to begin with, an unearthing of the programme’s pre-production. The suggested title, *Focus on the Housewife*, was first mentioned on the 14th of January when, Marjorie Banks, the General Editor of *Focus*, wrote to her colleague Nesta Pain, ‘when this [The Housewife] has been typed, I should be very grateful if you would let me have a glance through it, just to see if there are any snags.’⁴³⁰ On the date of transmission, however, it was acknowledged that the script, written by Stephen Grenfell, was unsuitable. Although Grenfell had already attempted a rewrite, it was deemed not fit to broadcast by Banks, and the producer Pain.⁴³¹ Indeed, the memo stated that ‘in order to present a “*Focus on the Housewife*” tonight, Miss Banks has completely re-written the script, and I think in the circumstances you will agree that we are under no obligation to pay Stephen Grenfell the remaining half of his fee.’⁴³² Grenfell had submitted his script at the last minute and even the Controller of the Light Programme, Tom Chalmers, was distressed:

The script that Mrs. Pain showed me on Thursday, one day before transmission, was of the poorest: precious few facts, mostly moans, cheap remarks (even by the narrator) and occasionally inaccurate ones. She herself was extremely unhappy about it. I said that we had to put it on the air if at all possible as we could not risk a further *Focus* cancellation, but that she should ask D.T.

⁴²⁹ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Focus on the Housewife*, 23 January, 1948, BBC WAC.

⁴³⁰ Memo from Miss Banks to Mrs. Pain, 14 January, 1948, BBC WAC R19/377/4.

⁴³¹ Memo from Features Organiser to Mrs. Dickinson, 23 January, 1948, BBC WAC R19/377/4.

⁴³² Grenfell had agreed a fee of 48 guineas, of which half had been paid in advance as a commissioning fee. Ibid.

[Director of Talks] to recommend an expert who could check the script for inaccuracies. [...] If *Focus* programmes are to be broadcast, we must have the utmost confidence in the scripts. That anything as bad as this could be submitted to me by a nearly helpless producer 24 hours before the broadcast really shakes me.⁴³³

Grenfell, born in South Africa and having joined the BBC after the war, was a freelance scriptwriter and playwright who wrote and narrated many radio documentary feature programmes. He is further described as a 'leading figure in BBC Radio during the 1950s and early 1960s'.⁴³⁴ In an investigation into what happened, Banks in her report made clear that she was not in favour of Grenfell's script. Indeed she was '100% against the idea suggesting "Birthrate" instead.'⁴³⁵ Banks herself had previously worked for the Commercial Radio Department at the London Press Exchange, where she wrote 'scripts for musical, magazine and dramatic programmes'. She had also worked as a journalist for two years at the *Daily Express*, and written articles for the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror*.⁴³⁶ In 1941 she sent in a radio drama script for consideration to the Drama Department, accepted by Val Gielgud, in which the characters were all men. Gielgud did not yet know that she was a woman, 'I make this point' she pointed out because 'I feel it demonstrates my ability to write objectively for men as well as women.'⁴³⁷ According to Thomas, Banks became quite a well-regarded feature producer who in 1950 toured America collecting material for a documentary series on America and Marshall Aid for the Home Service.⁴³⁸

Banks was on leave until January the 5th and was told by her secretary that the script on the 'Housewife' had been accepted and that she was asked to find a producer. It was agreed that Pain would take on the duty. Grenfell's script was received one week before the show: 'This script was handwritten on the backs of used paper. Neither Mrs. Pain nor I like to judge a script in this state. Mrs. Pain, however, read it and complained bitterly to me. I then read it and could only agree with her that it was dull, without facts, and appallingly written.'⁴³⁹ Pain, who is better known than Banks, had moved from

⁴³³ Memo from Chalmers to Director of Features, 23 January, 1948, BBC WAC R19/377/4.

⁴³⁴ Obituary Stephen Grenfell, *The Times*, 11 March, 1989. Grenfell worked as a scriptwriter on *Radio Newsreel* and he also worked with Richard Dimbleby on *Down Your Way*.

⁴³⁵ Report on Focus on the Housewife, [no date], BBC WAC R19/377/4.

⁴³⁶ Banks, Marjorie, script writer, 1939 – 1956, 16 September, 1941, BBC WAC RCONT 1.

⁴³⁷ Letter dated 16 September, 1941, Scriptwriter Banks, Marjorie, [contributor file] File 1, 16 September, 1941, BBC WAC, 1939-1956.

⁴³⁸ Thomas, op. cit. p. 210. (1994).

⁴³⁹ Report on Focus on the Housewife, [no date], BBC WAC R19/377/4.

Liverpool to London in 1942 with her 15 year-old daughter. She had been awarded a First from Liverpool University and would also spend a year at Somerville College in Oxford.⁴⁴⁰ She had a strong historical interest and pioneered science programming. Even though she specialised in making programmes for the Third Programme, Pain was a key figure in introducing science to a more mainstream audience but without losing the creative aspect of a radio feature.

Banks was then promised by Grenfell a revised script by Tuesday the 20th, but, instead, a script, still un-typed and full of in-accuracies, arrived the day after. ‘The “spiv” language in which the original was written had become even worse.’⁴⁴¹ For example, ‘British stomachs rumbled in sympathy at the shape of things to come....’ or [narrator to housewives] ‘Hey! In full cry you all sound like an Eastern bazaar...’⁴⁴² The characters seemed unreal and Banks therefore re-wrote the script the following day, one day before transmission. In a memo to the Director of Features, Pain also expressed her annoyance: ‘the general effect was cheap and second-rate. The housewives, in particular, seemed to be presented as whining incompetents, without sense of responsibility or realism. The narrator appeared to hold them in well-justified contempt.’⁴⁴³ The *Focus* scripts in general did emphasise facts and was supposed to be researched and based on actual information. Pain, however, noted three inaccuracies at the first reading. To begin with, ‘it was stated that housewives have thirty points to spend in the month. The correct figure is twenty-eight. It is not hard to imagine the outcry there would have been if we had made as elementary a mistake as this.’ Then the script suggested that housewives were moaning at the high price of fish, but fish prices were about the same as before the war. And finally, and perhaps most shocking of all, a statement was made that ‘at a County Mental Hospital, the number of women seeking treatment had gone up 100% and this was attributed to the strain of present-day conditions.’ She continued, ‘Stephen Grenfell told me that he had seen this statement in a report of a County Mental Hospital. If this is so, it must be a freak phenomenon in that particular district; but the broadcast of this passage would certainly have given the impression that it was universal.’⁴⁴⁴ The script had to be completely re-written by the two producers and it was also checked by an expert from *Woman’s Hour*, the daily

⁴⁴⁰ Obituary, Nesta Pain, *The Independent*, 27 July, 1995.

⁴⁴¹ Report on Focus on the Housewife, no date, BBC WAC R19/377/4.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Memo from Pain to Director of Features, 29 January, 1948, BBC WAC R19/377/4.

⁴⁴⁴ Memo from Pain to Director of Features, 29 January, 1948, BBC WAC R19/377/4.

women's magazine programme. The final corrections to the script were not done until 6 p.m. on the day of the broadcast. She ended 'My cast worked extremely well under these adverse conditions and I think they did all they could with such unsatisfactory material.'⁴⁴⁵

A missed opportunity?

Despite such frantic efforts, the programme as broadcast clearly failed to satisfy a majority of listeners surveyed. The programme featured a range of voices including men and women, young and old. For instance the listener was introduced to Mary, in the transcript described as 'middle-aged, sensible, straight, understanding'; and Joan, a young housewife around nineteen or twenty; Damaris, an elderly woman in her seventies described as 'frail' and 'cultured'; a Mrs. Roberts, a fifty-six years old miner's wife from North Lancashire; Charlie, the husband to working-class Kate, who has a large family and lived on the third floor in a large, 'dirty old Victorian' house. After the introduction the Narrator asks, 'just who is the British housewife?', and concludes that there is no such thing. The Narrator, however, is then interrupted by Mary who points out that, 'There are ten million of us. Ten million! It doesn't matter whether it's a castle, mews flat, crofter's cottage, or country mansion – there's always a housewife running the home.' And from this point on the listener is introduced to a range of voices; all giving their view and sharing their experience.

One of the recurring themes is that the situation after all is perhaps not so bad, that it could be worse. For example we are first introduced to Joan, the young housewife who grumbles about her flat: 'it's so dilapidated you have to be jolly careful you don't sneeze too hard', to which the Narrator replies 'Well, I suppose its poor comfort to say you could probably find others worse off.' Joan further complains about the food situation, to which Mary replies: 'Oh, nonsense, my dear. There's plenty of fish about. [...] I'd say that was the one big thing the Ministry of Food has done lately – provide fish for the housewife.' After Mary and Joan's discussion of rationing and the general food situation the Narrator asks whether there is less food available or less variety, and suggests that 'Perhaps a glance at a Government White Paper might be interesting. Government White Papers don't sound like interesting reading, but let's see what information is contained in one called "Food Consumption levels in the United

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

Kingdom’’, dated August last year.’ Then a ‘voice’ comes in explaining that less meat, bacon, eggs, sugar and fat, is being consumed than before the war, but that we now consume more fish, more flour ‘in spite of bread rationing’, cheese and coffee.

The ‘voice’ goes further on to explain various facts and figures related to consumption and again to emphasise that the situation could be a lot worse. The listener is informed by a woman from North Lancashire, Mrs. Roberts, who says: ‘[...] I’ve got three children. They’re growing up now. But they were little before the war. And some of us didn’t have much of a chance then you know. My husband is a miner and I worked in mill [sic] since I was twelve. I’m 56 and still working – a factory now.’ Mrs. Robert’s continued talking about having time for both housework and factory work. Quite often she only got two to three hours sleep, and for her family grumbling is unheard of. As a miner’s wife, she is used to queuing: ‘queuing for dole and queuing for free soup at soup kitchens [...] Sometimes thinking of days before the war we feel as if there’s plenty of everything – a proper feast for all.’ Later in the transcript another miner’s story is brought up. Johnnie, from the ‘Information Office’, which, in the transcript has helped the Narrator finding unusual housewives, tells the story: ‘Then there was that dreadful report, always from Wales, from a mining village, about a wife who lives with her husband, a small son and another son working down the mine, in a two-bedroomed cottage infested with rats. And she was going to have another baby.’⁴⁴⁶ It seems that the message the transcript was trying to put across by using these working-class or miner’s families, was to show that things could really be (or have for many been) worse off than they really were. We should not complain because for many families things were actually now better.

It is reasonable to see the *question of class* as important to our reading here. The middle-class experienced higher taxes on earnings and a lot of families could no longer afford servants or the comfortable lifestyle the interwar years had provided.⁴⁴⁷

McKibbin has suggested that for the middle-classes the Attlee government represented loss.⁴⁴⁸ It meant that the usual middle-class living standard suffered and declined. As he explains:

⁴⁴⁶Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Focus on the Housewife*, 23 January, 1948, BBC WAC.

⁴⁴⁷ The situation of the middle-classes was even proposed as a topic for debate in 1949: ‘Proposed discussion on the position of the Middle classes’, which was due because of the ‘great deal of public interest and discussion centred around the position and future of the Middle Classes.’ Roy Lewis book, *The English Middle Class* (1949), was given as an example of a book ‘extensively reviewed at the moment’ (Memo from Pollock to AHTD (Mr. Newton), 24 June, 1949, BBC WAC R51/118/7).

The greyness of life after 1945, the narrowness of social and cultural choice, the restrictions upon personal consumption, affected the middle class no more than the working class but the comparative effects were more harsh. Many of the attributes of life commonly regarded as essential by the middle classes either disappeared or became almost impossible to retain. For the first time in British history the comfortable classes had to run their households unassisted and for many this particular rite of passage was painful.⁴⁴⁹

According to a report made by Mass Observation, on middle-class housewives in London, concerned with housekeeping expenditure, it was reported that they were particularly worried about the 'rising cost of living and difficulties of balancing a budget.' It was observed that: 'Housewives who were conditioned to their job in the era of middle-class plenty between the wars have a very different attitude to present difficulties, from younger women who have no such standards of comparison – but, as far as this small survey shows, their housekeeping habits are much more alike.'⁴⁵⁰ In an accompanying, survey Mass Observation also noted that the feeling of discontent depended on the age of the housewife; there was a clear difference in attitude depending on generation: 'The older housewife, however her actual incomes compares with the younger housewife, has much clearer memories of the time when "you could buy ten oranges for a shilling instead of four!"' and her attitude to the present restrictions and reshaping of the middle class world is correspondingly more anxious and resentful.'⁴⁵¹ In this sense, it is possible to see the *Focus* programme as aimed, at least in part, at middle-class women and their critique of post-war austerity. As will be evident, the script goes further into the importance of recognising the improvements that had been made by the government and yet again the idea of 'togetherness' was highlighted. It makes clear that women were still having a hard time and that this had been recognised by politicians. First, an extract from a speech by Churchill made in 1943 was played out, praising women's efforts during the war. This was followed by an extract from a speech by Attlee: 'I know how great a burden has been and is being borne by the

⁴⁴⁸ According to McKibbin: 'those on annual incomes of £250-£700 in 1938 paid 2.7 per cent of it in tax; but in 1947 12.7 per cent. For those on annual incomes of £700-£2000 the figures were 9.3 per cent and 22.7 per cent'. McKibbin, op. cit. p. 63. (1998).

⁴⁴⁹ McKibbin, op. cit. pp. 64-65. (1998).

⁴⁵⁰ MOA FR 3161, 'A Report on the London Middle-Class Housewife and her Housekeeping Expenditure', September 1949. It is worth noting that the survey was quite small, only 250 women participated and only from London so the sample is not representative for the country as a whole. But it does nevertheless provide an insight and gives a sense of personal experience and opinion from individuals at the time.

⁴⁵¹ MOA FR 3160, 'A report on the London Middle Class Housewife and her Food Problems, September 1949.

women in our homes. It would not be human if they did not grumble a bit, but I am sure that they will continue to show the *patience* and cheerful acceptance of difficulties as they have done in the past.’⁴⁵²

In the programme, the conversation soon went back to food again. Joan, the younger housewife, complained about the recipes suggested by the Ministry of Food printed in the papers. She was swiftly confronted by another ‘woman’, possibly middle-class since she never used to cook, who praised them: ‘Oh, I think they’re good’. She continued that she spent most of her time in India and did not therefore know how to cook at all, and after coming to Britain had had to learn how to cook using ration books: ‘those Ministry of Food pamphlets and their recipes in the papers have made all the difference to me. My husband really enjoys his meals now.’ The conversation moved to the difficulties of feeding a family, especially children. A ‘man’ (in the script described as ‘elderly’), said, ‘Still, children do get hot meals at school these days and they get extra milk, and expert free medical attention at borough clinics, and orange juice and cod-liver oil for the little ones. I’m told that the average weight of children has gone up since before the war. That’s something surely?’ He is supported by a woman, Janet, who said ‘Yes, I grant you that. We could be a lot worse off’ and she continues to praise the food they were given at Christmas: ‘I must say this for Mr. Strachey, he did give us a feast at Christmas time.’

In the end, a woman made the point that perhaps, ‘we do complain a bit too much’, and that this complaining brought about the activities of the British Housewives’ League:

- Husband: There’s no doubt about that. Compared with others we’re doing all right old girl. And it’s not..it’s not dignified. Take that business of the Housewives’ League last year..at the Central Hall or wherever it was. That was just a gift for newspapermen to make the most of..
- Reporter: (Towards mike, excitedly) I went there for my paper. What a battle! It was worse than the spring sales before the war.
- Secretary: What happened?
- Reporter: The works. Continuous disorder practically. The League’s President fainted. Storms of protest when the chairman took the

⁴⁵² Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Focus on the Housewife*, 23 January, 1948, BBC WAC. (My emphasis).

chair. There were a couple of battles for the microphone at odd times. Booing, catcalls, a real Dannybrook Fair.⁴⁵³

The British Housewives' League was an independent, mostly middle-class, non-party organisation, although it was often linked to - and supported by - members of the Conservative Party and the right-wing press. James Hinton has made the important point that the media coverage the League generated played an important part in the vibrant rebellion. One of the League's biggest rallies was at the Royal Albert Hall in June 1947, where around 7000 women were present. However soon after the opening speech 'a well-organized force of Communist women' interrupted the meeting, consequently chaos and tumult was unavoidable.⁴⁵⁴ In general the League protested against queues and austerity. One of the biggest issues was the introduction of bread rationing in 1946. In the *Focus* transcript, after the critique of the League, a woman tried to defend the attack by suggesting that men have noisy meetings too, and she referred to Parliament. But she was snubbed by - according to the transcript - a 'husband', who said that all the protests did not make any difference; bread rationing, which the British Housewives' League was particular critical about, *had worked*. He ended: 'But what I'd like to see you women - you housewives - do, is for you to sit down quietly and sensibly and tabulate a list of the things you want.'⁴⁵⁵

By criticising the activities of the British Housewives' League as 'not dignified' and further suggesting (for the second time) that bread rationing had worked, the transcript appeared to offer fairly unequivocal support of the Labour government and its policies on post-war rationing and austerity. It was not just noted that John Strachey, the Minister of Food at the time, had offered a Christmas feast, but also that the Ministry of Food had done a good job of providing fish and that their recipes in the press were successful. It was also suggested that children were better off and the working-class, here mostly represented by miner's families, had faced harder times in the interwar period. Hinton has suggested that 'the housewives revolt remained predominantly a middle-class phenomenon.'⁴⁵⁶ The experience of post-war austerity was different depending on your class background. Whereas the working class population were to some extent better off, the middle class had to adapt to a new life where previous

⁴⁵³ Ibid. (Emphasis original).

⁴⁵⁴ Hinton, J. (1994), 'Militant Housewives: the British Housewives' League and the Attlee Government', *History Workshop Journal*, 38, pp. 129-156. p. 146.

⁴⁵⁵ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Focus on the Housewife*, 23 January, 1948, BBC WAC.

⁴⁵⁶ Hinton, op. cit. p. 137. (1994).

privileges were now not available. The transcript therefore also resonated with what was discussed at the September 1947 'Special Board Meeting' on the 'BBC and the National Crisis', where what was highlighted by Miss Ward was the importance of 'encouragement'.⁴⁵⁷

Towards the end of the feature, the discussion yet again turns to present conditions and what has been said in recent weeks about food. One of the women seems to be reading a list: 'Butter returns to three ounces. An extra ounce of margarine as from February the second' before the narrator referred to the Ministry of Food Official (for the second time), which again emphasised the world food problem and the dollar situation in Britain and the need to export goods: 'we haven't enough dollars to pay for all the food which we could buy. The only way we can earn dollars is to export our goods to Canada and America and the Argentine and the other dollar countries.'⁴⁵⁸ The Ministry of Food Official also emphasises that in general more families were better off now. As to whether things would improve, 'that largely depends on whether we all pull our weight, on whether coal output continues to go up, so we can export coal to pay for our food, on whether the Lancashire girls will spin us more cotton goods to buy food with; it depends on production generally; and it also depends, of course, on whether the Marshall Plan goes through.'

The transcript, however, was not only telling women not to grumble or to moan. At a few places it actually offers a *critique* of the low value that was evidently placed on domestic work, and the lack of nurseries available. However this passage proves ambivalent. On the one hand, it could suggest an undertone of feminism or at least the possibility that women's domestic work should be recognised; on the other hand, it could also be read as teaching women to work harder:

Elsie: Yes – there's the time factor. That's a point I was going to make. There's no such thing as a 40-hour week for housewives. I suppose in the vast majority of homes in the kingdom the housewife is the first to get out of bed in the morning and the last to go to bed at night.

⁴⁵⁷ 'BBC and the National Crisis', Minutes of Special Board Meeting, 18 September, 1947, BBC WAC R1/15/1.

⁴⁵⁸ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Focus on the Housewife*, transmitted 23 January, 1948, BBC WAC.

- Joan: No, they never dream of cutting our working hours down. You should have seen what my husband showed me in one of the first copies of the National Coal Board's Magazine!
- Man: (Reads) "A survey shows that adoption of the five-day week is becoming more general. We are marching towards the day when mankind will be free of the curse of Saturday morning labour."
- Joan: Marching all right...in queues.⁴⁵⁹

Another woman, Mary, makes the critical point that according to a ruling made years ago: 'work is work only when it is paid' and therefore housework must be seen, 'as being a labour of love.' And the discussion then turns to the kitchen, in a sense the 'working environment' of the housewife:

- Johnnie: Now that we're building houses all over the country again, a lot more care ought to be given to the kitchens of all those houses before it's too late. Too often the kitchen is the worst room in the house – it's badly lighted, and too small, and the shelves are too high up. No, as a woman spends so much of her time in the kitchen it ought to be a large airy place...
- Joan: With a frig [sic] and a washing machine.
- Mary: Ovens at eye level with glass doors, and adjustable lamps.⁴⁶⁰

The conversation continues with details about the 'ideal' kitchen and the discussion demonstrates the change in material standards and the possibilities now available. The furniture designer Robin Day has made the point about the importance of the domestic setting in this period, how it was linked to a better future with new kitchen styles and gadgets: 'We naively felt that modern town planning and enlightened design of buildings and products would transform the environment and enhance the lives of people [...] Kitchens gained a new importance with fitted storage units and appliances, vinyl floors and plastic laminate work surfaces.'⁴⁶¹ The transcript suggests that the dream of a better future was also manifested in the kitchen and could improve the life and work of the housewife.

A final point is made about day-nurseries. Johnnie critically asked what has happened to the day-nurseries, suggesting they have almost disappeared in peace-time. 'We'd have

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid. (Emphasis original).

⁴⁶⁰ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Focus on the Housewife*, 23 January, 1948, BBC WAC

⁴⁶¹ Day, R. (1997). 'Foreword', in Chamberlain, Rayner and Stapleton, (Eds.). *Austerity to Affluence British Art and Design 1945-1962*. London: Merrell Holberton. p. 6.

more time for everything – *even for a job* – if someone could take our children sometimes.’⁴⁶² The reply to all of the requests and the critique was a reference to the dollar question, ‘Well, certainly, all those make a reasonable enough list – and the answer to most of them will be found when we get the dollars!’⁴⁶³ Was the purpose of this passage to offer a little feminist critique or to just encourage women to work harder? It was clear that the issues of undervalued domestic work, day nurseries and ‘ideal’ kitchens were questions that the producers *felt* were of concern to women. It was Pain and Banks who had re-worked the script – neither of them your typical housewife, but clearly both independent and ambitious career women: Pain who was separated from her husband was described as ‘a woman of the Nineties in the Fifties: a scholar of questioning outlook who also hugely enjoyed the novels of Dick Francis and was keenly interested in racing.’⁴⁶⁴ Banks was also ambitious and enjoyed a career with the BBC. In 1946 working for a series titled *Window on Europe*, she travelled across Sweden and wrote about the programme as a look to the future, since Sweden had achieved the type of social reforms and, ‘built the sort of town halls, museums, art galleries, factories and homes that we in the war-battered countries hope to see one day, some day’, as she put it, ‘Sweden is one great Ideal Homes Exhibition and Industries Fair. But with this difference – people are already living with this attractive furniture and working in these model factories. It’s not a case of “Sweden can make it”’; Sweden has made it.’⁴⁶⁵

Banks and Pain tried to address some of the issues that they believed concerned women and without their re-workings the script would without a doubt have failed even more and probably not have had any ‘feministic ambiguities’. But still the attempt failed, some of the concerns were never explored in depth. Andrews, for example, who has written about the National Federation of Women’s Institutes in the post-war period and their campaigns to improve life and conditions for rural women, has argued, ‘In a sense the personal may become truly political when women are involved in making political demands based on a desire to improve their own material circumstances in which they live and labour.’⁴⁶⁶ The programme therefore failed to really investigate some of the issues that were important to the housewife. Instead the programme steered away from

⁴⁶² Programme As Broadcast Transcript, *Focus on the Housewife*, 23 January, 1948, BBC WAC. (My emphasis).

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Obituary, Nesta Pain, *The Independent*, 27 July, 1995. Dick Francis was an English novelist interested in horse racing and specialised in crime and mystery novels.

⁴⁶⁵ *Radio Times*, ‘My 1000-mile tour of Sweden’ Marjorie Banks, 1 November 1946.

⁴⁶⁶ Andrews, op. cit. p. 83. (1997).

controversy and complied with what it seemed to have been aiming to do; to emphasise the food and dollar situation and by doing so legitimate the policies set out by the Labour government. *Focus on the Housewife* contained a mix of voices, mostly women, but also men. It was presented as to represent a range of people and views and in this way bring together a patchwork of experiences but clearly, many of the comments in the listener report, which suggested the programme propagandist in tone and unconvincing, were valid.

The citizen asks

The self-explanatory *How are we Doing?*, was broadcast in October 1948. This was a three part series on the BBC Home Service concerned with the current situation of post-war austerity and looking specifically at the economic situation. Each programme was forty-five minutes long and consisted of speakers each giving a twenty minute presentation. This would then be followed by questions to the speaker by a 'jury': ten men and two women (both housewives), who were chosen to represent the public. The same panel would take part in all three broadcasts and would get the chance to question public figures about the state of Britain. The three guests specially invited to answer these questions were Florence Hancock, the Chair of the Trades Union Congress; Sir Frederick Bain, President of the Federation of British Industries; and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Labour's own Sir Stafford Cripps. None of the files examined revealed the reasons for the choice of speakers, but the guests were chosen as being 'ex officio' and thus able to give authoritative answer to the main question.⁴⁶⁷ Hancock was a trade union leader who had worked hard to organise women in industries and campaigned to improve conditions for women workers. She was, however, not only interested in engaging women in the trade unions, she was a member of the general counsel of the TUC from 1935 and 1958, and was made chair 1947-1948.⁴⁶⁸ She showed a strong loyalty towards the Labour leadership in the post-war period, and her knowledge and experience of industrial organization made her a regular member on various committees and investigations (she was for example a governor for the BBC between 1956 and 1962).⁴⁶⁹ Hancock was also invited a year later to *Woman's Hour* as a special guest

⁴⁶⁷ Hancock, Florence, Talks, Misc (Hancock A-Z), 16 August, 1948, BBC WAC RCONT 3.

⁴⁶⁸ June Hannam, 'Hancock, Dame Florence May (1893-1974)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31193>, accessed 18 Sept 2009].

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

talking on 'My Job.'⁴⁷⁰ Bain was a chemist and industrialist, 'always a staunch Liberal', and an energetic president of the Federation of British Industries from 1947 to 1949.⁴⁷¹ Cripps has been described by Hennessy as a 'puzzle, a man of paradox.'⁴⁷² He came from a Conservative background but became a leading Socialist. Cripps took over as the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1947 and during the winter, 1947 to 1948 the British economy grew. Whether this was down to Cripps personally is hard to tell.⁴⁷³ Peter Clarke has observed that during the fuel crisis in 1947, even if Cripps' plan for the crisis did not really succeed, he was one of the few 'ministers to emerge with an enhanced reputation.'⁴⁷⁴ Cripps' strategy was to increase taxes and prioritise exports and capital investment. He firmly believed in the need to reduce personal consumption in Britain, to boost the export drive. Meaning that the 'needs, comforts, and amenities of ordinary consumers' came last.⁴⁷⁵ During the years of financial decline and crisis he was naturally a well-known figure.

What is interesting about this series is its effort to involve the ordinary person. In contrast to *Focus*, which was a dramatic feature, *How are we doing?* was presented as an unscripted discussion with real people – members of the public. It was a kind of a predecessor to today's *Question Time*. It was advertised in *Radio Times* in September - about a month before the broadcast:

Sir Stafford Cripps, on October 28, will take part in an informal stocktaking of the economic position of this country, and after a short statement will reply to questions put by members of a studio audience drawn from a variety of occupations and interests. Earlier in the same week Miss Florence Hancock of the T.U.C., and Sir Frederick Bain, of the Federation of British Industries, will be heard answering questions in this short series on *How are we doing?*⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁰ Booking Requisition, 17 January, 1949, Hancock, Florence, Talks, Misc (Hancock A-Z), BBC WAC RCONT 3.

⁴⁷¹ J. D. Pratt, 'Bain, Sir Frederick William (1889–1950)', rev., *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30535, accessed 18 Sept 2009].

⁴⁷² Hennessy, op. cit. p. 194. (2006a).

⁴⁷³ Ibid. p. 339. Hennessy argues that some improvements were due to Hugh Dalton's last budget as Chancellor before Cripps took over.

⁴⁷⁴ Clarke, P. (2002). *The Cripps Version. The life of Sir Stafford Cripps 1889-1952*, London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press. p. 480.

⁴⁷⁵ Peter Clarke and Richard Toye, 'Cripps, Sir (Richard) Stafford (1889–1952)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32630, accessed 18 Sept 2009].

⁴⁷⁶ *Radio Times*, 24 September, 1948.

In the invitations to Hancock and Cripps it was also stated that that this was ‘a new form of broadcast which will be something like a press conference.’⁴⁷⁷ The invitation highlighted the need to develop new formats and seek ways to engage (and entertain) the listener: ‘The task of interesting a large audience in the basic facts of the nation’s economy gives us here much concern, and we have some evidence for thinking that *exhortation and elucidation* no longer have much appeal for the listener. However the job remains to be done and we must seek new techniques. I have hopes that we may have hit on something that will give new vigour to the theme.’⁴⁷⁸ There is also an emphasis in *Radio Times* on the ‘citizen’, and the idea of radio as offering a public forum where ordinary people are able to voice their concerns. The billing for *How are we doing?* says, the programme is one in which, ‘The Citizen asks the Government, industrial leaders, and organised labour’. On the front page of the magazine, accompanied by an image of four ‘industrial’ looking men working in what seems to be a car factory near a harbour, a small piece of text outlined the format of the programme. It said the programme was ‘an attempt to use radio as a means of putting men and women representative of the ordinary British citizen in direct touch with some of the people who take a prominent part in shaping and carrying out national policy.’⁴⁷⁹

Was the programme live? It appears so and other material suggests that unscripted broadcasting was something that was being developed. It is certainly noted in a memo from 1949, concerned with Talks on the Home Service, circulating an agenda for an upcoming meeting on unscripted broadcasting. The memo lists producers who have experience of the technique and items suggested for discussion such as, what is the ‘know-how’; for what programmes might this technique be used etc.⁴⁸⁰ Not surprisingly, the audience figures for these broadcasts were very high. The last two programmes both had a higher number than the normal listening figure: the final programme in the series, which was broadcast on a Thursday, had an audience figure of 20% (the percentage is based on a figure approximating to the ‘adult civilian population’, which in 1948 was estimated as 36 million), compared to the normal

⁴⁷⁷ Cripps, Sir Stafford Talks: 1939-51, 19 August, 1948, BBC WAC RCONT.

⁴⁷⁸ Hancock, Florence, Talks Misc (Hancock A-Z), 16 August, 1948, BBC WAC RCONT 3. (My emphasis).

⁴⁷⁹ *Radio Times*, 22 October, 1948.

⁴⁸⁰ Memo from Mr. Thomas Radley to Other Producers Interested, ‘Unscripted Broadcasting Agenda’, 12 August, 1949, BBC WAC R51/234/1. Briggs (1979) has also noted that, ‘more programmes were unscripted’ (p. 569), before 1955 (Briggs, op.cit).

evening audience on a Thursday of 10%.⁴⁸¹ The reason for its success may have been that the public figure under fire that evening was Sir Stafford Cripps. The series consequently generated a lot of press. The *Daily Mirror* wrote:

B.B.C. Steps Out!’ At last the B.B.C. breaks away from the tepid technique of prepared scripts, censored speeches, and opinions so nicely balanced that they can be guaranteed to offend no one. A new series called “How Are We Doing?” deals with matters of national interest on the basis of free speech[...] It is a bold and imaginative conception and gives us live broadcasting.⁴⁸²

And the, *Daily Herald*:

Cripps enjoys 30-min. Quiz’. Hands on hips, enjoying every minute of the broadcast, Sir Stafford Cripps, Chancellor of the Exchequer, last night answered questions fired by 10 men and two women on the last of the “How are we Doing?” series. For more than half an hour he faced his questioners [then cites one person] “When is Purchase Tax coming off household goods?” asked Mrs. May, housewife.⁴⁸³

As noted, the people taking part in the programme came from a range of backgrounds. Added to the two housewives were, for instance, a farm worker, a miner, a managing director, a journalist, a social scientist, and a bricklayer. Each programme opened with the speaker giving a general comment on the situation. For example, Hancock said:

I do not agree with those who say we aren’t getting on at all. I am certain, on the contrary that the country is making real and substantial progress towards recovery [...] Demobilisation of millions of men and women in our armed forces and auxiliary services was accomplished speedily and smoothly. The switch-over from war to peace production – an immensely complicated problem is now practically complete [...] Nobody has gone short of food and nobody need be searching hopelessly for a wage-earning job. We have none of the industrial conflicts or social disorders such as those which followed the first world war when prices soared; wages fell and unemployment became rife.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸¹ A Listener Research Report, BBC WAC R9/68/14.

⁴⁸² *The Daily Mirror*, 27 October, 1948.

⁴⁸³ *The Daily Herald*, 29 October, 1948.

⁴⁸⁴ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *How are we doing?*, Home Service, 25 October, 1948, BBC WAC.

The speech was then followed by the questions from the panel, sometimes a ‘voice’ which acted as a moderator was heard but mostly it was the panel members and the speakers that talked. In the first programme, Hancock was asked questions on the mobility of workers, infiltration of communists in the trade unions, the role of American and Canadian aid, and worries about national security (this question from John Carlton, a Schoolmaster):

How far do you think, Miss Hancock, that conditions of national security are going to affect industrial recovery? Because it seems to me that it was all right in the nineteenth century when we were on top of the world to be planning a brave new world, but in these days so much depends on what the fellow on the other side of the frontier’s planning, and if he’s planning guns while you’re planning butter there’s going to be a big bang.⁴⁸⁵

The questions reflected the feelings and atmosphere at the time, and in all three programmes, the discussion was quite open and critical. For instance in the third programme, Cripps was asked by an economist: ‘You’ve told us to use our brains and muscles. Does your socialist policy just boil down to work hard and save hard and if so what is there new about it and what is there original about it? [this was followed by laughter and applause].’⁴⁸⁶ And the social scientist raised worries on the moral and spiritual side: juvenile delinquency, mass gambling, emigration and ‘the amazing development of neurotic illness.’⁴⁸⁷

In this public and strikingly political discussion two housewives were picked to represent the female part of the population. The two women, Mrs. May and Mrs. Simpson, asked questions in all three programmes and not surprisingly they were related to the domestic sphere. However, although the questions were close to the home they are nevertheless political in nature. In the first programme, Mrs. Simpson, asked this: ‘Miss Hancock – I was wondering if a system of bonuses wouldn’t help to keep wages static, because, as the last speaker said, if prices are not actually soaring, they’re certainly flying very high, and wage increases are bound to be asked for. If bonuses

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ Programme As Broadcast Transcript, *How are we doing?* Home Service, 28 October, 1948, BBC WAC.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

were offered for higher production wouldn't it help to keep the balance between output and expenditure?'⁴⁸⁸ The issue of rising prices was further emphasised by Mrs. May:

Miss Hancock, in your speech you mentioned about slow and steady progress, but things seem to be so much worse for the housewife. Prices are still rising, as Mrs Simpson said, and we still find it impossible to buy a lot of things, and next year, it says in the [press] - and several members of the Cabinet have said so - it's going to be more austere and more worse [sic]. Well, are things going to get better in time? I mean, I can't afford to buy a lot of things I need. There's furniture and clothes - are prices going to drop so that people in my position of life can afford to buy them?'⁴⁸⁹

Hancock was sympathetic to the woman but suggested that she was probably not the best person to answer, 'you'd better direct that to tomorrow night, or to the Chancellor of the Exchequer'. Instead, Hancock made the point that although there are many shortages the, 'great mass of the people of this country, the working people, have more today than many of them had pre-war.'⁴⁹⁰ Again as in *Focus on the Housewife* the issue of class is brought up and the theme that many - the working people - are, relatively speaking in a better position than before the war. Hancock's answer (as in her opening speech) was also supportive of the current line of policies and politics implemented by the post-war Labour government.

The two women continued to ask questions related to their own (and by implication, many millions of other women's) experience. Mrs. May was worried about the nationalisation of steel and asked Sir Frederick Bain how this would affect the housewife: 'Since coal has been nationalised it's been 6/6d a ton now dearer, electricity's been nationalised, and I find I'm putting double per week in the Gas meter now. Now can you tell me - if Nationalisation of Steel - will it mean I'll have to pay more for household goods in the kitchen.'⁴⁹¹ And later Mrs. Simpson uttered some of the frustration that many women like her experienced on a regular basis:

I should like to ask you, Sir Frederick, if it's really necessary to burden the home maker with many very inferior utility goods. I've heard of complaints from a

⁴⁸⁸ Programme As Broadcast Transcript, *How are we doing?* Home Service, 25 October, 1948, BBC WAC.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Programme As Broadcast Transcript, *How are we doing?* Home Service, 26 October, 1948, BBC WAC.

great many people, and my own particular trial are [sic] children's clothes. You wait for weeks before you can get what you want; when you get the garment or whatever it is, it's of such poor quality, it wears out in no time, you pay such appallingly high prices for it, it's becoming increasingly [sic] difficult to make ends meet. And from the housewife's point of view this is very depressing, and very infuriating. And I wonder if it's really necessary to economic recovery.⁴⁹²

Sir Frederick replied:

I was frightened about the kind of question the ladies would ask. I so agree with the inspiration of that question, but I find it very difficult to answer. I'm afraid it is necessary. I'm afraid that we must accept that it is necessary. But it does make one very furious sometimes to see what British industry can produce which our women have had to do without all these years [...] I'm afraid it is necessary because without exporting everything that's really good and can get the dollars, we could not get our food. It comes down to that. That's our issue which we've got to face. It is export – or lack of food.⁴⁹³

The need to export goods rather than favour domestic personal consumption was highlighted Bain therefore supported Cripps' economic policy. The impact of post-war policies on the home was a persistent theme. One woman in her thirties who was asked by Mass Observation if she got enough of 'all the essential foods' answered that she did not: 'At the present time I'd give anything for some more bacon – I give my hubby all mine, and there's time I'd dearly like it myself.'⁴⁹⁴

In the final programme, Mrs. May, asked Sir Stafford Cripps when purchase tax was likely to end on household products (her question supported by much 'hear, hear' from the panel), 'there are so many things needed for the home that I myself find it impossible to buy on my husband's wages.'⁴⁹⁵ But there was also a slight tone of 'ridicule' to one of the housewives' questions. A sense that the question was a bit 'silly' and instead of taking the issue seriously Cripps more or less laughed it off, as this next extract shows:

Mrs Simpson: Sir Stafford, there are a lot of questions I'd like to ask you.

Cripps: There are.

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ MOA: TC Box 6: 6A Food 1937-1953, 12 March, 1946.

⁴⁹⁵ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *How are we doing?* Home Service, 28 October, 1948, BBC WAC.

Mrs. Simpson: I've been asked by another housewife to put this one to you, and she wants to know – why we're importing cranberries from the United States, and so spending very precious dollars which might surely be better spent on such things as dried eggs, particularly she says as cranberries do nothing at all to cheer up our very dreary diet?

Cripps: Well I didn't know we were importing cranberries (laughter), and in fact I very much doubt if we are importing cranberries (laughter), and therefore I find it difficult to answer but I'm quite sure we are not importing cranberries from the United States of America, wherever else we may be getting them from, and anyway a turkey is always improved by a cranberry. (laughter)⁴⁹⁶

Clarke, has suggested that Cripps was not very tactful when it came to the frustration of some women towards austerity and rationing, where clear gender differences were present: 'In taking the offensive against the Housewives' League as "a political instrument encouraged and misdirected by our opponents"', Cripps hit a fair target; but he risked missing the underlying significance of women's felt needs.'⁴⁹⁷ When he further criticised and joked about the 'New Look', as Clarke has commented, 'not all women voters may have found it funny.'⁴⁹⁸

Overall though, the two housewives were taken seriously and the programme did enable them to raise topics that concerned them. By doing this the BBC offered the ordinary citizen a forum where their views and opinions could be heard. The format also seemed to have been a success since it was further mentioned in the BBC files. For example, in May 1949 a, *How are we doing?*, on the 'NHS' with Anuerin Bevan was confirmed and there was also earlier the same year a suggestion of making a *How are we doing?* on the 'Railway'.⁴⁹⁹ But the three-part series did come under some criticism for its representation of women. The General Secretary of the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) wrote a complaint to the BBC governor, Barbara Ward:

You, with us, may have noticed a tendency on the part of the official male to assume the existence of a mythical character described as "a typical housewife", and to confine their recognition of our sex very largely to this category. Up till

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁷ Clarke, op. cit, p. 505. (2002).

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ The Railway item was however cancelled; I am not sure why this was, 1 April and 20 May, 1949, BBC WAC R51/234/1.

recently, we believed better things of the B.B.C. than this. Their attitude to and provision for women has, in our view, been sensible and enlightened. But our faith was badly shaken by the recent programme '*How are we Doing?*', which purported to include a representative panel of men and women.⁵⁰⁰

The letter clearly stated the writer's disappointment that no working woman had been represented in the 'jury', and concluded, 'May we beg your Board to maintain their enlightened attitude to women, who, at this stage in the 20th century, may surely claim to be treated as human beings, citizens, people with professional and business careers – and not exclusively as housewives.'⁵⁰¹ The letter suggested that the BBC had in general been successful in representing both the housewife and the working woman – but when the BBC claimed to have selected a fair representation of men and women of this country for *How are we doing?*, leaving the working woman out they clearly had made a mistake in the writer's view since it was not representative of women at this time. The letter was also a critique of the programme's idea that all women were 'typical housewives' and not independent citizens in their own right. The post-war period was changing, and the representation of women on high profile programme such as *How are we doing?* was consequently being questioned.

Conclusion

There are a number of aspects of these two programmes that deserves particular attention in evaluating their significance to broadcasting between 1945 and 1955, and to the role of women in that history.

First, the examples reveal that understanding the audience and representing the post-war woman was not at all easy. In terms of representation it was clearly inadequate and sometimes terrible. The BBC did get it wrong and represented the housewife in a patronising way. Listeners to *Focus on the Housewife* were disappointed over the tone of government propaganda and the opportunities missed in representing the housewife in a more positive way and that the programme failed to reflect in a more realistic sense her worries, concerns and demands. A bleak attempt, to say the least, the programme demonstrated that the housewife was crucial in keeping morale up and that producing an item on the housewife demanded accuracy and facts, and *respect*: the capabilities and

⁵⁰⁰Letter from Frances Farrer to Barbara Ward, 19 November, 1948, BBC WAC R41/123.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

the intelligence of the housewife were not to be underestimated, but the evidence suggest that they clearly were.

The production process of *Focus* demonstrated at the time that failures in the machinery did have a damaging effect on the output. Other incidents in the *Focus* file indicate that this was not the last time failures in the production occurred.⁵⁰² The report made by Barden in 1950 (see page 95), and the ‘six steps’ as outlined was a way of avoiding frictions between producers and scriptwriters and to ensure that facts were checked and used wisely. After Grenfell’s mishap with the script, Banks and Pain at least understood the possible outcry that would have been unleashed if it had not been re-written and fact checked. It was these two women producers who insisted on the programme’s changes. Banks who in the first place was against the topic being used in a *Focus* programme, also had a background in propaganda publicity work during the war where she had worked in the Publicity Department, of Odhams Press, doing Ministry Propaganda as well as other publicity work.⁵⁰³ Women producers such as Pain and Banks evidently understood the importance of not undermining the housewife. But at the same time they did not in this period possess the knowledge and understanding of the targeted audience for this programme that they needed to be fully confident in their own decision-making. At the time, in 1948, there were only three women producers out of twenty in the Features Department (Pain, Banks and Eileen Hots). This could be compared to the Talks Department, which supplied *Woman’s Hour* with material, where seven out of twenty-four Talks producers were women (nearly thirty percent).⁵⁰⁴ In order to avoid making mistakes or presenting facts incorrectly Banks and Pain consulted a person from the BBC’s women’s programme, *Woman’s Hour*, to get all the details double-checked. As we know, however, this was not enough for the programme to be successful: it was not the facts that needed checking, it was the tone and the voices heard that people were

⁵⁰² In February 1958, there is another script discrepancy between Dennis Barden (editor of the series) and a Peter Eton about a script on old age written by a Mr. Cruickshank who had not followed the brief he was given. Eton wrote: ‘You will remember it was agreed at the last ‘Focus’ meeting with H.F. that whenever possible the producer should be consulted before the lay-out of a script was finally agreed upon. In this case, Cruickshank presented me with a script on which I had not been consulted and which, in my opinion, was not a radio programme at all. I think it is a tedious and rather unimaginative “article”. It is too repetitive for radio and is quite inadequate for such a moving subject [...] One final point: you say that discussions on production do not arise until a script has been passed by your office. This is not so. In radio the very shape of the script and content of the material is the concern of the producer, and if a script is to be a “radio script”, then discussions on production must take place right from the beginning’ (Memo, 2 February, 1950, BBC WAC R19/377/8).

⁵⁰³ Banks, Marjorie, Scriptwriter, 1939-1956, BBC WAC RCONT 1.

⁵⁰⁴ The difference in percentage is that out of all the producers in Features, 15% were women, whereas in Talks, 29% of producers were women (BBC Staff List October 1948). Adding to this, the Assistant Controller of Talks at the time was Mary Somerville.

not happy with. *Woman's Hour* worked very hard to understand its audience and communicate in the right tone and manner. Both *Focus* and *Woman's Hour* faced the challenge of being broadcast on the Light Programme. This meant that they were often informative and educational in nature but required to be highly accessible. To find the balance between talking down, or, actually addressing the audience in a skilful and appropriate way was difficult. *Focus on the Housewife* failed because it did not appear to know its female listeners.

The failure suggests that when women were allowed to speak for themselves, as in *How are we doing?*, the result was a considerable improvement. Yet, when Stafford Cripps turned the question about cranberries into a joke, some of the issues raised by Mrs. May and Mrs. Simpson were not taken that seriously, *and* the programme left out the working woman. The complaint from the General Secretary of the NFWI, in regards to the representation of women in *How are we Doing?*, also tell us that working women demanded better representation. More women were working in the post-war period, particularly married women, and therefore questions of representation were surfacing. Women were no longer 'just' housewives; they were also business and professional women, citizens in their own right.

Second, we can also see a 'feminised' Light Programme possessing a serious element. That the post-war period saw the development of serious programming on the Home Service and the Third Programme is perhaps to be expected, since the two programmes were aimed at a middle-brow audience expected to be interested in political and current affairs. *How are we doing?*, was an example of a new form of broadcasting, an informal discussion introduced to further awaken and engage listeners in topical events. Briggs has commented that there were concerns among "traditionalists" within the Talks department, since competition from the Light Programme would shift listeners commitments from the Home to the Light.⁵⁰⁵ He quotes Harman Grisewood, who believed that that the BBC's war-time role as the "voice of authority" was becoming less popular among the public and that there was a growing demand for 'spontaneous chat'.⁵⁰⁶ It seems as if the years of crisis - continuation of austerity, and the need to explain government policies and action - demanded and resulted in new ways of

⁵⁰⁵ Briggs, op. cit. p. 580. (1979).

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 582.

exploring issues that had already exhausted the public.⁵⁰⁷ As was noted in the invitations to Cripps and Hancock, for *How are we doing?*, ‘exhortation and elucidation no longer have much appeal for the listener. However the job remains to be done and we must seek new techniques.’⁵⁰⁸

This desire also encompassed a concern to adopt such techniques on the Light Programme. *Focus* was just one of many examples of the introduction of current affairs or other topical issues into the Service. In 1948, the Acting Controller of Light Programme, Tom Chalmers said that: ‘My mandate from the Director General is to interest listeners in life and the world around them without at any moment failing to entertain them [...] I interpret this as meaning a strong foundation of entertainment programmes which are used to support our more serious offerings in the way of news bulletins, *Radio Newsreel*, *Woman’s Hour*, *Focus*, *Books and Authors*.’⁵⁰⁹ In 1949 *Topic for Tonight* was first broadcast, which was later described by Briggs as ‘the progenitor of hundreds of a.m. and p.m. programmes dedicated to the Day and the events thereof.’⁵¹⁰ It also had an emphasis on covering topics that had an impact on listeners’ daily lives and would therefore feature and reflect ordinary people’s experiences.⁵¹¹ *Topic for Tonight* did for example cover the issue of equal pay for women.⁵¹² Another example of new programming was *Argument*, which was first transmitted in January 1951 and Briggs claims that it was ‘an unscripted and

⁵⁰⁷ The post-war period was also the time of television and the impact of television broadcasts on Sound is worth exploring. According to Briggs (1979), however, it seems as if the main forces shifting the style of talk from formal to more spontaneous unscripted talk had to do as mentioned above with the desire to be less ‘authoritarian’. He also suggests that the development of *sound recording techniques* was one defining factor, ‘facilitating the shift in style’ (p. 581), as he suggests television would later complete the process (Briggs, op. cit). In a special issue on media history and the archive, Paddy Scannell explores the issue of technology, and raises the question about the status of radio and television recordings, where he suggests that rather than just focus on ‘reading’ these recordings, we ought to shift our focus away from the content to how they *were made* and with what kind of *technical resources*. The impact of various sound recordings in the post-war period, as playing a part in the change in Talk on radio and later television (as discussed by Briggs) would be one good example of this (Scannell, P. (2010). ‘Television and History: Questioning the Archive’. *The Communication Review*. 13, 1, pp. 37-51. p. 40).

⁵⁰⁸ Cripps, Sir Stafford Talks: 1939-51, BBC WAC RCONT.

⁵⁰⁹ Acting Controller, Light Programme, ‘Aim of the Light Programme’, 13 May 1948, BBC WAC R34/454/2.

⁵¹⁰ Briggs, op. cit. p. 582. (1979).

⁵¹¹ Ibid. p. 583.

⁵¹² For example David Keir was the speaker on *Topic for Tonight* on Equal Pay in January 1951. He gave a fairly objective report on the question outlining both sides for or against. He did however end with the point that if a woman is not treated differently as a consumer why should she be treated different as producer? He ended: ‘And there, I think, you have the problem in a nutshell – on the one hand the Treasury’s natural anxiety about the nation’s expenditure and the danger of inflation; on the other, the demand for what so many women consider to be only social and economic justice’ (Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Topic for Tonight*, 5 January 1951, BBC WAC).

unrehearsed programme.⁵¹³ *Argument* appears to be the creation of two female Talks producers, Peggy Barker and Elisabeth Rowley, whose names are linked to the birth and production of the programme.⁵¹⁴ It was lively and often featured high profile names receiving high listening figures.⁵¹⁵ Rowley would later be Talks Organizer from May 1953 over the Home and Light Services.⁵¹⁶ It is therefore evident that women as broadcasters or producers were part of creating programmes not necessarily just related to women but rather programmes covering political topics. Women such as Banks, Pain, Barker and Rowley were able to make careers within the BBC and engage with topics not falling under traditional ‘women’s programmes’ producing material with sometimes a political angle.

Because of this focus on topical and current affairs the Light Programme did indeed become a lot more ‘serious’ than it was first assumed it would be and has been assumed in later academic analyses. It was already noted in 1949 that the Light Programme was advised by the Director General to ‘mitigate the severity of the competition [to the Home Service] and take its share of more serious material which it has done without loss of audience. The spoken word material has increased considerably.’⁵¹⁷ In a report on listening trends in 1952 which echoed worries of a decline in listening one of the options put forward was that there was less attraction to the programmes: ‘the Light Programme becoming rather more serious over the years.’⁵¹⁸ In a memo discussing Home Service Talks it was noted that there was a ‘general decline in interest in news, current affairs, cold war’, and that there was a mood for ‘escape’ and that ‘demand is for entertainment’.⁵¹⁹ This decline in listening appears not to have had that great effect on the serious content in the Light Programme.

⁵¹³ Briggs, op. cit. p. 659. (1979). In a memo titled ‘Discussion on the Light Programme’ it was noted that: ‘Judging by the evidence of the Vernon Report, we have still a good deal of experiment to do before we solve the problem of “interestingness” in the Light Programme – how to make worth while but perhaps rather formal subjects seem attractive to a mass audience. I’m sure that the new “Argument” series is a step in the right direction – I thought the first programme very promising – but of course it does depend on the presence of two outstanding stars, and stars are always likely to be in very short supply’ (Memo from Mr. Bonarjee to Mr. Green (Chief Assistant), 9 January, 1951, BBC WAC R51/118/7).

⁵¹⁴ Talks, *Argument*, 1950-1952, BBC WAC R51/26.

⁵¹⁵ Memo from Rowley to Chief assistant, 31 January, 1951, BBC WAC R51/26. According to BBC Yearbook (1952) the programme had an audience of ten-million.

⁵¹⁶ Briggs, op. cit. p. 579. (1979).

⁵¹⁷ Memo from Chief Producer Talks Department to A.C.T., 31 March, 1949, BBC WAC R51/299/1.

⁵¹⁸ Memo from DHSB to DG, 12 May, 1952, BBC WAC R41/9.

⁵¹⁹ Memo from AFEO to A/CT, 12 May, 1950, BBC WAC R51/397/9.

This idea of the Light Programme becoming ‘more serious’ was confirmed in 1954 when it was first brought up and suggested that the feeling was that ‘the Home and Light Programmes have, in fact, each become more high brow more quickly than have those to whom the programmes have been addressed.’⁵²⁰ Later that year, Kenneth Adam, the Controller of Light Programme, investigated the amount of talks in the Light Programme and the Home Service (the investigation was made out of curiosity to see if the assumption that the Light Programme had fewer talks than the Home Service was correct). From the compilation of Talks made it was suggested that actually, the Light Programme had more Talks. The Home Service had 10 hours and 28 minutes, and the Light Programme 11 hours and 25 Minutes.⁵²¹ This investigation was made by Adam after a newspaper column had suggested that talks in the Programme were low. One of the reasons this was assumed, according to Mary Somerville, the Controller of Talks (whom I will discuss more in detail in the next chapter), was that people did not think of *Woman’s Hour* as a programme that included talks. This observation suggests a different side to the Light Programme. There was clearly a move towards more serious broadcasting.⁵²²

The Light Programme should therefore be seen as a site in which producers – many of whom were women - developed during the post-war years new ways of balancing serious elements with more entertaining items, aimed at an audience consisting mostly of women. *Focus* and, as will be discussed in the next chapter, *Woman’s Hour*, were two good examples of how this technique was applied. McKibbin, as observed in chapter one argued that the Light Programme overall was “‘feminized’” [...] and the ‘atmosphere’ [...] middle-classish, feminine and domestic.’⁵²³ This is of course true to some extent but the above discussion shows that there was a seriousness to it, and

⁵²⁰ Memo from HMRP to DHSB, ‘Listening trends’, 18 May, 1954, BBC WAC R34/422/1.

⁵²¹ Memo from CLP to CT (Sound), 8 December 1954, BBC WAC R51/721/3.

⁵²² It is also possible to suggest that this move towards a more ‘responsible broadcasting’, was due to the knowledge of an imminent evaluation of the BBC’s service as a whole, and its renewal of license and possible demise of monopoly: the 1949 - 1950 Broadcasting Committee (the Beveridge Committee). Briggs (1979) notes that the BBC had anticipated the inquiry since 1946 when the ‘temporary’ charter was given, and that already in 1948 it was anticipated that a committee was nigh (pp. 288, 311). Giving evidence to the Committee, the BBC claimed that ‘under competition [...] all these responsibilities [public service] would be blurred or destroyed’ (Briggs. p. 323). The Beveridge Committee, did not in the end, recommend the break-up of the monopoly. In this thesis there is not space or scope to examine to what extent concerns about the Committee and its aftermath, did impact on output - whether this move towards a ‘serious’ Light Programme was an attempt to justify the monopoly, and I have not come across any records that would suggests that was *the* reason. But even if this was the case there is still an argument to be put forward that the ‘feminised’ but serious Light Programme, which included programmes such as *Woman’s Hour*, with its emphasis on education, would have contributed to the evidence that the responsibilities of a public service broadcaster were maintained.

⁵²³ McKibbin, op. cit. p. 472. (1998).

possible a pioneering ‘seriousness’ in the way that programmes and serious items were made more accessible and educational. It contained a mix between ‘heavy’ and ‘light’ news and information. After discussing the material examined here there is a strong case for suggesting that Haley’s influence almost ‘Reithian’⁵²⁴ on programming and his view of the role of public service broadcasting to educate and inform, was quite prominent. To put it in simple terms: The Light Programme certainly did more in terms of education than the Third, and it possibly did just as much if not more than the Home Service. The one programme that would come to exemplify this was arguably *Woman’s Hour*.

But before we move to the next chapter, there is one final point to make: the place of *radio* as a public forum bringing *people* and *politics* together. In other words, the ability of radio, as a medium crossing class and gender boundaries, even the public/private divide. Although *Focus on the Housewife* was a dramatic feature it still tried to engage with ordinary people, just as *How are we doing?* was attempting to represent the British public through various occupations and voices. Listeners could hear a miner, a journalist, a managing director, a bricklayer etc. – and all question the representatives of authority on the *same* basis. A modest, but noticeable democratisation of the airwaves was taking place and it is here that women also found a place.

Both examples featured the voices of women, and more specifically, the housewife. The housewife was therefore not a passive or particularly suppressed figure removed from the outside world. On the contrary, her *status* was demonstrated in programmes such as *Focus*, or in a public discussion such as *How are We Doing?* And, radio therefore offered a space for women; it was a means of engaging women. These programmes allowed women to speak out as housewives. Rationing, austerity, affluence, and public health were all issues that were dealt with by women not only in private, but also through radio on a public, political level. As Andrews has observed, ‘women’s domestic base was used to justify their demands for social reforms. In so doing rather than challenging women’s association with domesticity, the meaning of domesticity was

⁵²⁴ The term ‘Reithian’ refers to the BBC’s first Director General, John Reith, and his believes in ‘mixed’ programming, to offer a variety of programmes – light and heavy – ‘something for everyone’ but more importantly ‘everything for someone’, as Andrew Crisell writes, ‘It was not simply that each individual should seek and find her own interest and then switch off: the hope was that she would be enriched by exposure to the *full range* of the programming’ (p. 29). To encourage listeners to new topics and subjects and therefore give the listener, “‘something a little better than she thought she wanted’” (Ibid.). (Crisell, A. (2002). *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*. 2nd Edition. London: Routledge).

challenged, its boundaries were redefined. Domesticity became not passive but active and assertive.⁵²⁵ The material also suggests that the BBC worked hard in further emphasising the housewife's role and responsibility as a citizen. Presenting or representing women as 'responsible' and involved in public issues, the construction of the housewife as an *engaged citizen* was evident. For example in *Focus on the Housewife*, the listener was informed about 'food consumption levels' and was made aware of the situation in the country overall. In *How are we doing?*, Mrs. May showed awareness of the nationalisation of electricity and coal, and was worried about the effects if steel was nationalised. This idea of the 'responsible' housewife is something that will be apparent in the following chapters

But we also see evidence of what I have referred to as the *domestication* of politics. Politics were not just about the outside world, but rather increasingly interested in the personal, the homely; food consumption, rationing, pots and pans, utility goods. The housewife was influencing the political agenda, rather than being on the 'receiving end'. We can therefore see a clear difference in how women were addressed by broadcasters or participated in radio programmes at the BBC, from that of the 1920s and 30s, when women according to Moores and Bailey were seen as the 'state's delegate.' By having someone like Stafford Cripps, *appearing on radio*, answering questions by ordinary housewives it also shows politicians' desire to connect with the electorate, to make ordinary citizen's concerns *their* concerns, to reach out and talk on the same level as the voters. The point about the increasing importance of the women's vote in this period, as put forward by scholars such as Thane and Zweiniger-Bargielowska, is crucial. As Listener Research Director R.J. E. Silvey wrote in 1946 about the power of radio: 'Within a few weeks of the end of the war in Europe came the General Election, which vividly demonstrated the power and scope of the microphone. From Monday to Saturday for four successive weeks, both the Home Service and the General Forces Programme carried twenty – or thirty-minute election speeches from the party leaders.'⁵²⁶ Radio therefore offered a space, or a suitable place, for the 'meeting' between the public and the private world.

We can also see how radio, did not only act as a forum bringing people together, but it also enabled a space where a *mix* of people, from *different* classes could come together.

⁵²⁵ Andrews, op. cit. p. 152.

⁵²⁶ BBC Yearbook. (1946). p. 30.

The programmes examined in this chapter demonstrate that class identity was an implicit factor in the shaping of women's various experiences. This is evident in both *Focus on the Housewife* and *How are we doing?* What also makes the issue of class more complicated is of course that this is also linked to politics. As discussed in chapter one, Zweiniger-Bargielowska argued that middle-class women were particularly unhappy with Labour's post-war policies on rationing, and, to put it simply, showed their discontent by voting Conservative in the following election.⁵²⁷ In the discussion of *Focus on the Housewife*, it was evident that some of the voices that were heard in the broadcast represented this discontent with present conditions. 'Joan' for example was moaning about housing and food conditions and in *How are we doing?* Mrs. Simpson was asking about the increasing prices and the lack of good consumer durables. In a survey made in 1946 by Mass Observation, the question was asked, 'What do you think of the Labour Government so far?'⁵²⁸ to which one woman in Battersea answered, 'Well, I can only say I used to be Labour in sympathy and it's turned me practically Conservative – I think it's awful.'⁵²⁹ Another woman was a little more hopeful: 'I think they're doing their best. It takes time you know', but continued on the question about the food situation for the next coming months, 'Well I suppose we can stagger along as we have been do[i]ng through the war. It's the disappointment though of not finding things improving.'⁵³⁰

Although the transcript raised tensions and highlighted differences between classes - for example in terms of food, and by doing so the BBC *allowed* a range of viewpoints and opinions on air - the recurring message of the programmes was that it was the housewife's duty to get on with things and appreciate what was available. Hancock for example referred to the interwar years and how for many families life had improved, and in *Focus on the Housewife*, the miner's wife Mrs. Roberts told her story of pre-war queuing at the dole and soup kitchens, and how her family never grumbled. The working-class voices heard, or the stories told about them, appeared thus to have had the function of re-assuring the general public that things had in general *improved* for most people; policies on rationing such as the restrictions on bread had actually worked. There is also an implicit criticism of organisations such as the British Housewives' League for making a fuss. Praise for the Ministry of Food's supply of fish or 'Mr.

⁵²⁷ Zweiniger-Bargielowska, op. cit. (2000a).

⁵²⁸ MOA: TC Food, 6/A, Food 1937-1953, February 1946.

⁵²⁹ MOA: TC Food, 6/A, Food 1937-1953, Battersea, March 1946. (Emphasis original).

⁵³⁰ MOA: TC Food, 6/A, Food 1937-1953, St. Pancras, February 1946.

Strachey's Christmas feast' also strengthened the message. There was also the choice of speakers; Hancock and Cripps were both able to defend and promote their interests on air, even Bain was in support of the government's emphasis on export. There was a general consensus among the speakers that the right things had been done and this was the route to follow. This meant that the BBC in effect, supported the policy of the post-war Labour Government - or at least, the BBC appears to have been comfortable *aligning* itself with its policy.

In some respect this was consistent behaviour for the BBC. Keeping up morale and encouragement had always been important for national security and wellbeing. Scannell and Cardiff who have traced the origins of the BBC, say that public service broadcasting was seen as a 'cultural, moral and educative force for the improvement of knowledge, taste and manners.'⁵³¹ They particularly focus on John Reith, and the influence by the Victorian reforming ideal of service, which represented: 'a sense of moral purpose and of social duty on behalf of the community, aimed particularly at those most in need of reforming – the lower classes.'⁵³² This meant that radio as a national service, had the potential, through culture and education, to unify the nation and thus maintain a stable democracy. Reith was influenced by Mathew Arnold who in his essay *Culture and Anarchy* believed that culture was a way of 'alleviating the strain and hostility between classes in a deeply divided society, [...] and thus preventing the threat of revolt from below.'⁵³³ Vitally then, as Scannell and Cardiff notes, 'The linking of culture with nationalism – the idea of a national culture – was given new expression in broadcasting through those kinds of programme that had the effect of, in Reith's words, "making the nation as one man."⁵³⁴ In 1948 the cry of Reith might seem far off but the programmes discussed in this chapter do suggest that the role of public service broadcasting (in a time of crisis such as this) was very much still to keep the nation stable.

⁵³¹ Scannell and Cardiff, op. cit. p. 7. (1991).

⁵³² Ibid. p. 9.

⁵³³ Ibid. Arnold's definition of culture was of course 'the best' that had ever been produced, i.e. high culture.

⁵³⁴ Ibid. p. 10.

CHAPTER FOUR

The voice of the post-war woman: *Woman's Hour*

The Editor discusses matters from time to time with the Editor of the Light Programme and the Head of Talks. Subject to this, she has complete control. She and her producers are a team who feel responsible for *Woman's Hour*, they do a very worthwhile job and thoroughly enjoy it. It is a good example of decentralisation of authority in the Talks Department to a group of producers.

Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, 1953⁵³⁵

As I understand it *Woman's Hour* was started some five years ago in rather a hurried and haphazard way: "Let us have a daily programme for women and put in a woman to run it" [...] *Woman's Hour*, however, coming one year after the end of the war, was started without reference to the past and almost indeed as though a programme for woman was some bright new-fangled idea thought up overnight. Certainly in its early months there was no indication of the fruits of the battles fought and won and no sign of the knowledge and experience which had been accumulated. I need not go over the history of the programme, its ups and downs, its changes of organiser, later called editor, its struggles against external criticism and internal contempt or indifference. It says much for its vitality and for the succession of people who have struggled with it and for it and above all for the real need that women listeners feel for such a programme that it has survived [...] My complaint is not simply that we are being over-worked but that we are being prevented from doing the job as it should be done [...] because it is time that *Woman's Hour* moved from a hand-to-mouth struggle for existence to recognition as an established programme with a high listening figure whose claims to staff and money should be looked at on the basis of its worth to the Corporation.

Janet Quigley, Editor, *Woman's Hour*, 1951⁵³⁶

In the midst of post-war austerity and gloom, on the 7th of October 1946, at 2 p.m., *Woman's Hour* was first heard on the BBC Light Programme. The billing in *Radio Times* read: '*Woman's Hour* - a daily programme of music, advice, and entertainment

⁵³⁵ Wythenshawe, Lord S. (1953). *The BBC from Within*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd. p. 117.

⁵³⁶ Memo from Quigley to Editorial Board, 29 November, 1951, BBC WAC R13/ 408/ 6.

for the home.⁵³⁷ Research into a programme for housewives – ‘best hours and days’ – had begun in April 1946 and it was reported that between the hours of 10am and 11am, and 2pm and 4pm, were most suitable, and Tuesday was considered the best day.⁵³⁸ Broadcast, however, every Monday to Friday between 2 and 3 p.m., *Woman’s Hour* soon became very popular: a few weeks after its first broadcast it was reported that the programme received more than a thousand letters per week.⁵³⁹ Listening figures soon rose. In 1947, it was reported that the programme had ‘reached a peak for daytime listening.’⁵⁴⁰ That listening figure had reached 4 million in 1950.⁵⁴¹ In chapter one, a point was made about *Woman’s Hour’s* ‘contradictory character’. Before a deeper analysis of the programme is provided, it is necessary to offer a flavour, or, a few examples of what is meant by this.

A programme especially for women, however, was not new for the BBC. As the war had drawn to a close there was much internal debate in the BBC about how the list of programmes that had appeared in war-time might be continued in the circumstances of peace. In July 1945, Janet Quigley, who was in charge of women’s programmes during the war and who was behind the successful programme *Woman’s Page* (1943) which focused on items beyond the domestic horizon, such as equal pay, and work, wrote in a memorandum of the importance of continuing this type of broadcasting:

It seems to me that while we are probably agreed that all these regular features should continue some re-thinking is needed about them. This, I think, is particularly true of the *Kitchen Front*. We are all agreed that food is still an urgent problem. At the same time the approach should now gradually become a rather different one, I think, and probably this can best be done by introducing new blood and dropping most of the old boys and girls who are associated in listeners’ minds with the darkest days of the war. *Woman’s Page* is another programme that needs a fresh impetus.⁵⁴²

It was also suggested in November the same year by a George Inns, who had worked in commercial radio and seen the ‘terrific response’ to women’s programmes in commercial radio, that the BBC ought to do something similar; an hourly programme

⁵³⁷ Radio Times, VOL 92, No. 1201, 1946.

⁵³⁸ Listener Research Report, 5290, ‘Planning for Housewives Best hours and days (April 1946)’, BBC WAC R9/9/10.

⁵³⁹ Memo from Norman Collins to Director General, 30 October 1946, BBC WAC R51/640/1.

⁵⁴⁰ *Daily Mirror*, 4 August, 1947.

⁵⁴¹ *Daily Graphic*, 28 April, 1950.

⁵⁴² Memo from Quigley to Alford, 20 July 1945, BBC WAC R51/397/7.

including items on household hints, fashion, child care and a radio doctor.⁵⁴³ The idea for a 'woman's hour' began to form in the beginning of 1946 and the 'lighter' approach was also further embraced as the talks producer, Peggy Barker, suggested that fashion, dress-making and gardening should be part of the proposed daily women's programme.⁵⁴⁴ Norman Collins, who launched *Woman's Hour* in October 1946, and is often referred to as its creator, was very keen to cater for the housewife and must have realised the potential of such a programme.

In *Radio Times*, the first programme was advertised with a photograph of a woman sitting in her chair leaning forward, and tuning into her radio with a cup of tea on the armrest next to her, in what seems to be a middle class setting. At the top of the photograph a swirling ribbon is displayed with text suggesting topics such as: 'Today's Recipe', 'Your Winter Clothes', 'Children in the Home', 'Your Health Problems', 'Putting your best Face Forward', 'Answering Your Questions', and 'Mother's Midday Meal'.⁵⁴⁵ The programme had a very domestic feel. It featured Mary Manton, who did a talk on midday meals, and she expressed her enthusiasm for the programme in a letter to Collins a few days before the first broadcast: 'may I take this opportunity of wishing your new programme a great success? I feel sure its [sic] just what the housewife needs - an interesting, jolly hour at the very time she is free and ready to relax. And the chance to have a say in the programme!'⁵⁴⁶ The first programme was also listened to by a panel of women, including the film star, Deborah Kerr, the former Minister of Labour, Margaret Bondfield, and a North-country housewife, Elsie Crump, who were all positive about the programme. This trio would in many ways represent the type of women that would later feature frequently on the programme. The presenter Alan Ivimey answered listener's questions and they also played music requested by listeners. The programme also included a serial reading, which has been a staple feature until this day. The first week also had a talk by a doctor which caused some internal anxiety over whether listeners might have mistaken a Canadian Doctor to be American.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴³ Memo from Inns to Chalmers, 23 November 1945, BBC WAC R34/949. The memo or other correspondence does not make clear where Inns had worked in commercial radio.

⁵⁴⁴ Memo from N.G. Luker to Chalmers, 13 March 1946, BBC WAC R51/299/1.

⁵⁴⁵ *Radio Times*, VOL 92, No. 1201, 1946.

⁵⁴⁶ Letter from Manton to Collins, 5 October, 1946, BBC WAC R51/640/1. (Emphasis original).

⁵⁴⁷ It was noted by Isa Benzie that: 'We understand that Mr. Collins requires the doctor at once removed from the programme, as he is not British (he is in fact Canadian). I believe you wish to discuss on Monday the desirability of taking this decision after one hearing when the doctor is 1 of high repute, 2 prepared to give the time, and 3 praised by listeners in their letters' (Memo from Benzie to DT, 11 October, 1946, BBC WAC R51/640/1). It was later suggested that perhaps it should be mentioned that he

Just one week after *Woman's Hour* started, Collins wrote to producers involved to tell them that it was, 'generally agreed [there was] too much cookery in the programme at the moment.' He also said; 'over-riding point: need for more serious, including controversial, talks and discussions in programme as a whole. At the moment *Woman's Hour* seems too much devoid of serious discussion of topics which affect domestic life in this country in general.'⁵⁴⁸ *Woman's Hour* did, without a doubt, have a strong focus on the domestic, with emphasis on the home, childcare, cooking and fashion. But the programme also steered more and more towards serious subjects. Soon, regular experts such as Marian Cutler or BBC's first woman reporter Audrey Russell were heard in the programme.⁵⁴⁹ In its first weeks, Russell reported from the National Conference of Labour Women, and Cutler began her various advisory talks explaining and informing listeners about government legislation. For example in 1948, in her series 'What's Your Worry?', Cutler discussed National Insurance: 'I've hardly time to say, "Hello" – for there are so many different points about the National Insurance scheme, and I know many of you have been waiting anxiously to hear how the new proposals will affect you.'⁵⁵⁰ At the end of October 1946 a request had also been put forward for talks on current affairs and Parliament to be included on a regular basis.⁵⁵¹ In a 'Report to the Board', in 1948, the Acting Controller of Light Programme wrote that, '*Woman's Hour* in general has tended towards more serious subjects, largely at listeners requests.'⁵⁵² Issues such as welfare and health, current affairs, and work were on the agenda. 'Equal Pay' was first covered in November 1946, when Lady Davidson discussed the report made by the Royal Commission on Equal Pay. She explained the report in detail and

was Canadian so that no one would believe he was American (Memo from Benzie, 15 October, 1946, BBC WAC R51/640/1).

⁵⁴⁸ Memo from Collins to various producers and Assistant Controller Talks, 14 October 1946, BBC WAC R51/642.

⁵⁴⁹ Audrey Russell had a background in drama and theatre before she joined the BBC, and during her 'spell' in London's theatre land volunteered for the Auxiliary Fire Service. In 1939 at the outbreak of war she was called in. Russell was sent to a fire station on Chiltern Street which was only a few minutes away from the BBC. She was interviewed several times by BBC reporters and eventually landed a job herself at the BBC within News, working on programmes such as *Radio Newsreel* (Oral History Transcript, Russell, Audrey, BBC WAC R143/110). Russell later said in her biography, 'the pressure of events and the departure of several more of our war correspondents to the battle of fronts of North Africa and Italy, as well as a growing scarcity of dog and cat shows, brought me closer to more exciting assignments' (Russell, op. cit. p. 44) and she then became a fully credited BBC war correspondent assigned to various countries in Europe.

⁵⁵⁰ Cutler then continued that for many there will be an increase on pension or allowances, for others, there will be no change: 'But so much does depend on your own particular circumstances that it's always best to make enquiries and find out exactly what claim you have to an increased pension, or if you come under some part of the new scheme for extra benefits' (Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Woman's Hour*, 'What's Your Worry?' – National Insurance by Marian Cutler', 10 February, 1948, BBC WAC).

⁵⁵¹ Memo from Assistant Director of Talks to DT, 19 October, 1946, BBC WAC R51/640/1.

⁵⁵² Memo from Chalmers to B.E Nicolls, 19 March 1948, BBC WAC R34/422/1.

discussed the complications reported in introducing equal pay. She ended her talk by saying that it was now up to the Government to pursue the issue, and finally said: ‘the report of the Royal Commission and the information that they have made available will be of immense influence.’⁵⁵³

A controversial topic such as the menopause was suggested by the talks producer Isa Benzie, in February 1947, and further discussed in May the same year: ‘perhaps you could get me a ruling, at the same time, on the “The Change”, talks on which many listeners, as I am sure you remember, have asked for.’⁵⁵⁴ A series of talks were later produced (by Benzie), for example in October 1947: ‘The Older Woman – The Change – why worry? By a Woman Doctor’, which opened with the following line: “‘Oh, Doctor, I’m so worried, can it be the change?’” How often we hear this kind of remark, it’s almost a daily appeal.’⁵⁵⁵ The talk was very informative and reassuring:

One need not to feel anything abnormal, at the menopause or “change” as it is called, and if one does the doctor can nearly always cure the symptoms. So why worry? It is rather complicated and impossible to explain in detail, but you all know perfectly well that after the change a woman can no longer have children.⁵⁵⁶

The programme did not only learn to listen to its audience and widen its range of topics. It also had to learn how to speak to its listeners. The male presenter, Alan Ivimey, was encouraged by a producer, Leslie Perowne to lighten his approach.⁵⁵⁷ Ivimey was, however, soon replaced. It was suggested, that a large proportion of listeners agreed with the first listening panel and especially Elsie Crump, that his manner, was somewhat patronising, and this in turn gave a patronising tone to the programme.⁵⁵⁸ In December 1946, it was confirmed that a new presenter would be Joan Griffiths.⁵⁵⁹ She had previously worked as an announcer on the Forces Programme during the war and

⁵⁵³ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Woman’s Hour*, 11 November, 1946, BBC WAC. Equal pay was also covered in June 1947 by Elaine Burton MP, who did a talk with the title, ‘What is she worth?’ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Woman’s Hour*, 13 June, 1947, BBC WAC.

⁵⁵⁴ Memo from Benzie to Barker, 19 February, 1947, and, Benzie to Bradney, 7 May 1947, BBC WAC R51/640/2.

⁵⁵⁵ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Woman’s Hour*, 17 October, 1947, BBC WAC.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid. (Emphasis original).

⁵⁵⁷ Memo from Perowne to Collins, 11 November, 1946, BBC WAC R51/642/1.

⁵⁵⁸ MacGregor, S. in Kearney et.al. (2006) *Woman’s Hour: From Joyce Grenfell to Sharon Osbourne. Celebrating Sixty Years of Women’s Lives*, London: John Murray Publishers. p. 6.

⁵⁵⁹ Memo from Collins to Talks, 18 December 1946, BBC WAC R51/640/1.

was therefore a familiar voice. By February 1947, one newspaper wrote about the programme:

When it was first introduced last autumn "*Woman's Hour*" was one of the most criticised of all radio programmes. Now I am told it has a daily audience of more than 3,000,000 - a big figure for an afternoon programme [...] "*Woman's Hour*" started badly by "talking down" to its audience. Women tell me that it is still guilty in this respect at times, but it has undoubtedly improved. One recent improvement was the introduction of Joan Griffiths as the regular announcer.⁵⁶⁰

Other familiar voices would follow: Olive Shapley took over as presenter from Griffiths in February 1949, and in 1951 the 'trio' took over: Marjorie Anderson, Margaret Hubble and Jean Metcalfe.⁵⁶¹

An analysis of the audience made in April 1948, showed that 75% of listeners came from a working class background and it was stated that the programme attracted a 'rather greater proportion of lower middle and of working class people than upper middle class. The former are, of course, much more numerous and that is why they cover 97% of the total audience.'⁵⁶² It was also noted that the programme was more popular among listeners over the age of 30 than under, and that 94% of listeners listened regularly in the home. The report highlighted that: 'if you are getting *one-fifth of the country's women* listening to your programme every day – and that means that you are really drawing on a much larger proportion since not everybody listens every day - you are surely not doing too badly.'⁵⁶³

But its relationship to its audience was far from straightforward.⁵⁶⁴ In 1948 a reader of the *Manchester City News* commented on the 'page for women' under the headline: 'I don't think *Woman's Hour* is just for snobs - BBC can't please all the Housewives all the time':

Let me confess that I do not often listen in to *Woman's Hour*, for the sufficient reason that between two and three in the afternoon is for me a time of [...]

⁵⁶⁰ *Evening Standard*, 15 February 1947.

⁵⁶¹ In her memoirs Olive Shapley recalls at times having to take her children into the *Woman's Hour* studio for the day, without fuss from the production team - or the children - who were given old BBC scripts to draw and scribble on (Shapley, op. cit. p. 131).

⁵⁶² Memo from Treneman to Miss Gibbs, 5 May 1948, and 'Analysis of 'Woman's Hour Audience on 12th and 13th April 1948', BBC WAC R51/640/4. (Emphasis original).

⁵⁶³ Ibid. (My emphasis).

⁵⁶⁴ This issue will be further explored later on in the chapter.

considerable domestic activity [...] But the other afternoon – as perhaps you heard – drama broke into the placid calm of *Woman's Hour*, when commere Joan Griffiths read a letter she had received from an irate housewife. This lady maintained that there was nothing in the programmes, barring the cooking items, to interest women, that it should be re-named “Snobs' Hour,” and that her advice - in which she maintained that she was well supported by other women – was “Get off the air!” [...] I am no fan of the particular B.B.C. feature, as I have explained; and even if I had plenty of time, I should hate to listen to it every day. But in all its variety of contents and of contributors most women can find something of interest; and if some of it is “snob-stuff.” a good deal is not [...] carry on, *Woman's Hour*!⁵⁶⁵

The varied opinions on *Woman's Hour* were also noticed in a Mass Observation report on radio listening, where people were asked what they thought about the BBC. Various women mentioned *Woman's Hour*, for instance in January 1948 one housewife, aged 56 said: ‘too long and lacking in general interest rarely [...] listen to it.’⁵⁶⁶ Another housewife, aged 43, who preferred plays and *The Robinson Family* said: ‘I also enjoy *Women's Hour* [sic] the hints are sensible.’⁵⁶⁷ A third housewife from Bromley, aged 44, said: ‘I think the programmes have improved a lot of late. They [BBC] put on a very good Christmas fare, I thoroughly enjoyed the programmes. I enjoy listening to *Housewives Choice* in the mornings, but do not care for *Woman's Hour*.’⁵⁶⁸ The programme clearly received mixed views. But it must have done something right since it stayed on and developed into a well established feature of the Light Programme.

This chapter will examine in more detail what is perhaps, the BBC's most famous post-war contribution to women's radio programmes. I have already discussed in broad terms, its contradictory character - as a programme with a domestic focus but that also shows the beginnings of a more radical dimension (see Appendix for examples of weekly programming). What follows is an attempt to explore how this manifested itself, and this will be done from three perspectives: first, the internal structures of the programme and its growth; second, the programmes relationship to public and political matters; and third, through the audience and the programme's representation of women. What each section will point to is a programme that played an important function in the general development of broadcasting in Britain, in the way it represented and

⁵⁶⁵ *Manchester City News*, 20 August, 1948.

⁵⁶⁶ MOA: TC ‘Radio listening 1939-1949’, Box 4 (368), File 4/C, 24 January 1948.

⁵⁶⁷ MOA: TC ‘Radio listening 1939-1949’, Box 4 (368), File 4/C, 15 January 1948.

⁵⁶⁸ MOA: TC ‘Radio listening 1939-1949’, Box 4 (368), File 4/C, 19 January 1948.

understood the female audience and its needs (particularly the working class). It shows radio as a site in which women's voices could be heard, and their concerns and worries aired. Women's programmes, such as *Woman's Hour*, thus offered a crucial and pioneering platform for women; not just in its representation of women and by voicing their concerns, but also the way it allowed ordinary women to participate in the programme. Again, we can see radio as a medium that brings people together, and enables public participation.

Given it exhibited both informational and educational purposes, which were arguably Reithian in nature, it was also a programme that showed women's radio as democratic and intimate, attractive to political parties but also reminding women about their own role and duty as *citizens*. This not only raises the question of the boundary between the private sphere and the public, but also the issue of women's role as broadcasters and the female audience's ability to shape broadcasting content and practices. Women such as the editor Janet Quigley, Talks producer Isa Benzie and the Controller of Talks Mary Somerville, without a doubt created a programme that ought to be seen as an early example of feminist media. These aspects will all be further discussed in the conclusion.

A strive for autonomy and recognition

The chapter was opened by two quotations. The first was by Lord Wythenshawe, a former Chairman of the BBC writing in 1952, who described *Woman's Hour* as a good example of 'decentralisation' within the BBC's Talks Department. The quotation that followed was written to the editorial board of the Talks Department by the editor of the programme, Janet Quigley in 1951. Wythenshawe and Quigley's accounts appear to be contradictory impressions of how the programme was run. The idea of 'decentralisation of authority' was not easily achieved, according to Quigley: it was continuously tested and tried. By having examined the internal relationship and the programme's development, three arguments can be made. First, the programme saw an immediate growth and development from the start. This would involve a re-definition of what a women's programme should be about, cause questions about editorial responsibility between the Talks Department and Light Programme, and raise issues about the allocation of resources and staff. Second, these internal conflicts were also expressed in spiteful comments and prejudiced attitudes from colleagues and management. Third, despite being a small, struggling entity, the programme showed an extreme knowledge

and understanding about its female audience, something particularly visible in the quest for a repeat.

In 1950 this short snippet gave readers of the *Daily Graphic* a sneak preview inside *Woman's Hour*:

[...] of its five regular producers responsible for talks in domestic subjects, fashions, music, health and for serials, two are men [...] In the main, however, production and control is by women, even to the programme engineers on microphone and disc duty. [...] Rehearsal occupies 45 minutes in which microphones are checked with speakers' voiced and with musical instruments. The casual visitor is impressed by the quiet efficiency of rehearsal and broadcast [...] Talks producer Mrs. Marguerite Scott said 300 letters arrived in the producers' offices each week about the programme.⁵⁶⁹

Entitled 'Behind the scenes of Woman's Hour - A thousand time on the air', the writer was impressed by the 'quiet efficiency of rehearsal and broadcast.' But behind- the-scenes of *Woman's Hour* was really an overworked and understaffed team of producers that, in spite of having received external recognition for their work, were often, throughout this period, fighting for internal appreciation and acknowledgment. *Woman's Hour* was deliberately placed as a separate unit outside programme departments with a close relationship to the Talks Department, which supplied producers and talks. The intention of this, as suggested by one of its first editors Evelyn Gibbs, was 'to preserve the programme's character as a magazine eminently suited to experiment and expansion.'⁵⁷⁰ But the programme was also under the Controller of the Light Programme. This placement, thus, caused confusion and often conflicting departmental and editorial interests. One of the main issues throughout the period was a lack of resources and particularly staff. Second, the reluctance to supply the programme with an editor holding full editorial seniority and responsibility led to internal disorder and argument.

One example of this can be seen on the 16th October 1946. It was then that the programme's organiser Nest Bradney complained to Collins and made the point about the need for more secretarial help and better facilities.⁵⁷¹ At this very moment the

⁵⁶⁹ *Daily Graphic*, 'Behind the scenes of Woman's Hour - A thousand time on the air', 28 April 1950.

⁵⁷⁰ Report from Evelyn Gibbs, 17 February 1948, BBC WAC R13/408/5.

⁵⁷¹ Memo from Bradney to Collins, 16 October 1946, BBC WAC R51/640/1.

production team was made up of: Pat Osborne who selected records; talks material was supplied by Peggy Barker and other producers through her; scripting and production were done by Leslie Perowne.⁵⁷² The organiser was Nest Bradney whose function came closest to that of an 'Editor'.⁵⁷³ The success of *Woman's Hour* meant that the small production team was under an immense pressure from the start, to respond to listeners' letters and demands, and produce quality content. Already in its first few weeks there was a demand for a more efficient and a better staffed production. At the end of the month Collins wrote a detailed memorandum to the Director General, about the progress of *Woman's Hour* and commented on the good listening figures and stated:

I do not feel, however, that the programme is being as well produced at the moment as it could be and I am most anxious that there should not be a gradual decline once the initial enthusiasm of those who are at present working on it has subsided. As I see it, it is essential that there should be a full-time editor working on the programme [...] At the moment *Woman's Hour* gets itself on to the air as a result of the efforts of Mrs. Bradney who has been borrowed from Staff Training for a period of three months as "organiser" (without enjoying any official title) [...].⁵⁷⁴

He then discussed the implications of appointing an editor, under which department she should be placed and whether or not she should be on the staff of the Talks Department (since most of the output was talks) or part of the Light Programme. His own position was that the editor appointed should continue to work closely with him to ensure, 'that what might be called "the Light Programme approach" is maintained.'⁵⁷⁵ Collins further suggested that the editor must be able to 'cater for all tastes and [...] be as aware of the interest aroused by the Mountbatten wedding in Romsey Abbey as by Basil Henriques's remarks on Juvenile Delinquency.'⁵⁷⁶ In November the Director General replied back that an editor could be appointed but that, 'no increase in Talks Producers could be sanctioned, [though] the overall work of Talks Division for Light Programme

⁵⁷² Memo 16 October, 1946, BBC WAC R51/640/1.

⁵⁷³ Audrey Russell interviewed in 1977 said she was approached by Norman Collins and offered the job as Editor of *Woman's Hour*. Russell said: 'he asked me to lunch [...] he talked all about a wonderful new programme that was going on the air every day and it would never end he said [...] and he offered me the editorship of the first *Womans Hour* [sic]. Well he never forgave me but I didn't really want to do that I had already in my head what I thought I wanted to do, one was to get into television or two [...] I think I could be a commentator if I really put my mind to it' (Oral History Transcript, Russell, Audrey, BBC WAC R143/110).

⁵⁷⁴ Memo from Collins to Director General, 30 October 1946, BBC WAC R13/408/5.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

should be reviewed in order to see whether the demands for *Woman's Hour* could be met by some retrenchments elsewhere.⁵⁷⁷

In this period, the Talks Department was growing steadily in size and going through recurrent internal re-structuring. This created other problems. The Assistant Director of Talks wrote in 1946 that, 'already the sense of common effort and the exhilaration of common achievement is missing. We do not know each others' minds. We do not work together. Paradoxically as the size of the whole has increased the component parts have fallen away from each other and the total effect is one of diminution.'⁵⁷⁸ He then suggested the setting up of smaller working groups under titles such as 'Literary Broadcasts', 'Current Affairs', 'Woman's Hour', 'Science', 'Industry', etc. Clearly *Woman's Hour*, with its emphasis on talks, added extra pressure to an already heavily-in-demand department.

A *Woman's Hour* editor was, however, not introduced until July 1947, when Eileen Molony, a talks producer was appointed.⁵⁷⁹ Molony was given a clerk and secretary. The staff situation within the Talks Department had also improved and it was thus better able to supply *Woman's Hour* with material. Despite these developments she left the post in January 1948 and produced a very detailed and in many ways interesting report on her five months as editor of the programme.⁵⁸⁰ It is worth examining in some detail.

On the opening page of her report Molony wrote: 'throughout the five months I have been working for '*Woman's Hour*' I have been constantly impressed by the opportunities offered by a programme reaching an audience of this size and consistency day in and day out.' Molony continued highlighting the fact that besides a short period

⁵⁷⁷ Memo from William Haley, 25 November 1946, BBC WAC R51/640/1.

⁵⁷⁸ Memo from Assistant Director of Talks to Director of Talks, 11 November 1946, BBC WAC R51/128/1.

⁵⁷⁹ Before Molony's appointment, Ursula Eason, who was Assistant Programmes Director in Belfast, Northern Ireland, was considered for the post. R.A Rendall, Controller of Talks said in a memo to the Director General: 'I would hope very much that Miss Eason, who seems a most suitable candidate and is known to be anxious to come to Talks Division and to deal with women's talks, can be told that she may apply for this job if she wishes, though I take it that that would again raise the question of replacement in Belfast'(Memo from Controller of Talks to DG, 3 January 1947, R51/640/2). Eason remained in Belfast, she was not released from her bosses 'despite numerous pleas' until 1952 when she moved to London and made a career in children's television (Obituary, *The Independent*, 15 January, 1994).

⁵⁸⁰ It was not clear why she left. In the report she cites herself as 'acting Editor', so whether she was just a temporary solution or not was not clear. She did though return as a Talks producer on the programme in the 1950s. It was also noted in a different file on the programme's serial that in December 1947, Evelyn Gibbs was expected to take over the programme (Memo from Chalmers to DT, 12 December 1947, BBC WAC R51/643/1).

in the morning on the Home Service, it was the only programming aimed at women specifically in this country. Compared to women's programmes on the 'American Networks it occupied a small part of broadcasting output, and therefore has a proportionately large job to do.'⁵⁸¹ Molony further emphasised its importance by pointing out that before *Woman's Hour* the daily audience listening to the Light Programme at 2 p.m. was four percent of the total population. Now this figure was ten to eleven percent. The report then goes on to describe the routine of the programme. Each programme contained four 5-8 minute talks, supplied by Talks Department on a weekly basis, and scheduled three weeks in advance. They always left a few minutes open so that they could cover items up-to-date such as news stories or openings of exhibitions: 'Items such as these help the audience to feel that the programme is alive and in touch with their day to day needs and interests.'⁵⁸² She then highlighted the huge amount of correspondence the programme received every week, and that it was crucial for the editor and the producers to have access to these since the listeners' letters give an enormous insight into the audience attitudes. Her main concern, however, was that the programme at that time could not fulfil its desired function: 'the present staffing situation in '*Woman's Hour*' is such that I believe few of the programme's further possibilities can as yet be realised.' Molony's final request was for a deputy editor to be appointed to share some of the workload that the editor was now experiencing. But there was not only a shortage of staff; there was also confusion over editorial lines of command:

When I took over the programme, the Controller of Talks, Mr. Collins and subsequently AD(T) [Assistant Director of Talks...] impressed upon me the necessity of my taking responsibility for the general professional level of the Programme as well as its adjustment to the audience. Here in practice there seems to be some confusion. Furthermore responsibility appertains also to the Head of Talks Department who is responsible for the quality of all Talks output. The practical results of this system is [sic] often bewildering to the Talks Producer who may receive two or three sets of widely differing and often contradictory criticisms. Thus, the Chief Producer (*who does not study the special audience*) may criticise a production qua talk without reference to the special points which the Editor has been trying to make.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸¹ 'Report on Woman's Hour', Eileen Molony, 5 February 1948, BBC WAC R13/408/5.

⁵⁸² Ibid. (Emphasis original).

⁵⁸³ Ibid. (My emphasis).

Perhaps then it was not so strange that listener's views on the programme, as already described in newspapers and Mass Observation records, were so varied. There was clearly an 'editorial battle' going on behind the scenes, where 'quality' or a certain 'in house style' according to one department, might have preceded a talk specifically written in style and tone to a specific audience. Molony was clearly aware of this: 'similarly the Head of Talks Department may criticize as too elementary or as unnecessarily unpleasant talks of which both Mr. Chalmers and the Editor may approve for their audience.'⁵⁸⁴ She was further critical of this 'double supervision', arguing that the editor of the programme:

is well placed to offer criticism of presentation and production because of her special knowledge of the audience. She also knows in detail what the Controller of the Light Programme wants and in practice she must brief the Producers. Moreover, so long as the Editor has no say in the choice of Producer she can only exercise her control by discussion and criticism. It would seem only logical that the Producers should work to her and the Head of Talks Department exercise his responsibility by sampling rather than by editing before transmission.⁵⁸⁵

This was a tentative effort to assert a degree of autonomy, so far as BBC editorial structure would allow. The problem was the BBC's line of editorial command. There was a tension between 'supply' and 'output', in other words, supply departments such as Talks or Drama might have set a certain standard or editorial preference, whereas the output, the Light Programme or the Home Service for instance, would rely on certain policy in terms of what they saw their overall aim to be. There was divided responsibility between 'supply' and 'output', which created a tension, and *Woman's Hour*, fell between the two. This uncertainty picked up as a problem at an early stage by Peggy Barker, the talks producer who was in charge of supplying *Woman's Hour* with talks in 1946. In a memorandum to the Director of Talks she expressed her worries highlighting that there were problems with the talks supplied and a pressure of supplying good material. She further explained that there seemed to be confusion among speakers: they sometimes went straight to the Light Programme or *Woman's Hour*, and not to Talks. There was also a problem with the material supplied from other locations: 'talks from the Regions are constantly coming to us for the scripts to be

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid. (Emphasis original).

worked on.’⁵⁸⁶ A similar example can be found in June 1948, four months after Molony’s initial report in February, suggesting that the problem had not been solved. This time it involved the new editor Evelyn Gibbs. In a memorandum to the Controller of Talks, the Head of Talks Department NG Luker wrote:

As you know I regretted the decision to place the running of Woman’s Hour outside the department, but I hoped nevertheless that in practice we would achieve some sort of working compromise. I am sorry therefore to have to return to the issue, but I am finding practical difficulties which I am sure are as troublesome to Miss Gibbs as they are to me. The task of allocating producers to their various assignments, and of guiding them in carrying out these assignments is already difficult enough because of divided responsibility between Talks Division and Programmes, but it becomes heavy indeed when there is further duplication of authority within the Division [...] Woman’s Hour has recently decided to carry film and book talks to be produced by Miss Rowley. I already have a producer in close touch with the cinema world and seeing all the films, who also happens to be doing book talks (Bell). It would greatly suit the general purposes of the Department to transfer him to the Woman’s Hour assignment but Miss Gibbs so strongly deprecates this that I cannot decently do it [...] My views on policy scrutiny and Miss Gibbs’ views often differ widely. On two occasions this has led to the uneasy situation in which a producer is conscious of conflicting authorities.⁵⁸⁷

He continued that this issue was very unfortunate and ‘very hampering to the marshalling and control of my staff’, but insists it was not a personality problem or issue between him and Gibbs.⁵⁸⁸ Interestingly, adding to this was another report - unfortunately undated but possibly made the same year and within weeks of Molony’s report - by Gibbs, who agreed mostly with Molony particularly that the urgent staff situation needed to be resolved and that there was a need for a deputy editor.⁵⁸⁹ She made the point, though, that the existing relation with the other departments needed to be overcome and she had discussed the problem at length at her appointment board and later with Controller of Talks and other various people. At their previous meeting it was

⁵⁸⁶ Memo from Barker to DT, 8 November, 1946, BBC WAC R51/640/1.

⁵⁸⁷ Memo from Luker to Controller of Talks, 29 June 1948, BBC WAC R51/128/1.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁹ As mentioned there was no date on the actual report but in one of the files it was mentioned, on the 5 February 1948, the beginning of Gibbs editorship in a memo from Mary Somerville Acting Controller Talks to Editor of Woman’s Hour and Head of Talks Department: ‘I shall be glad in due course to receive any comments you may wish to make on Miss Molony’s report on “Woman’s Hour”. When Miss Gibbs is ready to make her own recommendations, I suggest that we three should meet together to discuss these and Miss Molony’s report, as a preliminary to a conference with Mr. Chalmers on the future of the programme’ (Memo from Somerville to Editor WH, 5 February 1948, BBC WAC R51/640/4).

agreed that *she* as the editor of *Woman's Hour* would have the final say on scripts. She ended by saying, 'it is surely essential that the practical difficulties of this arrangement should be overcome so that *Woman's Hour* may become not indeed a microcosm of broadcasting as a whole, but a programme where material of interest and value to a specific audience may be given its most suitable and effective presentation.'⁵⁹⁰

Allowing the programme greater autonomy was problematic. These were the first signs of the programme's struggle to gain editorial control. Clearly placing the programme outside the other departments and giving the editor of *Woman's Hour* full responsibility and the final say, was a rather complicated issue. Even though it had been brought up in February 1948, the statement above made by Luker, suggested that whichever person or department had the final decision over the programme was still not clear in June. A deputy was eventually appointed and the editorial situation improved somewhat when Quigley took over as editor in June 1950.

At her appointment the staff situation was: editor, deputy editor, compere, two secretaries, and one clerk.⁵⁹¹ As editor, she rapidly sought to re-organise the organisation of *Woman's Hour*. It is clear from the records that the Controller of Talks, Mary Somerville, was very keen to see Quigley as editor, she *wanted* Quigley to do it, and certainly induced her appointment.⁵⁹² Somerville became BBC's Director of School Broadcasting in 1931 and Quigley started in 1930 as an Assistant in Foreign Department. There, Quigley worked with Isa Benzie, who in 1933 became Director of Foreign Department (both had been educated at Oxford, Lady Margaret Hall). After the war, Benzie became a keen Talks Producer for *Woman's Hour*, pioneering health and medical talks.⁵⁹³ It is evident from the archival records, that this 'trio' were an extremely competent force. It is thus possible to argue that due to their knowledge of broadcasting and its possibilities, in terms of education, the programme gained new strength and vigour in the 1950s.

⁵⁹⁰ 'Report on Woman's Hour', by Evelyn Gibbs, [no date], BBC WAC R13/408/5.

⁵⁹¹ Report from Gibbs to ACT, 'Woman's Hour Report', 5 June, 1950, BBC WAC R51/640/7.

⁵⁹² [Various correspondence between Quigley and Somerville], January and February, 1950, Janet Quigley, BBC WAC L1/784/1.

⁵⁹³ Janet Quigley, BBC WAC L1/784/1; Somerville, Mary, BBC WAC L2/195/1. Benzie, for example, insisted at several occasions in 1947 and 1948 that the BBC did not give enough space for health and medical issues, and that a review of the Corporation's policy on health and medical talks ought to be done (see for example: 'Record of Interview with Miss I.D. Benzie on the subject of her work in Talks Department', 27 February 1947; 'Record of Interview with Miss I.D. Benzie on the subject of Annual Interview', 21 March 1947). In February 1948 it was noted that: 'Miss Benzie would like the Corporation to have a "Broadcasting and Health Education" policy' (Note by ACT, 19 February 1948, Benzie Isa Donald BBC WAC L1/1049/2).

Monica Sims, Controller of Radio 4 in the late 1970s, started as a Talks producer for *Woman's Hour* in 1953 (under Quigley's editorship) and she has said that working for the programme was 'very hard work.' But that she learned a lot from it, it was the best start she could have had. *Woman's Hour* had according to Sims a good editor and deputy – quite strict – you could not get away doing a hasty job – you had to do good research. To find topics to cover, they scanned the newspapers, and she said that each producer had a different 'area' - she personally did items on gardening, travel – human interests. Guests were chosen and discussed at meetings which were 'democratic', where 'all chipped in.'⁵⁹⁴ Sims said about Quigley that she was 'very fair' with high standards, quite 'academic but quite human.'⁵⁹⁵ This observation is important because it says something about Quigley's outlook on broadcasting; how she approached content in the programme, the combination of academic or educational topics, and more popular ones.

Material examined, suggests that the internal working relations within the *Woman's Hour* unit, were well-working, once clear leadership and direction was achieved. The presenter Jean Metcalfe said: 'we occupied a smaller studio [...] where the entire cast gathered for a complete run-through shortly before noon – two engineers, an overall producer, one or two secretaries, a compere and at least six or seven speakers with their personal producers. It was easy to separate speakers from staff. The speakers were the ones wearing hats.'⁵⁹⁶ Sims mentioned that they also had the '*Woman's Hour* lunch', the day before transmission, where the guests would meet the compere and rehearse and have a small lunch together.⁵⁹⁷

Quigley's previous experience of producing women's programmes and being in charge of talks and discussions proved invaluable. In a report a month into her appointment she gave a good insight of the situation:

As the programme goes out at present it consists of unrelated talks broadcasts by different speakers who do not know each other personally, produced by different producers who do not work together at rehearsal. The Editor has never heard any

⁵⁹⁴ Interview with author, 23 June, 2009, London.

⁵⁹⁵ For example Sims recalled one time, when she had to go to Norway to do an item on travel – for a Norway edition – where she met the 'Kontiki man' and she also did a bit on childcare (crèches). It was technically a difficult task but once it was done Quigley rang and asked how it went. Sims said it was like a 'pat on the back', that Quigley was a 'caring person.' Ibid.

⁵⁹⁶ Michelmores, C, and Metcalfe, J. (1987). *Two-Way Story*. London: Futura (1986c). p. 96.

⁵⁹⁷ Interview with author, 23 June, 2009, London.

of the talks until she hears them going out over the air. She does not get the final timing of the talks until half an hour before the programme starts. The compere is not rehearsed at all, but times herself beforehand and gives the Editor her overall timing, also half an hour before the programme starts. Is it to be wondered at that criticisms have been made of ‘‘bittiness’’, of lack of a friendly atmosphere, of no feeling that the programme has been devised and carried out as a single entity.⁵⁹⁸

She further commented on the suggestion that had been made to introduce a ‘chief producer’. She believed it might have a negative effect on other producers and their work, and that some speakers might be uncomfortable not dealing with the producer they normally rely on. She also pointed out that, ‘a talks producer has to work with amateurs, not professionals. This means that the human factor must be taken into account at every point.’⁵⁹⁹ Quigley’s comments were no doubt made in the context of her belief that a programme producer and editor must know the programme, and the audience to whom it was broadcasting:

The Editor of a magazine programme consisting mostly of talks material should know what it sounds like, what kind of personality the speaker has before she places any particular script. Ideally, in fact, the overall production should be done by the Editor herself. In the month that I have been here I have been forced to recognise that as things stand this practice would be impossible as it would mean that the Editor would spend more than half the day on studio work to the detriment of other duties.⁶⁰⁰

It was evident that Quigley valued or saw the importance of working ‘hands-on’, something she clearly did. Writing about her job as editor, for her old College ‘Brown Book’, she said - that in radio work ‘there should be no hard and fast line drawn between the work of editing and that of producing.’ Quigley continued, ‘Both the Deputy Editor and I do a certain amount of studio work. We feel that anything savouring of remote control would be bound sooner or later to lead to loss of reality and of the sense so all important of being in direct touch with the listeners.’⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁸ Report from Editor, *Woman’s Hour*, to CT, ‘Woman’s Hour: reorganisation’, 3 July, 1950, BBC WAC R13/408/6.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁰¹ Quigley, J. *Brown Book*, December 1958, p.53, LMH Archives. When Quigley left the BBC in 1945, G.R. Barnes, the Assistant Controller of Talks, wrote about her: ‘Miss Quigley is a careful and conscientious worker; she has a keen sense of humour and her relations with staff and with speakers are easy; in spite of bad health she does not spare herself and is clear headed in a crisis. Her interest lies more in the content of a programme than its presentation at the microphone, but she has produced almost every

Quigley suggested a scheme whereby producers would work more closely with the programme and, for instance, producers would take turn and be responsible for the whole production of *Woman's Hour* for a week at a time. In this experiment she wanted to include the more experienced producers such as Elisabeth Rowley, Isa Benzie, Peggy Barker and Marguerite Scott (it is worth noting that it was Quigley, Benzie and Rowley who would go on to create the *Today* programme in 1957). The suggested new scheme of production, Quigley continued, would 'greatly increase the interest of contributing producers in the programme as a whole (very important) and would lead, I hope, to their feeling personally concerned with its fate instead of, as at present, concentrating on the success of their own contributions and inclined to remain distantly critical of the whole.'⁶⁰² She then highlighted that the most urgent need was for a new deputy editor. Mary Hill the existing deputy was better as a reporter than 'deputising', and Quigley described Hill as, 'active, lively, full of ideas and has a very sound feeling for our audience,' and Hill would be part of the Mobile Unit: 'first-hand reporting, mobile features, interviewing at the microphone are all items which I am anxious to develop.'⁶⁰³ Quigley was innovative and keen to introduce new broadcasting techniques to the programme.

Overall, Quigley's report was optimistic. It showed a sense of control and 'ownership' that had been absent before 1950. Quigley successfully led *Woman's Hour* into the 1950s. She still had to fight against a decision to cut the programme's airtime in the summer of 1951 which she contested and won. It was also under her editorship that the programme was finally repeated and a page in *Radio Times*, 'Woman's Page' was introduced in the same period (September 1951). She seemed to have been on good terms with the new Controller of the Light Programme, Kenneth Adam, who was also appointed by the BBC in 1950. However, in the early 1950s the programme was still suffering from shortage of staff, partly, due to the introduction of a repeat, *The Digest*, and the page in *Radio Times*. With the start of *The Digest* there was an 'acute problem'.

kind of talks programme with success. Completely free from either pettiness or egotism she has always shown herself keenly interested in the rest of the Department's output and her advice at Talks Meetings has been valuable and always to the point.' He further said she should certainly be offered re-employment at any time (Assistant Controller (Talks) to A.O(T), 22 October 1945, Janet, Quigley, BBC WAC L1/784/1).

⁶⁰² Report from Editor, *Woman's Hour*, to CT, 'Woman's Hour: reorganisation', 3 July, 1950, BBC WAC R13/408/6.

⁶⁰³ Ibid. According to Briggs (1979), recording vans were often used in the Regions, which in this period increased its output, and particularly Regional News was 'more comprehensive and livelier' than before the war (op. cit. p. 96).

Somerville, by now the Controller of Talks, even argued that if ‘we are to avoid breakdowns from overwork we must do something to relieve Miss Quigley and Miss Scott-Moncrieff during the autumn quarter when it is scheduled as experimental only [...] What is quite certain is that Editor and Deputy Editor, Woman’s Hour cannot shoulder the extra work involved in the Digest without relief of some kind.’⁶⁰⁴ It did, however, take another few months and it was this situation that led to the very bitter letter from Quigley to the editorial board as showed in the beginning of this chapter. Her plea did have an effect; in December an extra person was confirmed.⁶⁰⁵ The programme gained more respect and acknowledgment from the departments and management as it developed in the 1950s, particularly from 1952 and onwards, it did become a key programme in the schedule; thus staff and more money were allocated.⁶⁰⁶ It gained a ‘maturity’ and appears to have ‘settled down’. But the programme, its producers and audience was throughout the period, targets of fellow colleagues prejudice.

Relations outside the Woman’s Hour unit

In the handing over of the editorial post to Quigley, Gibbs wrote a report on the ‘Divisions of Work’. In it she stated that work with other departments, especially with Talks, was going well. They were having weekly planning meetings where they kept everyone informed about the programme as a whole. This also created the possibility of exchanging views and effort. From Features, for example, Eileen Hots had produced the monthly ‘Profile’ and the department also produced ad hoc items such as items on the history of the sewing machine and one on the life and poetry of Walt Whitman. Schools Department also supported the programme, particularly when Talks was not able to do so. In general, Gibbs seemed pleased with the work and the contributions from Schools: ‘producers grasp very quickly the needs of Woman’s Hour because they are accustomed to working for a *clearly-defined audience* and to training their material on to a target.’⁶⁰⁷ The Mobile Recording Unit was, at first, less suitable because the quality and suitability of its material was uneven: ‘made by young men with virtually no contact with the

⁶⁰⁴ Memo from Controller of Talks to AOT, 14 September, 1951, BBC WAC R51/640/10.

⁶⁰⁵ 10 December 1951, BBC WAC R13/408/6.

⁶⁰⁶ In September 1951, the budget for the programme increases from £325 to £355 per week, (Memo from A.R Bell to Editor, 1 September, 1950, BBC WAC R51/640/8.) And in December 1951 another extra £10 is allocated to cover for extra editorial assistance (Memo from Controller Light Programme to Postgate, 12 December, 1951, BBC WAC R51/640/10).

⁶⁰⁷ Report from Gibbs to ACT, ‘Woman’s Hour Report’, 5 June, 1950, BBC WAC R51/640/7. (My emphasis).

Woman's Hour audience.⁶⁰⁸ Things had, however, improved. News reporters, particularly Audrey Russell, had been valuable in covering various conferences and events and other topical events of interest to women. If this all sounded positive in many ways, there were, nevertheless, difficulties. As Gibbs concluded:

I think there is a lot to be said for this way of running *Woman's Hour* as opposed to a small production unit, but the Editor's job would be made much easier if the responsibilities of all the departments concerned could be more *clearly defined and agreed*. As it is, they are most of them inclined to regard *Woman's Hour* as something *outside and additional* to their own work. The result is that nearly always *Woman's Hour* work is given to the most junior or least experienced producers and in moments of stress our needs are entirely ignored.⁶⁰⁹

One example of this was the regular current affairs' item in the programme. In 1949 it was suggested that Schools Broadcasting would take over the production of the current affairs item from Talks Department. This was suggested by Gibbs, since over the months her current affairs producer had been switched several times, as Mary Somerville made clear in a memo to the Controller of Talks:

I had not contemplated the possibility of Schools taking on *Woman's Hour* Current Affairs as a regular commitment until yesterday, when Editor, *Woman's Hour* herself made the suggestion [...] Five different Talks producers have had to be put on to this item in the past eighteen months, and Miss Gibbs was very upset that the last of these, Mr. Leach, was left from her just when he had proved his competence. She does not like the idea of having to start working again with another novice (Miss Moore) and, other things being equal, would prefer to look to the Schools News Commentary/Current Affairs unit for supply rather than to go on taking chances that a suitable Talks producer will be available.⁶¹⁰

It was not just a problem of being allocated the least experienced producers; sometimes it was down to producers' attitudes towards the programme. Between September and November 1951 Quigley wrote several times to her bosses asking for extra staff. She had already complained to the management (the editorial board) on the 29th of November. Five days later, on the 4th of December, another memorandum from Benzie, expressed similar frustration. Addressed to Chief Assistant, Mr. Green, she wrote:

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid. (My emphasis).

⁶¹⁰ Memo from Assistant Controller of Talks, to Controller of Talks, 9 September, 1949, BBC WAC R51/128/1.

I wonder if you could help over the attitude which producers not working for Woman's Hour take in their ignorance for that programme? The weight of this programme is resting on the shoulders of people who can tolerate a very severe amount of work year after year; and who can tolerate also, and also year after year, the ever-repeated exhibition of fellow producers' contempt.⁶¹¹

Within Talks, Isa Benzie was known to have a temper, but on this occasion it appears to have been justified.⁶¹² The memo continued in the same tone and she spelled out her aggravation over the treatment and attitude over the programme. Due to her own experience as a producer and her familiarity with women's programmes, she felt certain that 'when I suggest that they at present contain, as I think they always have contained, the most successful adult education which the Corporation has ever transmitted.' The memo's strong tone is a measure of the sensitivity felt within the *Woman's Hour* production unit about other BBC producers they encountered. Their biggest concern was, it seems, about broader pre-conceptions over the audience and the programme:

the Management of the Division does not I think know that the superior technical innovation had been going forward for some time in Woman's Hour – the only programme where, I believe, it is currently doing so [...] I somewhat cynically accept an annual reprimand for doing rather too much work – entirely due to the under-staffing of Woman's Hour. What I really object to is that the undue work for all who are at my time doing it is due to the engagement or transfer of producers whose intellect does not qualify. The material which I consistently originate in Woman's Hour could all find its place, reframed and clothed in other words, in the Third Programme; I mention this because I fear this may be the very high standard of intelligibility so often attained in Woman's Hour, which contributes to the ruling belief that the programmes for women have nothing in them.⁶¹³

⁶¹¹ Memo from Benzie to Chief Producer, (Mr. Green), 4 December, 1951, BBC WAC R51/640/10.

⁶¹² When going through her personnel file, Benzie's personality seems to have caused her some difficulties. For example, Somerville wrote a report in 1950 which emphasised that she did maintain high standards in regards to her medical talks but further highlighted two criticisms of her work as a Talks Producer (that had been noted by others before): 'a tendency to exhaust herself in elaborate preliminary studies of any matter she is asked to handle; a tendency to make editorial supervision unnecessarily difficult, and indeed on occasion to convey unintentionally the impression that she is evading it' (Annual confidential report, 1 May, 1950, Benzie Isa Donald, BBC WAC L1/1049/2).

⁶¹³ Memo from Benzie to Chief Producer, (Mr. Green), 4 December, 1951, BBC WAC R51/640/10. Benzie's strong belief in the Light programme was revealed in an annual interview with Controller of Talks, R.A. Rendall in March 1947. It was noted that Benzie had, 'expressed a particular interest in Third Programme talks, though adding that she thought really that service talks, *particularly in the Light Programme*, were in some ways a *more important task to tackle*' (Record of Interview with Miss I.D. Benzie on the subject of Annual Interview, 21 March 1947, Benzie Isa Donald, BBC WAC L1/1049/2). (My emphasis).

Here, and on other occasions, spiteful and degrading comments from other BBC staff were noted. One announcer left a particularly nasty message in a log book, commenting on one the current affairs series 'Behind the Headlines –Background to recent News Events':

The first one – today – has been all about the Comet. I should have thought this quite unsuitable for Woman's Hour. Surely the yardstick for this sort of thing is to say "Is this more suitable elsewhere?" If you have to say "yes", then put it there. In this case, your most interested audience is obviously children. Whey [sic] not have made up a feature of all the worry, work and general preparation leading up to the Dress Show the Queen went to at Claridge's? There are plenty of things reported in the papers which are of exclusive interest to women and I'm dead certain the Comet isn't one of them! Women, on the whole, distrust anything mechanical.⁶¹⁴

Quigley was passed the comment and asked to reply which she did in her usual waspish way, pointing out that it was:

in response to a certain small but vocal section of the audience which expresses the view that we confine ourselves too exclusively to so-called "women's interests" and pay too little attention to events in the outside world. It is aimed, too, at the woman who has little time, opportunity or inclination to read more than the headlines in any newspaper that may come her way and is therefore a ready victim to rumour. This particular talk was not characteristic of the series as it is hoped to develop it and I agree, so far as one can with a generalisation, that women on the whole distrust anything mechanical. I think, speaking for myself and my own generation, I would substitute the words "bored by" for "distrust". There is evidence, however, within the Corporation itself and from our correspondence that amongst young women who have recently left school or who may have had some time in one of the women's services during the war that there is great interest in mechanical subjects and that everything to do with flying fascinates them. On the general question of the success of this new series as a whole, it is of course too soon for us to judge but we are watching it carefully.⁶¹⁵

Fellow producers and staff did hold various views of the programme and its listeners. But the programme makers of *Woman's Hour* did hold a close connection to its audience and tried to respond to its needs. The unit behind the programme possessed

⁶¹⁴ Memo from Engelman to Editor, *Woman's Hour*, 17 November, 1952, BBC WAC R15/244. (Emphasis original).

⁶¹⁵ Memo from Quigley to Engelman, 19 November, 1952, BBC WAC R51/640/13.

strong audience *awareness*, and this was evident in the struggle and introduction of the repeat.

The repeat: understanding the needs of the female audience

One problem faced by *Woman's Hour*, and which involved lengthy negotiation, was the question of how to reach and cater for the woman who was working outside the home during the weekdays. In 1951 Quigley wrote to the Controller of Light Programme and Controller of Talks Department that the programme was, 'under fairly constant attack from business and professional women for broadcasting *Woman's Hour* at a time of day when they can never listen to it.'⁶¹⁶ The organisations suggested that if the programme could not be repeated or broadcast in the evening a weekly special edition should be offered at the weekend, 'consisting of a recorded repeat of items selected from the previous week's programmes.'⁶¹⁷ She further highlighted that this pressure was not only from individual women but also from organisations like the National Council of Women, the Business and Professional Women's Clubs and others. In the memorandum Quigley continued, 'they argue that *Woman's Hour* is not restricted to items of purely domestic interest and that even if it were there is no longer *a rigid line of demarcation between women with home interests and women with careers*.'⁶¹⁸

The demand for a repeat began in 1948 just two years after the programme began. In April the Acting Controller Light Programme, Tom Chalmers was impressed by the 'steady flow' of letters from women in industry asking for a programme they were able to listen to. Chalmers response was 'we should examine ways of meeting this quite reasonable demand.'⁶¹⁹ But by December nothing had yet been done. In a policy meeting, Somerville, then Assistant Controller Talks, had spoken to the Controller of Light Programme and Controller of the Home Service: 'neither sees [?] his way to placing a special weekly session for women who work outside the home' [...] It is a pity to overlook the claims of the outside working woman in these days.'⁶²⁰ She continued that over five million women work, out of necessity, and she was clearly unhappy about the situation.

⁶¹⁶ Memo from Quigley to Controller of Light programme, 2 July 1951, BBC WAC R51/ 640/10.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid. (My emphasis).

⁶¹⁹ Memo from Acting Controller Light Programme, Chalmer to ACT, 14 April, 1948, BBC WAC R51/640/4.

⁶²⁰ Memo from Mary Somerville, 17 December, 1948, BBC WAC R51/642/1.

Similarly, it was noted in 1951 by producer Mary Hill that the reputation of *Woman's Hour* among some of the women's groups would greatly improve if they just had a slot in the evening or at the weekend so that the women who do not spend all their time at home could listen, and, she ended, 'it is not at all clear to me on what basis the various requests for a Woman's programme at the weekend are refused.'⁶²¹ The most likely answer was that a repeat would put more pressures on resources and staff. Briggs has highlighted that within some sections of Talks, serious staff shortages existed, which put pressure on the internal atmosphere.⁶²²

Nevertheless in August 1951 a repeat, *The Digest*, was finally introduced. It was broadcast on Sunday afternoons and after its first programme, the Controller of Light Programme, Kenneth Adam, sent a very encouraging memo to Quigley saying: 'I must congratulate you on the first Woman's Hour Digest. I thought it made one of the best programmes on yesterday's listening [...] I do hope you can keep it up.'⁶²³ One fascinating feature of *The Digest*, though, was that it was described as 'family listening'. It was also suggested that it should be presented by a man:

The Digest is being placed in the middle of an all-star Sunday afternoon programme; and I am convinced that unless the presentation has real panache and attack, the quality of the material actually presented will be wasted. A woman's voice, introducing excerpts of talks by other women, is bound to sound rather woolly. The crispness of a male voice will, I think, automatically give the programme a lift [...] and I honestly believe that (this being a man's world) a really smart Digest of the W.H. week presented in comparatively serious style by a man may well win some of those two per cent of women who have ceased to listen at two o'clock back into the fold.⁶²⁴

The idea of a repeat being supplied in the interests of the 'working woman' is here almost entirely absent. Nevertheless, the programme was well received: in January 1952, Quigley reported that: 'The National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs were one of the bodies most active in pressing for a selected repeat of *Woman's Hour* at a time when women working outside their homes could hear it. It is

⁶²¹ Memo from Mary Hill to Editor, *Woman's Hour*, 28 March 1951, BBC WAC R51/640/9.

⁶²² Briggs, op. cit. pp. 578-580. (1979).

⁶²³ Memo from Adam to Editor, 1 October 1951, BBC WAC R51/640/10.

⁶²⁴ Memo from Deputy Editor, to Editor, *Woman's Hour*, 21 August 1951, BBC WAC R51/640/10.

satisfactory to note that they are pleased.’⁶²⁵ In July it was noted by Somerville, who had - with Quigley - attended a women’s conference called by the Treasury Economic Information Unit, that, ‘At this conference there was loud praise for the Digest from one representative after another but particularly from the professional and business women’s representatives.’⁶²⁶

The repeat seemed to have been doing well, but in June 1952 it was announced that it would be dropped in the autumn due to, ‘changes in programme arrangements’.

Quigley, however, proposed a new programme broadcast in the evening or on a Sunday morning that would overcome some of the difficulties previously faced by *The Digest*:

The fact that it was placed on Sunday afternoon defeated the ends of the original project as it at once became apparent that, far from selecting material from the previous week’s programme that would be of most interest and service to business and professional women who can’t listen to the daily programme, we were forced by considerations of the actual audience which included fathers, husbands and children to choose instead the items of least specialised interest [...] I still think we have an obligation to the growing body of women who work either whole or part-time outside their homes.⁶²⁷

After much discussion a new ‘version’ of the repeat was introduced in 1953. This time it was called *Home for the Day* and it was aimed more towards the working woman and the younger audience.⁶²⁸ The new repeat became quite a success with Adam again praising it: ‘I think “Home for the Day” is so good these days it ought to be on Sunday afternoons in the autumn. Listen and see if you agree.’⁶²⁹ Its success was also confirmed in a listener research report the same year:

On the whole, the evidence suggested that ‘Home for the Day’ was thought to offer some very interesting and often unusual talks and discussions, and was generally much appreciated. This has, of course already been demonstrated by

⁶²⁵ Memo from Editor, Woman’s Hour to CT and CLP, 25 January, 1952, BBC WAC R51/640/11.

⁶²⁶ Memo from Controller of Talks, to CLP, 3 July, 1952, BBC WAC R51/640/12.

⁶²⁷ Memo from Editor, Woman’s Hour to CT, 24 November, 1952, BBC WAC R51/640/13.

⁶²⁸ For example a series was suggested for the programme titled, ‘Women at Work’, which would have women in various different jobs describing their work: ‘The speakers should not, I think, regard themselves as representing their professions, but as individuals, talking about themselves, what they do, what interests them particularly in their work and so on. Any difficulties they have had to face because they are women might be mentioned, as long as they are not feminists!’ Jobs suggested were: Civil servant, Model, Matron, Factory hand or forewoman or welfare officer, Schoolteacher, Engineer, Salesgirl, Probation officer, Beautician, Member of Parliament (Memo from Joan Yorke to Editor, 7 August, 1953, BBC WAC R51/640/16). (Emphasis original).

⁶²⁹ Memo from Controller, Light Programme to Mr. Pelletier, 22 April, 1954, BBC WAC R51/ 640/17.

the reactions to individual programmes: thirteen editions reported since the series started have had an average Appreciation Index of 64, with a range between 60 and 68: 'Woman's Hour' averages 63.⁶³⁰

As has been demonstrated throughout this section, the people behind *Woman's Hour*, women such as Molony, Gibbs, Benzie, Somerville and Quigley, realised from an early stage the potential the programme had and the importance attached to represent all kinds of women. The programme's content gradually changed to not only focus on the typical 'women's interest'; it was soon more serious and outward looking in its approach. But being a relatively small and – by many – less regarded part of the BBC, exposed *Woman's Hour* to patronising attitudes or contempt from fellow colleagues and management. Gaining staff and resources – recognition - to be able to make a successful programme often seemed to be a struggle. The demand for a repeat of the programme is a good illustration of the knowledge and care for its audience that the *Woman's Hour* team possessed in comparison to that shown by BBC management.

Moreover *Woman's Hour's* internal struggles also reveal a battle over the definition of what should or should not be contained within its editorial reach. Rosalind Coward writes that 'to try to understand the history of *Woman's Hour* is to try to unpick the contradictions which reside in that most ambiguous of terms, "serving women's interests."⁶³¹ It is evident that *Woman's Hour* was started as a programme aimed at the ordinary housewife as something to 'liven up' the daily dreariness and drudgery, with items on fashion, sewing, food and health. It ended up, however as, more diverse, concerned with public affairs and politics, more adventurous, and thus an important programme not just for its audience but for the BBC, and the political establishment.

Neither worker nor housewife but citizen

Woman's Hour's insistence on public matters as well as on what were regarded as traditional 'feminine' interests reveals an enormous effort and desire within at least one part of the BBC to widen women's horizons and nurture women as *citizens*. Archival records reveal a real desire among the producers and editors of the programme (who were mostly women) to create something *more* than just a 'woman's programme'. They clearly saw it as their duty to 'foster' women as citizens. The programme aimed to make

⁶³⁰ LR/54/1043, 24 August, 1954, BBC WAC R9/9/18.

⁶³¹ Coward, R. *The Listener*, 23 October 1986.

women aware of their political power and parliamentary processes, to make women more aware of the outside world. This needs to be emphasised in order to modify the existing assumption among some writers that women's radio 'reverted' back to a 'feminine' and 'domestic' focus. Speaking in 1948, the Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee said: 'Socialism demands a higher standard of civic virtue than capitalism. It demands a conscious and active participation in public affairs.'⁶³² *Woman's Hour's* aims and aspirations appeared to encourage this type of civic virtue. But it is important to note that the 'conscious and active' citizen that Attlee spoke of did not just exist in the immediate post-war years during the Labour government. It is fair to say that the material examined shows that even in the 1950s, after a Conservative victory, *Woman's Hour* continued to place emphasis on current affairs, and to engage its listeners in public issues and debates. The second point that can be drawn from the material is the implication that by focusing on topical issues and appearances from guests such as Lady Megan Lloyd George and Leah Manning, both MPs, *Woman's Hour*, became a quite deliberately *political* programme: an important communication channel which the government and opposition were keen to use. Consequently questions of political bias and balance were raised. The programmes desire therefore to be topical and to inform about government policy and public matters, was crucial. It gave the programme a political edge which has not yet been fully acknowledged.

Just a few weeks after its start there was a request to include talks on current affairs and parliament.⁶³³ The editor, Molony later wrote that 'I think too often newspaper articles and BBC take for granted the fact that people in this country are familiar with ideas and phrases which they bandy about easily but which have never been explained simply to the rest of the public.'⁶³⁴ The inclusion of current affairs was further pursued in 1948, when the programme started to work with Further Education Experimental Broadcasts to find out what kind of current affairs women would like to hear.⁶³⁵ It was also noted

⁶³² Prime Minister, Clement Attlee of the Labour party speaking at a conference in 1948, cited in Moore, M. (2006). *The Origins of Modern Spin: Democratic Government and the Media in Britain, 1945-51*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 26. Labour won the election in 1945, and implemented new legislation that would have an impact on people's lives; National Insurance, and among other things, the National Health Service.

⁶³³ Memo from Assistant Director of Talks to Director of Talks, 29 October, 1946, BBC WAC R51/640/1.

⁶³⁴ What has spurred Molony to this conclusion is a recent public opinion report: 'stating that 60% of the people in this country said that they knew nothing about the Marshall Plan' (Memo from Molony to Controller of Talks, 26 August, 1947, BBC WAC R51/640/3). (Emphasis original).

⁶³⁵ Various reports and papers 1948-1949, BBC WAC R15/94. I will address this issue further in the next section on audience.

that current affairs in *Woman's Hour* had to recognise a 'woman's' angle. In a memorandum, Talks producer Archie Gordon outlined his discussion with Norman Collins, who:

visualises these talks as being normally of direct interest to women, and as up to the minute news talks whenever possible [...] if no direct women's subject presents itself, the talk should be introduced by way of some topical event of interest to women – for example: *the arrival of lemons in the shops might be the peg on which to hang a talk about trade relations with*, and the general situation in citrus – growing countries [...] He seems definitely to rule out from 'Woman's Hour' in general, any talk – no matter what its subject – which does not in some way accept the conception of a special audience of women in the home. Any subject which does not come under a recognised "women's interest" must be hung on a suitably beribboned peg.⁶³⁶

To begin with most talks did have a relationship with - or was 'disguised' as related to - women. But over time, this obvious linkage to 'women's interest' becomes more blurred. There seemed to be a shift to broaden its current affairs and include other topics. For example, in February 1951 there was an item on 'Flood control'⁶³⁷, and in March 1952 a talk on Djakarta which apparently upset the Indonesian Embassy.⁶³⁸ In 1953 the 'peace offensive' in Korea was discussed.⁶³⁹ There was also a suggestion in 1953 to do an item on 'Parliament and Public Money', where 'a Senior Clerk' in the House of Commons had proposed a talk 'on the technique whereby Parliament controls public spending.'⁶⁴⁰ The insistence on public issues was prompted in 1951 at a current affairs meeting with Talks Department. Talks producer Benzie was now responsible for current affairs in *Woman's Hour*: 'Miss Benzie will hold a watching brief for us so that our responsibility to keep *Woman's Hour* listeners informed on public questions is safeguarded.'⁶⁴¹ At the same meeting it was also decided that, 'it was hoped to establish a linkage between *Woman's Hour* Current Affairs and the evening broadcasts which might give women listeners a *fuller exposition of public matters*.'⁶⁴²

The commitment to broaden the mind of the listener was further evident in a memo that outlined details of public affairs items in *Woman's Hour*:

⁶³⁶ Memo from A. Gordon to ACT, 17 January, 1947, BBC WAC R51/640/2. (My emphasis).

⁶³⁷ Talks Current Affairs Minutes of meeting, 7 February, 1951, BBC WAC R51/112/ 2.

⁶³⁸ Minutes of Woman's Hour meeting, 24 March, 1952, BBC WAC R51/641/1.

⁶³⁹ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Woman's Hour*, 1 May, 1953, BBC WAC.

⁶⁴⁰ Talks Current Affairs Minutes of meeting, 11 February, 1953, BBC WAC R51/112 / 4.

⁶⁴¹ Memo from Janet Quigley, editor, to John Green, Chief Assistant Talks, 2 October, 1951, BBC WAC R51/640/10.

⁶⁴² Current Affairs, Minutes of Meetings, 2 October, 1951, BBC WAC R51/112/2. (My emphasis).

Current Affairs- “Behind the headlines” – a weekly talk explaining the background to a current news item. “Feminine Viewsreel” - a monthly twenty-five minute magazine collating topical reports of conferences, exhibitions and events of particular interest of women. “For your information” - a series of talks placed at irregular intervals to explain new legislation affecting the housewife, and to remind her of the provisions of existing laws. (Talks on the new Maternity Benefits, the Married Women’s Property Act [...] have all been placed in the near future).⁶⁴³

The programme was also interested in national debates. For example in March 1952, Benzie reported to the editor of *Woman’s Hour*:

This is a week of big domestic debates in Parliament [...] The House of Commons debates Education today, Textiles and Unemployment in Lancashire tomorrow and the National Health Service on Thursday. My recommendations are [...] (a) Skip Education (b) Look upon Lancashire, price of cotton goods and unemployment as the top subject for the audience and do it on Thursday [...] (c) Add, if you wish on Friday, an account of the National Health Service Charges Debate, inviting Guy Eden, Lobby Correspondent of the Daily Express, to undertake the talk.⁶⁴⁴

Woman’s Hour frequently reported and often introduced new items that would give women listeners ‘a glimpse of a far horizon, a new sphere of thought, a strange and unfamiliar subject’.⁶⁴⁵ In July 1947 contributions to *Woman’s Hour* by MPs were fully approved, subject to relevance and to political balance.⁶⁴⁶ One example of this was a series produced by Antony Derville, one of the few male producers who regularly contributed to the programme, titled ‘Star Guests’ which would feature various prominent women. In a memo to the editor in May 1948 he confirmed that, ‘Lady

⁶⁴³ Memo from Deputy Editor, *Woman’s Hour* to Controller of Talks, 8 September, 1953, BBC WAC R51/640/16.

⁶⁴⁴ Memo from Benzie to Quigley, 25 March, 1952, R51/640/11.

⁶⁴⁵ ‘Window on the World’, from editor to talks producers, 10 January, 1952, BBC WAC R51/640/11. Another series had the title ‘Other Women’s Lives’, 6 January, 1947, BBC WAC R51/640/2.

⁶⁴⁶ Light Programme, Minutes of meetings with Director of Talks, 22 July, 1947, BBC WAC R51/299/1. However in a later memorandum when the editor was requesting women MP’s for a new series, it was noted that: ‘There is no need to balance the Parties within Woman’s Hour. The overall balance in BBC programmes is achieved quarter by quarter, and each proposal must be separately considered in relation to the state of things at any time within a current quarter’ (Memo from Assistant, Controller Talks to Editor, *Woman’s Hour*, 12 February, 1948, George, Megan Lloyd (Lady), Talks File 1 1929-1947, BBC WAC RCONT).

Megan Lloyd George (Liberal member for Anglessey [sic]) is “*Woman’s Hour*” star guest on Monday, 14th June, speaking on “Parliament Is Your Affair”⁶⁴⁷.

Lady Megan was a familiar public figure as the daughter of David Lloyd George and a successful politician and MP in her own right, Liberal but moving toward the left. Her talk which in the end had the title, ‘Is Parliament Your Affair?’ urged women to realise that most of the things that affected them in the home had a correlation to politics. In the talk she invited the listener into the Gallery of the House of Commons: ‘to hear a little bit of what goes on there, and I think I can safely say “you’d be surprised.”’ She introduced the first ‘scene’, ‘Question Time’ and described the Government Bench where ‘Mr. Morrison’ sits and ‘next to him the small alight figure of the Prime Minister, almost hidden out of sight behind the massive figure of Mr. Bevin – opposite Mr. Eden and Mr. Churchill – a volcano which may, at any moment erupt.’ She then gave a few examples of questions that might arise and ‘victims’, as she called them, who would go into the witness box:

It may be Mr. Strachey, or Dr. Edith Summerskill, on points, and sugar for jam making; or the Minister of Education telling us why this village school is to be closed, or how many local authorities give financial assistance in case of need to students in a University. You see? You might almost be listening to *Woman’s Hour*.

To emphasise that whatever was discussed in Parliament had an impact on ordinary life, and particularly women, she then gave another example, the ‘Finance Bill’:

On Tuesday, and all through the night until 9 o’clock the next morning, we were discussing Purchase Tax on pots and pans, and beds and cots, radio sets and draining boards; and as dawn was breaking and the cocks were beginning to crow, very appropriately, we got on to alarm clocks.⁶⁴⁸

But the real intention of the talk was to make women aware of their power as voters and members of a democracy. Implicitly, the border between the private and the public was being challenged:

⁶⁴⁷ He then continued: ‘I would like to know when it will be in order for me to approach a Unionist member or a Labour member (possibly Lady Davidson, Unionist member for Hemel Hempstead, or Margaret Herbison, Labour member of North Lanock)?’, Memo from Derville to Editor, 24 May, 1948, BBC WAC R51/640/4.

⁶⁴⁸ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Woman’s Hour*, ‘Is Parliament Your Affair’ by Lady Megan Lloyd George, 14 June, 1948, BBC WAC.

The truth really is that at every point Parliament touches your life, your home, your food, your clothes, your husband's job, or your son's, not only the education of your children but their future prospects. Parliament is very much your affair. I hope you will be thinking by now "there may be something in what you say, but what can I do about it?" - a great deal. To begin with there are something like a million more women than men in this country, so *you have got a greater say* in electing Parliament and the Government of the day. And I believe that none of us can really exercise that priceless privilege and responsibility - the vote - wisely or in the best interests of [...] the country unless we keep ourselves posted about happenings in Parliament and the world outside. It's only by doing that that we can make up our own minds, and that's the most important things of all - not to [...] inherit our views or take them secondhand, because the best recipe for a good wholesome democracy is a well-informed public opinion.⁶⁴⁹

Similar talks were made by other women MPs. In October 1948 Leah Manning, the Labour MP for Epping spoke on the topic: 'Is there a Woman's Point of View in Politics?' Manning - a left wing socialist, active in educational work and women's rights - made the point that:

If Parliament is to continue to be the vital democratic institution it is today, it must be a faithful reflection of the life of the whole nation; not only of the affairs of business and professional men [...] but of housewives and mothers, of nurses and girls who serve in shops and work in factories and laundries [...] But there are not many women in the House of Commons [...] and not one single woman in the House of Lords. So we have to work very hard if we are to represent the general point of view of our constituencies and try especially to put the woman's point of view as well.⁶⁵⁰

Aware that she had mainly talked about issues that were of direct concern to women she pointed out that wider issues such as finance and economics also mattered:

Yes indeed, in these matters too there is a woman's point of view and it is of paramount importance. If I could take you with me into the Chamber during some all night sitting when a Finance Bill is under consideration, you would see

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid. (My emphasis).

⁶⁵⁰ Manning described the work by women such as Lady Astor who championed nursery education. Then Eleanor Rathbone: 'her book "The Disinherited Family," was a most powerful plea for Family Allowance.' She reminded the listener of legislation put through by Ellen Wilkinson: 'Wilkinson's Hire Purchase Act was the result of her experience and of her complete understanding of these house-proud women who stood on the pavement and bitterly watched the home for which they had nearly paid, carried away in the removal van. That cannot happen now.'

the women of all Parties lined up, aching to get into the Debate to offer the Chancellor “The Woman’s Point of View” on certain items in his Budget.

Manning ended her talk with a nice little story that was supposedly an encouragement and an important reminder to the listeners:

Many years ago, I went to a Conference at the Board of Education at which Lady Astor was also present. Whilst I was making my statement the Minister went on talking to his Private Secretary. In her tempestuous way, Lady Astor banged on the table and said to him, “Listen to the woman speaking.” There is a piece of advice which might be urged in much wider circles – to Governments, to International Conferences, to people everywhere, “Listen to the woman speaking, for she has a point of view”.⁶⁵¹

What is clear from the examples discussed above is that *Woman’s Hour* placed great emphasis on education and information, and that it repeatedly asserted that what happened outside the home mattered. It is also worth stressing that it is perhaps not just about being a good responsible working woman or a housewife, it is about being a *citizen* in your own right.⁶⁵² Supporting this notion is Sims who said about the programme that they wanted to: ‘encourage them [women] to think for themselves.’⁶⁵³ Although *Woman’s Hour* was not classed as a political or journalistic programme - it is more described as a programme of information and knowledge - its desire to be topical and to inform about government policy and public matters undoubtedly gave it a political edge.

‘Whitehall and the Kitchen’: the personal is political

The BBC’s archives reveal, in fact, that there had *long* been a sense among political and government figures that a programme such as *Woman’s Hour* might be a suitable channel of communication with women voters. One early moment when this can be seen came in 1947 during the winter fuel crisis. A growing shortage of coal, which was

⁶⁵¹ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Woman’s Hour*, ‘Is there a Woman’s Point of View in Politics?’ By Leah Manning MP for Epping, 18 October, 1948, BBC WAC.

⁶⁵² Another example of this was in July 1956, the Labour MP and social reformer Edith Summerskill was invited to take part in a new discussion series in *Woman’s Hour*’s Sunday repeat, on the topic ‘Women in the House’. Its purpose was put thus: ‘The idea is to introduce as many as possible of you to our audience, and to hear your point of view on Parliamentary and current topics.’ The discussion was unscripted (but pre-recorded on the 10th July) the speaker would be sent a few questions in advance to avoid surprises. Summerskill took part in the programme broadcast on the 15 July 1956 (Baroness Summerskill of Kenwood (Edith), Talks 1: 1939-1962, 9 March, 1956, BBC WAC RCONT).

⁶⁵³ Interview with author, 23 June, 2009, London.

the main supply of energy, combined with cold weather in January 1947, created one of the worst winters Britain had seen. On top of the brewing fuel crisis there was already an acute shortage of labour. The problem was so severe that between 1947 and 1949 the Ministry of Labour campaigned to get women back into the labour market. There were shortages within the textile industries as well as ‘vacancies in the Women’s Land Army, in nursing, midwifery and teaching.’⁶⁵⁴ The success of a programme such as *Woman’s Hour*, and its ability to reach millions of women, made the programme particularly attractive to the Government and other political bodies and parties. For example in May 1947 talks producer Peggy Barker described her work as a producer on *Woman’s Hour* for the *Northern Daily Telegraph*:

Whitehall and the Kitchen – a household, a kitchen, is not nowadays a place that is isolated and safe – it is besieged by harassing difficulties and almost any decision taken in Whitehall will affect it. So that is definitely one kind of subject that women listeners would like to hear talked about over the air – they want to hear voices of authority explaining, advising and debating questions of public interest. To my mind any programme especially designed for women that does not cater for that sort of women’s interests is falling far short of its duties.⁶⁵⁵

In January 1947 Honor Balfour did a talk in *Woman’s Hour* on the topic of ‘Manpower’ and it was suggested that this topic should be followed up and explained in further discussions or talks.⁶⁵⁶ It had been observed that the BBC Controller of Talks, among other department heads from the BBC, was invited to No. 10 where they were told that the government was keen for the BBC to help explain the White Paper to the people.⁶⁵⁷

Later the same month it was noted within the Talks Department that the Women’s Land Army (WLA) was planning a forthcoming recruitment campaign.⁶⁵⁸ The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries were ‘about to launch a national advertising campaign to secure sufficient recruits for the WLA to maintain the Army at its present strength, in view of the very serious labour situation on our farms.’⁶⁵⁹ At a policy meeting in March it was then suggested that *Woman’s Hour* would cover the campaign and it was also

⁶⁵⁴ Rowbotham, op. cit. p. 244.

⁶⁵⁵ *Northern Daily Telegraph*, 13 May, 1947.

⁶⁵⁶ Memos from Gordon to Bradney (no date) and Bradney to Collins, 31 January, 1947, BBC WAC R51/640/2.

⁶⁵⁷ Moore, op. cit. p. 196.

⁶⁵⁸ Controller of Talks, Policy Coordinating Committee Minutes, 24 January, 1947, BBC WAC R34/320/2.

⁶⁵⁹ Talks Suggestions Women and Women’s programmes, January, 1947, BBC WAC R51/735.

noted that the programme would include a talk on 'Harvest Helpers.'⁶⁶⁰ The issue was then further pursued in July when the Controller of Talks wrote to the Director of Talks: 'you might like to consider the possibility of arranging for a talk on the WLA in '*Woman's Hour*', which would seem to me quite a reasonable thing.'⁶⁶¹

The WLA however, was not the only organisation needing manpower in 1947; there was also a shortage of nurses. *Woman's Hour* had planned an interview in March, 'to be broadcast 'live' between Marian Cutler and Dame Katherine Watt of the Ministry of Health about the appeal for part-time voluntary nurses.'⁶⁶² The fuel crisis, however, also had an impact on the BBC, which had to restrict broadcasting hours and output. The BBC Home Service and the Light Programme was thus temporarily merged into one service, 'punctuated by long and mysterious silences'.⁶⁶³ *Woman's Hour* itself was off air from February and was not resumed until the end of March. The interview with Dame Katherine Watt had to be postponed. But the government's view on the value of the programme was evident. In this memo from 'organiser' Bradney to Collins:

I have been wondering whether a note from you to Aneurin Bevan [Minister of Health] might help. As you know, he is supposed to take part in *Woman's Hour* on Tuesday, March 25th when his speech at the opening of the Daily Herald Modern Home Exhibition is to be broadcast. He is fully aware of the value of this programme as can be deduced from the fact that he wished to increase the duration of his speech from six minutes to fifteen as soon as he knew that it was going to be broadcast. Do you think that a letter from you in the week before saying what a great pity it is that on account of the fuel restrictions we cannot put him in touch with five million women listeners would have any effect on the 'inner circles'? It may not be fully realised by the Government quite what an opportunity they are losing by depriving the women of this country of their own programme.⁶⁶⁴

This external recognition, though admittedly, reported second-hand, shows that *Woman's Hour* was particularly powerful and attractive, and that women, as a group were an important target for the Government. In June 1947, George Isaacs, Minister of Labour and National Service, appealed to women in a special broadcast, 'A Word to

⁶⁶⁰ Policy Coordinating Committee Minutes, 18 March, 1947, BBC WAC R34/320/2.

⁶⁶¹ Memo from Rendall, Controller of Talks to Director of Talks, 11 July, 1947, BBC WAC R51/735.

⁶⁶² Memo from Gordon to ADT, 11 March, 1947, BBC WAC R51/640/2.

⁶⁶³ BBC Yearbook. (1948). p. 69.

⁶⁶⁴ Memo from Bradney to Collins, 15 March, 1947, BBC WAC R51/640/2.

Women', transmitted first, at 7.10 p.m., in the evening, on the Light Programme, and repeated the day after in *Woman's Hour*:

I am not going to quote figures for you this evening. I am not going to use difficult phrases about economics, nor am I going to give you any high-sounding slogans. I just want to tell you, in the plainest words, the simple truth – that the country is badly in need of your help, in the factories, in many services and in agriculture. The most urgent vacancies in the factories are in about sixty districts. There will be announcements in your local papers about these urgent jobs, and it is particularly to the women in those places that I am addressing myself, this evening. I'm sorry that I've got to make this appeal. You did well – amazingly well – by your country during the war, and it seems a pity that there is again this urgent call for your help.⁶⁶⁵

He ended the broadcast by highlighting the spirit of the war: 'we got together in the factories and workshops', and he is convinced that the spirit was still there in the community. Just as the war this was a national crisis, and clearly the BBC, just as in the war, acted in the interest of the nation, which in this case also happened to be the interest of the government.⁶⁶⁶

When the economic situation worsened in July due to the currency crisis, Lady Reading, Governor and Deputy Chairman of the BBC, was particularly keen that the BBC would 'explain the crisis to ordinary people' and advise on what they could do to help.⁶⁶⁷ *Woman's Hour* broadcast several talks on the crisis. From June to the end of August, 1947, nine talks were broadcast.⁶⁶⁸ With titles such as: 'Can we make ends meet?' or 'Science and the Housewife – Facts about Fuel,' these talks were of an informative and explanatory nature. One talk in July had the title 'Housewife meets Economist,' a discussion between Mary Whitaker and Rosetta Desbrow, an economist:

⁶⁶⁵ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Woman's Hour*, 'A Word to Women' by George Isaacs, 2 June, 1947, BBC WAC.

⁶⁶⁶ Moore who has studied the Labour government and its relations to communication, between 1945 and 1951, argues that Labour was in 1945 the first British government that dealt with the issue of how to best communicate with its citizens. Moore further argues that the catalyst to this change in communications policy was the fuel crisis. Moore argues that the eight talks on 'Britain's Crisis', were produced in close partnership with the government. When it was advertised, however, the BBC maintained it was an independent production, not collaboration. This is what Moore has called a 'concealed involvement in independent programming' (Moore op.cit. pp.196-197).

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., p.198.

⁶⁶⁸ The broadcasts were: 12 June 'Can we make ends meet?'; 10 July 'Supplies and Shortages in the Shops'; 11 July 'Science and the Housewife – Facts about Fuel'; 18 July 'Wages and Direction of Labour'; 23 July 'Housewife meets Economist'; 25 July 'Plans for Staggering Hours'; 8 August 'Economy Cuts'; 15 August Current Affairs – Control of Engagement; 22 August 'Agricultural Production and Present Needs' (Board of Governors Papers, 'Broadcasts on the Crisis,' G71/47, BBC WAC R1/83/3).

- Desbrow: We can't get cups and saucers for two reasons; there's a shortage of manpower in the pottery industry, and British pottery is a particularly good export [...]
- Whitaker: Do you mean that if more people would go and work in the potteries, we could in fact have more cups and saucers?
- Desbrow: Yes, and we could even have some patterned tea-sets again [...] If more people, particularly women, went to work in the cotton-mills, we'd have more clothes [...].

Desbrow later made the point that 'all the propaganda in the world is useless if people won't listen,' instead she suggested that information was needed: 'I feel very strongly about this – people need to know quite clearly what an Economic Dunkirk would look like.'⁶⁶⁹

Two other talks broadcast in the same period of crisis both made reference to the shortage of manpower and *especially* the need for women to step in. But the talks also suggested that women should be free to choose a job if they wanted to. In one of the talks the discussion is between Isabel and John Merrett:

- Isabel: Sheila rang up today. She wants your advice.
- John: Oh! What's wrong this time.
- Isabel: She wants to take a job. She saw an advertisement which seemed to be just the sort of thing she would like – and then Peter kicked up a fuss about it. Said he wasn't going to have his wife going out to work.
- John: Silly ass!
- Isabel: Well, I just told her to go ahead and take it. [...]
- Isabel: It always amazes me that there are still so many of these Victorian men about who just think that a woman's place is at home [...]
- John: I say the same as you – she ought to be free to take a job if she wants to. Goodness knows industry needs all the women it can get because manpower is one of the greatest shortages now. Any woman who has the time – ought to take a job [...].⁶⁷⁰

The other discussion is between a Jean Cooper-Foster and a housewife, Kay McMeekin:

⁶⁶⁹ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Woman's Hour*, 'Housewife meets Economist', 23 July, 1947, BBC WAC.

⁶⁷⁰ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Woman's Hour*, 'Should women keep their jobs after they are married?', 4 February, 1947, BBC WAC.

- J. Cooper-Foster: [...] There's a desperate shortage of workers - I believe somewhere in the region of 300,000 more women are needed in industry to get this country back on its feet economically [...] and I feel very strongly that it's the duty of every woman who possibly can do so, to make a contribution to the economic recovery of Britain [...]
- K. McM.: I feel that married women should confine their activities to the home, in fact make marriage a career.

Here, we find that both women presented their arguments over why women should work or not. The conversation outlined the main arguments about a wife's duty to her home and family as well as a woman's right to be independent and seek fulfilment in a career. Cooper-Foster pointed out that a woman who had trained for a career should be able to continue even upon marriage. She should use her skill where it was most needed, in her job. Speaking of training and skill, McMeekin, suggested, 'a lot of people seem to think that a domesticated woman is rather a dull and mousey person, with no conversation except tales of the children's prowess.' On the suggestion by Cooper-Foster, that most housewives spend their leisure 'lapping up the latest Hollywood [sic] heart-throb', McMeekin retaliates that 'the modern housewife has a wide range of interests and I think it's the career woman who's much more likely to become stereotyped and develop a one-track mind.'⁶⁷¹

It is important to recognise that very often in this period, the BBC was responding to instructions from politicians. It was noted in a Spoken Word policy meeting in November 1948 that the Minister of Defence had asked the BBC to recognise the importance of recruitment:

Letter from the Minister of Defence was read. It was agreed that the recruiting drive should not be accepted as a Corporation Campaign, but that the importance of the Government's campaign should be recognised and attention drawn to it without sacrificing Programme value [...].⁶⁷²

This note was to be circulated to 'all concerned'.⁶⁷³ In December it was then noted in a confidential memo from the Assistant Controller of Talks, Mary Somerville, to editor, *Woman's Hour*, that:

⁶⁷¹ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Woman's Hour*, 'Can a woman make a success of Marriage and a Career?', 6 June, 1947, BBC WAC.

⁶⁷² Policy, Spoken Word Meetings, 8 November, 1948, BBC WAC R34/878.

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

while recruiting for the voluntary element of the Territorial Army is not accepted as a Corporation campaign, its importance must be recognised and attention should be drawn to it in programmes where this can be achieved without sacrifice of programme interest. Will you please glance through the attached paper and let me know whether, and if so how, *Woman's Hour* could draw attention to it before the end of December, with particular reference to the A.T.S. (T.A.) section.⁶⁷⁴

In 1949 a talk on 'Women in the Army' by guest speaker, Dame Mary Tyrwhitt – resulted in three complaints the main theme being: 'keep the Women's Services and recruitment out of *Woman's Hour*.'⁶⁷⁵

We can say, then, that *Woman's Hour* was clearly an important and attractive channel of government communication. According to Martin Moore, the Labour government believed that information and education would make people into citizens and thus promote a healthy democracy. In this period, for the first time in peace-time, a government communications machine was fully developed.⁶⁷⁶ And the fuel crisis of 1947 was a seminal moment in this process. Moore argues that the government expected the support of the BBC, as it had done during the war. However, this created an uncomfortable situation for the Corporation, which tried to maintain its independence, leading to what Moore calls a 'concealed government involvement in independent programming.'⁶⁷⁷ The interest in a programme like *Woman's Hour* - with the potential to reach a mass audience – was evident. The inclusion of government campaigns and information consequently raised issues of political representation.

A question of balance and bias

Given the close interest of politicians, questions of balance and bias rapidly became a recurrent concern for the producers of *Woman's Hour*.⁶⁷⁸ For instance in 1951 it was

⁶⁷⁴ Memo, Private and Confidential, 3 December, 1948, BBC WAC R51/640/5.

⁶⁷⁵ Summary of *Woman's Hour* Post for Week Ending, 18.11. BBC WAC R41/243.

⁶⁷⁶ Moore op. cit. pp. 15-17.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 196.

⁶⁷⁸ For example, the programme Marian Cutler did on National Insurance in February 1948, carefully explained the different changes: [if your] 'husband had retired from work by October 1946 – that was a year last October when the old age pension was increased – and if you are over 60 – you're now getting 42/- a week between you. There will be no alteration in your pension next July – that is, if you've no one depending on you. [...] The first increase I want to mention is the case of a married man drawing a retirement pension whose wife is under 60. At present he doesn't get the full 42/-. He gets only 26/-. But at the beginning of next July a married man drawing a retirement pension with a wife depending on him – a wife any age – notice that – any age under 60 will get the 16/- for his wife. He won't have to wait until

noted at a current affairs meeting that a Conservative MP was urgently needed for general MP balance in *Woman's Hour*.⁶⁷⁹ And a memo from Peggy Barker to the Controller of Talks confirmed this:

Possibility of Labour M.P. guest in Woman's Hour in September -
I put this suggestion to the Woman's Hour meeting but the Guests for Woman's Hour are all arranged for September. Also, in view of the fact that so many service talks in that programme are by their very nature bound to be devoted to explaining the Government's policy, *Woman's Hour* appears to be far more Left Wing than Right and, therefore, the Editor is not anxious to use a Labour MP.⁶⁸⁰

This was also observed by the Conservative party, which was not afraid to complain.⁶⁸¹ In October 1947, Eileen Molony and the Director of Talks were invited to lunch with three members of the Conservative and Unionist Central Office – Sturgess-Jones, the women's Press Officer, Brigadier Hinchcliffe, and John Profumo, of the Conservative Radio Liaison Office. And, in a memo to the Controller of Talks, Molony wrote:

we were expecting them to raise the point that they thought an undue proportion of Left-wing speakers and journalists were used in Woman's Hour. In fact the lunch passed off very cordially and the point was not raised. They did mention they would like to supply us with a list of names of possible speakers.⁶⁸²

Molony accepted the proposal of a list but immediately explained to them that the party of speakers in *Woman's Hour* was not of concern; speakers and scripts were accepted on merit and suitability. But the meeting seemed to have reminded her about the importance of political balance, for, as she reported internally:

I do think, however, we ought to be especially careful to see we do include in Woman's Hour a report on the Conservative and Liberal Women's Conferences when they occur next year. As you know we did in fact broadcast on the 1st October, the report of the Labour Women's Conference at Southport, and Miss

she reaches the age of 60 before he gets the full 42/- a week' (Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Woman's Hour*, "What's Your Worry?" – National Insurance by Marian Cutler', 10 February, 1948, BBC WAC).

⁶⁷⁹ Current Affairs minutes, 31 May, 1951, BBC WAC R51/112/2.

⁶⁸⁰ Memo from Barker to Controller of Talks, 21 July, 1950, BBC WAC R51/640/8.

⁶⁸¹ The Conservative Party had in January 1947, produced a report of BBC talks in the Home Service and after analysis, suggested that there was a left-wing bias ('Politics and the BBC an Analysis of Broadcast Talk,' 25 January, 1947, BBC WAC R1/83/4).

⁶⁸² Memo from Molony to Controller of Talks, 30 October, 1947, BBC WAC R51/640/3.

Sturgess-Jones registered a protest at the time that we did not report the Conservative Women's Conference earlier this year.⁶⁸³

Interestingly in November that same year it was agreed at a meeting in Talks Department that all party conferences should be covered in *Woman's Hour*, 'when subjects arise which are in a general sense of special interest to women.'⁶⁸⁴

That the reports from the party's women's conferences were of importance is further emphasised by examining one talk in detail. In 1949 Audrey Russell reported from the Conservative Women's Annual Conference. Russell started by discussing the morning's main topic of discussion, the recently published Conservative Report on Women's Questions, 'A True Balance'. She outlined some of the main points in the booklet such as, 'the strengthening of family life [...] On the employment side first and foremost on the list comes equal pay, that is the fulfilment by the next Conservative Government to come into power of the rate for the job. Then the simplification of the income tax laws.' After finishing her discussion of the booklet and the Conservative agenda she described the rest of the afternoon; the debate on the need for promoting closer understanding between the nations of the Commonwealth, and the question of housing. On housing, Russell, reported that, 'Miss Elizabeth Christmas of Kensington, maintained that the majority of people didn't realise that it was "Nye Bevan who was stopping the houses from being built with, as she called it, his beastly quota system, under which only one private enterprise house could be built to every four council houses.'⁶⁸⁵

The significance of *Woman's Hour*, then, appealed across parties – just as both sides of the political spectrum appeared to be recognising women's political interests more generally. Labour MP, Alice Bacon warned at a party conference in 1951: 'never underestimate the importance of women at election times – or at any other times! [...] Miss or Mrs – 1951 does not ask her father or her husband how *he* is going to vote and then submissively put a cross in the same place herself. Women are rapidly becoming a great political force in Britain.'⁶⁸⁶ The danger for broadcasters, of course, was clear. In 1955, the BBC Handbook, recognised 'that the appearance of an M.P. at the microphone, whether the subject of the broadcast be political or non-political, may

⁶⁸³ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁴ Minutes of Meetings Light Programme, 11 November 1947, BBC WAC R51/299/1.

⁶⁸⁵ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Woman's Hour*, 'Audrey Russell on the Conservative Women's Annual Conference in London', 20 May, 1949, BBC WAC.

⁶⁸⁶ Alice Bacon cited in Francis, op. cit. p. 205. (1997).

inevitably carry with it a degree of publicity for the party to which he belongs.⁶⁸⁷ We can therefore see the concern for political balance and bias in the programme, as a measure, for the perceived impact it could have on women and politics.

The Woman's Hour Listener

It has been said that *Woman's Hour* from its beginning 'was one of the earliest programmes to address its listeners intimately and directly and to respond to their questions and needs.'⁶⁸⁸ Producers frequently listened and responded to listener's letters and worries. Many items featured *ordinary* housewives from all over Britain. The majority of listeners were working class. However, it is always a mistake to treat a radio audience only in its aggregated mass. The nature of the programme appealed to women from various background and incomes. According to Eileen Molony, editor in 1948, the common denominator was that most of the listeners were housebound, 'in need of stimulus' and they were able to listen while doing their duties.⁶⁸⁹ But serving such a wide ranging audience, in a time where issues such as class, education and social status, still played a key part, posed its difficulties. First, who were the programme makers representing? Second, how did they meet the demands and needs of such a wide-ranging audience?

One strategy was to inject a regional flavour. For instance in 1948 the editor, Eileen Molony, planned a series on 'the Budget.' In a memo to the producers she wrote, 'will you please note that in Week 10, [...] inclusive, we are holding a regional budget week. This means that eight minutes each day will be occupied by a regional housewife describing how she spends her income.'⁶⁹⁰ Another example was a whole edition of the programme from Birmingham with a Birmingham housewife as presenter.⁶⁹¹ The regions were always asked to contribute in various ways. During two weeks of programmes, for example, 'live inserts' came from Plymouth, Leeds and Manchester.⁶⁹² Kay Ennals, who worked on the programme as Studio Manager, said: 'on your...control

⁶⁸⁷ BBC Handbook. (1955). p. 17.

⁶⁸⁸ Feldman, S. (2000). 'Twin Peaks: The staying power of BBC Radio 4's *Woman's Hour*,' in Mitchell. op.cit.

⁶⁸⁹ Memo from Molony to Assistant Controller Talks, 5 February, 1948, BBC WAC R51/642.

⁶⁹⁰ Memo from Molony to Gordon, Derville, Wilson and Benzie 20 January, 1948, BBC WAC R51/640/4.

⁶⁹¹ Memo from Deputy Editor, *Woman's Hour* to Mrs. Hill, 6 February, 1951, BBC WAC R51/640/9.

⁶⁹² See Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Woman's Hour*, 7 September 1948; 8 September 1948; 14 September 1948; and 15 September 1948, BBC WAC. (See Appendix for details of live regional programming).

panel you had various lines so that you could open up that meter in there and come in and talk from another studio or outside'.⁶⁹³ The Scottish region also supplied talks on a regular basis after its own women's programme, *The Scotswoman*, was taken off air in 1948 due to low listening figures.⁶⁹⁴ The programme thus represented women in the cities as well as the countryside.

A second strategy was listener participation.⁶⁹⁵ The producers of *Woman's Hour* continuously listened to listener's ideas and requests and listener's letters were taken very seriously and often used as a starting point for an item.⁶⁹⁶ In 1951, an experimental theatre series was introduced in which 'ordinary' people instead of professional critics, would be asked to go and see and then discuss on the show a theatre production.⁶⁹⁷ In 1952 a discussion was broadcast between four married women on 'happy marriage.' This discussion openly talked about marriage and how to sustain a happy one. But intimate problems such as the sexual relationship between husband and wife, and sex education were soon brought up and the women spoke freely about their experiences:

- Molony: [...] was there any point when you felt that your marriage was threatened, either by some difference between you, or by external circumstances – by illness, or something of that sort, because I think it's very useful to find out how marriage might have gone wrong, and how you managed to avoid these sort of difficulties. Mrs. Calder, have you got any feelings on that?
- Calder: No, the only time when I really felt that way, was not that it might be, but just that we were drifting, not necessarily apart, but it was just becoming a routine.
- Molony: A bit dull?

⁶⁹³ Interview with author, 9 February, 2010, Dorchester.

⁶⁹⁴ *The Scotswoman* was introduced in the Scottish region in January 1946. But the programme was short lived and one of the reasons was that listeners preferred *Woman's Hour* (The Scotswoman 1946-1948, BBC WAC SC23/ 411/1).

⁶⁹⁵ For instance in December 1948 it was suggested that *Woman's Hour* should run a regular discussion 'in which listeners are invited to take part' (Memo from Editor *Woman's Hour* to Bentinck, 8 December, 1948, BBC WAC R51/640/5). And, in February 1949, it was noted that Mrs. Scott was recording a 15 minute discussion once every four weeks, with the Editor and listeners to the programme (Memo from Marguerite Scott, 'Listeners Discussions for Woman's Hour', 1 February, 1949, BBC WAC R51/640/6A).

⁶⁹⁶ Letters often commented on the programme with both positive and negative criticism. Many often touched on issues such as health and childbirth, and issues of a sexual nature. In 1953 the programme received around 200-500 letters per week (1 April, 1953, BBC WAC R51/640/15) and together with programmes such as *The Archers* and *Mrs. Dale's Diary*, it continued to receive a constant flow of letters (see Advisory Committees General Advisory Council Papers 174-193 1953-1954, BBC WAC R6/ 30/ 16). They also arranged special editions for older or younger women, for example in May 1953 they did a 'Younger Woman's Hour', (see Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Woman's Hour*, 7 May, 1953, BBC WAC).

⁶⁹⁷ Memo from Joanna Scott- Moncrieff to Boswell, 31 March, 1952, BBC WAC R51/640/11.

Calder: Yes. But I think that was mostly my own fault.

Molony: In what way,

Calder: Because I have a lot to do, and the children are inclined to get on my nerves. [...] And I think at times I take it out of [sic] him and I blame him for things that really he doesn't think of. [...]

Molony: Yes. Mrs. Spurrier, was there a point in your marriage when you felt that things were getting a bit difficult?

Spurrier: Yes. When we were first married and I thought our marriage would really go on the rocks, because I'm afraid things were not very satisfactory as regards the intimate side of our married life.

Molony: Yes. You found sexual relations a little difficult to start with, was that it?

Spurrier: Yes, it was most unsatisfactory altogether, and in a few weeks I became quite a nervous wreck and very irritable and bad tempered. [...]

Molony: Yes. And how did you put it right?

Spurrier: Well, I did seek medical advice, but there was nothing wrong there really, but I was just told to go home and have a baby, just like that. So, I said, 'well that's all right. I'd wish you'd show me how to do it'. However, my husband was very relieved to know there was nothing really wrong, and fortunately he was extremely patient and kind to me.

The discussion continued, on this intimate level, Molony pointed out how that 'side of married life' was very important and further that it was important to know that someone 'has been able to find their own way out of these difficulties.' Interestingly, what is scratched out on the transcript was a sentence saying that later in this series she, 'hope perhaps we may be able to have a doctor in to talk a little more about this matter.'⁶⁹⁸

The talk by the four women was considered open enough to attract the attention of the *Daily Mirror*: 'four wives yesterday took part in one of the frankest talks ever broadcast by the BBC.'⁶⁹⁹

A third strategy was to address those audience members who worked outside the home, not just by means of a weekly repeat, but by a steady flow of editorial items in the regular programme. In 1948, features producer Eileen Hots put together a programme on 'Women in Industry: Qualified Women Engineers.' The first question was if the women had experienced any 'opposition' from men? One of the women answered:

⁶⁹⁸ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Woman's Hour*, 'Happy Marriage', 20 November, 1952, BBC WAC.

⁶⁹⁹ *Daily Mirror*, 21 November, 1952.

There was opposition – when women engineers first started to go into factories in the middle of the Great War. But they were found to be so good at the job, that employers said: “We didn’t think women could do this sort of work, but they do it as well as the men”. Since that time more and more girls have been taking engineering courses, and there has been a gradual change in the attitude of employers to them.

Another woman, made the point that she was the only woman on her course, ‘Heating and Ventilation’. The conversation gave a detailed description of how one became an engineer and what types of engineering there were.⁷⁰⁰ In 1949 the programme began to work on a series titled, ‘Women in Local Industries’. The idea came from an unsolicited script from a woman worker in the silverware industry.⁷⁰¹ In the 1950s a monthly ‘summary’ of the various activities of women’s organisations was introduced in the item titled ‘Meeting Point’.

The programme represented and acknowledged the working woman and as demonstrated, *Woman’s Hour* had an important function because it did allow all kinds of women - worker or housewife, regional or urban - to be represented and heard on the air. This representation of women made it unique within the BBC. Catering for such a wide ranging audience, however, could not always be dealt with by balancing representation of women from different regions or occupations. If we focus, for example, on current-affairs items, the issue of *class* and of *tone* remained problematic.

In 1948 *Woman’s Hour* together with the BBC Further Education started to investigate current affairs talks in the programme.⁷⁰² Several listener research reports were made through the collaboration with three women’s groups and their members: The National Federation of Women’s Institutes (NFWI), The National Union of Townswomen’s Guilds (NUTG) and The Social Service Clubs of the National Council for Social Service (NCSS), whose members represented a lower income group. Added to this were also separate discussion groups and a listening panel. The purpose of the enquiry was to find out whether there was a need for current affairs, and if so, whether the language used was appropriate. The enquiry also wanted to find out whether women wanted a

⁷⁰⁰ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Woman’s Hour*, ‘Women in Industry’: Qualified Women Engineers’ by Eileen Hots, 16 December, 1948, BBC WAC.

⁷⁰¹ Memo, 5 July, 1949, BBC WAC R51/640/6B.

⁷⁰² Further Education Experiment ‘Report on three Current Affairs Talks in Woman’s Hour’, 1948, R15/94.

‘specifically woman’s approach to current affairs.’⁷⁰³ Volunteers were placed in listening panels or in group discussions and most women came from a lower middle class background. Many of the women said they did not listen regularly to the programme: volunteers from the NUTG and the NCSS listened mostly two to three times a week whereas 44% (majority) of the NFWI listened ‘every day or most days.’ It was reported when they did listen, women from all three groups usually listened to the whole programme. Of the ones who listened to parts of the programme, a majority reported that they *only* listened to the talks (rather than the music or the daily serial).⁷⁰⁴

There are several aspects that make this report particularly interesting. First of all, the report observed that a number of women from all three organisations had said that they could ‘assimilate the information in talks much more easily than by reading articles in the newspaper.’ For example one woman said, ‘I don’t read the newspapers a lot and when you hear it on the radio it seems more interesting’. Another participant had similar views: ‘it is easier to take in facts from a talk on the radio than reading the same thing in an article in a newspaper.’⁷⁰⁵ These comments were made more frequently by women from the NFWI, and *particularly* the NSSC, rather than the more middle class NUTG.⁷⁰⁶ The report further noted that literary skills also varied amongst the women, being poorer amongst NSCC members. The investigators drew the conclusion that there were clear demarcations between the groups and this also affected the way listeners understood or appreciated the talks. To demonstrate the issue we can look at one of the talks listened to during the enquiry, with the title ‘Shopping Prospects.’⁷⁰⁷ More or less all the women said that they knew the facts already, but the members of the NSSC were most in favour and commented positively that the talk provided a background. The NFWI, on the other hand, thought the talk propagandist, and listeners even questioned speaker’s facts on the sugar ration. The NUTG was also critical and suggested that the topic was government propaganda and that it did not cover anything new; these women

⁷⁰³ Further Education Experiment ‘Report on three Current Affairs Talks in Woman’s Hour’, 1948, R15/94. p. 1.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 15.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 7.

⁷⁰⁶ Writing for the ‘ear’ was something that the BBC had developed in the 1930s under Hilda Matheson, the director of Talks. Her ‘basic aim was to reach people whose lack of literary education barred them from access to “complicated, difficult and novel ideas”’ (pp. 32-33). (Cardiff, D. (1980). ‘The Serious and the Popular: aspects of the evolution of style in the radio talk 1928-1939’. *Media Culture and Society*, 2, pp. 29-47.

⁷⁰⁷ Further Education Experiment ‘Report on three Current Affairs Talks in Woman’s Hour’, 1948, R15/94. p. 7.

were clearly more confident and outspoken. The last two groups also seemed to prefer a more general point of view rather than a woman's one.⁷⁰⁸

The issue of class was not a new concern for *Woman's Hour*. Indeed, the programme was very class conscious: the effort not to offend was striking. For example, in 1947, when it was suggested that *Woman's Hour* should take a break over the summer, the Controller of Light Programme, Norman Collins protested on the grounds that most of their listeners do not take 'summer holidays away from home'.⁷⁰⁹ When a talk was suggested on refrigerators, the deputy editor Mary Hills, rejected it on the grounds that 'the very large majority of our audience have no such helpful appliances as vacuum cleaners and refrigerators, and listeners' correspondence shows that they are intensely irritated by such reminders of comfort beyond their reach.'⁷¹⁰ Suggestions of talks on consumer durables and other aspects of materialism were described as 'a perpetual thorn in our delicate class-conscious skins.'⁷¹¹

Language and tone was thus carefully monitored. Sims said about the programme that they were all very 'serious' and 'anxious to be useful', and that they were 'always talking to them [listeners] as individuals.' She suggested that the 'cardinal principal' in *Woman's Hour* was to never talk down.⁷¹² The concluding thoughts of the report suggests that *Woman's Hour's* need was to 'take into account two quite separate types of listener, whose educational needs appear to be to some extent incompatible.'⁷¹³ This was, however, not always easy. In March 1949, a letter from the Birmingham Association of Women's Clubs sent to the Controller of the Midland Region revealed the difficulty:

In response to the Questionnaire, members expressed some dissatisfaction with this programme. Too often it was the week's news all over again and simplified as if the planners underrated the intelligence of the housewife. Other complained

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 8-9.

⁷⁰⁹ Memo from Collins to Director of Talks, 23 May, 1947, BBC WAC R13/421.

⁷¹⁰ Memo from Mary Hill to K.M. Healey, 19 August, 1948, BBC WAC R51/640/5.

⁷¹¹ This particular quote refers to a suggested discussion on 'House Design' (Memo from Deputy Editor *Woman's Hour* to Paul Humphreys, 13 March, 1951, BBC WAC R51/640/9).

⁷¹² Sims recalled a story about an item they did on an African tribe where a woman speaker talked about the tribe and Sims thought some aspects of it funny, but Deputy Editor Joanna Scott-Moncrieff, found the talk 'terribly patronising' and so Sims learned from that incident to be more aware of how tone and style could have an impact, and not to be patronising. As she said they were 'pretty careful not to make fun of people' (interview with author, 23 June, 2009, London).

⁷¹³ Further Education Experiment 'Report on three Current Affairs Talks in *Woman's Hour*', 1948, BBC WAC R15/94. p. 14.

that many of the subjects were not practical and realistic enough for the ordinary working woman, and dealt with luxuries and abstractions, often beyond the reach of the average purse.⁷¹⁴

Later an additional report was undertaken on current affairs in *Woman's Hour* and in a memo it is recorded that the purpose of the series was⁷¹⁵:

to present to an audience of women of *many different interests*, aptitudes and *levels of intelligence and ability*, a short analysis of one or two current important national or international events, and to show how they affect the listener, avoiding expressions of opinion, but making such impartial comment as may be helpful.⁷¹⁶

The memo made the point that the range and diversity of the listeners, made the production process more difficult: 'the attempt to reach as wide an audience as possible involves over-simplification and a tendency to "talk down" – in thought if not in word; it also means that some questions of importance cannot be touched as they are too difficult and this in practice often leads to a "safe" (but minor) topic being chosen.'⁷¹⁷

Part of the problem was the actual *content* of current-affairs talks in *Woman's Hour*. The report carried out in 1948 on the three women's groups, the NFWI, the NUTG and the NCSS, also confirm this. When asked what were the most popular talks first came talks on travel and life in other countries, then cookery and housekeeping followed by current affairs.⁷¹⁸ However, when asked, what talks were *less* liked, food and household subjects were also placed at the top.⁷¹⁹ Investigators were surprised by the contradictions.⁷²⁰ Four years later, in 1952, a new current affairs series was introduced,

⁷¹⁴ Memo from Contoller, Midland Region to Controller Light Programme, 9 March, 1949, BBC WAC R51/640/6A.

⁷¹⁵ It seems one investigation covered the period, May to October 1949, and included a collaboration with Women's Social Service Groups (various, local, council groups etc.) and Women's Co-operative Guilds, to try and find out more how to best reach out and appeal to the female audience. It was done by closed groups of listening, for example the series "Cost of Living" was 'tested', they followed up the broadcasts with questionnaires to get a feeling of what worked and what did not. It was particularly related to consumer talks, since 75% of the audience were working class, it had been complained that some of the talks were being too 'difficult' (Further Education Experiment Programmes: Social Groups and Women's Co-op societies May 1949-October 1949, BBC WAC R15/ 90/ 1).

⁷¹⁶ Memo from Paul Leach to Evelyn Gibbs, 7 July, 1949, BBC WAC R51/640/6B. (My emphasis).

⁷¹⁷ Ibid.

⁷¹⁸ Further Education Experiment 'Report on three Current Affairs Talks in Woman's Hour', 1948, R15/94. p. 5.

⁷¹⁹ Ibid. p. 16.

⁷²⁰ For example in one of groups, who had been put together at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, at the first meeting, volunteers all enjoyed the current affairs item, but at the next meeting it emerged that no one really wanted current affairs in *Woman's Hour*, it was said that current affairs was

‘Behind the Headlines’, in which ‘the topics are to be current affairs topics not “women’s” topics. It was noted that:

there is a good deal of conflicting evidence about the acceptability of political topics. The more well educated listeners who write to *Woman’s Hour* ask for these topics but the less well educated ask for them to be avoided. We shall have to find a midway course by experience and listening-end check.⁷²¹

Addressing the audience and meeting their needs and demands was a complex matter. Variations in education and literacy played an important part. It is evident that the broadcasters understanding of current affairs in *Woman’s Hour* was that it did help listener’s to keep up to date, and it was particularly useful since women could continue with their housework while listening. Additionally, it was understood that *hearing* the talks made them easier to understand than reading them in the newspapers. Listening in the home thus benefited women from a lower income group and with less educational background. The report discussed, however, also reveals a second aspect of interest: it uncovers women’s personal listening habits and attitudes to listening and the importance of current-affairs in *Woman’s Hour*.

Listening in private

One report from one of the discussion groups approached, suggested that ‘any relaxation from the routine in order to listen to the radio produces “anxiety or a sense of guilt”, but that may be neutralised by doing housework, sowing [sic] or knitting while listening.’ The report stated that current affairs talks, ‘bring to the housewife’s mind news she has little time to study in the newspaper, whereas she can knit, sew or mend and listen as well.’⁷²² Since the talks had an educational value they could then compensate for ‘lost’ housework. This tension between women’s work and leisure has been highlighted by Langhamer who observes that, ‘the unpaid domestic work of

treated in so many other programmes of the BBC that it was not needed in this programme. The investigator was surprised since most of the women were not typical working class housewives they were ‘more politically and culturally conscious than the average’, some were keen members of the Co-operative Guild. They argued that *Woman’s Hour* did not contain ‘enough material of practical interest to the working class housewife, who is interested in running her home and feeding her family under conditions imposed by rationing and inadequate income’ (Memo from Education Officer South to Secretary S.B.C, 20 November, 1948, R15/94).

⁷²¹ Note of Meeting Between Editor, *Woman’s Hour*, Mrs. Cochrane, Mr. Postgate, ‘Current Affairs Element in *Woman’s Hour*’, 3 September, 1952, BBC WAC R15/244.

⁷²² Further Education Experiment ‘Report on three Current Affairs Talks in *Woman’s Hour*’, 1948, BBC WAC R15/94. p. 4.

married women limited both the opportunities for and expectations of leisure. In effect, a notion of leisure as earned through full-time, paid labour framed women's own perceptions of their right to leisure.'⁷²³ Leisure for married women in adult life thus became an, 'ambiguous category [...] and the boundaries between "work" and "leisure" were often difficult to draw.'⁷²⁴ Langhamer further notes how knitting, sewing, and needlework were popular leisure activities, but with the advent of television women expressed their worries that the television - unlike the radio - would prevent them from doing particularly creative leisure activities. The radio therefore appears, at least from the evidence discussed above, to have offered women a sort of 'compromise'.

But listening to the radio was not always that easy. Many women gave evidence of listening being difficult due to distractions from children and other family members. One woman said, 'owing to the wireless being in the only room we have apart from bedrooms, I find it difficult to listen owing to all my family sharing this one room, also lack of time', and another one 'when I do listen I listen to it all as it is very interesting, but sometimes, owing to different shifts, there is someone in bed.'⁷²⁵

Although most of the women pointed out they did listen to other programmes containing current affairs most were in favour of an inclusion of current affairs in *Woman's Hour*.⁷²⁶ One of the reasons suggested was that 'they feel they are being specially catered for and given the opportunity of catching up, in private, on their husbands and families. They can then "voice an opinion without any glaring mistakes."'⁷²⁷ As one NUTG woman put it:

Woman's Hour is a woman's programme, and therefore we usually find time to listen without fear of interruption, seeing all the family are either at school or work, so therefore we can enjoy the talks on current affairs and other talks. I like to listen because I learn things I should be too shy to ask anyone I know for fear

⁷²³ Langhamer, op. cit. p. 133. (2000).

⁷²⁴ Ibid. p. 134.

⁷²⁵ Further Education Experiment 'Report on three Current Affairs Talks in Woman's Hour', 1948, BBC WAC R15/94. pp. 6-7.

⁷²⁶ A large proportion of the women claimed to listened to *Schools News*, *Forces Education Broadcasts*, *Radio News Reel*, *Progress Report*, *Questions of the Hour*, *Friday Forum*, *World Affairs*, and *Focus*, 'on most days'. What is important to note though is that the less educated, women from the NCSS group listened more to *Radio News Reel*, and *Schools News*, they represented the Light Programme listener, while for example women from the NUTG where more familiar with the Home Service and current affairs programmes such as *Friday Forum* and *World Affairs* (Ibid. p.13).

⁷²⁷ Ibid. p. 10.

of being thought ignorant, also because it is the only means most of us have of finding things out.⁷²⁸

This quote demonstrates how important these talks were, enabling women a chance to catch up on public and political matters, in their own time and in private. It was also added that ‘the absence of the man of the house often allows the housewife to turn on the wireless as and when she likes in a way that is impossible in other programmes.’⁷²⁹ Daytime radio therefore gave women listener’s a sense of control. This was their radio time. In a Mass Observation survey in 1949 on the ‘devaluation of the pound’, a housewife answered that she had first heard about it through the wireless.⁷³⁰ But for women to get the most out of these talks, one of the conclusions of the Further Educations Experiment was that *pace*, and choice of *words* (i.e. to not use ideas and concepts not familiar to the audience) were crucial aspects to be able to take in, all the information. It was thus highlighted that, ‘This means that the producer, and the speaker, should know their audience from first-hand experience.’⁷³¹

Another crucial observation was that the investigators of one group got the impression that women’s attitude to current affairs varied depending on her position in the family: ‘because of this relationship, she may not consider current affairs within her province at all; on the other hand she may be on an equal footing with her husband in outlook and interests.’⁷³² The report believed that attitudes to public and domestic affairs were changing and it spoke of, ‘a trend towards equalisation of the status of husband and wife, and *towards acceptance by both of the need to enlarge the scope of interests of the wife in the sphere of current affairs and of the husband in the sphere of domestic affairs.*’⁷³³ It was further argued that the three organisations examined seemed to reflect different stages in this process, where for instance the NUTG showed the ‘strongest

⁷²⁸ Ibid. p. 11.

⁷²⁹ Ibid. p. 6.

⁷³⁰ MOA: TC ‘The Budget, Money matters, Household budgets and saving and spending 1937-53’, Box 1, File I, Devaluation, Notting Hill, 26 September, 1949.

⁷³¹ ‘Broadcasting in Further Education, Report on a two year Experiment’, 1 May, 1951, BBC WAC R15/13, p. 25. This was particularly noticed in the report on the Current Affairs item ‘The Cost of Living’ which was analysed as part of the experiment in 1949 (Further Education Experiment Programmes: Social Groups and Women’s Co-op societies May 1949-October 1949, BBC WAC R15/90/1). The findings of the *Woman’s Hour* experiments together with others were analysed and put together in a concluding report in May 1951 (‘Broadcasting in Further Education, Report on a two year Experiment’, 1 May, 1951, BBC WAC R15/13).

⁷³² Further Education Experiment ‘Report on three Current Affairs Talks in Woman’s Hour’, 1948, BBC WAC R15/94. p.10.

⁷³³ Ibid. (My emphasis).

signs of independence.’⁷³⁴ It was no longer a clear demarcation between ‘women’s interests’ and public interests.

Conclusion

To conclude a number of points can be made about *Woman’s Hour*, as a programme, and about its place in the broader history of women and broadcasting.

First, the records reveal that a set of problems recurred. It was acknowledged by the producers and the editors that women did have different interests, and came from different social and educational backgrounds, and that some were working outside the home while others were not. As demonstrated this often posed problems in terms of addressing and catering for such a broad audience. This manifested itself in two ways.

First, at its start there was a clear assumption of what a programme aimed towards women was supposed to be about. In its first months, the focus lay very much on stereotypical ‘women’s interests’ such as fashion, beauty, health, childcare and the home. The content, however, soon developed to include more serious and political items and this was partially due to listeners’ own requests. This consequently spurs the question, was there such a thing as a ‘women’s interest’? How was it defined? In a sense producers had to re-define the idea of ‘women’s interests’ and this was made with the help of the audience. The producers clearly believed that what brought the items together was a special point of view, a ‘woman’s point’ of view.

Second, the analysis of current affairs in *Woman’s Hour*, reveal a very class conscious programme. It was criticised for ‘talking down’ to listeners in its early years, and it has since been criticised by scholars for being too middle class in its tone and outlook.⁷³⁵ But the evidence suggests this was an over-simplified reading. I would argue that it was evident taking to account the actual context and within the circumstances the programme was made (i.e. a still very middle class BBC). Rayner made the point that the post-war BBC did not really understand its audience, particularly the working class listener, but in comparison to the two programmes discussed in the previous chapter (*Focus on the Housewife* and *How are we doing?*), the examples discussed in this

⁷³⁴ Ibid.

⁷³⁵ Leman, op. cit. (1983).

chapter demonstrate that *Woman's Hour*, tried to *understand* and *learn* more about the needs of the audience and develop the programme accordingly. Factors such as class and education did play an important part where it was felt that the more educated listeners wanted more political items such as current affairs (which in turn suggests that some women were already engaging in the 'public' world), whereas the less educated wanted lighter items, entertainment or household tips. There was not only a struggle to find and *define* women's interests in terms of entertainment or serious political topics. There was also a struggle in finding the right *voice*, or tone. The material discussed illustrates the diversity of the audience and that to keep such a wide audience - trying to please everyone - was a complex matter.

But besides from problems dealing with content, tone and class, the other major point that can be made, is that actually, as a programme it did many good things. First, *Woman's Hour* tried to learn more about the needs of the audience and sought more appropriate ways of communicating with listeners. It was very innovative; both in tone and technique, but also in providing education.

The programme received a huge amount of correspondence. Listeners' letters and suggestions were brought up (for example in the item Reading Your Letters) and sometimes turned into actual programme items, even allowing ordinary women to take part in the programme. Thus a more democratic, intimate style was developed. *Woman's Hour* worked as a kind 'exchange' or 'forum', arguably a pioneering form of radio production, ahead of its time. By doing this the female audience helped to shape the output of the programme and broadcasting in general.

One aspect of innovation in broadcasting techniques was its educational items. The material examined, show that listening to *Woman's Hour* had for many women - particularly women from a working-class background - an educational purpose and that it served an important function in disseminating information. Women claimed that by *listening* they could assimilate information more easily than by reading about it in newspapers. *Woman's Hour* collaborated with Schools Broadcasting and Further Education to develop new ways of incorporating serious material such as current affairs in a manner and style that would not alienate listeners. The programme worked hard to introduce new ways of approaching topics. A good example of this was the attempt to educate and engage listeners in cultural activities for instance, the experiment of letting

ordinary women go and see a play or other theatre production and then report back and discuss it on air (rather than having a critic). The production team was innovative and Quigley was very keen on making the programme more 'interactive'. Women *were learning through experience*, if not their own, by hearing from others who had the experience. Sims said about the programme that within the BBC, no men ever listened to the programme – particularly within the higher ranks (or hierarchy) of the Talks department. This was in some sense good since, as she says the programme was 'left alone to get on with things.'⁷³⁶

The magazine format itself was very important. At the time *Woman's Hour* was very much alone in its unique presenting style which enabled a range of programme items to be put together. The key in the programming was the way educational items were 'disguised'; a mixture of lighter and serious items. One edition in 1953 for example opened with a discussion, including a Professor and two women from the 'Listeners Group', on nutrition. This was followed by reviews of plays from the London theatre, and then an item titled 'Adventures in Africa' whose female speaker looked back at adventures from the continent. The last item before the usual serial reading, was a 'dramatised' profile of Mary Stuart, Queen of England (see Appendix).⁷³⁷ This was truly Reithian, and arguably one of the best examples of the BBC's post-war attempt to educate and inform. John Grist, former Head of Current Affairs Television, has said about the Talks Department: 'they came from the classical academic background of the older universities that made enquiry into a way of living [...] They were the natural heirs of Mathew Arnold.'⁷³⁸ The women (and the few men) behind *Woman's Hour* clearly possessed an understanding or insight, about the possibilities and potential the programme had. Women such as Somerville, with her background in School Broadcasting, and Benzie who evidently believed in the potential that the Light Programme could have in terms of educating a wide audience - together with Quigley's return to the programme, appear to have played an important part in its development. The programme aimed to widen women's horizons - not just 'geographically' talking about foreign places or other countries in the world, but also *mentally*, educating women about intimate and personal issues such as the body, psychology, and personal confidence. The majority of listeners were working-class women and the programme

⁷³⁶ Interview with author, 23 June, 2009, London.

⁷³⁷ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Woman's Hour*, 28 April, 1953, BBC WAC.

⁷³⁸ Grist, op. cit. p. 57.

through collaboration with Schools Broadcasting and Further Education developed new ways to explain and engage working-class women in public and political matters. As the evidence suggests according to some listeners it did make a difference.

But the programme material also reveals a second aspect of education. The records suggest an emphasis - a desire - to educate and nurture women as *citizens*, which consequently gave the programme a political edge and arguably a feminist one too. The programme can therefore be seen as progressive and it further highlights how the public service ethos encouraged a very different representation from its commercial counterparts. The material demonstrates that the supposed idea that women's radio in the post-war period 'reverted' back into the home as suggested by scholars such as Nicholas, Leman, and McKibbin discussed in chapter one, is not entirely correct. *Woman's Hour* was in a sense a continuation of the more public, outward-looking programmes that began during the war. The question of citizenship was just as important in the post-war period. And the programme's focus on citizenship reveals a desire to empower women as citizen's in their own right. This allows us to distinguish radio slightly from women's magazines, which tended to treat women more *consistently* as consumers. In this sense, public service broadcasting presented an alternative in the representation of the post-war woman.

This has further implications for our understanding of the nature of women's experience in post-war Britain. In America, the female radio audience were crucial as consumers and thus also constructed as such on air. But in post-war Britain the female audience were represented more clearly as citizens and voters as well as consumers. By including educational talks on current-affairs and topical events; *Woman's Hour*, not only showed that women's interests were no longer restricted to the home; they further pushed women to take their place in the outside world.

Because of this emphasis on educating women about their role as citizens, it is possible to see *Woman's Hour* as having a political dimension. It was, for instance, attractive to the political parties: current affairs, social welfare and the daily drudgery of austerity and rationing, made it important as a 'gateway' to the home. Women in this period were seen as a strong political force. There was no longer a clear demarcation between the private and the public: the programme sought to transport the listener beyond the four walls of the home. It is also interesting to note the types of women that were present on

air. In the last chapter it was proposed that we did not only see the politicisation of the home, it was also the reverse; the *domestication of politics*. With women MPs like Lady Megan Lloyd George and Leah Manning talking about parliament, we can see politicians revealing a little more about themselves than just their public persona.⁷³⁹

Quite often the MP's present on *Woman's Hour* were there as, 'Guests of the Week', or, as in 1956 when Nancy Astor was interviewed by Mary Stocks, giving a very personal insight into her first experience of Parliament.⁷⁴⁰ These were women 'in power', which therefore, also helped to change the *perception* of women in society.⁷⁴¹

The final point is the programme's ability to offer a *space* for women, *both* in the schedule, and in the home. In 1953 Janet Quigley described the programme as such:

Woman's Hour has come to be regarded by many of its listeners as a kind of club. Far from being confined to passive listening, membership of this club takes an active form: listeners write about the programme and about themselves, they criticise, encourage, suggest and occasionally broadcast. This co-operation in building the programme insures that it is really their own and forges a chain that links listeners to us and to each other.⁷⁴²

In a later article she said that she was often asked by women, 'never by men', why a specific women's programme was necessary. 'Surely, my interrogators say, women are as capable as men of choosing what they want to listen to from the general programmes. Is it not old-fashioned and even a little insulting [...]?' Quigley answered that there was many reasons for this separation, one was for example the size of their own mail-bag, 'which shows amongst women of every age and class an appetite and a positive need for programmes of their own.' Another reason was, as she put it, 'one can demonstrate that however varied the subjects that may be included there is a way of presenting them and of looking at them that appeals specially to women. Which seems to mean that we have

⁷³⁹ Other MPs appearing were for example Labour's Elaine Burton who spoke about Equal Pay on 13th of June, 1947, (Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *Woman's Hour*, BBC WAC); and the Conservative Thelma Cazalet-Keir who also spoke on Equal Pay on the 29th of March 1951 (for a reproduction of the transcript of Cazalet-Keir's talk, see Kearney, M., Murray J. and Macgregor, S. (2006) *Woman's Hour: From Joyce Grenfell to Sharon Osbourne. Celebrating Sixty years of Women's Lives*, London, John Murray. p. 81).

⁷⁴⁰ Nancy Astor interviewed by Mary Stocks, 7 October 1956 (Kearney et.al. op.cit. p.78. The transcript of the interview is reproduced in the book).

⁷⁴¹ *Woman's Hour's* ability to feature women speakers was of significance. Female speakers and experts were used in other programmes within limited numbers. For instance, *Friday Forum*, a topical, up to date current affairs programme on the Home Service, broadcast between October 1947 and April 1948, twenty-six programmes. Throughout all of these broadcasts a total number of eighty speakers were used - three of these were women; Honor Croome, Ruth Drew and Margery Fry (*Friday Forum* BBC WAC R51/191).

⁷⁴² Scott-Moncrieff, J. (Ed.). (1953). *The Book of Woman's Hour the Words Behind the Voices*, London, Ariel Productions Limited. Foreword.

come to the conclusion that after all there is such a thing as a woman's point of view.⁷⁴³

Woman's Hour sought to represent *all kinds* of women: housewives, or working, women from different parts of Britain, old and young, thus offering an important space where women could speak for themselves, and their worries concerned (by covering for example controversial topics such as the menopause or intimate details of how to maintain a 'happy marriage'). It might seem a banal observation to make, but the fact that the programme in its title had the word 'woman' rather than just 'housewife' suggest that there was an aim to include all women and not exclude anyone.⁷⁴⁴ For example, as was evident with the continued insistence on a repeat or a programme at the weekend for the working woman and by also transmitting from various regional places such as Birmingham or Scotland. Alexander Badenoch has written about women's radio in West Germany after the war and suggests that women's radio addressed its audience (or women) as one single group allowing listeners to imagine, 'a (national) community of women.'⁷⁴⁵ This notion of a 'community' offers a parallel with the British context, where the programme was referred to as a 'club.'⁷⁴⁶ *Woman's Hour* established a very close relationship between the production team and the audience, with familiar voices and regular items of content, attending to listeners' needs and demands.

Broadcasters, however, were also of the impression that listening in the private gave women a sense of control; this was *their time* where they could learn about the world and topical issues (without necessarily doing less housework). The actual listening experience of being perhaps alone during the day was of importance. This feeds into the ideas developed by Scannell and Lacey, that both suggest that radio did help democratise society and public life, and as Lacey has argued, radio integrated women

⁷⁴³ Quigley, J. 'My Job' in *Brown Book*, December 1958, p.55, LMH Archives.

⁷⁴⁴ This is an important point to make because if one compares it to other countries in Europe it was perhaps not such a straightforward thing. Karin Nordberg for example has written about women's programmes at the Swedish Radio in the post-war period. She has studied a few of the main programmes for women of which two had the titles, *Husmorsskolan* and *Husmorshalvtimmen*, which translates to the *Housewife's School*, and the *Housewife's Half-hour* (Nordberg, K. (2001). 'En flitig, förnuftig, finurlig, förnöjsam, företagsam, fredsälskande, föreningsaktiv fru och flerbarnsmor med förråden fyllda. Om husmorsfostran och medborgarbildning i radio', in. *Folkbildning och genus. Det glömda perspektivet*, (Eds.) K. Nordberg and K. Rydbeck, Linköping: Mimer, pp. 63-91; Nordberg, K. (1998), *Folkhemmets röst: radion som folkbildare 1925-1950*, published PhD Thesis, Umeå universitet).

⁷⁴⁵ Badenoch, A. (2007). 'Time Consuming: Women's Radio and the Reconstruction of National Narratives in Western Germany 1945-1948', *German History*, 25,1, pp. 46-71. p. 54.

⁷⁴⁶ See quote above by Quigley, and the programme was also referred to as a 'club' in *Home Notes*, 'A date at 2 o'clock for four million women', 9 June, 1950.

into the public sphere. A programme like *Woman's Hour* did act as a bridge between the public and the private, and there was a sensibility about it that made it work particularly well. It is interesting to know that already in its early days the choice of having a separate programme for women was questioned. But having examined the material it is clear that the programme played an important part in providing women with company and – something that has been rather underestimated up till now – political education and information. As a programme it really seemed to *care*.

Indeed, we might conclude that *Woman's Hour* was a good example of what Naomi Black has defined as *social feminism*. Social feminism is a term that highlights women's difference and specificity.⁷⁴⁷ Black argues that: 'social feminists' argument was implicitly for the integration of the social and the political, the movement of women into the public sphere in the extension of their domestic role.'⁷⁴⁸ Women could find a political role 'as women'. She studied three women's organisations that all had a membership of women and were run independently by women, they also sought to encourage women's political activity but they did not necessarily identify themselves as 'feminist'.⁷⁴⁹ In many ways this is how *Woman's Hour* was working; it was run mainly by women for women. It was often pointing out or the angle on a story was (as even Quigley said) 'the woman's point of view', and by doing this sought to introduce women to political questions or issues by 'hooking' it to something that was specific to them, for example something to do with food or household items. The references to 'Whitehall and the kitchen' or the talks by MP's such as Lady Megan Lloyd George and Leah Manning are good examples of this. It is, as Black suggests, approaching politics but from a different perspective.⁷⁵⁰ This is perhaps a way of trying to understand aspects of 'feminism' in the post-war period, how the domestic role or sphere could be a starting point for political engagement and activity.⁷⁵¹

⁷⁴⁷ This is in contrast to the other strand Black identifies as, *equity feminism*, which suggest a belief and focus on women being *similar* to men and therefore calls for equality for women on that basis (p.11). But as she highlights it does not mean that social feminism accepts or supports patriarchal beliefs of separate spheres, or, women's marginalisation, rather social feminists as she put it: 'reject the most important of the characteristics ascribed to women: dependency' (p. 53). (Black, N. (1989) *Social Feminism*, London: Cornell University Press).

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 26.

⁷⁴⁹ The three organisations were: the British Women's Co-Operative Guild; the French L'Union Feminine Civique et Sociale and the American The League of Women Voters.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 310.

⁷⁵¹ There is also an interesting parallel here to the Swedish Radio, where a similar notion about women's education as housewives and citizens were emerging. The boundary between the two strands; the first educating women in domestic skills and housewifery, and the second citizenship, were at some points very fluid: mutual beliefs that one would lead to the other. So for example, an interest for good

CHAPTER FIVE

Mrs. Dale's Diary: between art and life

The feature has been running in the afternoons so long now that it seems to have become part of the housewife's life and an escape from her many vexations. [...] It has reached its pinnacle of popularity because it concerns the things that happen round about us all. There may be exaggerations to add colour, but for the most part it is a story of everyday occurrences about everyday folk, binding the listener very closely to the characters and prompting her to say: "I might have done that." Or: "That woman is the very spit of –". I think it is this humanising of the characters, making this suburban household like the one next door, if not your own, that has given this radio feature an almost magnetic effect on our womenfolk.

Alfred Wilcox, *Yorkshire Evening Post*, April 1950⁷⁵²

The Dales live in circumstances which must give pleasurable day-dreams to the majority of listeners who identify themselves with the family. But it would be wrong to write Mrs. Dale off as pure escapism, out of touch with social realities. Nor would it be fair to judge this programme in terms of "drama" [...] It is not Art, in this full sense, at all. But neither is it mere Life, the too faithful reproduction of everyday existence untransmuted [sic] by art. It is something in between.

The Observer 27 December 1953⁷⁵³

Mrs. Dale's Diary started on the Light Programme in January 1948 and ran until 1969.⁷⁵⁴ The fifteen minute broadcast was recorded in advance and transmitted at 4 p.m., Monday to Friday. In 1949 a daily repeat at 11.45 a.m. was introduced. The original scriptwriters were Ted Willis and Jonquil Antony. Both had previously been hired to write for *Front Line Family*. Over time, the scriptwriters would vary: Jonquil

citizenship would be awakened through the idea of professionalization of domestic skills and domestic work, at the same time the position as a housewife would be strengthened by or associated with good citizenship (Nordberg, op. cit. p. 67. (2001)).

⁷⁵² *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 'Home Sweet Home – and Mrs. Dale' by Alfred Willcox, 22 April 1950.

⁷⁵³ *The Observer*, 'Profile – Mrs. Dale's Diary', 27 December 1953.

⁷⁵⁴ By 1969 it had been renamed *The Dales*.

Antony stayed-on and was joined by two other writers, mainly women, although a male writer, Basil Dawson, was later introduced.⁷⁵⁵

Mrs. Dale's Diary depicted the everyday life of a middle-class family in a north London suburb, 'Parkwood Hill'. It followed the main character – Mary Dale, a doctor's wife - and her husband Jim, their children Bob and Gwen, and their friends and immediate family, including Mrs. Dale's mother, Mrs. Freeman and her cat Captain, the 'daily help', Mrs. Morgan, and the gardener Monument. The 'Editorial Policy' from 1949 stated:

this serial has a simple object: to hold a mirror to the everyday life of a normal, middle-class family. It is not a soap-opera of the kind which abounds in American daytime radio [...] Womanhood does not have to be demonstrated invariably as the dominant sex and the source of all human virtues. In other words, Mrs. Dale's Diary should strive to achieve a realism which is specifically withheld from its American counterparts.⁷⁵⁶

The serial was supposed to reflect everyday life, but clearly in a different way from American serials. According to Hilmes, *Mrs. Dale's Diary* was an 'antidote', a break with the American associations that had been made through *Front Line Family*.⁷⁵⁷ Early on it was also noted: 'one might say that this series is a human rather than a kitchen drama.'⁷⁵⁸ Reading the scripts for the actual broadcasts, they reveal quite a personal and intimate style. After the regular theme tune of harps playing, Mrs. Dale herself would usually open each episode by 'writing' in her diary. 'This morning Gwennie went off to her new job. She seemed very calm about it, but I think she's been doing a lot of

⁷⁵⁵ Ted Willis and Jonquil Antony were the first two original writers. They were joined by Melissa Wood, and, when Willis left, Lesley Wilson took over (who had also worked on *Front Line Family*, according to Hilmes, op. cit (2007)). When Melissa Wood left she was replaced by Joan Carr-Jones who was later given notice and replaced by Hazel Adair in November 1953. Adair would later go on to write for the television serial *Crossroads*. In March 1953 Basil Dawson took over from Lesley Wilson. Since writing for *Mrs. Dale's Diary* provided regular work - a regular income - it did attract attention from novelists at the time. For example, in 1953 when a script-writer position was available, both Antonia White (Memo, 18 March, 1951, BBC WAC R19/779/3) and Doris Lessing showed interest. Lessing sent a 'trial script' to producer, Antony Kearey saying: 'Perhaps it is a bit strong for domestic drama, but I thought better to err on this side than the other?' (Letter from Lessing to Kearey, 2 November, [1953], BBC WAC R19/779/4). In her biography, Lessing discusses her attempt to write for *Mrs. Dale's Diary* and conclude: 'I then decided that all these attempts to earn money in ways other than writing seriously were a mistake' (p. 126). (Lessing, D. (1998). *Walking in the Shade. Volume Two of My Autobiography, 1949-1962*, London: Flamingo).

⁷⁵⁶ 'Editorial Policy', 26 May, 1949, BBC WAC R19/779/1.

⁷⁵⁷ Hilmes, op. cit. p. 22. (2007).

⁷⁵⁸ McMillan to Martyn Webster, 29 October, 1947, BBC WAC R19/779/1.

thinking of her own.’⁷⁵⁹ The main dramatisation between characters would then unfold, and a scene or dialogue would then be followed by Mrs. Dale’s own reflections: ‘I often think how dull life must be for people without children. I don’t know what I’d do without mine to think about. I’m glad there doesn’t seem any prospect of Gwennie getting married yet awhile. But when she does, whatever she learns in this new job won’t be wasted, that’s one thing.’⁷⁶⁰

Each episode would contain a mix of Mrs. Dale’s thoughts and the dialogue of the various characters, creating an end-product that talked closely to the listeners, that even prompted some listeners to feel as if the characters were “real people”, people whom they feel they know intimately.’⁷⁶¹ “They are my friends” one listener said; another said, “I feel as if the family were relations of mine or very close neighbours.”⁷⁶² Over the years listeners followed the developments of the family and its friends and neighbours. Stories focused mainly on everyday family life: happy or unhappy marriages and relationships; work; illness. Listeners would follow Mrs. Dale’s son, Bob, trying various jobs and love interests; Gwen, after getting married setting up a home and later after having a baby debating whether to stay home as a ‘domestic wife’ or go back to work; and the various adventures of Mrs. Dale’s sister Sally, in many ways the complete opposite to the traditional and devoted housewife, Mrs. Dale.⁷⁶³

The serial soon attracted millions of listeners - at its peak four to five million - and was particularly popular among women. For example in November 1950, Esta Shirley wrote in the *Sunday Sun*:

“Everything Stops”, [...] What is there about this family that has so captured the hearts and imagination of the women of this country that time tables are arranged in such a way that the Dales’ latest adventure is never missed and their anxieties and domestic crises discussed as realities,

⁷⁵⁹ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, Episode 197, 11 October, 1948, BBC WAC.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁶¹ Listener Research Report LR/52/941, ‘Some observations on listeners’ reactions to domestic serials, with special reference to “Mrs. Dale’s Diary”, 21 August, 1952, BBC WAC R9/9/16.

⁷⁶² Ibid.

⁷⁶³ Sally was an independent and ambitious woman, (once divorced), described by Ted Willis ‘as a character the “antithesis” in every way of the pivotal character’ (McMillan to Webster, October 29, 1947, BBC WAC R19/779/1). In the ‘Editorial Policy’, she is portrayed as being thirty-five, more ‘gay’ than her sister, sometimes selfish, and a quite flirtatious person (McMillan to Webster, October 29, 1947, BBC WAC R19/779/1). Her lack of domestic skills was referred to at various times in the scripts.

equalling in importance the happenings in our own homes? [...] Why do we love this family so much?⁷⁶⁴

When the daily repeat was established in July 1949, the *Weekly News* wrote that it was ‘breaking BBC records for popularity, “Mrs Dale’s Diary” makes history this week in being the first radio show to earn two broadcasts a day’.⁷⁶⁵ Most listeners were aged thirty and upwards; the majority came from a working-class background. Above all, it was mostly women who listened to the serial, largely, it seemed because of its daytime placing in the schedule. Many of these listeners were referred to as ‘addicts’.⁷⁶⁶ Correspondence to the ‘diary’ in 1952 was of an average of 79 letters a month (but this would fluctuate depending on story-lines and changes in cast).⁷⁶⁷ The cast and the production team would regularly be sent gifts and cards, and advice to characters on what to do in a certain situation. Listeners were, to say the least, dedicated. When the serial was threatened in 1952, one wrote to a newspaper to say: ‘So now someone wants to come right into the house and switch off the radio. We housewives have no clothes, no food, and no coal. At least leave us *Mrs. Dale’s Diary*’.⁷⁶⁸

Because of its popularity, *Mrs. Dale’s Diary*, just like *Woman’s Hour*, generated considerable attention from various bodies and organisations outside the Corporation. For example, September 1948 it was noted by the ‘Home Broadcasting Committee’ that the Corporation ‘should help where possible’ on the current Territorial Army Campaign.⁷⁶⁹ In October 1948, ‘Bob Dale’ joined the Territorial Army.⁷⁷⁰ There was a request, too, for various items on electricity and fuel economy to be put in. This prompted the Controller of the Light Programme, Kenneth Adam to conclude, ‘I am quite agreeable to the kind of mention of fuel economy which you suggest in “Mrs. Dale’s Diary”’, but we clearly must be careful about the number of institutional references in this programme.’⁷⁷¹ Requests continued, however. And in 1954 we find

⁷⁶⁴ *Sunday Sun*, ‘Esta Shirley looks into the popularity of ‘Mrs. Dale’s Diary’’, November 5, 1950.

⁷⁶⁵ *Weekly News*, ‘The 4 o’clock favourite’, 16 July, 1949.

⁷⁶⁶ Listener Research Report LR/52/941, ‘Some observations on listeners’ reactions to domestic serials, with special reference to “Mrs. Dale’s Diary”’, 21 August, 1952, BBC WAC R9/9/16.

⁷⁶⁷ Memo from Brian Mulliner, PCS, to Norman Wright, 19 February, 1952, BBC WAC R19/779/2.

⁷⁶⁸ *The Scottish Daily Express*, Marion Law of ‘Glenbranted, Strachur, Argyll’, responded to a previous letter suggesting the serial should come off the air, 28 January, 1952.

⁷⁶⁹ ‘Policy Home Broadcasting Committee Minutes’, 14 September, 1948, BBC WAC R34/414/1.

⁷⁷⁰ ‘Script conference’, 21 October, 1948. It was further noted on the 25 November, that ‘Bob’s Territorial Service must be mentioned from time to time; not so much from the Military aspect, but as it affects his Domestic life. Through the Territorials [sic], Bob will make some men friends, join a Rugger Club, and generally be “toughened up” (Script conference 25 November, 1948, BBC WAC R19/779/1).

⁷⁷¹ Memo from Controller, Light Programme to Charles Lefeaux, 23 November, 1951, BBC WAC R19/779/1.

the Director General, together with the Director of Television, and the Director of the Spoken Word, meeting a representative from the Ministry of Transport and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents to discuss co-operation on the issue of ‘road safety’.⁷⁷² ‘What do you think of the idea of letting ROAD SAFETY ‘creep into’ the Diary in some form or other?’⁷⁷³ The serial’s producer, Anthony Kearey responded that this topic had already been covered extensively in the serial where various ‘plugs’ had been inserted.⁷⁷⁴ The effectiveness of the serial remained even in the 1960s. The actress Shirley Dixon who played Jenny Dale, remembered a story line which aimed to encourage women to do ‘screening’ and ‘smear tests’. Dixon’s character did a test and some irregular cells were found (in the end she was fine though), but women listeners wrote in and said how Jenny’s test had prompted them to do their own, as Dixon reflected: ‘So you suddenly realised that in actual fact the programme that you were working on did have a very strong, social impact’.⁷⁷⁵

The serial would later face competition from *The Archers*, which was transferred to the Light Programme in 1951⁷⁷⁶, and *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* was twice under threat of being cancelled (in 1952 and 1953). In the 1960s a diminishing audience led to more pressures to keep the series up-to-date with social and controversial issues: ‘abortion, young widowhood, spastic children, unmarried mothers.’⁷⁷⁷ In 1967, as Howes put it in an anthology of gay representations, one of the main characters, ‘changed from being a happy queer to an exiled homosexual, leaving Mrs. Dale in a bother. For all her gurgling, practical tolerance, she couldn’t accept that her brother-in-law – whom she had known as a gentleman of obviously aesthetic temperament and taste for nearly 20 years – was one of them.’⁷⁷⁸ The serial was in 1969 replaced by *Waggoners’ Walk*, on Radio 2, a serial which portrayed the life of three young women living in London and which ‘threw itself into social problems such as abortion, child custody, hypothermia,

⁷⁷² Memo from Controller, Home Service to CLP, 16 June, 1954, BBC WAC R19/779/5.

⁷⁷³ Memo from Rooney Pelletier to Antony Kearey, 2 July, 1954, BBC WAC R19/779/5.

⁷⁷⁴ For example: ‘Dr. Dale is always shown as a careful and considerate motorist: his conversations with passengers in his car are often punctuated with remarks about the behaviour of other road users. Mrs. Dale has naturally been drawn into these experiences [...] Bob, the son, has been driving a motor cycle for the past eight or nine months and through him, we have focussed a good deal of attention about the vulnerability of motor-cyclists’ (Memo from Antony Kearey to Rooney Pelletier, 6 July, 1954, BBC WAC R19/779/5).

⁷⁷⁵ Interview with author, 29 January, 2010, London.

⁷⁷⁶ *The Archers* was first broadcast in 1950 on the Midland Region (Home Service).

⁷⁷⁷ Howes, K. (1993). *Broadcasting It. An Encyclopaedia of Homosexuality on Film, Radio and TV in the UK 1923-1993*. London: Cassell. p. 527.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid.

murder, and confrontations of every kind.’⁷⁷⁹ This was very different from the world of Mrs. Dale, who by then seemed obsolete; an ‘old-fashioned maiden aunt’.⁷⁸⁰ In its heyday, however, the serial was a phenomenon. The seemingly simple policy manifesto, ‘to hold a mirror to the everyday life of a normal, middle-class family’ was key. But, of course, this was no simple task. For some, the focus on the private, intimate, domestic side of life was a little too sordid for the BBC, and not enough to differentiate it from its ‘American counterparts’.

There are thus three areas to discuss. First, the departmental dispute between the Light Programme and the Drama Department over taste and standards that the serial provoked. Second, the attitudes towards the female audience - within and outside - the BBC. This section will focus on worries about women’s devotion to certain characters as if they were real, but also explore defenders of the serial, and some of the reasons *why* women loved it. Third, the serial’s move towards a more public, outward looking, and ‘responsible’ soap opera.

Female taste and drama standards

In November 1945 it was noted that the ‘serial habit’ was growing among listeners.⁷⁸¹ There was thus a post-war interest in continuing broadcasting domestic serials, particularly on the new Light Programme. However, with the BBC’s post-war service expanding, and with the emergence of the new Third Programme in September 1946, the continuation of the ‘domestic serial’ would prove to be a thorn in the side for some. These tensions were articulated at their most extreme in correspondence between the Director of Drama, Val Gielgud - who had been appointed as ‘Productions Director’ as far back as 1929 - and the Light Programme management. A clash over programme interests *and* policy was inevitable. The tradition within the Drama Department was, ‘to try to broadcast the best drama of every kind, to give the best performance possible, to maintain suitable standards of decency and good taste; to give an opportunity to all sections of the public to hear all the different kinds of drama in which they are likely to be interested.’⁷⁸² Unsurprisingly, therefore, at the same time, it was recognised that

⁷⁷⁹ Crook, T. (1999). ‘*British Radio Drama- A Cultural Case History*’, [http://www.irdp.co.uk/britrad4.htm, (via the website, www.irdp.co.uk), accessed 19 February, 2010].

⁷⁸⁰ Drama producer Betty Davies, who was the serials’ producer from 1955 to the early 1960s, described it as such (interview with author, 16 April, 2010, London).

⁷⁸¹ Memo from T.W. Chalmers to Gorham, 20 November 1945, BBC WAC R34/454/1.

⁷⁸² Wythenshawe, op. cit. p. 94.

‘some members of the Drama Department detest the daily serials which they regard as thoroughly bad [...].’ The essential problem was clear however: ‘Mrs. Dale is loved by millions, and the Editor of the Light Programme *rightly, and indeed inevitably*, insists on it.’⁷⁸³

As early as July 1946 it was clear that tensions were arising in the Drama Department over the new commitment to the Third Programme and the continuing obligations to produce a new serial drama. In July, Gielgud wrote to the Acting Controller of Entertainment:

I have indicated to Collins [Controller of Light Programme] that in my view, however important it may be from the policy angle, “The Robinson Family” is proving a quite unreasonable burden from the staff point of view, considering its demands upon professional producing talent. To be relieved of this burden would make considerable difference to the strain on my people but in any event [...] I hope and trust that our “quality” work, upon which the whole prestige of this department depends and for the attainment of which it has worked so hard for so long, will not be sacrificed to mere routine assignments. The tendency towards the increase in the latter is having and is bound to have an effect upon staff morale, depressing in the first instance and in the ultimate, destructive.⁷⁸⁴

Gielgud’s resistance to ‘soap operas’ is well known. For him it was a question of taste and standard, and thus of *priorities*. The Drama Department was like others such as Features Department or the Gramophone Department, under the umbrella of the Entertainment Division. Like them, it acted as a ‘supply’ department for the three services – the Light, the Home and the Third. The arrival of the Third Programme gave room for more experimental productions, as well as classics by Shakespeare, and foreign plays by Ibsen and Strindberg. Over all three programmes, the audience demand for radio drama was throughout the period still high. The Home Service’s *Saturday Night Theatre* had in 1948 an average audience of over twelve millions, and *Curtain Up*, first broadcast on the Light Programme in 1946 had an audience of seven million in the mid fifties.⁷⁸⁵ Gielgud felt strongly that the continuation of domestic serials, or the so called ‘routine assignments’ that he referred to, would put extra pressure on his department and prevent producers from developing the ‘quality’ work for which the department was famous. While Norman Collins, Controller of the Light

⁷⁸³ Ibid. p. 96. (My emphasis).

⁷⁸⁴ Memo from D.D. to A.C. (Ent.), 10 July 1946, BBC WAC R19/280/4.

⁷⁸⁵ Briggs, op. cit. p. 691. (1979).

Programme from 1945 to 1947, had shown keen interest in adding more serious aspects to the Light Programme, he was also, as Briggs has described, ‘able to initiate and develop new kinds of “popular” programme.’⁷⁸⁶ So when it was suggested in the summer of 1946 that the *Robinson Family* might be replaced by another serial drama in the Light Programme, Gielgud further emphasised the implications of such an obligation:

In the first memorandum Collins says we must look forward to “living with this serial for some years”. In other words, we are letting ourselves in for a second “Robinson Family” with all that that implies: a commitment of indefinite duration. I feel I should be assured that the D.G. is aware of the indefiniteness of the commitment when he ruled in favour of the serial being undertaken. Perhaps I am being unreasonably cautious and I am, of course, perfectly prepared to undertake the serial if the implications are thoroughly understood.⁷⁸⁷

Gielgud believed he could meet the demands of the Third Programme if he could be relieved of the *Robinson Family* serial. His solution was to hire two outside producers on programme contract that would form a separate serial ‘unit’ thus enabling his producers to return from the serial commitment back to the usual drama work required.⁷⁸⁸ This suggestion was accepted by the Director General, William Haley, who agreed to supply the department with two extra producers, but ended with the comment, “I hope the tendency towards more serials is being watched; we don’t want a whole series of soap operas.”⁷⁸⁹

In 1946, the term ‘soap-opera’ resounded as something negative. This was, of course, not new. Hilmes has highlighted the BBC’s resistance – especially during war-time - towards the introduction of ‘women’s culture’ as defined by serial dramas and soap operas, aimed towards the female audience and often produced by women. In America, by the late 1930s domestic serials were not only hugely popular among audiences but received fierce critiques from cultural commentators. One critique within America, as Hilmes highlights, was similar to the critique in Britain of US broadcasting being in general:

⁷⁸⁶ Briggs, op. cit. p. 226. (1979).

⁷⁸⁷ Memo from D.D. A.C. (Ent.), 10 July 1946, BBC WAC R19/280/4.

⁷⁸⁸ Fiftieth Meeting of Coordinating Committee, 8 August 1946, BBC WAC R34/320/1.

⁷⁸⁹ Fifty-first Meeting of Coordinating Committee, 20 August 1946, BBC WAC R34/320/1.

Tied closely to radio at its most commercial, popular with a consuming audience of lower- to middle-class women and centered firmly in the domestic sphere, these shows promoted a new kind of feminized, non-elite, “private” address in the public sphere of radio that many on both sides of the Atlantic found disturbing, vulgar, sensational and in the worst of taste.⁷⁹⁰

The issue of ‘taste’ was to prove pivotal. Hilmes draws here on Andreas Huyssen, who has theorized the notion of a ‘feminization of mass-culture’, which obtained ground in the 19th century. This was that mass-culture was associated with women, while “real, authentic culture remains the prerogative of men.”⁷⁹¹ This division between a ‘feminised’ mass-culture and a ‘real’, ‘authentic’ culture, as Huyssen suggests, was prevalent in 1930s America, as Hendy notes of American soap operas: ‘as assembly-line products, they were the antithesis of the traditional concept of Art as the creation of a single – and free – mind.’⁷⁹² Because it was mass-produced it could never be ‘art’. In Britain, Hoggart referred to popular writers and novelists – the producers of ‘the newer mass art’ – as writing ‘semi-automatically.’⁷⁹³ With its American associations the ‘soap opera’ proved a challenge to the BBC and particularly Gielgud.

The idea of the ‘assembly line’ was later echoed by the BBC’s Head of Drama: ‘I will say no more here of the evil internal effects upon producers and actors inevitable in the handling of serials of this kind’.⁷⁹⁴ The result on staff, in Gielgud’s view, was destructive and he felt that the production of domestic serials impeded the rest of the work produced by the department, lowering standards, and consequently having a bad impact on the whole of the drama output. Gielgud’s view of artistic loss was also shared by another drama producer (and later Assistant Head of Drama), Donald McWhinnie, who in his celebration of ‘Sound Radio’ wrote:

For most of our lifetime *civil* war has been raging in the world of art and entertainment. [...] Moving pictures, gramophone records, Sound Radio, talking pictures, “paperbacks”: each has developed into a mammoth industry, each, intoxicated by mass adoration, has been tempted to undervalue and neglect its potential as a medium of artistic expression.⁷⁹⁵

⁷⁹⁰ Hilmes, op. cit. pp. 10-11. (2007).

⁷⁹¹ Hilmes, op. cit. p. 152. (1997).

⁷⁹² Hendy, op. cit. p. 8. (2003).

⁷⁹³ Hoggart, R. (1992) *The Uses of Literacy*, London: Transactions Publishers, (originally published in 1957 by Essential Books, Inc.). p. 159.

⁷⁹⁴ Memo from Head of Drama to CLP, 23 August 1949, BBC WAC R19/280/6.

⁷⁹⁵ McWhinnie, D. (1959). *The Art of Radio*, London: Faber and Faber. p. 13. (Emphasis original).

Mrs. Dale's Diary was thus destined from its very inception to be categorised (and devalued) as popular, feminised, mass-culture, mainly written by women for a female audience. The serial was not admired among BBC producers. This resulted in producers working on a rota, or in the engagement of outside producers on an ad hoc basis.⁷⁹⁶ The departmental debate on the production of the 'Diary' ended with the setting up of a serial 'unit', a self-contained entity supervised and administered by the Drama Department. But the interdepartmental relationship, particularly between the Drama Department and the Light Programme, was never fully restored.⁷⁹⁷ And questions recurred as to whether *Mrs. Dale's Diary* should be seen as a 'drama' at all.

Gielgud is clearly a central figure in all this. He seemed to have had issues with all three programme Heads (Home, Light and Third). But it is hinted in a memo from the Senior Controller, B.E. Nicolls, that this particular complaint 'lay almost entirely against the L.P. [Light Programme].'⁷⁹⁸ 'Popular-culture' was according to the Head of Drama, not good for the listener or the producer. In a memo from Acting Assistant Head of Drama, McWhinnie to Gielgud in 1953, it was bluntly put:

Although 'Mrs. Dale' is sited in Drama Department it is not a "dramatic production"; each drama producer who works on it is therefore confronted by a serious dilemma: either to jettison temporarily the standards required of him for normal drama output, or to involve himself in work which, in comparison with other drama programmes, is out of all proportion to the value of the finished object.⁷⁹⁹

Attached with the memo was a note by A.H. Mills, an Administrative Assistant in the Drama Department:

⁷⁹⁶ Memo from A.A. Drama to A.R. Bell, 13 January 1953, BBC WAC R19/779/3.

⁷⁹⁷ The discussion over who should have the final say over dramatic content flared up again September 1946. In correspondence addressed 'my dear Val', Norman Collins wrote: 'I am as fully anxious as you are to see the matter of Drama in Light Programme placed on a happy and smooth working basis', he continued, 'I had no idea that you were so wretchedly unhappy about the way in which things had in point of fact been working out.' The matter revolved around the issue of who had the better editorial judgement of what went into the Light Programme. Collins made it clear that he was not criticising Gielgud's professional expertise; he simply wanted to 'reserve for myself the right to get the best kind of popular drama, done as well as it possibly can be done.' He emphasised that he was willing to trust the judgement of the Director of Drama to be free to make a decision without Collins needing to read scripts in advance of acceptance (10 September, 1946, BBC WAC R13/84/1).

⁷⁹⁸ Nicolls continued that, 'Much of the trouble was caused by what D.D. considered unreasonable requests for advance scripts coupled with the expression of views by inexperienced and often junior staff of the L.P. on the likelihood of the script proving to be a good play. D.D. with justice claims that he is the B.B.C.'s expert on this point' (Private and Confidential, Senior Controller to A.C. (Ent.) copy to Collins, 9 December 1946, BBC WAC R13/84/1).

⁷⁹⁹ Memo from Acting Assistant Head of Drama (Sound) to H.D. (Sound), 5 March, 1953, BBC WAC R19/779/3.

Compared with the administrative and production costs of “The Archers” I am of the opinion that those of “Mrs. Dale’s Diary” are too high and will continue to be so, so long as it remains the responsibility of this department. I feel that the programme should be transferred to a different department where it would be *viewed differently* with possibly better results.⁸⁰⁰

This was the institutional context within which *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* was launched. The unenthusiastic view of the serial in Drama Department contrasted to that of the Light Programme management, who saw it differently. They realised that popular culture had to be part of the Light Programme service. Soap operas, categorised as a feminine genre, were seen by them as a necessary component in the general output, and people such as Norman Collins, Tom Chalmers, and later Kenneth Adam when he took over as Controller in 1950 (both Collins and Adam would later move into television), saw it as a crucial part of the Light Programme’s policy. The inclusion of the serial format, particularly *Mrs. Dale’s Diary*, in the post-war service sparked a departmental conflict of interests. This debate, however, was part of a wider set of tensions over taste, standards and ‘quality’ in radio drama: ‘popular’ versus the ‘elite’; producing the ‘best’ but also responding to the demands of the listeners and the desires of a mass-audience. *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* prompted a debate within the BBC on what culture really *was*, or ought to be. In the end it appears as if the Light Programme approach succeeded; *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* would go on and it was soon followed by another serial, *The Archers* (1950). It was also clear that this ‘mass-audience’ that the Light Programme catered for, was as Rayner suggested, mainly working-class and feminine.⁸⁰¹ There are therefore issues of ‘taste’ that can only be fully understood if they are linked to *gender* as well as class.

Radio addicts

Gielgud was, as always, ‘anxious to place longer plays of somewhat higher artistic merit than present crime/costume drama output in Light Programme.’⁸⁰² When Chalmers took over as Acting Controller of the Light Programme, Gielgud yet again expressed his desire to increase ‘quality’ work in the Programme:

⁸⁰⁰ Ibid. (My emphasis).

⁸⁰¹ Rayner, op. cit.

⁸⁰² ‘Entertainment Meetings’, 31 December 1947, BBC WAC R19/722/2.

As things stand we confine ourselves, I hope with reasonable efficiency, to a steady supply of what may be termed Grade B serials; to series such as Mystery Playhouse which, though they may occasionally climb out of the B category tend occasionally to fall below it; to pabulum for the domestic hearth such as Mrs. Dale, which may be desirable and unexceptionable, except from the standpoint of intelligence [...] Do not think that I am urging at this stage that we should try to replace Mrs. Dale by Jane Austen, or Mystery Playhouse by the works of Tchekov [sic], but it is simply a fact that all over the country there has been steadily growing a taste for dramatic work of genuine aesthetic and intellectual quality [...].⁸⁰³

It is clear in Gielgud's view that *Mrs. Dale's Diary* was not of an 'aesthetic quality', nor was its audience reasonably intelligent. The serial was described by him as 'pabulum', something easily absorbed, or bland. A year later, in 1949 he was still fiercely critical:

This is no plea for the highbrow, it is a plea for the qualification of common sense. It is probably futile for me at this stage to raise my two King Charles' heads of Mrs. Dale and Barton. I am inclined to think that the latter can be justified in terms of penny blood, but from the sociological point of view I remain profoundly convinced that the Robinsons and Mrs. Dale are dramatically inept and sociologically corrupting. The perpetual flattery of lower middle class habits of mind – I say nothing of their habits of body – is one of the worms in the bud of present day existence. Until the organs of government and public opinion will realise that it is their business to persuade the common man and woman to be uncommon rather than to purr over their prevailing commonness so long will mediocrity of mind and opinion be encouraged.⁸⁰⁴

These strong words expressed by Gielgud represent the ever so central debate in BBC history; whether to lead or follow.⁸⁰⁵ As I discussed in chapter three, in its early years public service broadcasting was seen as a force that could improve knowledge, taste and manners. It had moral as well as educational duties. The BBC's first Director General, John Reith believed, as Scannell and Cardiff put it that: 'broadcasting should give a lead to public taste rather than pander to it.'⁸⁰⁶ This notion was also apparently prevalent in the post-war period and very much shared by the Head of Drama, it was about the preservation of standards.

⁸⁰³ Memo from H.D to Acting Controller, Light Programme, 31 March 1948, R19/280/5.

⁸⁰⁴ Memo from Head of Drama to CLP, 23 August 1949, BBC WAC R19/280/6.

⁸⁰⁵ See for example, Hendy, op. cit. pp. 118 – 149. (2007).

⁸⁰⁶ Scannell and Cardiff, op. cit. p. 7. (1991).

Gielgud's anxiety about possible effects was then something others in the BBC were likely to share. And they were supported in their anxiety by press coverage, which tended to liken the popularity of the serial to a 'craze', sweeping Britain. It was reported by *Tit Bits* in 1949 that: 'work stops in something like four million British households at four o'clock from Monday to Friday. Housewives throughout the country lay down their mops and dusters, pour themselves out a cup of tea, switch on the radio and listen for fifteen minutes to the most popular serial the B.B.C. has ever created', and the article continued, "Mrs. Dale's Diary" is now an institution. When it was suggested that it might come to an end a little while ago, an avalanche of protests swept into Broadcasting House.⁸⁰⁷

Press coverage liked to fasten onto incidents which hinted at a hysterical weakening in women's grip on reality. It was for instance reported that when Sally "went into" a flower shop, people wanted to know the address.⁸⁰⁸ And when Mrs. Dale went on a diet it was reported that women listeners wrote in asking for "Mrs. Dale's diet sheets", which led the BBC to drop her 'slimming radio stunt'.⁸⁰⁹ The serial even caused an international embarrassment in February 1953, when the producer Norman Wright was passed on a complaint from Switzerland; a representative of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation had received a growing numbers of complaints on the characterisation of the Swiss maid Trudi in *Mrs. Dale's Diary*, particularly over her lack of domestic skills. It was said that this portrayal was bound to have a damaging effect 'on the position of several thousands of Swiss girls who are either employed or who are contemplating employment here. [...] also, of Anglo-Swiss relations I hope it will be possible for your scriptwriter to reform Trudi's character or by some other means to rectify the unfortunate impression this characterization is at present creating'.⁸¹⁰ Scriptwriters were at once instructed to bring out the better sides of her character and avoid mentioning her non-domestic skills in the future.⁸¹¹

Again and again, the language of 'addiction' can be found. 'They're "Doped"' by that Dale Diary' said one report. Its author described the nation's wives and mothers as drug-addicts:

⁸⁰⁷ *Tit Bits*, 'Programme the BBC daren't stop', 6 September 1949.

⁸⁰⁸ *News Chronicle*, 'Millions listen to this Family's problems' by Jill Allgood, 2 August, 1950.

⁸⁰⁹ *Daily Herald*, 'Mrs. Dale will stop dieting', 19 June 1951.

⁸¹⁰ Memo from Mr. Best, European Liaison Office to Mr. Norman Wright, 10 February 1953, BBC WAC R19/779/3.

⁸¹¹ Script conference No. 104, 12 February 1953, BBC WAC R19/779/3.

Each day while we men slave an honest nine-to-five our stay-at-home womenfolk can scarcely contain themselves until it is time for the next shot from the hypodermic. What is more, the dope is habit forming. Each shot is administered daily at 4.15 p.m. *It has a name – MRS. DALE’S DIARY.* [...] In my home district the fad has reached fantastic proportions. As the day progresses the tempo of housework steadily increases. It reaches a pitch just after four o’clock and then a great hush falls over the area at four-fifteen as the women, *en bloc*, suffer and weep with the Dale family. Are they satisfied when the programme finishes? Not a bit of it. There is a concerted rush to the telephone to lament with a neighbour over the latest tragic turn of fate in this ghastly family. [...] I give up – but just let me ever catch one woman ever again criticising my odd glass of beer.⁸¹²

Another critic, aware of the American counterparts, was also concerned about the effects this type of serial had on the audience and wrote in an article with the title, “Page three asks: Just how silly can women be? Mrs. Dale’s mother in a car crash”:

For years I’ve chuckled cynically over the credulity of the American “soap opera” audience; the people who listen without fail to the saccharine serials telling the stories of plain folk, who have the most extraordinary adventures. When any of these radio families celebrate a birthday, a wedding, an engagement or suffer loss or grief the studios are flooded with flowers [...], candles, gifts, phone calls and offers of help.⁸¹³

When Mrs. Freeman (Mrs. Dale’s mother) was taken to hospital after a car accident the critic was stunned by the reaction from listeners. He declared that the ‘hysteria’ encountered in America was now here, at the ‘sober BBC’, since not long after Mrs. Freeman was taken to hospital, he wrote, Broadcasting House received telegrams, letters and phone calls begging the BBC not to let her die.⁸¹⁴

Women then, were seen as ‘silly’, likened to ‘drug-addicts’, their behaviour improper. There was amazement that women took it so seriously as if the serial was *real*. The comparison to America is important because Americanisation of culture was a key

⁸¹² *The Star*, ‘They’re “Doped” by that Dale Diary’ by Denis Atherton, 28 November 1950. (Emphasis original).

⁸¹³ *Scottish Daily Express*, ‘Page three asks: Just how silly can women be? Mrs. Dale’s mother in a car crash’ by Robert Cannell, 17 November, 1950.

⁸¹⁴ He continued: ‘And I walked into a BBC office just before 4.15 p.m. yesterday to find two women officials waiting anxiously by a radio set to “hear” the news about “Mrs. Freeman” [...] I suggest Mr. Kenneth Adam, the new Light Programme controller has a good earful of “Mrs. Dale’s Diary” with a view to deciding whether this sort of slush is quite the kind of thing that is good for the BBC to put out – or for the public to swallow.’ Ibid.

cultural anxiety of the time.⁸¹⁵ Valeria Camporesi has for example traced the BBC's relationship to – and resistance of – American programming or material in the 1920s and 30s, and suggests that this continued after the war.⁸¹⁶ The impact of serials was an anxiety that could be seen in earlier periods. As Charlotte Brunsdon has shown, many American studies in the 1930s and 40s by people like Rudolf Arnheim, Helen Kaufman and Hertha Herzog, were concerned with whether the soap opera audience were 'different' from non-listeners.⁸¹⁷ For example Herzog compared listeners and non-listeners to discover whether listeners were 'more concerned with personal problems than public affairs' or 'more isolated' or of 'smaller intellectual range' than non-listeners.⁸¹⁸ American critics were also fascinated by listeners belief in the soap opera characters, or rather how listeners blurred the boundaries between the fictive worlds of the soap opera with reality. Cartoonist and writer, James Thurber, wrote in his *Soapland* essays from 1948 that if a character were in financial difficulty, listeners would send in cheques, coins and 'paper money', which would be donated by the Sponsors to the Red Cross or other charities since, 'The money, like the presents, cannot very well be returned to the senders, for fear of breaking their naive hearts.'⁸¹⁹ Hilmes has argued that high-culture critics who were used to the stern separation between the text and the audience, 'often expressed appalled disdain for serial listeners who would write to their favourite characters as though they were real people, send them gifts, give them advice on what they should do [...] Obviously, these women were deluded, susceptible, neurotic.'⁸²⁰ Jason Loviglio in his discussion of American soap opera critiques of the 1930s makes a similar point: 'given the assumption of an exclusively female audience for soap operas, this critique reinforces the notion that the irrational, mass-mediated audience is essentially a feminine one.'⁸²¹ As the reaction to Mrs. Dale shows, the critique posed by American sociologists and cultural commentators on American soap operas in the 1930s and 1940s, clearly resonated in post-war Britain in both the press *and* within the BBC.

⁸¹⁵ See for example Hoggart's references to American culture edging in ('juke-box boys' and "spicy" 'magazines'), in the 'newer mass art' in Hoggart, op. cit. pp. 188- 209.

⁸¹⁶ Camporesi, V. (1990) *Mass Culture and the Defence of National Traditions: The BBC and American Broadcasting 1922-1954*. Florence: European University Institute.

⁸¹⁷ Brunsdon, C. (2000). *The Feminist, the Housewife, and the Soap Opera*, Oxford, Clarendon Press. p. 45.

⁸¹⁸ Ibid. p. 49.

⁸¹⁹ Thurber, J. 1948. *The Beast in Me and Other Animals*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company. p. 256.

⁸²⁰ Hilmes, op. cit. p. 163. (1997)

⁸²¹ Loviglio, J. (2005). *Radio's Intimate Public: Network Broadcasting and Mass-Mediated Democracy*, London, University of Minnesota Press. p. 73.

Yet the serial had its defenders, too. Although *Mrs. Dale's Diary* was fiercely criticised, and its listeners seen or described as 'addicts', there were people who recognised its popularity and its appeal. Particularly the idea of identification: that listeners could recognise themselves or rather that popular culture (mass-culture) was something that the majority of Light Programme listeners *actually liked* and were familiar with. The Acting Controller of the Light Programme, Chalmers, was indeed anxious to meet Gielgud's pleas for more serious drama productions and felt in 1948, that this was a good time to do so: 'I think the time has safely come when with our majority audience we can afford to put on more serious drama – if indeed it is not our positive duty to do so.'⁸²² Chalmers, however, did not abandon the Programme's 'lighter' policy, or *Mrs. Dale's Diary*. Indeed, he strongly defended the serials *Mrs. Dale's Diary* and *Dick Barton*, pointing out that the aim of the Light Programme was to entertain a mass audience, and that the majority of listeners came from a lower-middle and working-class background and were more familiar with films than with plays and theatre:

Outside its own home, this section of the public relies mainly on cinemas and variety theatres for its non-sporting entertainment; it is not in general a play-going public. Apart from the radio itself, the greatest single influence in forming its appreciation of dramatic values is the cinema. Without implying that we should base our values on those found profitable by the cinema industry, it is reasonable to assume that these listeners respond with most interest to the same subjects: suspense stories, crime stories, cloak and dagger stories, local-boy-makes-good stories, sentimental stories – anything, in fact, in which they can identify themselves with one of the characters so as to project themselves out of their own insignificance.⁸²³

Chalmers' reference to the serial as a pleasurable source of escapism is supported by listeners' comments on the serial at the time. For instance, after *Mirror* readers had pleaded "Gag that old bore!", over hundred fans had written to the paper defending Mrs. Dale. Mrs. Whittaker from Manchester wrote: 'What small-minded women they must be who dislike Mrs. Dale and her family because they are not "working class" and speak English. I would hate it if she lived just the life I do! Surely there is one remedy for those who do not like the Dales – it is my remedy for the Archers. I just switch off.'⁸²⁴ The BBC's own listener report noted that many of the listeners 'do not

⁸²² Memo from Acting Controller, Light Programme to H.D., 1 April 1948, BBC WAC R19/280/5.

⁸²³ Memo from Controller, Light Programme to H.D., 31 August 1949, BBC WAC R19/280/6.

⁸²⁴ *Daily Mirror*, 'Viewpoint Dear Mrs. Dale...', (Mrs.) J. Whittaker, Rober Park-avenue, Manchester, 28 October, 1952.

think of the Dales as a typical doctor's family, though they are apparently prepared to accept them as representative of middle-class people in general.' Listeners apparently felt that Dr. Dale's life did not seem as hard as the life of the doctors they knew. Some thought there was an air of superficiality about the family, free from disasters "unaware of heaven or hell". However, listeners admitted that the serial had a 'fascination', even a "drug-like fascination". As a Post Office engineer's wife put it: "I find them interesting sometimes, infuriating and even maddening, but hear them every day I must." ⁸²⁵

One aspect of the report that is also worth noting is that listeners in general appeared to prefer everyday happenings over sensational stories. For example, one group of panel members mentioned an episode in which Gwen received a reward for finding a missing pearl necklace, 'This, they felt, struck completely the wrong note'. When discussing the various characters the prevalent view was that: 'all have their failings but "they are human."' The authors of the report stress the appeal of "real" people and 'ordinary, homely credible incidents was [sic] very much in evidence.' It was also clear that *Mrs. Dale's Diary* offered the listeners some kind of relaxation. The timing of the show was important and, according to the researcher, to its advantage: 'the combination of "Mrs. Dale" and elevenses' or "Mrs. Dale" and "a cup of tea" is clearly formidable.'⁸²⁶

Here, then, is a delicate mix of 'realism' and escapism, as well as an attempt to blend working-class and middle-class cultures. Chalmers argued that on the Light Programme there was always going to be a need for crime and thriller stories, 'of the best quality, and for costume drama of the Scarlet Pimpernel/Three Musketeers type. Domestic dramas of the Malinden type are welcome, provided the characterisation and problems are not exclusively upper-middle class'. But then he added in brackets:

The great appeal of "Mrs. Dale's Diary" to the Light Programme audience is that it deals largely with the life and problems of the lower-middle classes viewed with the sympathetic and unpatronising eyes of an upper-middle class woman. Our need, as I see it, is to display and interpret the eternal problems

⁸²⁵ Listener Research Report LR/52/941, 'Some observations on listeners' reactions to domestic serials, with special reference to "Mrs. Dale's Diary", 21 August, 1952, BBC WAC R9/9/16. (Emphasis original).

⁸²⁶ Listener Research Report LR/52/941, 'Some observations on listeners' reactions to domestic serials, with special reference to "Mrs. Dale's Diary", 21 August, 1952, BBC WAC R9/9/16.

that form the core of any dramatic situation in terms that are either class-less or are not exclusively those of a minority.⁸²⁷

Given this attempt to cross class-boundaries, it is possible to argue that the appeal of the serial came less from a 'class perspective' than from a 'gender perspective'. Women enjoyed the serial because they could identify with family life: relationships, marriage, motherhood and so on. Companionship was also offered. In response to a critique of the serial by a Dutch man in *The Daily Mail*, one reader from Sheffield wrote: 'I'm an old woman, perhaps old enough to be his grandmother, and am crippled with arthritis. The radio is part of my life, and I along with many others, enjoy anything that brings us in touch with other human beings.'⁸²⁸ Ellis Powell who played Mrs. Dale was in 1953 quoted saying '“many of the listeners [...] are people whose means of relaxation are limited – the old people, the lonely, and those in hospital.”'⁸²⁹ But, more specifically, the serial offered a fusion of reality and fiction – or, rather, a way of bringing dramatic *value* to the apparently mundane. Thus, for example, on the BBC's own programme, *The Critics*, theatre critic M.R. Ridley suggested that 'a lot of ordinary people see the ordinary events of their own lives, as it might be, made into something dramatic, or semi-dramatic'. The art critic J.M. Richards explained it thus: 'I think that is the appeal of it, that listeners are encouraged to identify themselves all the time with the Dale family, or to relate their own experiences with it, which gives it a kind of vicarious realism which you don't get in any other kind of programme.'⁸³⁰

Despite the fact that the editorial policy for Mrs. Dale stated that, 'Womanhood does not have to be demonstrated invariably as the dominant sex and the source of all human virtues'⁸³¹, it was clear that the serial's appeal was its focus on domestic concerns and settings. Although very often non-feminist and conservative in their outlook, simply by focusing mainly on women, the soap operas, according to Hilmes, opened up a space where women's specific concerns could be aired and discussed. For example, Hilmes argues that plot-lines generally resolved in a way that would reinforce women's main position as being within the domestic sphere; but at the same time, the serials' 'constant friction against social standards, cultural distinctions, network censors, and high-culture

⁸²⁷ Memo from Controller, Light Programme to H.D., 31 August 1949, BBC WAC R19/280/6.

⁸²⁸ *The Daily Mail*, Constant Reader Sheffield, 5 January, 1950.

⁸²⁹ *John Bull*, 'The women behind Mrs. Dale's Diary' by Don Eviritt, 11 April, 1953.

⁸³⁰ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *The Critics*, 9 November, 1952, Roll No.3/4 18 March 1951 to December 1953, BBC WAC.

⁸³¹ 'Editorial Policy', 26 May, 1949, BBC WAC R19/779/1.

opinion finally may have worked to open up options previously unavailable to their audience – or at least room to assert a range of possibilities.⁸³² Given this interesting claim, the next section explores the following question: how, in concrete terms, might this have been achieved in *Mrs. Dale's Diary's* scripts?

In the serial's first years, many of the story-lines revolved around family and relationships, some revealing a quite intimate style in dialogue and tone. There was also an air of 'escapism' and romance but this diminished as the serial changed. Indeed, beneath the obvious plot – interest in family and relationships, one can detect a serial which is, in itself, *dealing* with a changing Britain and women's changing experiences. The rather 'closed' world of intimate relationships is apparent in many early scripts. One of the first big story-lines was when young Gwen fell in love with an older married man. This caused frictions in the family and much quarrelling. It also illustrated the challenges of adolescence, as a young slightly 'naive' Gwen believed this man might one day fall for her too: 'I love him, Mother, if that's what you mean. I'll never stop loving him...I won't... Dad can shout – he's got a right to shout at me. Maybe I'm not good- I can't help it – can I?' Dr. Dale continued his interrogation worried that the older man might have used Gwen: 'He's never kissed you –or anything...?' The conversation heated-up and after getting slapped by Dr. Dale, Gwen ran out, and listeners were left in suspense as Mrs. Dale ended the episode: 'Somehow it helps to write all this down. Like telling someone – an old friend. Our Gwen – gone away from us...it isn't possible, it isn't ... I mustn't let myself go...They'll find her...they're sure to find her...they must – THEY MUST.'⁸³³

Similarly, when Sally married Stephen, a foreign correspondent, we get another extended examination of human relationships, and, in particular, the tension in a post-war marriage. Sally was divorced once and re-married twice, her character was clearly more independent than Mrs. Dale.⁸³⁴ Settling into married life was never going to be easy for her. In one episode she quibbled with her husband, and told him: 'Well, I shall dress how I want to. You can't dictate to me about things like that'. And, she continued: 'you get awfully bossy sometimes, Stephen. You forget that I've been on my own so

⁸³² Hilmes, op. cit. p. 174. (1997).

⁸³³ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 13, 21 January, 1948, BBC WAC. (Capitals original).

⁸³⁴ Sally who worked in a florist shop eventually becoming a manager and in 1954 ventured into her own business; a hat shop in the West End - this becoming a quite considerable storyline ('Script conference', 4 March, 1954, BBC WAC R19/779/3).

long – I must be allowed to lead my own life.’⁸³⁵ Sally emphasised in a later episode that Stephen ‘never expected [her] to be domesticated.’⁸³⁶ In a conversation with Dr. Dale, she was asked if she was happy with Stephen. Sally replied: ‘I’m divinely happy with him – when he’s here. But he never seems to be here, does he?’⁸³⁷ Stephen, however, did not last long; the production team did not like Sally being ‘settled’. He was killed off in an airplane accident.⁸³⁸ Sally’s ex-husband (from her first marriage) Tony Coppard – now ‘crippled’ after a fire – returned. He needed help and begged Sally to take him back.⁸³⁹ The Dales were, naturally, worried:

Mrs. Dale: I know it must be very terrible, and difficult not to feel sorry for him. But don’t you see, you can’t let him impose on you as he will want to do. He’ll twist himself round and round you, Sally, into your life, you’ll never be free of him, I know you won’t.

Sally: But – but do I want to be? That’s what I keep asking myself. [...] I feel I owe him something. Our marriage went all wrong, and I’m sure it was my fault as much as his.⁸⁴⁰

Other early story-lines were distinctly more ‘escapist’ in nature. One example was Mrs. Dale’s friendship to the foreign Count de Renzy. After having befriended the Count, who flattered her with gifts and presents (red roses, a pair of gloves), took her to lunch and the theatre, the story-line escalated when she was invited to attend his dinner party: ‘And before I knew where I was, I had said I would come. How stupid I am! When I had gone out to lunch specially to tell him that I wouldn’t! But he was so very pressing [...] and the wine was so delicious..But after tomorrow night, I won’t see him any more. I have quite made up my mind about that.’⁸⁴¹ In an echo of *Brief Encounter*, the Count offered Mrs. Dale something different: ‘Well, I want to see the flat – all those things I helped him choose – and it’ll be nice to go out to a real dinner party, and meet interesting people. [...] So different from – well, the people at Kenton and Parkwood Hill,’ she confessed to Sally.⁸⁴² Since her husband Jim was not invited Sally questioned whether she should in fact go, bearing in mind that the Count might have other

⁸³⁵ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 256, 3 January, 1949, BBC WAC.

⁸³⁶ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 394, 19 July, 1949, BBC WAC.

⁸³⁷ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 440, 22 September, 1949, BBC WAC.

⁸³⁸ Listeners complained and wanted him back but it was noted from higher up in hierarchy, by the Chief Assistant to the Light Programme, that ‘the fact remains that we need a foot-loose and fancy free character amongst the principals’ (Lloyd James to Whitaker, December 9, 1949, BBC WAC R19/779/1).

⁸³⁹ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 1125, 10 June, 1952, BBC WAC.

⁸⁴⁰ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 1126, 11 June, 1952, BBC WAC.

⁸⁴¹ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 256, 3 January, 1949, BBC WAC.

⁸⁴² Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 257, 4 January, 1949, BBCWAC.

intentions. But Mrs. Dale pleaded: ‘But I do want to go! Sally, if you’d spent evening after evening getting the dinner for your family – for years and years – and only going out occasionally – wouldn’t you like to be asked to a really smart dinner party – just for once?’⁸⁴³ Even Mrs. Dale longed for a bit of romance and escape. Of course the Count had planned a party only for two and the final episode of the story was dramatic, turning the Count from a Gentleman into a patronising foreigner: ‘you are so modest!’, he said, while continuing to talk about her ‘dull’ husband Jim. ‘Well..let us admit it, my dear, he is most dull. And all the time you wash his shirts, and cook his bacon..how absurd, is it not? Mary..come with me - to Paris, Vienna – to Monte Carlo – away from the shirts and the bacon, my dear.’⁸⁴⁴ Mrs. Dale of course chose the bacon over Vienna, and back home told Jim everything.⁸⁴⁵

This obviously sentimental plot offered a slight reproach to domesticity. Yet, in the end, it reinforced the strengthened relationship between husband and wife. Overall, the serial reinforced the idea that one needed to ‘work’ on a relationship in order to maintain a happy marriage. Listeners could identify with Mrs. Dale. In portraying the complications and strains within marriage, the struggle to repress escapist fantasies, the serial was painting and exploring many of those changes taking place in the post-war period. Mrs. Dale and her sister Sally represented different kinds of women: one a ‘traditional’ and devoted housewife, the other a more independent and ambitious career woman.⁸⁴⁶ Sally was presented as a surprisingly sympathetic character. She was also very popular among listeners. The *Daily Express* referred to her as a ‘national hero.’⁸⁴⁷ The actress playing Sally was Thelma Hughes, ‘as frank and independent in real life as “Sally” is on the air’.⁸⁴⁸ Sally was also portrayed as a ‘modern’ woman. For example, in one episode her mother, Mrs. Freeman was invited to join her and Stephen for dinner.

⁸⁴³ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁴ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 259, 6 January, 1949, BBC WAC.

⁸⁴⁵ Jim was very supportive, and had suspected that something was going on but he never failed believing she would jeopardise their marriage, and suggested that lessons ought to be learned: they should treat themselves to a trip to the West End sometimes, just the two of them, acknowledging the need to spend time just husband and wife.

⁸⁴⁶ Sally was for example described in a report: ‘although not educated for a career she received a good general training at a reputable school. [...] She lives independently in London, has a less “restricted” life than the Dale family itself and would probably have travelled much more [...] A capable woman and reliable in her work, obviously accepting special responsibility in it although this may not be strictly necessary from a financial point of view. [...] Her life, therefore, seems more nearly to fit into the pattern of a capable middle-class widow now living alone in a flat in London who has undertaken a full-time job and finds it interesting and satisfying’ (McMillan to Adam, ‘A report on the social status of the Dale family’, November 1950, BBC WAC R19/779/1).

⁸⁴⁷ ‘Sally Lane’, friend of millions, quits ‘Mrs. Dale’s Diary’, by Robert Cannell, *Daily Express*, 9 November, 1951.

⁸⁴⁸ ‘Secret Pages from Mrs. Dale’s Diary’, *Daily Herald*, 3 December, 1951.

Sally, all excited, has cooked the food in a pressure cooker, something Mrs. Freeman was not keen on: ‘well, I like to think I’ve kept abreast with the times, but I don’t like these modern inventions, Stephen.’⁸⁴⁹ Sally’s lack of domestic skills was also referred to at various times in the scripts. For example, in one scene she was cooking apples with Gwen: ‘Gwennie, do you think it’s done? You know, there’s a very odd thing about apple sponge. It just won’t cook. At least, not in any certain length of time. And then, just when one’s least expecting it, the beastly thing goes as hard as a rock. Is it done, do you think?’⁸⁵⁰

The ‘modern woman’ was depicted in other ways, too – along with her dilemmas. For example, when Gwen’s friend Lilian started to work in the local library she met the older Mrs. Mountford⁸⁵¹:

Mrs. Mountford:	...well, you’re a sensible sort of girl – how long have you been here?
Lilian:	Just this afternoon, madam.
Mrs. Mountford:	Why? What’s happening to the other girl, oh? Got the sack?
Lilian:	No, She’s getting married.
Mrs. Mountford:	Getting married? Girl’s only a child – just out of the cradle. And as soon as I get used to you, you’ll be getting married too, I suppose. Eh?
Lilian:	I am married.
Mrs. Mountford:	Married, eh? What’s happened to your husband?
Lilian:	Nothing. He’s at home. He’s studying to be a doctor.
	Mrs. Mountford: Studying to be a doctor...! A married man studying to be a doctor...!
Lilian:	Why not? Why shouldn’t he? I don’t see what being married has to do with it. [...]
Mrs Mountford:	You’re quite right...you’re quite right. No reason at all why he shouldn’t. I’m an interfering old woman, aren’t I? Never mind, I like to see a bit of spirit. ⁸⁵²

There are frequent references to characters as ‘old-fashioned’, spotlighting a tension between tradition and change. In one episode Dr. Dale suggests that Mrs. Dale should

⁸⁴⁹ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 216, 6 November, 1948, BBC WAC.

⁸⁵⁰ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 207, 25 October, 1948, BBC WAC. (Emphasis original).

⁸⁵¹ Mrs. Mountford was Mrs. Dale’s neighbour, often portrayed as grumpy and a bit snobbish.

⁸⁵² Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 269, 20 January, 1949, BBC WAC.

use more of her ‘labour saving gadgets’, that it would half the time she spent on cooking:

- Dr. Dale: Women are too old-fashioned, that’s the trouble – they cling to the old ways of doing things when they could save themselves time and trouble by bringing their ideas up to date! Good heavens, if men clung to the past like that we’d be using quill pens instead of typewriters!
- Mrs. Dale: I’m waiting for just one example of all this, please.
- Dr. Dale: Well, er – there were some rather nice kitchen scissors –
- Mrs. Dale: I have kitchen scissors.
- Dr. Dale: Oh - have you? And then there was a new sort of mincing machine –
- Mrs. Dale: My mincer is most efficient and I’ve had it for years.
- Dr. Dale: That’s what I mean, it’s high time you got something more modern. And then there was a handy little gadget for taking the cream off the top of the milk. [...]
- Mrs. Dale: By the time they’ve been put together, used, taken apart, washed and put away again, the job could have been done twice as quickly in the old-fashioned way!
- Dr. Dale: I don’t agree –
- Mrs. Dale: (Rather crossly) I don’t care whether you agree or not, Jim, you’re talking about something which is my business – and you’re talking nonsense! Now, will you please lift your cup and saucer, I want to clear the table!⁸⁵³

We can hear the clash of modernity and tradition. But, above all, we can hear Mrs. Dale asserting the domestic arena as her terrain in which she rules knowledgeably.

It is also worth thinking of the intended audience, most of whom were working-class. The majority of the listeners were unlikely to be using these new gadgets on a regular basis. Mrs. Dale therefore not only gives some kind of validity to the ‘old kitchen’ but also to more common ways of cooking: good ‘old fashioned’ (and cheap) methods were still often the best. When it came to another modern ‘gadget’, television, however, Mrs. Dale was clearly more positive than her daily help, Mrs. Morgan:

- Mrs. Dale: What do I think of it? Why – I really don’t know – are you thinking of buying a set then, Mrs. Morgan?
- Mrs. Morgan: (Violently) No, m’m, I am not! Over my dead body one of them things come into my house! In it comes, and out goes

⁸⁵³ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 1133, 20 June, 1952, BBC WAC. (Emphasis original).

Daisy Morgan, feet first! [...] The devil's instrument, that's what they are! Made to breed idleness and bone-laziness – why, you can't even knit while you're looking at 'em! Just sit in the dark and gawp!

Mrs Dale: A lot of people wouldn't agree with you, Mrs. Morgan.

Mrs. Morgan: I know that, m'm, more fools them, and Mrs. Mustoe's one of 'em.

Mrs. Dale: Mrs. Mustoe?

Mrs. Morgan: Yes. Her set come on Saturday. [...] been telling the world she's going to give TV parties.⁸⁵⁴

Often, though, it is Gwen who illustrates most persistently generational and gendered experiences of change. In 1949 she was described as being 19 and 'approaching the time when she will decide whether to pursue a professional career, marry and devote herself to domesticity, or attempt to combine a career and married life.' A BBC note on the programme's editorial policy states that 'From time to time these questions exercise her mind considerably. She is often irked by the restrictions of family life and on those occasions regards independence as a primary objective. Alternately, she finds the idea of leaving home unthinkable.'⁸⁵⁵ Gwen represented the new generation of women who had a choice of whether to stay at home or continue to work after marriage. But she also conveyed vividly how *difficult* this choice was. In the first years of the serial Gwen was keen to pursue a career, and started to work as a secretary to a Glass and China Exporters. Her grandmother Mrs. Freeman was especially supportive: 'She can go on with her career after she's married, can't she? That's what all the girls seem to be doing these days. Don't keep harping on marriage, Mary – let the child concentrate on her career.'⁸⁵⁶ Gwen who was very happy about the job and the prospects of a career also made the point that her generation is different from her mothers': 'I don't want to marry anyone for ages. I want to go about and meet people and learn things [...] well, I'd like to go abroad and see a bit of the world before I settle down. I know you're very happy, mummy, but you were awfully young when you got married. Not much older than I am. And you never had a job or anything.'⁸⁵⁷

Gwen had several romances and was supposed to marry in 1949, but when the editorial policy was drawn up it was suddenly decided by the Light Programme management that

⁸⁵⁴ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 1203, 29 September, 1952, BBC WAC.

⁸⁵⁵ 'Editorial Policy', 26 May, 1949, BBC WAC R19/779/1.

⁸⁵⁶ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 197, 11 October, 1948, BBC WAC.

⁸⁵⁷ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 201, 15 October, 1948, BBC WAC.

Sally had to be un-married and Gwen's wedding was to be prevented.⁸⁵⁸ Gwen married, eventually, in 1951. Much of the policy change was, it seems prompted, by the three female scriptwriters in November 1950 who, in a letter to the production team, urged a change: they felt tired of writing about romantic story lines for Gwen that did not lead anywhere; from a writer's point of view it was simply getting a bit repetitive.⁸⁵⁹ Over the years, these script-writers toss Gwen back-and-forth between work and domesticity.⁸⁶⁰ Once married, and after her first child Gwen decided to stay at home full-time: her child came first. But her decision did not come easily and was negotiated over nearly a year. The question was linked to the idea of being a 'modern girl'. For example, in the early stage of her pregnancy Gwen wanted to keep working as long as she could. But it was clear that her husband, David, wanted her to stay at home. In one episode Gwen told her friend Maud French about the dilemma:

Maud: Oh, my dear! But you mustn't! It would make such a difference to you financially –

Gwen: Not if we have to pay someone to look after the baby!

Maud: But you'd find it so dull! [...] Gwen, and you'd be bored to tears staying at home all day with a baby – nobody to talk to but the milkman! [...] I think you'd be most unwise to tie yourself like that, dear! You'd lose all contact with the outside world, and anyone will tell you that's bound to make you - well, a little dull, maybe. It keeps one alive, Gwen dear, to have outside interests. And, whatever you say, I'm sure David likes being married to a modern girl with a career!

⁸⁵⁸ Memo from Controller, Light Programme to Mr. Martyn Webster, 30 May, 1949, BBC WAC R19/779/1. The editorial policy had been drawn up by John McMillan, Chief Assistant to the Light Programme. It was therefore agreed at a script-conference held in June the same year that Sally would become a widow (Stephen, her husband, as mentioned earlier was to die in a plane crash) and Gwen's wedding to Dick to be postponed due to measles. Dick who was a Major was then to be posted 'overseas for an indefinite time. [...] and disappears from the story' (Script conference No: 22, 9 June, 1949, BBC WAC R19/779/1).

⁸⁵⁹ Letter from Lesley Wilson, Jonquil Antony and Joan Carr-Jones, 30 November, 1950, BBC WAC R19/779/1.

⁸⁶⁰ It is worth highlighting that in this period most of the scriptwriters were women: Jonquil Antony, Melissa Wood, Lesley Wilson and Joan Carr-Jones. The Dale 'office' was organised by a Mrs. Jean Child who was in charge of keeping records of storylines, characters, scripts, listener research and so on. She was herself featured in one article 'backroom girl turns diary pages' by Jonquil Antony, in *The Daily Graphic* (24 March, 1951, BBC WAC). At several times it was noted in the press coverage that the script-writers often took inspiration from real life. Antony, for example, ran a series of articles in *The Daily Graphic* in March 1951, where she was described as one of the highest paid women at the BBC - spending her time between her Kensington flat and Hampshire cottage. But she made the point that all the writers including herself - were all married women - 'women with our own homes to run' (*The Daily Graphic*, 'Mrs. Dale's Secret' by Jonquil Antony, 19 March, 1951, BBC WAC). Antony revealed that quite often it was events in their own lives that provided inspiration and copy for the serial. She said in *Good Housekeeping*, that when Mrs. Dale was on a diet this was due to Joan Carr-Jones's experience of dieting, and Sally's dog Bella was based on Antony's own experience taking care of an ill-treated dog (*Good Housekeeping*, 'Looking back on 4 Years with Mrs. Dale' by Jonquil Antony, March, 1952, BBC WAC). And, Lesley Wilson left as a script-writer in 1953 when she was to have a baby - she was replaced by Basil Dawson ('A male angle on the Diary' [press release], 13 April, 1953, BBC WAC R44/277).

Gwen: (Rather wearily) Perhaps, Maud – but he'll just have to get used to being married to an old-fashioned girl with a baby!

Again the words 'old-fashioned' and 'modern' are being used. Gwen, later in the episode told her grandmother Mrs. Freeman about the issue:

Mrs. Freeman: You don't make enough [fuss]! In my day it wasn't heard of for a young woman who was expecting a baby to go out to work as well! It's quite wrong, and David shouldn't let you! [...] Your child must come first, Gwen it would be quite wrong for you to attempt to stay on as Richard Fulton's secretary. It can't be done – one or the other would be neglected, and you'd worry yourself into a nervous breakdown!⁸⁶¹

Later, after having baby Billy, she returned to part-time work. While she was out at work, Billy was left with Mrs. Dale. But working *and* taking care of the home proved too much: 'It would be all right if I had nothing to do when I got back, but, of course, there's all Billy's washing and ironing and the flat and – oh, one thing and another. Still, I expect I'll get used to it.'⁸⁶² Then, in March 1953 after listeners had complained about Gwen leaving Billy too much with her mother, it was decided by the producer and the scriptwriters that she would be returned to 'a more domestic and family atmosphere while her child was so young.'⁸⁶³ A few months later she gives up her work completely.⁸⁶⁴ The part-time situation suited her best but the workload made it too complicated. Sally suggested that 'I think you're going to find domestic life a little on the dull side at first', but then said she was doing the right thing.⁸⁶⁵

The 'double-burden' is here brought vividly to life. Through *Mrs. Dale's Diary*, the struggle to be a mother *and* a worker is being examined dramatically, day after day, for a mass-audience of millions of women, many of whom would have recognised only too well Gwen's dilemma. So, while it is true that, as Hilmes suggests, radio soap operas often reinforced conservative and non-feminist views – the essential domesticity of

⁸⁶¹ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 1132, 19 June, 1952, BBC WAC.

⁸⁶² Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 1304, 19 February, 1953, BBC WAC.

⁸⁶³ Script conference No: 106, 12 March, 1953, BBC WAC R19/779/3; Script conference No: 107, 26 March, 1953, BBC WAC R19/779/3. In *Woman's Hour*, it was also noted that the 'mailbag' had received a large number of letters from grandmothers showing strongly worded criticism about: 'the lack of pleasures displayed by the young mothers in their children and home duties', which prompted the suggestion of a discussion between mothers of 1910 versus mothers of 1950 ('Summary of Woman's Hour Post for Week Ending 3.3.50.', BBC WAC R41/243).

⁸⁶⁴ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 1358, 11 May, 1953, BBC WAC.

⁸⁶⁵ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 1359, 12 May, 1953, BBC WAC.

women, we also see a serial's ability – at least on the BBC – to 'unpack' the complexities and tensions experienced by many women. As in the American context, *Mrs. Dale's Diary* offered a space for women where issues and topics related to the listeners could be aired, obviously women's experience would have varied, depending on age, class and social - and educational background. But as mothers and wives, *and* workers, listeners could identify with some of the dilemmas, or at least found some recognition. Professional critics might not give these dilemmas, much significance. But women themselves knew the importance of determining a happy marriage, gender roles, and how to deal with work and motherhood. Different kinds of 'womanhood' and aspects of modernity were all part of the serial.

Private and public worlds

To sum up the views of most critics, *Mrs. Dale's Diary* is nothing more nor less than the glorification of gossip, of female tittle-tattle.

Charlotte Haldane, *Illustrated*, 6 December 1952⁸⁶⁶

In October 1952 both *The Daily Mirror* and *The Times* reported that *Mrs. Dale's Diary* had become "too aloof" for the average woman listener, and that 'top level' talks were now being held about the serial's future. *The Daily Mirror* reported: 'Current events pass unnoticed. Little housework is done. None of the Dale family is ever ill' and *The Times* in a similar fashion: 'She [Mrs. Dale] never comments on current events, she does very little house-work, and she is immune from catarrh.'⁸⁶⁷ *The Times'* writer continued:

Whether she would increase her popularity if, with the Effects Department simulating the sounds of washing-up, she talked about the nationalization of steel while suffering from a cold in the head is not altogether certain. What can be safely assumed is that it is not only in these three particulars that she differs from the rest of Britain's womanhood. She never seems to bet or to have a fling [...] or mention the Government, to talk scandal, lose her temper or listen to the BBC [...] It must be fascinating to realize how thin the ice is – to gauge the volume of the protests which would be aroused if she put a florin on a horse or her foot on a cockroach, if she expressed a political opinion or

⁸⁶⁶ *Illustrated*, 'The Amazing Mrs. Dale' by Charlotte Haldane, 6 December, 1952. Although this critical observation, the author was still in favour of the BBC continuing this 'British soap opera.'

⁸⁶⁷ *Daily Mirror*, 'Mrs. Dale puts the BBC in a fix' by Clifford Davies, 24 October 1952; *The Times*, 'Mrs. Dale's Deviations', 24 October, 1952.

uttered a mild expletive. Perhaps it is easier to keep her off the rocks than it was to keep Dick Barton on the rails. [...] but the delicate task of laying down the protocol which must govern these visitors to millions of homes is just the sort of matter in which many ordinary citizens would be glad of a chance to lend a hand. It is just as well that they are not given one.⁸⁶⁸

This is not just a critique of the listeners and their obsessions with the serial but also, perhaps, the BBC for being too safe and avoiding controversy. It also implies that the 'real' middle-class woman was more engaged in public and cultural activities. This view was further reiterated by *Illustrated* magazine's four page spread about the serial, published two months later, whose writer commented on what she thought was the 'weakest point': 'its appallingly low cultural level [...] They never read a good book – let alone a classic – listen to an opera or a concert, discuss a topical problem or show any interest in politics or even the wider implications of day-to-day problems such as rationing or the cost of living.'⁸⁶⁹ The discussion on *Mrs. Dale's Diary* would, in the autumn of 1952, erupt into a range of comments in the press on middle-class behaviour in general; what it meant to be middle-class, suggesting that here was a radio serial with the power to open-up a broader public discussion about British class identity.

In October, a few days later after publishing the articles on Mrs. Dale, both *The Times* and *The Daily Mirror* received a range of letters, many from a middle-class perspective. *The Daily Mirror* published a selection of views in response to a plea from readers to end the programme. One writer commented: 'I find Mrs. Dale's Diary a happy cross-section of English family life – Christian and conservative in outlook – which is the backbone of our beloved country. Refinement is after all an indefinable something that must be preserved.' Another suggested that Mrs. Dale set a good example of 'happy home life': 'why should she do any housework if she employs a servant? God bless her and her radio family.'⁸⁷⁰ What followed in *The Times* were similar responses, particularly on what it meant to be 'middle-class':

I know only one middle-class family, but their case is perhaps instructive. By careful questioning I have ascertained that none of the grown-up children had heard of *Candide*, though to one, admittedly, the name of Voltaire was not altogether new. Two members of the family (the only ones who ventured to express an opinion) ascribed the *Unfinished Symphony* to George Gershwin,

⁸⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁹ *Illustrated*, 'The Amazing Mrs. Dale', by Charlotte Haldane, 6 December, 1952.

⁸⁷⁰ *The Daily Mirror*, 'Viewpoint Dear Mrs. Dale...', 28 October, 1952.

an American composer. The whole family agreed to condemn the study of psychology as “unnecessary.”⁸⁷¹

The debate in *The Times* even caught the attention of Harold Nicolson, who spent a whole page in *The Spectator* writing about the serial: ‘I have been reading with respect and bewilderment the correspondence published in *The Times* newspaper on the subject of Mrs. Dale’s Diary.’ Nicolson could not determine whether the correspondence was serious or not. He had further never listened to the serial and so took to immediate opportunity to do so and was ‘transported into a new world [...] but seldom, even in this age of cacophony, have I heard so much uninteresting emptiness discussed in a space of fourteen minutes.’ He admitted to feeling a natural curiosity - as with any serial – over what happened next. But it puzzled him why so many of the British public were so obsessed with this ‘dull [...] community’, when instead as he put it, ‘life can be so exciting.’ He ended his piece though, with this balanced judgement on Mrs. Dale: ‘Her diary causes in me the depression occasioned by a row of suburban houses. Solid, respectable, unimaginative, dull are Mrs. Dale and her friends. But they are sensible and not silly. They constitute a rock-foundation for the domes and pinnacles of the future State.’⁸⁷² A rather different critique emerged in 1952 from the left-leaning *Tribune*, which published an article under the heading, ‘Down with the Dales!’, after having heard *The Critics* suggesting that Mrs. Dale reflected the life of the ‘average woman.’⁸⁷³

In fact, the serial was changing, albeit slowly. In its first four years (1948-1952) it was much more focused on the personal side of life and the domestic setting. In *John Bull* in April 1953, Norman Wright, the executive producer was quoted saying ‘Mrs. Dale was

⁸⁷¹ *The Times*, ‘Mrs. Dale’s Deviations to the editor of the Times Sir...’, 29 October, 1952. To which there was an immediate response a few days later: ‘One can only stand in awe before a man who can live in England and know only one middle-class family. Wider acquaintance would show him that there are more than 57 varieties of us, with a corresponding bewildering variety of cultural levels. To say that the study of psychology is “unnecessary” is, admittedly, an understatement; but the understatement is one of the best expressions of British humour (*The Times*, ‘Mrs. Dale’s Deviations to the editor of the Times Sir...’, 1 November, 1952). Another said: ‘I can forgive Mrs. Dale her lack of interest in politics, music, art, [...], but I cannot forgive her paganism. Listeners last Holy Week must have heard with amazement and sorrow her confession to Mrs. Morgan (on being reminded that Monday would be a Bank Holiday) that she had no idea next Sunday would be Easter Day’ (*The Times*, ‘Mrs. Dale’s Deviations to the editor of the Times Sir...’, 1 November, 1952).

⁸⁷² *The Spectator*, ‘Marginal Comment’ by Harold Nicolson, 14 November, 1952.

⁸⁷³ The article stated that, ‘most housewives in Britain manage on less than one-third of the average doctor’s income; I realise that the ordinary housewife does not give over her cooking and cleaning to a full-time daily help, does not employ a gardener, however comic, twice a week, and, most assuredly, does not greet her milkman with “Good morning, Tomkyns!”’. The article continued to criticise the BBC and its representations of working-class people particularly the “daily woman” (*The Tribune*, ‘Down with the Dales!’ by Robert Pitman, 19 December 1952).

never intended to do any cultural good-workery. She's just pure escapism.''⁸⁷⁴ But by the time this was said (April 1953), it seemed as if the serial could not just be 'pure escapism'. Measures had already been taken inside the BBC to make the 'diary' more topical, up-to-date, and outward looking; in one sense to *better* reflect the life of a middle-class woman and family, consequently giving the serial a sense of the public world and by doing so a social conscious and an air of responsibility.

Thus, it was clearly outlined in the serial's 'Editorial Policy', in 1949, that *Mrs. Dale's Diary* was *not* an American soap opera: 'Mrs. Dale's Diary should strive to achieve a realism which is specifically withheld from its American counterparts'.⁸⁷⁵ Realism, though, is easier said than done. Being representatives of contemporary British post-war society, the characters in *Mrs. Dale's Diary* were to be seen, as stated in the 'Editorial Policy', as 'permanent': they could not grow older or wiser; they were not allowed to be married (since that meant a character would be 'lost' or too many new ones added), or be divorced, or even die:

From time to time they may attempt to break the bonds which hold them to their environment. They may try to increase their wisdom. But in the long run they must remain mentally, physically and spiritually intact – the same people, in the same stage of development, tied to the same background, inhibited by the same hopes and fears with which they were introduced.⁸⁷⁶

They were also not allowed any political opinion, or any views on current and topical events. The nagging question then, was this: how could the serial achieve some sense of 'authenticity' if the policy itself, from the beginning was so limited?

The answer, it seems, is that it could not – or, at least, could not very effectively. The first signs of a dissonance were present in 1950, two years after its start, when the programme had reached a new "high" in popularity and it was referred to as a 'British institution'.⁸⁷⁷ It was also then noted that the names of the cast were *not* to be published regularly in the *Radio Times* because the programme 'sets out to present a real family, and we do not want to destroy the illusion.'⁸⁷⁸ In August the same year, the Chief

⁸⁷⁴ *John Bull*, 'The women behind Mrs. Dale's Diary' by Don Everitt, 11 April, 1953.

⁸⁷⁵ 'Editorial Policy', 26 May, 1949, BBC WAC R19/779/1.

⁸⁷⁶ 'Editorial Policy', 26 May 1949, BBC WAC R19/779/1.

⁸⁷⁷ Memo from Controller, Light Programme to A.H.D, 15 March 1950, BBC WAC R19/779/1.

⁸⁷⁸ Memo from David Lloyd James to Cleland Finn, 31 January 1950, BBC WAC R19/779/1. (My emphasis).

Assistant to the Light Programme, John McMillan⁸⁷⁹ wrote to the Controller of the Light Programme, that *Mrs. Dale's Diary*, had considerably strayed away from the original policy on the family's wealth:

You will remember that when *Mrs. Dale's Diary* was being planned, it was decided by Light Programme Direction that the family, whilst not being part of the working-class, would not be so far "above" it as to be unrecognisable to the target audience. It was decided that the family should share the same kind of problems as confront the majority of people living in this country. [...] I listened to several episodes when I was in the North last month [and] It is apparent that the Dale's are living very comfortably; that they have no financial worries to speak of; that they are a much more cultivated group of people now than they were in the first instance. [...] The fault, I think, since this is essentially a Light Programme operation, lies within this department and I probably bear more responsibility than anyone else.⁸⁸⁰

Sally had for example bought a cottage and spent time between the country side and her Chelsea flat, and after the Count de Renzy story, she and Mrs. Dale had some time off in Holland. Mrs. Dale also had a 'daily help' and a gardener, Monument. In August of 1950 Gwen also spent time in France and was thrilled by the news that on her return trip to England she would be flying back.⁸⁸¹ At the script-conference at the end of the month, the writers were made aware that the life of the Dale family was a little too carefree; 'living almost as rich people do', and they were asked to be aware of this in any future writing.⁸⁸² In September it was also decided that a Miss Eirwen Owen would listen to the serial for two weeks and write an appreciation of the social status of the family. She was not a member of staff and therefore not aware of current policy, which it was felt, would enable her to give an unbiased analysis.⁸⁸³ The finished report, unveiled in November 1950, made some very interesting points about the family. It is worth reproducing at length:

The social status of the family is extraordinarily difficult to define because the life they lead and the details of that life which are portrayed seem at variance

⁸⁷⁹ Mcmillan had experience both of commercial radio and daily serials, according to one article who claim that: 'McMillan had produced hundreds of sponsored programmes for Radio Luxembourg from 1934 to 1939, but the BBC had kept secret the fact that he had also pioneered the daily thriller serial *Vic Samson: Special Investigator for Luxembourg* before the war' (Dennis Gifford, Wednesday 6 October 1999, Obituary 'Noel Johnson He played two great radio heroes, Dick Barton and Dan Dare', [<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/1999/oct/06/guardianobituaries>, accessed 17 March 2010]).

⁸⁸⁰ Memo from Mr. J. McMillan to CLP, 10 August 1950, BBC WAC R19/779/1.

⁸⁸¹ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 667, 16 August, 1950, BBC WAC.

⁸⁸² Script Conference No 48, 29 August 1950, BBC WAC R19/779/1.

⁸⁸³ Memo, 8 September 1950, BBC WAC R19/779/1.

with the background that is sketched or what one assumes from the general standard [...] The family seem devoted to each other and often to be at home together, but there is no indication of any interests or hobbies or activities that they undertake other than a curiosity and interest in transitory incidents. They do not even seem interested in each other's daily work [...] The fact that they make no comment on any events of the day – either sport, theatre, films, music or politics, or anything other than local details - tends to produce a feeling that they are isolated from the normal features which play a part in other people's lives [...] The impression given that they are a family with a small circle of very intimate friends [...] does not seem usual for a family with their background. One rather expects them to have more social or professional friendships. The background of reasonable comfort, the area in which they live, the comparative wealth of their intimate friends and neighbours, lead one to expect a certain standard of variety in activities, entertainments and friendships, but the Dale family life does not follow this pattern. Their luxuries and pleasures, and even interests, seem to reflect a somewhat restricted background and education, whereas their physical background would lead one to expect a wider or more social middle class life.⁸⁸⁴

It was clear that the family's geographical location, their neighbourhood, implied a certain status. But the family's behaviour did not comply with this. Owen continued, when discussing 'Mrs. Dale', that 'there is no indication of religion or politics, which is so for the whole family'. The elements or parts that define a family's social status were, as she said, 'completely missing'.⁸⁸⁵ Owen's report made clear that social status was defined very much in the way we lived, our friendships and hobbies, political and religious beliefs; our way of life. An early undated note by the two scriptwriters, Jonquil Antony and Ted Willis, further revealed that, as early as 1947, the purpose and style of the drama was confused:

We both feel that it is difficult to proceed further until we have a clearer idea of the type of serial which is required. Stress has been laid on the suggestion that it should be a human rather than a kitchen drama. While we believe that less emphasis could be laid on rationing and other difficulties, and more on other aspects of life, it is difficult to see how dramatisation of current austerities may be avoided, since they are so much a part of the life of any British family and housewife.⁸⁸⁶

⁸⁸⁴ McMillan to Adam, 'A report on the social status of the Dale family', November 1950, BBC WAC R19/779/1.

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁶ Notes from the scriptwriters, [no date], BBC WAC R19/779/1.

Further, two ‘dummies’ were played to a listening panel in December 1947 and it was reported by the ‘Radio Correspondent’ in the *Daily Mirror* that the panel’s criticism had resulted in changes to the script. It was reported that, ‘Chief criticism the housewives made was of the Dale’s daily help. They said she was more like a variety turn than a real-life character. The guest critics also said they did not want to be left to imagine the new family and its home. They wanted *real details* and plenty of them’.⁸⁸⁷

Owen’s report coincided with a plea from the scriptwriters, Lesley Wilson, Jonquil Anthony and Joan Carr-Jones, for a change in policy. They wanted Gwen to marry, from a creative point of view, she needed to move on and settle down: ‘we appreciate that the policy, as it is now laid down, is to prevent the Dales from ageing or changing, but we think the listeners are beginning to feel that it is *unnatural* for the family not to progress’.⁸⁸⁸ The writers ended the letter, ‘we feel very strongly indeed about this, as we think in time the programme may be affected by the disappointment felt by the listeners, who like to regard the Dales as a typical, real-life family, such as their own’.⁸⁸⁹ The whole thing, according to McMillan rested on the lifespan of the serial.⁸⁹⁰ After discussing it with Adam, the Controller of the Light Programme, it was agreed that the three writer’s request could be met, but, McMillan ended, ‘I think we must be very careful not to embark on a wholesale “progression”. It seems to me that it would be enough for 1951 to let Gwen get married and, possibly, start having a baby’.⁸⁹¹

Consequently, small policy changes were introduced the following year. The ‘Dale’s were henceforth allowed to be married and have birthdays’.⁸⁹² In 1952, it was agreed that, ‘the series might be given a little more depth by one member of the family having some cultural interest. It has already been stressed that none is musical but as David Owen [Gwen’s future husband] is in charge of a publisher’s book jacket department it seemed reasonable that he should one day take Gwen to the National Gallery, and for her to be interested’.⁸⁹³ This was followed by a request by McMillan that pieces of

⁸⁸⁷ ‘Wives alter “Mrs. Dale’s Diary”’, *The Daily Mirror*, 31 December 1947. (My emphasis).

⁸⁸⁸ Letter to Cleland Finn, 30 November 1950, BBC WAC R19/779/1. (My emphasis).

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁰ Memo from McMillan to Cleland Finn, 7 December 1950, BBC WAC R19/779/1. What is interesting is that Cleland Finn who was a producer, also referred to the lifespan of the serial in a memo to McMillan, basically saying that if the serial would go on forever, then no changes should be allowed, but if they were only to run it for a few more years, then they should be allowed to change (5 December 1950, BBC WAC R19/779/1).

⁸⁹¹ Memo from McMillan to Finn, 8 December 1950, BBC WAC R19/779/1.

⁸⁹² Script Meeting No. 56, 8 January [1951], BBC WAC R19/779/1.

⁸⁹³ Script Conference No: 79, 23 January [1952], BBC WAC R19/779/2.

topical interest should ‘occasionally be incorporated’⁸⁹⁴, it was for instance suggested that a reference to the King’s death, was to be inserted in February.⁸⁹⁵ In July further points were considered for the script writers; ‘Mrs. Dale’s activities on Committees or her involvement in the Women’s Voluntary Service should be brought up more frequently as well as references to theatre, cinema and books.’⁸⁹⁶ Owen’s points, and the script writers’ plea for more realism, were slowly being taken on board.

A crisis-point could not, however, be averted entirely. The serial once again came under discussion in the Drama department in May 1952, when it was decided that *Mrs Dale’s Diary* needed a ‘blood transfusion’.⁸⁹⁷ An Audience Research report had already been requested and it was also suggested that a Miss Theadora Benson would listen and provide critical comments.⁸⁹⁸ The sudden interest was due to a downturn in listening figures.⁸⁹⁹ As discussed in the first chapter, the 1950s saw a general decline in radio listening but this discussion also took place at a time in which the serial was no longer the most popular on the BBC. In January 1951, *The Archers*; a domestic serial about a farming community, was introduced on the Light Programme, first broadcast in the mornings but later at 6.45 p.m.⁹⁰⁰ According to daily listening figures in January 1951, *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* had a figure of 14%⁹⁰¹ (this can be compared with *Housewives Choice* which had a 18% figure, or the *News* at 10.00 p.m., which had 20%).⁹⁰² However, in December 1951, *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* had 13% and *The Archers* 14%.⁹⁰³ By January 1952 the figure was 13% and 19% respectively⁹⁰⁴, and by June 1952 the figure was even lower; *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* had a figure of 10% and *The Archers*, 19%.⁹⁰⁵ A small notice in the *Daily Express*, from May 1951 confirmed the popularity of the serial: ‘Radio’s farming family [...] has beaten all other serials in listener appeal’.⁹⁰⁶ Significantly, *The Archers* had more men listening due to its later air time. It also had a

⁸⁹⁴ Script Conference No: 80, 6 February [1952], BBC WAC R19/779/2.

⁸⁹⁵ Memo from Lefeaux to McMillan, 12 February 1952, BBC WAC R19/779/2

⁸⁹⁶ Script Conference No. 83, 20 March [1952], BBC WAC R19/779/2.

⁸⁹⁷ Memo from Mr. Charles Lefeaux to Mr. John McMillan, 5 May 1952, BBC WAC R19/779/2.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁰ *The Archers* was first introduced in January 1950, on the Midland Home Service, after its run on the Light Programme it would eventually move to the Home Service.

⁹⁰¹ These daily listening figures were based on an estimated percentage of the adult civilian population of Great Britain (11 January 1951 BBC WAC R9/12/6).

⁹⁰² Ibid.

⁹⁰³ 27 December 1951, BBC WAC R9/12/7.

⁹⁰⁴ 15 January 1952, BBC WAC R9/12/7.

⁹⁰⁵ 27 June 1952, BBC WAC R9/12/7.

⁹⁰⁶ *Daily Express*, ‘Dick Barton beaten by The Archers’, 22 May 1951.

more mixed group of listeners in terms of age.⁹⁰⁷ The success and popularity of *The Archers*, together with an overall decline in listening, seem to have pushed *Mrs. Dale's Diary* in a new direction, simply to save it from being cut altogether.

The discussion over the serial's future continued throughout May 1952. One of the producers, Wilfrid Grantham, had spent three days with *Mrs. Dale's Diary*. His view was that the programme's identity was an issue of production:

The six scripts I had to handle were deplorably amateurish both in writing and construction [...] These factors I found contributed to a general depression among the cast. I must say I consider it understandable [...] Each of the regulars, perhaps not unnaturally, turn his or her performance on like a tap. [...] The trouble, as it seems to me, is one very difficult to overcome (a) because of lack of time (b) because a long established 'method' cannot be suddenly torn away without the whole thing collapsing (c) because, for good or ill, it has become over a long period of time, a "style" of acting accepted, apparently, rapturously by the listener.

He believed this was not just down to the actors being 'un-cooperative' - according to Grantham, the writers did not attend rehearsals. Another reason, he suggested, was that reform "would take away their illusion!". To which Grantham commented, 'frankly [...] the sooner some of their illusions are taken away the better.'⁹⁰⁸ Norman Wright, who had been the serial's executive producer for over a year, agreed with Grantham: 'scripts are completely played out and the present writers are incapable of better work'. He suggested that overall there was a need for one person to take charge and, as he put it, 'devote all his energies to the organisation and supervision of the Diary.' Wright continued, 'it seems to me that the Diary has quite definitely lost its grip. [...] It seems to me that (a) an entirely new set-up might bring about a change or (b) perhaps the Diary has had its day.'⁹⁰⁹

The critique of the writers and actors seemed a little unfair, considering the strict editorial policy they had had to follow. These limitations had been identified by Charles Lefeaux, who was an Assistant in the 'Script Section', in a memo to the Head of Drama (Gielgud), nevertheless attempted a defence:

⁹⁰⁷ Listener Research Report LR/52/941, 'Some observations on listeners' reactions to domestic serials, with special reference to "Mrs. Dale's Diary", 21 August, 1952, BBC WAC R9/9/16.

⁹⁰⁸ He ended his memo: 'I am sure all this has been said, and said better, by others - but the last three days that I have spent on this entertainment have been something of an artistic nightmare - or should it be inartistic?' (Memo from Wilfrid Grantham to Charles Lefeaux, 22 May 1952, BBC WAC R19/779/2).

⁹⁰⁹ Memo from Norman Wright to Charles Lefeaux, 27 May 1952, BBC WAC R19/779/2.

I am not in entire agreement with their [Grantham and Wright] strictures upon the scripts. The three existing writers are very limited in their experiences of, and outlook upon, life; this naturally prevents their writing scripts on a higher level. I am not however persuaded that such scripts even if they were obtainable, would be to the taste of the audience for whom the programme is designed. That the writers are able to turn out year after year scripts in which the characters remain reasonable consistent and in which a fair inventiveness is used within the narrow ambit of suburban domestic life is an achievement in its own small way.

Having made his point, Lefeaux conceded the need to bring in someone new, 'young and enthusiastic', if the serial was to survive at all.⁹¹⁰ Gielgud saw his chance to get rid of the 'diary' once-and-for-good. In a memo to the Controller of Light Programme, his standpoint was clear:

[...] I feel it is my duty to let you know that in the view of several of the regular producers and script writers, the regretful conclusion has been reached that the "Diary" is really worked out [...]. I am not returning to the hopeless attempt to persuade anybody that that this type of programme item is not worth doing, but I do think I ought to try to persuade you that a substitute of a similar genre should be discussed and sought for. I am sure you will appreciate my disquiet by the confirmation of my old view that this particular chore was bound in the long run to get both producers and script-writers to a point at which they almost prefer to be working on a factory conveyer belt.⁹¹¹

In July, Benson reported back. The producer Norman Wright said of Benson's report: "much of it is a re-statement of our own attitude, and it is also interesting that as an "outsider" she has suggested a *levelling upwards* if the Diary is to continue."⁹¹² Other 'faults' noted by Benson were 'Unsatisfying and premature endings of stories, dropping potentially good material instead of carrying it through' and 'Occasional endings on an unethical note, thereby abandoning particularly promising material.'⁹¹³ McMillan found the report useful and interesting, and immediate measures were taken. In a memo to Lefeaux he wrote:

⁹¹⁰ Memo from Charles Lefeaux to H.D., 27 May 1952, BBC WAC R19/779/2.

⁹¹¹ Memo from Head of Drama to CLP, 28 May 1952, BBC WAC R19/779/2.

⁹¹² Memo from Mr. Norman Wright to Mr. Charles Lefeaux [accompanied with Benson's report, 'Report on Mrs. Dale's Diary'], 21 July, 1952, BBC WAC R19/779/2. (My emphasis).

⁹¹³ Benson also highlighted some mistakes and errors which are quite interesting. For example, in one episode it was suggested that Mrs. Morgan had worked as a 'parlourmaid' to the 'peerage', this Benson said was impossible - not 'with that accent.' Also someone was cut on a tin opener and she said this could not happen with the 'modern' ones. Ibid.

It is quite clear that we must adopt the technique which I applied to the “Archers” serial: to have a regular story conference of some duration in a congenial atmosphere for the purpose of setting the plot and the sub-plots for some way ahead. The present arrangement, which allows the writers to develop their own pet stories and neglect promising opportunities provided by their colleagues, lacks any kind of literary sense to my mind.⁹¹⁴

McMillan offered his flat in Baker Street (including tea) for future script meetings - ‘the scene of many successful “Archers” conferences’.⁹¹⁵ It was further confirmed by the Controller of Light Programme to the Acting Director General that McMillan and Lefeaux were confident that they could, based on their own judgments and Benson’s feedback, improve the serial.⁹¹⁶ Mrs. Dale was safe, for the moment, and by September a range of changes was introduced. For example it was decided among other things that:

Long and developing stories are preferable to short ones. [...] Plot situations can and should be made interesting by the varying reactions and opinions of the surrounding characters. [...] Writers should aim at *verisimilitude* by setting the characters against contemporary events and easily recognisable backgrounds when possible and by depicting more faithfully life in a doctor’s household.[...] Dr. Dale’s professional life should be a busier one, Mrs. Dale should take more part in it and touches such as his being called out at night should be added.⁹¹⁷

It was also at this time decided that Bob would be involved in a new story-line that would unfold over the next three months. This story was the first example of the new kind of stories that would develop in the 1950s: more public and outward looking, often involving months of preparations and research so as to be as close to reality as possible. In this story Bob would play the innocent victim, being used in a ‘housing racket’. It was noted that McMillan, ‘will suggest and we will engage an expert to advise upon suitable housing racket details and to vet the scripts from a legal angle.’⁹¹⁸ A Robert Clayton of New Bond Street was approached:

We are proposing to run a series of stories [...] dealing with various aspects of the present housing “racket”. We are writing to ask whether you would be

⁹¹⁴ Memo from McMillan to Lefeaux, 1 August, 1952, BBC WAC R19/779/2.

⁹¹⁵ Ibid.

⁹¹⁶ Memo from Controller, Light Programme to Acting Director General, 1 August, 1952, BBC WAC R19/779/2.

⁹¹⁷ Script Conference No.94, 25 September, 1952, BBC WAC R19/779/2. (My emphasis).

⁹¹⁸ Ibid.

kind enough to act as technical advisers to the scriptwriters providing information about housing “rackets” and to attend a script conferences when these suggestions are discussed. We should also like you to read the scripts before they are broadcast in order to ensure that they are accurate and would not get the BBC into trouble.⁹¹⁹

It was clear that by the time that *The Daily Mirror* and *The Times* reported that Mrs. Dale's *Diary* had become “too aloof” for the average woman listener, in October 1952, the BBC was already aware of criticism and was working on how to improve the serial. By Christmas the *Daily Mirror* reported that the new story involving ‘shady estate agents’ brought the serial “down to earth”.⁹²⁰ This new approach of writing and production would culminate with a big story in 1954, when the building of a new housing estate would threaten the peace of Parkwood Lodge, and possibly see Mrs. Dale run for the local council, in a clever PR stunt of “will she?”, “she may”, “no she won't”.⁹²¹ The idea of the Council pulling down Parkwood Lodge made Mrs. Dale's ‘blood boil’, ‘And the fact that the row of cottages where Monument lives is to be included, makes me even more angry, apart from how much its upsets me to think of him being turned out.’⁹²² Together with other residents she formed a Resident's Protest Committee, but along the way fell out with her husband who was in support of the housing scheme. In a sign of the new editorial policy, Mrs. Dale and Jim had different opinions. And the following extract reflects not just the style of writing but also her involvement in public matters, such as the need for housing:

- Dr. Dale: I didn't feel strongly one way or the other. But I do now. I'm convinced that the Council are right to build as much as they can, wherever they can.
- Mrs. Dale: Oh, I know there's still a desperate shortage of accommodation, but...
- Dr. Dale: That's just it, Mary? Do you know? I was talking Sedgwick yesterday, and he produced some facts and figures that amazed me.
- Mrs. Dale: I can well believe it. But you don't see the point, Jim. I'm all for the Council building, too. All I say is, why not do it somewhere else? Why ruin a lovely old place like Parkwood Lodge, when there are other places they could use without upsetting anybody?

⁹¹⁹ Letter to Robert Clayton from G.M. Turnell, 6 October, 1952, BBC WAC R19/779/2.

⁹²⁰ *The Daily Mirror*, ‘Mrs. Dale “coming down to earth”’ by Clifford Davis, 27 December, 1952.

⁹²¹ Memo from Pelletier to Kearey, 29 December, 1953, BBC WAC R19/779/4. Pelletier wrote: ‘This sort of publicity, in my view, focuses the right kind of interest on the programme itself.’

⁹²² Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 1552, 11 February, 1954, BBC WAC.

Dr. Dale then asks her to resign from the campaign but she refused. The quarrel gets more heated and louder, they both get upset and she reflected at the end of the diary:

Mrs. Dale: I wanted to run after him and tell him I'd do whatever he liked. But somehow I couldn't. I feel absolutely wretched about it all. It's the first serious quarrel we've had for years, and I know Jim thinks I'm just being feminine and stubborn. But I'm not. I'm so convinced that I'm right. And surely nowadays a woman ought to stick up for her own convictions, even if her husband doesn't approve. Or am I wrong? I wish I knew.⁹²³

Somewhat inevitably, there were firm limits set on Mrs. Dale's public activities. In the end she did not stand in the local election: 'It was definitely decided that Mrs. Dale could not be a member of the Council. The rest of the story as it stands can be used, with this omission. She can become interested in inofficial [sic] public work and join a local committee to protest against the takeover.'⁹²⁴ It was too much of a risk for the BBC to have the 'Dale saga' venturing into politics, to which the *News Chronicle* wrote sarcastically: 'to attain the perfection of complete safety in all circumstances, the BBC's nervous Napoleons should issue a lot more decrees on these lines. Mrs. Dale ought never to cook on a gas-stove, in case she upsets the British Electric Authority [...] Is there nobody in the BBC with enough red blood in his veins to liberate Mrs. Dale?'⁹²⁵ But the attitude towards the inclusion of more controversial storylines *did* change. For example, in December 1954 it was planned that builders working on a nursing home would go on a strike, and that the family members would have different views on this.⁹²⁶

The transformation of the serial was not solely due to changes in editorial policy. It also saw a re-organisation of production, and, more importantly, the introduction of a producer who took keen interest in the serial. Antony Kearey was an actor and had played parts in *The Robinsons* and *Mystery Playhouse*.⁹²⁷ He would later become a

⁹²³ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, episode 1566, 3 March, 1954, BBC WAC. (Emphasis original).

⁹²⁴ Script conference no.126, 17 December, 1953, BBC WAC R19/779/4.

⁹²⁵ *News Chronicle*, 'Too safe', 30 December, 1953, BBC WAC.

⁹²⁶ Memo from Pelletier to CLP, 23 December, 1954, BBC WAC R19/779/5.

⁹²⁷ Antony Kearey, Artists File 1: 1946-1951, BBC WAC RCONT.

radio and television producer.⁹²⁸ Kearey began to work on *Mrs. Dale's Diary* as Assistant in the Drama Department Script Unit. But in June 1953 he was hired as the main producer for the serial.⁹²⁹ Before his appointment it had also been confirmed that the serial was to be allocated not just a producer but also an assistant - Betty Davies who took over as the main producer when Kearey left in 1955 - and that the budget for the serial would increase from £287.10s to £290 per week (the budget increase was also to enable greater topicality).⁹³⁰ Kearey was keen to improve the serial.⁹³¹ Already in April, he had responded to a plea made by Rooney Pelletier, Chief Assistant to the Light Programme⁹³², to make the serial more topical by suggesting that a complete break with the current editorial policy was needed, and that national events could be mentioned. He further observed that at the present scripts were written five or six weeks ahead of transmission; if this could be cut to three weeks it would be easier for the writers to include more topical events and therefore be more flexible.⁹³³ In August, at a script conference, Kearey said that the main priority was to raise the level of scripts, by better reflecting the life of a middle-class family in a London suburb, their aspirations and so on: 'greater research by scriptwriters into their material is necessary if the past "vagueness" is to be overcome', he continued. Kearey also emphasised that, 'the diary should reflect current trends of thought and opinion on matters of interest to Londoners [...] an simple example being the rise in transport fares'. To give the scriptwriters a sense of the 'average suburban family' he would distribute a copy of "The Middle Classes."⁹³⁴

⁹²⁸ Kearey would for example go on to produce *Emergency Ward 10*, (1957-1967) on ITV, Britain's first televised medical drama, in which he was producer between 1957 and 1959 ([No author] <http://www.cherishedtelevision.co.uk/ward10.html>, accessed on 15 February 2010).

⁹²⁹ Letter, 'Charge to Mrs. Dale's Diary Budget', [to Kearey with contract enclosed], 11 June, 1953, BBC WAC R19/779/3.

⁹³⁰ Memo from A.A. Drama (Sound) to A.O. (Ent), 29 May, 1953, BBC WAC R19/779/3. On topicality see memo from Mr. H. Rooney Pelletier to CLP, 10 April, 1953, BBC WAC R19/779/3.

⁹³¹ One example of this was the research undertaken. For instance, in preparation for the 'Housing story' (the building of the estate), which would take shape in 1954, Kearey contacted the Ministry of Housing and Local Government to get advice and information about possible size of the estate and a suggested time line (Letter and report to Kearey from Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 22 October, 1953, BBC WAC R19/779/4).

⁹³² Pelletier was Chief Assistant to the Light Programme in 1953 and would become Controller in 1955. According to one newspaper article it was Pelletier's idea to 'kill off' Grace Archer on the dawn of commercial television, he wrote in a memo: 'The more I think about it, the more I believe that a death of a violent kind in The Archers, timed, if possible, to diminish interest in the opening of commercial television in London, is a good idea' (Nicole Martin, 16 April 2008, 'BBC killed Grace Archer to ruin ITV launch', [<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1895734/BBC-killed-Grace-Archer-to-ruin-ITV-launch.html>, accessed 7 April 2010]).

⁹³³ Memo from Assistant, Scrip Unit, Drama (Sound) to AAHD (Sound), 27 April, 1953, BBC WAC R19/779/3.

⁹³⁴ Script Conference No: 116, 13 August, 1953, BBC WAC R19/779/3. It is not evident in the material exactly what book Kearey is referring to, but Roy Lewis' book, *The English Middle Class* (1949), was

A first-hand insight into the production of the serial can be provided by Betty Davies, Assistant to Kearey in 1953, and later his replacement as ‘main’ producer in 1955, and Kay Ennals, a former Studio Manager who worked on the serial in the late 1940s and early 50s. Davies said about the script-conference that they would usually have a chart on the wall – an outline of the characters and what they were doing; with the aim to always have the main characters - Mrs. Dale, Dr. Dale, Bob or Gwen - being part of their own stories. The script-writers would bring their ideas to the conference - some ideas would be rejected while others accepted. A rough plan was then discussed and each writer would be assigned a particular story or character. Stories were then sketched out and a detailed plan would later emerge. In each stage the story would be advanced and all three writers would be aware of what was going on. Research, Davies recalls, was done at various stages, and they would ‘attempt to put it in the real world’. She said they tried to keep in touch with the news - to keep it topical - but since the serial was recorded in advance this was often difficult. Monday to Wednesday was usually spent on recordings, twice a day (one in the morning and one in the afternoon), and Thursday and Friday would be spent preparing all the scripts.⁹³⁵ Ennals, who started as a Programme Engineer in 1944 before becoming a Studio Manager, provided sound effects for various radio dramas. The Studio Managers would receive scripts in advance so they knew what to organise and order: ‘all your lunch hour you would go down there [effects department] to find the right sounds’. Ennals further said that working with *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* was: ‘really funny [...] always had tea so you always had to have a tray with tea cups and tea pots [...] and give this wonderful sort of sound as if it was happening’. They were usually two people working as Studio Managers during the transmission. According to Ennals, the writers came occasionally to the studio but, ‘not very often’. If they did come, ‘they would change the script and then that would cause problems [...] The actors weren’t always happy with that’, having learned their lines then learning new on the day. The studio was a large room with stairs leading up to a separate room above where the producers sat enabling them a good overview: ‘that was wrong [...] you did not get the intonation’.⁹³⁶

The serial came under threat again in October 1953, when Donald McWhinnie, who was now the Assistant Head of Drama (Sound), had ‘come to the conclusion that all

mentioned in an earlier BBC memo, as an example of a book ‘extensively reviewed at the moment’ (Memo from Pollock to AHTD (Mr. Newton), 24 June, 1949, BBC WAC R51/118/7).

⁹³⁵ Interview with author, 16 April, 2010, London.

⁹³⁶ Interview with author, 9 February, 2010, Dorchester.

attempts to refurbish this series are doomed to failure; theme, characters, and writers seem to me played out.’ Instead they would be looking for a replacement, ‘a new family saga.’⁹³⁷ However, by now, Kearey’s improvements to the script writing and production in general seemed to have paid off. In a report Kearey explained that the gain in strength was due to the creation of a separate ‘Dale production unit’, which had helped writers and cast, increasing integration and team spirit. He further noted that the accusation by the press, ‘that they never do anything’ is now out of date, and that stories are more developed according to listener reactions. Topicality had also improved through advanced information of coming events and ‘a shorter-term editing by the office.’ Further emphasis had been placed on research:

The office instigates research into background material, arranges on-the-spot visits and checks on accuracy. Examples here are numerous. Our attendance at the Willesden Council Housing Committee and at a Public Enquiry on a Compulsory Purchase Order for our Housing story. Attendance at the War Office and the Mill Hill Barracks for our National Service Story. Visits to London Airport for Bob (the son’s) present employment and prospects, etc.

He ended the report by saying that a small survey showed that the Appreciation Index averaged a 65 - compared to one week in 1952 which averaged 62. In 1948 the figure had been 56.⁹³⁸

It was in this context that Pelletier wrote to the Head of Drama, saying that, ‘I agree with Kearey that there is beginning to be a new “sense of responsibility” in these scripts which, without destroying the fictional attraction, is making the series slightly more real and in consequence more attractive.’⁹³⁹ *Mrs. Dale’s Diary*, clearly changed from being a fairly typical domestic drama or soap opera with a focus on the feminine, the personal

⁹³⁷ Memo from Assistant Head of Drama (Sound) to CLP, 8 October, 1953, BBC WAC R19/779/4.

⁹³⁸ Memo [see attached report] from Mr. A. Kearey to CLP and Mr. H. Rooney Pelletier, 4 October, 1954, BBC WAC R19/779/5.

⁹³⁹ Memo from Mr. H. Rooney Pelletier to HD (S.), 25 November, 1953, BBC WAC R19/779/4. And by the following year, in September 1954, the scriptwriters (Jonquil Antony, Hazel Adair and Basil Dawson) urged for an increase in pay. Their enquiry had been submitted already in June and by now they were threatening to take the matter to the Radiowriters’ Association if further delays were made (Letter from Antony, Adair and Dawson to Mr. Adam, 23 September, 1954, BBC WAC R19/779/5). Pelletier was in favour of treating the ‘Dales’ the same as *The Archers*, but continued: ‘It is not such a valuable property, of course, but this point is doubtless overshadowed by the argument “fair shares for all”’ (Memo from Mr. H. Rooney Pelletier to CLP, 23 September, 1954, BBC WAC R19/779/5). It was decided by the end of the month, by Adam that, ‘I think now we have decided we want to carry on with Dale’s Diary in Light Programme, and in view of the improvement in the reality of the scripts, we should agree the two guineas increase, and make it retrospective to the beginning of September’ (Memo from Controller, Light Programme to AHD (S.), 30 September, 1954, BBC WAC R19/779/5).

and the intimate, into a more outward looking serial with longer story-lines and emphasis on topicality. It also increasingly stressed its verisimilitude. Pressure to change from *within* the BBC, and from outside, as well as increasing pressure from its main competitor, *The Archers*, seemed to have transformed the serial in terms of production values and organisation - to one with a more outward and public focus: a serial with *social responsibility*. If at its start, *Mrs. Dale's Diary* had a less apparent public service ethos, this was less the case by 1955. There is of course the broader context of television adding to the equation, where it could be argued that the success and popularity of the Dales became crucial in the struggle for listeners. Combined radio and television licenses were rising and in 1953, with the televised Coronation of Queen Elizabeth, the television audience outnumbered those who listened to the radio. John Corner has identified this moment as television's 'process of becoming the principal instrument both of public information and of national cultural identity'.⁹⁴⁰ In 1954, after political pressure and various reports, the Television Act was passed, which would introduce commercial television in 1955 with the start of ITV. It was for example noted in 1953 by the Chief Publicity Officer to Pelletier, discussing a profile on the 'Diary' in *The Observer*, that 'it strikes me as useful publicity for Sound at a time when it is battling for space against Television.'⁹⁴¹ With the changes it also appears that the serial gained new listeners – and different ones. In 1955, Kearey wrote to Pelletier that he had received many listener requests for an omnibus edition of the programme on Sundays, and, he continued, 'Most of these requests have come from men who are normally at work during the times of our daily transmissions, which would seem to indicate that the programme has broadened its' sphere of interest and is now reaching a potentially new public I referred to when I first came to the programme.'⁹⁴²

Conclusion

We can see that *Mrs. Dale's Diary* and *The Archers* represented the beginnings of a British soap opera tradition that blended escapism and fantasy with a very significant admixture of social realism. Early on, it had been hampered by a restrictive editorial policy. But the serial always had a difficult task. Compared to women's magazines at the time, which would have had a more defined market, and therefore found it easier to

⁹⁴⁰ Corner, J. (1991). 'Introduction' in Corner (ed.) *Popular Television in Britain. Studies in Cultural History*. London: BFI. p. 4.

⁹⁴¹ Chief Publicity Officer Home to Mr. H. Rooney Pelletier, 4 December, 1953, BBC WAC R44/277.

⁹⁴² Memo from Mr. Antony Kearey to H. Rooney Pelletier, 18 February, 1955, BBC WAC R19/1788/1.

target an audience, the BBC struggled because it catered for a broad audience, where class and educational background was incredibly mixed. Nevertheless, over time, the serial succeeded in portraying women's 'double-burden', and featured women engaged in public matters or outside activities as well in the home. The intimate side of the serial, its focus on family relationships and the everyday was never enough. Although Mrs. Dale stayed as the loyal wife and mother, she became more involved in activities in the local community and public life. Rather than just being a housewife she became the involved citizen.

There are clear parallels to *Woman's Hour*, both in its production and perception within the BBC and outside. It was placed as a separate unit within Drama Department, and was mainly written by women for women. It had to strive to achieve recognition - particularly from the Drama Department who often saw it as degrading and something that took up time that could be used for better 'quality' drama. But it was also seen as an important 'gateway' for governmental and other public and private bodies. The writers and actors often appeared in the press; there seemed to have been a close relationship with the audience; recurrent public relations were important, and listeners felt as if the characters were real people, companions or friends. The writers and actors were often portrayed as forming a community or 'family' in itself. Just like *Woman's Hour*, it had an intimate style and dealt often with family and relationship issues, daily life. Women could identify with Mrs. Dale as mother or wife. But other characters also provided possible identification, such as young Gwen or independent Sally. Its popularity made it into a key programme in the Light Programme service, and by the mid 1950s it was receiving the recognition it needed, particularly from the Drama Department.

Several conclusions can be drawn from all this. First, domestic serials – characterised as 'feminine' – always struggled to be taken seriously. Their style was heavily associated with American 'soap operas'. As demonstrated from the beginning, 'the diary', had to differentiate itself from its American counterparts. It was required to hold a mirror to the everyday life, to have a 'reality' that was thought to be missing from the American serials. Press comments of the 'diary' and views within the Drama Department echoed attitudes similar to American sociologists in the 1930s and 1940s: there was a worry about the female audience - listeners were seen as 'corrupt', sentimental, or addicts who could not separate the real world from fiction. There was a worry (particularly from people such as Gielgud and McWhinnie) about the negative impact such 'mass-culture'

would have on the general situation in the Drama Department. It would prevent real, *quality* work from being done.

Second, for a long time, editorial policy prevented the writers from developing characters and story-lines in natural ways. Not being able to age, or divorce or marry, was clearly a mistake. As a broadcasting practice it did not work. From an artistic point of view it did not help either, preventing the serial from being more ‘real’. Its early failings, according to its critics, were twofold: first, because it did not connect the private world with the outside, the public world; second, because its main protagonist Mrs. Dale did not behave as a middle-class woman – a complaint which was, in itself a measure of the assumption that middle-class housewives at the time were more engaged in outside activities even public or political matters, or at least they were expected to be. The serial can thus be seen as a measure for women’s progress. The critique of the serial for being too obsessed with the home and the personal was also an issue American critics highlighted, as Brunsdon has showed: ‘the elevation of the individual over the social, the private over the public.’⁹⁴³ Was this the case in Britain? Less so, it seems. The serial reflected the lives of women in a more rounded way. It helped them make sense of modernity. As Giles put it: ‘Life stories, letters, diaries and *fiction* have [...] traditionally functioned as a space in which women could articulate their sense of the word.’⁹⁴⁴ The serial could help women to ‘cope’ with a changing Britain; the ‘modern career girl’, new housing estates, or just trying to understand a new technology such as the television.⁹⁴⁵

⁹⁴³ For example, Brunsdon quotes Rudolph Arnheim [1944] who said this about the soap opera listener and soap operas in general: “she [the listener] is encouraged to view failures as happening only to other people, and is confirmed in her belief that her suffering is caused not by herself, but by the imperfection and villainy of others. There is little effort to make the listener aware of her prejudices and resentments; rather, she is carefully flattered. Men are shown to be inferior to women, the working class is ignored, learning is depreciated. The egocentric and individualistic concept of a world in which the community appears mainly as a threat from outside is supported – hyenas howling round the campfire, with the law of the jungle as the only resort. Only private problems exist.” (Arnheim cited in Brunsdon, op. cit. p. 46).

⁹⁴⁴ Giles, op. cit. p. 24. (2004). (My emphasis).

⁹⁴⁵ There is also evidence from the late 1960s when the serial was coming to an end (this time being seen as old-fashioned) and social change was once in the air that older listeners to the serial felt left behind. One listener, who used to listen to the serial as an undergraduate in Oxford in the 1950s and had become very fond of the serial, wrote to the Controller of Radio 2 in February 1969: ‘I note with annoyance that you insist on discontinuing “The Dales” and replacing it with a serial about young girls in Hampstead [...] I fear your decision is merely because you are determined on a change, not because your listeners want one [...] We are not interested in swinging chicks in Hampstead and we are tired of this everlasting pop, pop, pop, and the puerilities of disc jockeys [...] how much further is “youth” to be allowed to encroach?’ (Burgess, P. Letter to Controller of Radio 2, 6 February, 1969, BBC WAC R41/284/1).

Marwick once concluded that class was not abandoned in the aftermath of 1945.⁹⁴⁶ But what did take place in the post-war period was a shift towards a wealthier society, in terms of universal healthcare, and eventually consumer durables. For many, life *was* better. These changes were so dramatic that it affected the *thinking*, about people, class and culture. I think it is here that the work by Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams is particularly useful in helping to understand what was happening.⁹⁴⁷ Williams, for example, referred to an important transition in society: ‘It is argued, for instance, that the working class is becoming ‘bourgeois’, because it is dressing like the middle class, living in semi-detached houses, acquiring cars and washing-machines and television sets’. But, he continued, ‘The worker’s envy of the middle-class man is not a desire to be that man, but to have the same kind of possessions [...] and for the rest want to go on being themselves.’⁹⁴⁸ He then said ‘The question then, perhaps, is whether there is any meaning left in “bourgeois”?’ Is there any point, indeed in continuing to think in class terms at all?’⁹⁴⁹ Hoggart in his opening also referred to the changes that had taken place: ‘It is often said that there are no working-classes in England now, that a “bloodless revolution” has taken place which has so reduced social differences that already most of us inhabit an almost flat plain, the plain of the lower middle- to middle-classes.’ He continued, though: ‘In spite of these changes, attitudes alter more slowly than we always realise.’⁹⁵⁰ *Mrs. Dale’s Diary*, in a sense, validates Hoggart. If the experience was that class was disappearing or rather it appeared as if the working-class and the middle-class were merging into one, the material examined in this chapter reveals that the focus on class-identity was still very strong. It even seemed to be heightened; our behaviour, actions, even hobbies and activities all determine our class, and were therefore seen and recognised by people in broadcasting as *important* in defining to whom we ‘belong’, or, determining whether we behave appropriately. Mrs. Dale was middle-class, but at first her status seemed ambivalent since she did not *behave* like a middle-class woman. She embodied a society in flux, in terms of both class and gender.

⁹⁴⁶ Arguing that, ‘neither the upheavals of the Second World War nor the programme of the Labour Government abolished it’ (Marwick, op. cit. pp. 25-26. (2003)).

⁹⁴⁷ Hoggart, op. cit; Williams, R. (1993). *Culture and Society: Coleridge to Orwell*, London, The Hogarth Press, (originally published in 1958 by London, Chatto & Windus).

⁹⁴⁸ Williams, op. cit. pp. 323-324.

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 324.

⁹⁵⁰ Hoggart, op. cit. p. 1. Hoggart who was interested in the shift towards mass-culture further said: ‘We may now see that in at least one sense we are indeed becoming classless – that is, the great majority of us are being merged into one class. We are becoming culturally classless’ (p. 265).

Once the serial exhibited a stronger sense of ‘social responsibility’, it received some kind of acceptance or recognition within the Drama Department. It had become a lot more ‘responsible’, outward looking, public - in a sense more ‘masculine’ in its content. But at the same time, we can also see the further integration of women into the public sphere. Mrs. Dale was the loyal wife and mother, but she also became the involved *citizen*. The serial therefore - at a time when it had been noted that listeners were tired of serious items – became more ‘serious’: a domestic serial with a sense of public purpose.

Behind all this, there often lurked the issue of *taste*. Hendy has argued that, ‘public-service radio funded by licence fees has always had to perform a difficult balancing act of populism and elitism.’⁹⁵¹ This balancing act was very present within the BBC post-war output.⁹⁵² A balance between populism and elitism was also present in the discussion on *Mrs. Dale’s Diary*. As worries about ‘mass’- or ‘popular-culture’ were surfacing, the serial questioned fundamental ideas on what ‘culture’ was or should be. The introduction of a daily serial spurred an internal cultural debate within the BBC particularly between the Drama Department and the Light Programme. Clearly, there were different views on what radio drama should be, especially in the Light Programme with its high proportion of working-class listeners. Should the BBC lead by presenting a version of culture in a typical ‘Arnoldian’ fashion, defining culture as ‘“the best that has been thought and written in the world,”’⁹⁵³ or should it merely reflect culture as real, everyday life, as Williams suggested, ‘a whole way of life’?⁹⁵⁴ The answer, for the BBC, appeared to be that it should somehow do both. Gielgud was keen to use radio drama as a vehicle for ‘quality’ work, eager to improve standards, resonating Arnold’s definition of culture. He believed in the importance of introducing serious drama in the Light Programme. His resistance to soap operas was well known and persistent.⁹⁵⁵ He faced a more open minded Light Programme policy that realised that the serial form was

⁹⁵¹ Hendy, D. (2000). *Radio in the Global Age*. Cambridge, Polity Press. p. 18.

⁹⁵² In previous chapters I have shown how the Light Programme although being ‘lighter’ and more ‘popular’ still had a very strong public service ethos and that several attempts were made to improve and implement ‘serious’ types of programmes.

⁹⁵³ Arnold cited in Scannell and Cardiff, op. cit. p. 9 (1991). For a discussion on Matthew Arnold and his most famous work *Culture and Anarchy* see chapter one in Scannell and Cardiff, op. cit. (1991).

⁹⁵⁴ Williams said: ‘Where *culture* meant a state or habit of the mind, or the body of intellectual and moral activities, it means now, also, a whole way of life’ (Williams, op. cit. p. xviii). (Emphasis original).

⁹⁵⁵ Even in 1959 on the 3000th anniversary of *Mrs. Dale’s Diary*, Gielgud’s view was clear: ‘I would suggest that the best way of celebrating the 3000th Anniversary of Mrs. Dale would be a state funeral – if necessary with military honours’ (Memo from Head of Drama to HPLP, 19 June, 1959, BBC WAC R44/966/1).

inevitably important and that it offered listeners (many of them women) some kind of pleasure. People such as McMillan, Collins, Chalmers, Pelletier and Adam were all part of the Light Programme, and, all were interested in popular forms of radio.

But as Chalmers highlighted, *Mrs. Dale's Diary*, was attractive to listeners because it dealt with ordinary life and this observation was also suggested in *The Critics*, where Pamela Hansford Johnson said about the 'diary' that it: 'does fulfil a very real need, because serious art has very much tended to neglect the bread and butter aspect of ordinary life – I mean serious art today – because Jane Austen didn't neglect it, and Trollope didn't either – but people do want to be – have reflected in art the kind of things they do in the ordinary way every one of the twenty-four hours.'⁹⁵⁶ In the end it was a move reflecting the change in the perception of what culture was or ought to be.

⁹⁵⁶ Programme as Broadcast Transcript, *The Critics*, 9 November, 1952, BBC WAC.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusions and afterthoughts

A focus on women's radio and the BBC in the British post-war period (1945-1955) has offered a rich and thought provoking history. The previous chapters have raised several points. For instance, how women's radio in the post-war period possessed a rather more serious tone in terms of address and content, than has previously been acknowledged. It has also been demonstrated how the internal culture of the BBC clearly shaped the output, and how departmental rows over editorial superiority and policy took place - and that often, as evident, these involved women's programming. There is also evidence of the significance of the role of women broadcasters and women's radio in the general development of broadcasting, *and* radio as a site bringing people and 'issues' together; bridging across class, gender, and the public and private divide. In this chapter I will thus offer a discussion of the contribution to knowledge that the thesis puts forward, and further elaborate on the four themes that have emerged and the implications that follow.

First, the Light Programme has been described as secondary, middle-class, and feminine, and in the academic literature it is often referred to as being the BBC's post-war response to the demand for light entertainment and in general more popular programming. The evidence presented in this thesis does suggest that we need to re-evaluate this assumption. Yes, the programme was indeed *feminine* and often 'lighter' in its approach, but, there is clearly an argument here to suggest that the Light Programme was also, *serious* and *educational*: that the '*feminised*' output in the Light Programme was consistent with a Reithian ambition, exemplified in *Woman's Hour*. The Light Programme contained a mix of lighter and serious items. Aiming for an audience mostly consisting of women and working class listeners, the Light Programme sought to experiment in style and tone, finding 'new ways' of doing radio (as in *Focus* and *Woman's Hour*). Education was the key, and therefore the Light Programme should be considered a lot more important in terms of educating people (particularly working class listeners) and making listeners aware of, and engaged in, public and political matters.

There is here a question of human agency and direction. As discussed in chapter three, the BBC's post-war Director General, William Haley, was clearly influenced by the BBC first Director General John Reith. In 1944 Haley set out his vision of the reconstruction of the post-war BBC. In a press release he said: 'Broadcasting has grown up [...] In our post-war plans we shall sacrifice nothing in the quality or quantity of our entertainment, but we shall safeguard broadcasting from becoming a glorified juke-box. By news, by discussions, by talks, by documentaries, by still new forms which we will seek and perfect, we shall play our part in making this country the *best informed democracy in the world*'.⁹⁵⁷ The evidence discussed throughout the chapters seems to suggest that Haley's vision was really 'filtered' down in departments such as Talks and Features, even Drama. Haley, however, was surrounded - particularly within the Talks Department - by people such as the Controller of Talks, Tony Rendall who joined the BBC in 1932, taking charge of Adult Education Talks⁹⁵⁸ and his replacement in 1950, Mary Somerville who had a background in School Broadcasting. Both Rendall and Somerville were aware of the educational possibilities that broadcasting had. The records examined suggest that individuals did play an integral part in the development of content and editorial policy in this period.

Programmes such as *Topic for Tonight*, *Argument*, and *Woman's Hour* did contain more public and political topics, and were the result of the effort to find new ways of informing and educating listeners. A programme such as *Woman's Hour* is again a prime example of innovation in its combination of entertainment, information and education. This is also noted to some extent within Features with programmes such as *Focus* and Drama - even *Mrs. Dale's Diary* gained a 'social responsibility'. Some of these programmes did feature housewives (but also working women) showing an interest in public and political life. The BBC clearly represented and constructed women as '*responsible*' and with a strong emphasis on *citizenship*.

But, some might object; is this not just another example of the BBC trying to 'mould' its listeners into dutiful citizens, as Michael Bailey put it, the BBC acting as a site for *cultural governance*? Bailey who draws on Michel Foucault's theory of "governmental

⁹⁵⁷ Haley cited in Briggs. (1970). *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: War of the Words*. Volume III. London: Oxford University Press. p. 723. (My emphasis).

⁹⁵⁸ Robinson, J. (1982). *Learning over the Air. Sixty Years of partnership in Adult Learning*. London: BBC. p. 107.

technologies’’, simply put: ‘the instruments and practices for actualising political rationalities’, which suggests that culture can be used as a tool or instrument in this process.⁹⁵⁹ Bailey has argued that in the inter-war period, ‘the formation of public service broadcasting is better reconsidered as a *civilising mission* whose political rationality was to render the listening public more amenable to techniques of cultural governance and particular regimes of citizenship.’⁹⁶⁰ In this ‘civilising mission’ culture was the key, and he argues: ‘[the BBC] its role was to instruct the public in useful cultural values and practices that would serve both to inform and educate but also to discipline and regulate.’⁹⁶¹ One of the ways, according to Bailey that this was implemented in the inter-war period, was by targeting certain groups, such as women: ‘Women in particular were perceived as absolutely integral to enabling a regularization of everyday conduct and thus targeted as instruments for conveying the norms of the state (healthy, regular and disciplined conduct) into the private sphere.’⁹⁶² According to Bailey, the BBC’s women’s programmes and ‘household talks’ became vital instruments in this process. Bailey argues that these programmes upheld patriarchal values in a time when women had gained the vote and were elsewhere represented in more ‘modern’ terms, thus increasing the demarcation between the private and the public spheres.

Bailey’s interpretation is valid and important. *Woman’s Hour* and *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* were seen as crucial programmes in the Light Programme schedule drawing large audiences in a period where competition was increasingly apparent. This was also a period in which austerity, with its emphasis on rationing and strict control, played its part. The period also saw the implementation of the NHS and other welfare policy, and I have at several points highlighted women’s importance as voters. The programmes therefore attracted attention from government and private bodies early on, becoming important ‘communication gateways’ into the home: routes that could, and undoubtedly *were*, used for government information and education in civic responsibility. We can clearly see how these programmes, for example, how talks in *Woman’s Hour* by MPs, clearly nurtured this post-war ‘responsibility’, and as mentioned earlier, even Mrs. Dale had to become more ‘public’ oriented and interested in the outside world, rather than just indulge in ‘gossip’ and female ‘tittle-tattle’. But the picture is further complicated

⁹⁵⁹ Bailey, M. (2009b). ‘Rethinking Public Service Broadcasting: the historical limits to publicness’, in Butsch R. (Ed.). *Media and Public Spheres*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 98.

⁹⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 97. (My emphasis).

⁹⁶¹ Ibid. p. 107.

⁹⁶² Bailey, op. cit. p. 63. (2009a).

and therefore there are aspects of Bailey's argument about the BBC and its cultural 'fostering' that does not entirely fit with the post-war period, and particularly its women's programmes.

It is clear that women's radio in the post-war period did not revert to a complete emphasis on the domestic setting and women's duties as wives and mothers. There are thus three points to be made. First, it is evident that women were not just on the 'receiving end', the housewife – particularly – was a frequent participant in radio talks, features and discussions. As was demonstrated in chapter three, housewives were able to air their views and concerns and to question authority on air. In *Focus on the Housewife* and *How are we Doing?*, it was clear that women – particularly the dramatised middle class women in *Focus* – showed discontent with the Government's policies on austerity and rationing. Although the message of both programmes, overall, appeared to be in favour of the implemented policies and measures, the programmes did allow, or rather included, different viewpoints and opinions that questioned the line taken. The listener research report of *Focus on the Housewife* also demonstrates that listeners did find the programme propagandist in tone and that they were disappointed, and in *Woman's Hour* when a government campaign on the Army was mentioned, the programme received letters of complaint, such as, 'keep the Women's Services and Recruitment out'. This suggests that listeners were critical in their readings of programmes. Second, a programme such as *Woman's Hour* offered women a space where they could speak for themselves; we can clearly see here a democratisation of the airwaves. As the archival records show, listeners' demands and suggestions *did* have an impact on the content and actual output. The focus on citizenship and civic responsibility appear to some extent also to have been a result of this, since, as it was noted, the increasing use of serious subjects in the programmes, such as current-affairs, were mainly due to *listeners' own requests*. It was clearly an *interactive* programme with a dialogue between the producers and the audience. Moreover, the material examined in chapter four discussed the contradictory nature of *Woman's Hour*, and its emphasis on women as *citizens* rather than just housewives or workers. I think it is possible to say that the programme was working in the *interest of women*, as opposed to the state. As Monica Sims said, they wanted women to think for themselves. This is of course a complicated argument, since as evident, sometimes the boundary between the interest of the state and the BBC was less defined (as demonstrated in chapter three – the BBC was at times aligned with the government). But I still think it is possible to

argue, based on the material examined, that *Woman's Hour* did have a feminist agenda. Third, there is also a case for arguing that one of the reasons programmes such as *Woman's Hour*, or indeed, *Mrs. Dale's Diary*, became 'responsible' was because this was *expected*. The content of women's programmes changed because women's roles were changing. As demonstrated in chapter five, there was an expectation on Mrs. Dale, *as a middle class woman*, to be more engaged in public life. In *Woman's Hour* it was also noted by producers and the editor that it was the more educated listeners who requested more politics and political items in the output. This indicates that women, particularly middle class women, were more engaged and active in public matters and politics. These programmes thus act as a *measure* for women's progress outside the domestic setting.

Because of this it is fair to say that - yes, there was to some extent a sense of 'governing' in the Light Programme; a sense and desire of educational duty and responsibility by the producers and the Controllers of supply departments, *but*, this was also a response to an already existing civic engagement, and a demand for serious items. The Light Programme may be described as 'feminine' and 'domestic' but it was *not* separating women from the public sphere.

A second contribution to knowledge is the *detailed* insight that the thesis offers of the *internal culture* of the BBC and its women's programmes in the post-war period. It was evident that very early on external recognition was there but internally programmes such as *Woman's Hour* and *Mrs. Dale's Diary* had to struggle for recognition. We can also see how these programmes were shaped by the internal dynamics caused by tensions between 'supply' - departments such as Talks or Drama - and 'output' as in The Light Programme. For instance how *Mrs. Dale's Diary* caused friction between the Drama Department and Light Programme management who had different ideas of what 'drama' should constitute; should the BBC lead or follow? Or how early talks in *Woman's Hour* - produced by Talk producers who did not know (or neglected) the audience they were aiming for, with the result that output sometimes 'talked down', or, was perceived as too 'simple'. We can also see how pre-conceptions about the female audience surfaced within the BBC. Listeners of Mrs. Dale were treated as sentimental 'addicts', and setting out a clear editorial policy for *Woman's Hour* required a re-definition of women's interests. Rayner talked about the post-war period as being one in transition in terms of popular mass-entertainment, but that the BBC did not really

understand this mass audience (see page 57). But as argued earlier, a programme such as *Woman's Hour* clearly worked hard to try and understand its audience; a good example of this was the request for a repeat, which showed that women's radio strove to represent the working woman.

We can also make some concluding points about whether a 'male' or 'female' working culture did exist within the BBC in this period. It is evident that women producers and script-writers dominated the production of women's programmes such as *Woman's Hour* or *Mrs. Dale's Diary*. It appears, however, as if there were no 'restrictions' on women working for other programmes, rather, women were employed across a range of departments and in managerial roles. For example, Nesta Pain and Marjorie Banks made successful programmes (not necessarily with a 'woman's angle') for the Features Department. And as argued in chapter three, Talks producers such as Peggy Barker and Elisabeth Rowley both produced more political and topical programmes aiming for both men and women (Talks in general consisted of many women producers). The BBC did have a tradition since the 1920s to recruit women into various departments on 'equal terms'.⁹⁶³ In the late 1920s Hilda Matheson became Head of Talks, and as noted earlier, in the 1930s Mary Somerville became Director of School Broadcasting, and Isa Benzie Director of Foreign Department. Women's employment at the BBC is outside the scope of this thesis, but I think it is possible to argue that the Corporation had a tradition of recruiting women (many from Oxford or other universities) to various departments, which in the long term (or at least into the 1950s) did benefit women's positions, and also the output. For example, the appointment of Mary Somerville as Controller of Talks in 1950, and her insistence on Janet Quigley as editor, clearly benefitted *Woman's Hour* as a programme.

This is not to say that the BBC was extremely fair or that prejudice against women did not exist. It is notable that News, for example in terms of its reporters and correspondents, was in this period male dominated.⁹⁶⁴ And Kay Ennals, working as a Studio Manager, remembered that after the war some men were slightly hostile towards women; accusing them of taking their jobs: 'they thought they were coming back to the BBC to work but they had to apply again and they would very often say [...] "what are

⁹⁶³ Briggs, op. cit. p. 395. (1961).

⁹⁶⁴ There are several women in more administrative positions in News (clerks and secretaries) and also Sub-Editors, but scanning the BBC Staff Lists 1945 -1955, it is clear that women in editorial positions or as reporters were few, if not non-existent. Audrey Russell was of course the exception.

you doing that job for you know a man needs it and he's got a family to keep'', you know they were very Victorian in their outlook then.'⁹⁶⁵ But I think it is fair to argue that women as producers and broadcasters made quite a presence in the BBC in this period, women clearly did pioneer broadcasting techniques and styles. Women's employment at the BBC ought to be further investigated so as to see what possibilities or restrictions were experienced, to further uncover women's history within such a public institution.

The focus on the internal culture of the BBC suggests one more point. It is clear that to fully understand programmes or 'texts' we need to look at the production and editorial process that is going on 'behind the scenes'. The *internal dynamics* within departments, programme units, and management clearly do have an impact on the end-product. The internal culture of a media institution such as the BBC should therefore not be ignored. This is purely a methodological point, and clearly with the move towards a more multidimensional media history, this step is already underway. This study therefore underlines the importance of the site of media production.

The third major contribution or theme that emerges is the evidence that women's radio in Britain was innovative, democratic, intimate, and that it showed an immense response to its audience. It is thus clear that these programmes contributed to the general development of British broadcasting, in terms of broadcasting practices and broadcasting's relationship to the listeners, therefore, answering the question what *role* (if any) did women broadcasters and women's programmes in the post-war period play in the general development of radio and the BBC? Programmes such as *Woman's Hour* or *Mrs. Dale's Diary*, were not being worked out in 'isolated' departments detached from the outside world; on the contrary they had a unique understanding and knowledge about their audience, which consisted mainly of women. As the editor of *Woman's Hour*, Janet Quigley emphasised the need to work hands-on and to not distance yourself as editor from the production or the audience, with the risk of losing grasp of 'reality'. This was clearly emphasised in the production process and by the unit, who showed a desire and keen awareness to *learn* more about the women audience and particularly how to meet the demands and needs of such a wide ranging audience. The programme also offered a space for women to *voice their concerns* and to *participate* in

⁹⁶⁵ Interview with author, 9 February, 2010, Dorchester.

public discussion. It is therefore possible to argue that we can see an early example of a piece of *feminist media*.

The female audience thus took part in shaping BBC radio programming in the post-war period, and, this ‘personal’ relationship is very much how broadcasting in general has developed in Britain and within the BBC. For example, Hendy has noted that BBC Radio 4 in the 1960s and 70s moved towards programming that was more personal and intimate in style. He notes four trends: that ‘real people rather than experts’ were used since ordinary people provided a kind of authenticity; he also suggests that listeners’ letters were being incorporated into programmes; there was also greater interaction – guests, producers and experts were all learning from each other; and one final point was, as he put it, that some of these programmes actually helped Britons to realise that it ‘was both possible – and desirable – to talk.’⁹⁶⁶ As evident, all of these aspects were *already* incorporated in *Woman’s Hour* in the 1940s and 50s, and in *Mrs. Dale’s Diary*, (to some extent) where the conversation and dialogue often revolved around ‘talk’ about family problems, relationships; women coming to terms with the ‘double burden’ of work and motherhood, which listeners could identify with.

But, there is here a question of a wider context. Karin Nordberg, whose work has highlighted the Swedish Radio’s women’s programmes (1925 – 1950), argues that, in Sweden, women radio producers had a different relationship to the audience compared to the male producers. Just as with *Woman’s Hour*, women’s radio in Sweden also featured discussions between listeners, and it responded to letters, which often resulted in a ‘subjectivity’, which differed from the traditional more ‘objective’ radio output as it was traditionally known.⁹⁶⁷ Adding to this is also Lacey, whose work on German radio (1923-1945) argues that that the intimate private style of address, as she put it, ‘the scripted impression of a friendly fireside chat’, was pioneered within the women’s programming, where a common style of ‘chit-chat’ was prominent.⁹⁶⁸ This suggests that there is overall, not only found in Britain, a certain ‘quality’ or style - less authoritative instead more personal and subjective - that women’s radio (such as soap operas and

⁹⁶⁶Hendy, op. cit. p. 232. (2007). One example of this was the programme, *If You Think You’ve Got Problems* (1971). For a full discussion of these trends and developments see pp. 221 – 247.

⁹⁶⁷ Nordberg, K. ‘kapitel 9, Husmodernismen, Husmorsfostran och kvinnlig medborgarbildning’ (unpublished draft of chapter from her PhD: NORDBERG, K. (1998), *Folkhemmets röst: radion som folkbildare 1925-1950*, published PhD Thesis, Umeå universitet). pp. 20-21.

⁹⁶⁸ Lacey, op. cit. p. 193. (1996).

magazine programmes) and women broadcasters have added and nurtured, and that this can be found across national boundaries.

As was mentioned in the introductory note to the thesis, an international network of women in radio (and later television) existed in the post-war period: the *International Association of Women in Radio and Television*, which was founded in 1949. I am not here suggesting that there is a clear link but it is worth noting that women broadcasters *did* exchange ideas and experiences, and that a *global* network existed; women broadcasters were active on a national but also international level, developing media production.

This calls for what Curran has welcomed: a media history that is more international or comparative across national boundaries. He suggests that a comparative perspective can open up new questions and further, 'identify and explore big intellectual themes – something that is very much needed.'⁹⁶⁹ The issue of whether women overall - as broadcasters - made a difference, having a better understanding of radio's function or potential, than their male counterparts, could be one such theme. *That* there was actually something that women broadcasters and the women audience brought to radio - due to their 'private' or domestic experience – that can be traced across national boundaries, but also radio as a medium listened to in the home; that the combination of these aspects worked particularly well.

There is then a fourth and final theme that needs further elaboration: the relationship between women's radio and everyday life. One of the research questions examined was whether the BBC *accurately reflected* the issues and debates with regards to working women and domesticity that were present in post-war society. After having presented the evidence I think it is fair to suggest that the BBC did not only reflect the debate, it actually acted or offered a public space, where women's changing role or 'life' cycle' could be explored. This was all evident in, for example, something as ordinary as a daytime soap opera.

In the serial, *Mrs. Dale's Diary*, we could clearly see how the 'double burden' was tested and tried by Gwen, and post-war womanhood was represented in different forms

⁹⁶⁹ Curran, J. (2010). 'Communication and History'. In Zelizer, B. (Ed). *Explorations in Communication and History*. London: Routledge. p. 56.

such as the traditional housewife Mrs. Dale, or, the independent career minded Sally. In the scripts, words such as a 'modern girl' were often juxtaposed with being 'old-fashioned'. Moreover, in chapter one I briefly discussed Homer's observation that on a political level ideals about a class-less 'mix' in housing existed, but that these were not in line with ordinary people's class prejudice. In *Mrs. Dale's Diary* we could also see Mrs. Dale as an upset middle class woman worrying about the building of a new housing estate. The discontent and anxieties that were experienced by women in the post-war period found expression in the daytime serial and also in other programming such as *Focus on the Housewife* and *How are we doing?*

There is also evidence of this in *Woman's Hour*, where the definition of a woman's programme had to be reworked, and producers of the programme constantly had to work on how to cater for a mass audience, where the more educated listeners wanted more politics and current-affairs. Thus the 'contradictory nature' of the programme laid in its ability to respond to different groups of women - urban, regional, working, housewives, working class, middle class etc. – different women wanted different things. The 'duality' of women's experience was even felt in radio: it impacted on the *schedule* with the introduction of the repeat and also in the content.

We therefore see the themes identified in chapter one as being 'worked out' or played-out 'on air'; gendered experiences of rationing and austerity, the emergence of the working woman and the 'double burden', various representations of women being 'tested' and acknowledged. What can be argued then is that *women's radio* in the British context clearly worked as a space where the transitions of the post-war period and its taste of modernity could be discussed, tested and tried. Lacey has described radio as a site where 'gender is produced, reproduced, and transformed.'⁹⁷⁰ This description is fitting of *Woman's Hour* and *Mrs. Dale's Diary*. But there is perhaps something in the medium of radio itself that makes it particularly suitable as a medium - mostly (at least in this period) listened to in the home – as a place where everyday life can be 'played' out.

One way of exploring this issue is to turn to Scannell and his argument about radio's, 'dailiness'. As he suggests: 'The programme structures of radio and television will produce and reproduce – as they are meant to do – the everyday human social sociable

⁹⁷⁰ Lacey, op. cit. p. 244. (1996).

world every day endlessly.’⁹⁷¹ Radio broadcasting has not only ‘organised’ our time; adapted the schedule for example to fit the daily routines of the housewife (as was discussed in chapter one), it is also about radio’s ability to ‘feature’ everyday life. Scannell further emphasises that this is particularly present in soap operas, where often the fictional characters are known just as we know real people: ‘since these move in parallel and at the same pace, it follows that the lifetime of viewers and listeners unfolds at the same rate as the lives of the characters in the story.’⁹⁷² This, as evident, was not obvious to the BBC in the early post-war period. The three female scriptwriters of *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* clearly realised that to not let the characters age or in general change, was a mistake. The appeal of the serial was just its ‘*dailiness*’ being ordinary: ‘it’s a slice of ordinary life’.⁹⁷³ Serials are talking to us as we would talk to people in real life, in similar situations; we know the characters just as we accumulate, ‘knowledge of the lives of those around us’.⁹⁷⁴ This aspect of the ‘everyday’ was evident in *Mrs. Dale’s Diary*, but it is also found in *Woman’s Hour*. Appearing at 2 p.m. every day featuring familiar voices and recurring programme items, such as *Reading Your Letters*; in a sense having a function as a ‘club’. The programme dealt with the events and happenings, worries and concerns of *everyday* life. It therefore appears as if women’s radio embodied this notion of ‘everydayness’, and therefore worked particularly well as a site where post-war womanhood could be confirmed, negotiated and challenged.

To conclude then, I hope to have demonstrated that women’s radio at the BBC in the post-war period played an important function in the way it addressed and represented women. I hoped to have shown that women’s programmes such as daytime serials or magazine programmes ought not to be dismissed as trivial, rather they need to be considered as having played a significant function in women’s lives, and as having contributed to the general development of British broadcasting. A focus on women’s radio, however, has also enabled me to contribute to further understanding and knowledge about the BBC as an institution that in this period was grappling with fundamental change over its cultural values and purpose. The debate over ‘female taste’ did not only reveal deeper concerns about the post-war change in attitudes towards culture; it also reveals concerns about class behaviour and identity. Therefore we can see how radio - or a programme such as *Mrs. Dale’s Diary* - clearly can work as a social

⁹⁷¹ Scannell, P. (1996). *Radio, Television and Modern Life*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. p. 177.

⁹⁷² Ibid. p. 159.

⁹⁷³ As Shirley Dixon called it (interview with author, 29 January, 2010, London).

⁹⁷⁴ Scannell, op. cit. p. 159. (1996).

document capturing the mood and mentalities present at one time. I therefore hope, in particular, that my work will have contributed, and be of interest, to the growing body of historical research concerned with the post-war woman.

APPENDIX

Examples of weekly programming in *Woman's Hour*, one week in September 1948, and one week in September 1953 (source: Programmes as Broadcast Transcripts, BBC WAC).

Week starting Monday 6 September – Friday 10 September 1948

All programmes open and end with 'Merry Wives of Windsor Overture', and both programmes had an 'interlude' in the middle, usually, with some music, often a mix of something classical such as Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, and, more 'popular' orchestras.

Monday 6 September 1948

Speaker: Hilda Whitlow: Filling the Storecupboard [sic]
Speaker: Mauren Gardener: What Athletics Mean to Me [a series inviting famous women to come and give a talk on Monday afternoons. Gardener was on in the British Women's Team who had done well at the Olympics.]
Speaker: Michael Barsley: The Dutch Royal Family
Speaker: Pamela Frankau: Life in California [novelist who married an American and lives now in California, recorded]
Speaker: Gerry Kiernan: A Budgie for the Children
Speaker: Peggy Hassard: *Three Came Home* [reading, it is Agnes Keith's story of 'her life in a Japanese Prison Camp']

Tuesday 7 September 1948

Speaker: Roland Earl: School and Home [on co-operation between parents and school, on for instance when 'rules of home and school differ']
Speaker: Ada McGheer: Petticoat Pioneer [A Canadian broadcaster will tell the story about this woman McGheer]
Live from Plymouth: Speaker: Mrs. Ware: Settling down in a new Locality [housewife]
Speaker: Daw Mya Sein: Life in Post War Burma ['will give us some idea of the different type of life a woman leads in her part of the world']
Speaker: Peggy Hassard: *Three Came Home* [reading]

Wednesday 8 September 1948

Speaker: Leslie Fabery: For Your Library List [item on books]

Live from Leeds: Speaker: Mrs. Lucy Boulton: I'm off to Tanganyika [a northern housewife who, 'will describe her slightly mixed feelings as she makes plans to leave England and go and join her husband in Africa for a while']

Speaker: Stella Monck: Variety in the Home [advice on how to make some variety by simple means]

Speaker: Mabel Constanduros: Gossip

Speaker: Peggy Hassard: *Three Came Home* [reading]

Thursday 9 September 1948

Speaker: Ruth Drew: Food for the Family

Speaker: Edith Nelder: Harvesting

Speaker: Olive Matthews: Visiting People in Hospital

Speaker: Marjorie Villiers: How a Book Gets Published

Speaker: Peggy Hassard: *Three Came Home*

Friday 10 September 1948

Speaker: Margaret Stewart: Current Affairs [Trades Union Congress at Margate]

Speaker: Doctor Woods: My Patients Call me by Radio [interview recorded by Joan Griffiths about an Australian doctor who visits his patients by air]

BBC Mobile Recording Unit: [on steps that are taken to ensure cleaner conditions to protect food, 'actuality insert for Woman's Hour'.]

Speaker: Evelyn Laye: More Thoughts on Beauty

Speaker: Peggy Hassard: *Three Came Home* [reading]

Week starting Monday 27 April 1953 – Sunday 10 May 1953

In 1953 the music is a lot more mixed in between the items, rather than an 'interlude'.

Monday 27 April 1953

Speaker: Rose Buckne: Letters from Home ['talks to mothers whose married daughters live overseas']

Speaker: Mary Neel: Going back to Work ['advises middle-aged housewives on the prospects of taking up a career again']

Speaker: Daisy Pidduck: Birthstones

Speaker: Minnie Pallister: I've Been Thinking About Spring

Speaker: Vera Day: Strange Little World [this item is her reflection on life in a hospital ward]

Speaker: Naomi Jacob: *No Easy Way* [reading, written and read by Naomi Jacob]

Tuesday 28 April 1953

- Speaker: Professor G. Fraser Brockington, Mrs. Stead and Mrs. Wyatt from the Listeners Group: Well worth the Money [‘Eating the Decorations’ or ‘Nature in the Raw’: on nutrition]
- Speaker: Ruth Drew and Jessie Kesson: At the London Theatre [plays reviewed]
- Speaker: Heather Lee: Adventures in Africa [‘looking back at adventures in Africa]
- Profile: Mary Stuart, Queen of England [dramatised profile]
- Speaker: Naomi Jacob: *No Easy Way* [reading, written and read by Naomi Jacob]

Wednesday 29 April 1953

- Speaker: Guest of the Week: Barbara Goalen [she is a Model]
- Domestic Debate: Maywen Godby, Pauline Chamont, Philip Honey, and Ruth Drew [‘a recording of Domestic Debate, giving spontaneous answers to listeners’ household problems’. It was also noted in the introduction that ‘This has been recorded before a studio audience’]
- Speaker: Naomi Jacob: *No Easy Way* [reading, written and read by Naomi Jacob]

Thursday 30 April 1953

- Speaker: Michael Barsley: Queen Juliana
- Speaker: Stephen Done: Painting for Fun
- Speaker: Winifred Gill: Not like Mother used to Cook [from Birmingham on amateur cooks]
- Extra item: ‘The Suffragette Movement’ Joan Yorke interviews Mary Richardson [no transcript but appears to have been a recorded interview it says ‘rec. 15.4. 53.’]
- Speaker: Vera Dallow: Locked out for the Evening [lighter item]
- Speaker: A. G. Peacock: How to get the Best out of Your Box Camera
- Speaker: Naomi Jacob: *No Easy Way* [reading, written and read by Naomi Jacob]

Friday 1 May 1953

- Speaker: Crystal (Herbert): Holiday afloat [on canal and river holidays]
- Speaker: Sydney Jacobson: Behind the Headlines [in today’s episode, Sydney Jacobson, a journalist will talk about peace. The talk refers to Stalin’s death nearly two months ago, and how there has since been talks about peace]
- Speakers: Reading Your Letters compiled by Joanna Scott Moncrieff [reading out listeners comments on previous items broadcast]
- Speaker: Mary Hill: Report on the Annual Conservative Women’s Conference
- Speaker: Naomi Jacob: *No Easy Way* [reading, written and read by Naomi Jacob]

Sunday 3 May 1953 [Home for the Day at 9.10]

Speaker: Ambrose Heath: Take an Apple [about apples]
Speaker: Antonia Ridge: 'I am an investigator'
Interview: Interview with Miss Helen Barclay OBE – Woman of the Week
Extract: [from Wednesday's domestic debate]
Speaker: Naomi Jacob: 'Personality Talk'
Speaker: Bernard Weatherall: Today's Job 'The Budgerigar'
Speaker: Hubert Gregg ['presenting an episode from "Three men in a Boat" by Jerome K. Jerome]

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