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Review of *Women and the British Army, 1815-1880* by Lynn MacKay

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Overall, this is a hugely impressive collection and a very fitting tribute to Professor Curry. The introduction on its own provides an excellent overview of the current state of research on the Hundred Years War: this essay (and the collection more generally) will be an obligatory point of reference for anyone undertaking research for the conflict for the first time; indeed, experienced researchers will also benefit from reading it!

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Lynn MacKay, *Women and the British Army, 1815-1880*. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2023. 313pp. ISBN: 978-1837650552 (hardback). Price £95.

Harridans or saints? The women who had dealings with the British army during the nineteenth century were typecast as both extremes at various moments across the period, although Lynn MacKay aims to address these social stereotypes in her recent book, *Women and the British Army*. Like many works that examine military history through a gender lens, MacKay's goal is to overturn long-held assumptions about the beliefs and behaviours of men and women during her period of study – assumptions that frequently had their origin in contemporaneous literature and culture. In dissecting these, MacKay reveals women and the army co-existing (sometimes unwillingly) in responsive dialogue, with army officials attempting to shape the roles and responsibilities of soldiers' womenfolk according to the beliefs of the day, and the women not infrequently pushing back.

The most striking part of MacKay's work is the inventory of challenges that the nineteenth-century army wife faced. During this time, army officials were reluctant to allow many soldiers to marry: fears centred on men becoming cautious on the battlefield, as well as the concern that too many wives (and the inevitable children) would become a logistical and economic burden on the army's movements and finances. The army was also concerned with the respectability of the women who were associated with it, although (MacKay's research shows) contrary to contemporary stereotypes, most army wives came from respectable families. Nevertheless, in response to this worry, the few approved army wives – six out of every hundred soldiers at one point in the century – were expected to conform to the structures and protocols of army life.

REVIEWS

In the first chapter, MacKay focuses on the relationships between soldiers and women that led to marriage, arguing that most couples did not traverse class boundaries and followed courtship patterns typical of that in which they had been raised. These unions could be pragmatic: MacKay gives the example of one couple where the groom 'was a widower who needed a wife' and the bride a cook who was 'offered a chance to escape the uncertainties of lifelong domestic service employment' (p.22). Other marriages were borne out of circumstance – for example, a soldier finding a wife among the locals where he was stationed. Nevertheless, romance and affection were not unusual components of army marriages; MacKay quotes liberally from letters sent between couples, demonstrating the love and concern that soldiers felt for their wives and children.

Chapters Two and Three continue to explore the experiences of women who married soldiers, examining the reality of life as a soldier's wife, first in the British Isles and then in overseas service. Although these women were subject to army constraints – constraints which may have been partly devised in response to popular stereotypes of the 'drunken harridan' army wife – MacKay is keen to emphasise that many did not passively accept the situations in which they had been placed. Some of this subversive behaviour may have fed into the negative perceptions of army wives; MacKay gives the colourful example of Kate Lawrence, who was arrested after throwing chunks of tripe at two men in the barracks, in response to being scolded for sending her children to school without shoes (p.108).

The fourth and fifth chapters also have thematic similarities, with a focus on the shifting perceptions of army wives among the middle and upper classes, and the impact that this had on the wives themselves. The Crimean War was an important juncture for this change in attitude, as charities were formed for the assistance of wives left behind – in the Victorian imagination, 'deprived of their male protectors' (p.193) – and pressure was placed on the army for more formal provisions to be made for them and their children. Although this new goodwill towards army wives came with certain social expectations (they were expected to be useful and compliant to warrant public compassion), MacKay notes that the wives themselves formed small communities that could push back against army decisions that they found personally detrimental.

The final chapter focuses on sex workers in the British Isles and India. Here, MacKay takes the opportunity to explore the lives of a different subset of nineteenth-century women who were, like wives, also subjected to the army's attempts to regulate their relationships with soldiers. Concerned about levels of venereal disease among soldiers – perhaps between a half and one third of all soldiers were infected at various points during the century (p.239) – sex workers were obligated to submit to regular intrusive medical examinations and, if found to be infected, held in lock hospitals for up to six months, where their diseases would be treated and they would be given moral and

religious instruction. Despite these efforts, however, the women subjected to these enforcements often openly defied army authority, flirting with soldiers on their way to be examined and exhibiting disorderly behaviour when appearing in courtrooms. Meanwhile in India, brothels could mimic traditional domesticity between the sex workers and their family members who lived with them there.

Although the subject matter clamours for more analysis of the familial and professional relationships between women and soldiers – despite the title, MacKay's emphasis is overwhelmingly on the romantic, sexual, and marital relationships women had with soldiers – this is nevertheless a valuable contribution to the field of gender research and the British army. Not only does it contextualise the experiences of the nineteenth-century soldier, it also demonstrates the army's reach, able to meaningfully impact the lives of men and women across society.

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Stefanie Linden, *Beyond the Great Silence: The Legacy of Shell Shock in Britain and Germany, 1918-1924*. Warwick: Helion & Company Limited, 2024. x + 337 pp. ISBN 978-1804514306 (hardcover). Price £35.

As a marginalized group of combat soldiers during the Great War, the legacies of shell-shocked veterans continued to shape the politics of war in the aftermath of the First World War. Historian Stefanie Linden analyses the perception of shell shock in Britain and Germany between 1918 and 1924. In this work, Linden argues that while both British and German shell-shocked veterans experienced similar conditions of warfare on the Western Front, their experiences differed in their respective countries as Britain and Germany interpreted shell shock differently. While recognizing shell shock and its psychological symptoms as early as 1914 and 1915, British medical authorities downplayed the condition after the war as they attempted to look for a physical cause of shell shock or diagnosed shell-shocked veterans with a physical wound, they did not sustain during their service to avoid shame and stigma. In contrast, the shell shock experience in Germany for veterans was vastly different as German doctors rejected the idea of shell shock. Instead, German doctors believed that shell-shocked veterans had a 'psychopathic constitution' due to an inherited weakness (p. 311). As Linden demonstrates, British and German doctors 'cut the link between the war and the