

---In order of appearance---

Diane Urquhart (Institute of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool)

'A woman's place': Women's unionism, 1880-1914

The alliance between Conservatives and Unionists, typified by the Tories' name change to the Conservative and Unionist Party in 1912, was hugely significant in the history of female politicisation. Using the legislative frame of the Corrupt and Illegal Practices Act of 1883, which forbade the payment of political canvassers, and the 1884 Reform Act, which enfranchised the majority of men in Britain, as well as the backdrop of three successful Irish Home Rule Bills, this article seeks to explore the processes by which an unprecedented number of women became politically active for the first time. From the introduction of the first Home Rule Bill in 1886, women became involved in unionism in ever increasing numbers. Northern and southern Irish female unionist organisations were subsequently established, the largest of which, the Ulster Women's Unionist Council, had amassed over 100,000 members by 1913, thus becoming the largest female political force ever mobilised in Ireland's history. English-based women's pro-unionist associations were also active, but the interaction between English, southern and northern Irish unionism has not yet been fully examined. Such an approach facilitates an analysis of why and to what effect women's unionism became Ulster focused; a comparative assessment of membership, methods and motivation as well as an exploration of the genesis of the gendered aspect of this first entry into mainstream politics. Indeed, the acquiescence of women to the notion that their political role was essentially different to that of men meant that a distinct 'women's place' within unionism emerged. This was an ancillary but nonetheless significant role which arguably shaped the nature of women's political activism within unionism for decades. Few protests were publicly aired, for example, when women were excluded from attending a unionist convention in Belfast in 1892 on the basis that their very presence would lead to 'suggestions of frivolity' or when they were not permitted to sign the all-male Solemn League and Covenant in 1912. Rather women organised counter events which although publicised as 'social gatherings' had a distinctly political purpose. Similarly, the 1912 Women's Declaration attracted more signatories than the Solemn League and Covenant. In the process of navigating their way through such a highly gendered political landscape, female unionists gradually helped to familiarise the population at large to the sight of politically active women.

David Thackeray (Exeter University)

At the heart of the party? The women's Conservative organisation in the age of partial suffrage, 1914-1928

In May 1918, Mary Maxse, the outgoing chairman of the women's unionist association, met her organisation's decision to disband and form a Conservative party women's organisation with foreboding. She despaired that her supporters had 'amalgamated like lambs with the official Unionist men'. Yet ten years later, the Conservative women's organisation claimed one million supporters, comfortably more than its rivals, and Maxse's successor, Caroline Bridgeman, chaired the party's National Union.

Did these successes mean that women had become fully integrated into the Conservative party? Well clearly there was a marked disparity between women's importance to grassroots organisation and the four female MPs who sat on the Conservative benches after the 1929 election. Moreover, women's position within the wider party organisation, so unclear in 1918, remained problematic.

Using previously neglected personal papers and election material, this chapter considers the formation and development of the Women's Unionist Organisation, exploring its relationships with male Conservatives, and the presentation of women in electioneering, both as candidates and candidates' wives. Curiously while the Conservative organisation had the most successful women's organisation in the first decade of female enfranchisement, it was also one which rejected formal links with feminist associations, and promoted former anti-suffragists to positions of major influence. As such, its success can be seen as part of a wider culture of 'conservative modernity' in inter-war Britain.

June Purvis (University of Portsmouth)

The Pankhursts and the Conservative Party

G. E. Maguire in her book *Conservative Women: a history of women and the Conservative party, 1874-1997* (1998, Macmillan) makes the startling claim that First Wave feminists Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, the suffragette leaders of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), the most notorious of the various groupings campaigning for women's suffrage in Edwardian Britain, 'tended towards conservatism'. The WSPU, a women-only organisation, was founded by Emmeline Pankhurst in 1903 to campaign for the vote for women on the same terms as it was, or may be, given to men. With the slogan 'Deeds, not words', the WSPU engaged in an assertive campaign that included not only legal forms of civil disobedience such as marches to parliament but also, increasingly from 1912, illegal tactics such as setting fire to pillar boxes and empty buildings, mass windows smashing of shops in London's West End and attacks on art treasures. Yet by 1927 Emmeline Pankhurst was standing as a Conservative candidate for an East End constituency she had no chance of winning, while her eldest daughter Christabel was a Second Adventist, combining feminism and fundamentalism. This chapter will seek to explore the political journeying of the Pankhursts, from their membership of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) at the time of the founding of the WSPU, their political allegiances during the suffragette campaign, their patriotic support for Britain during the First World War, the founding of the short lived Women's Party and their relationship to the feminist movement in the inter-war years. It may be the case that rather than 'tending' towards conservatism, the Pankhursts were strongly anti-Labour.

Matthew Hendley (State University of New York – College at Oneonta)

From Crucial Female Auxiliaries to Superfluous Women? The Primrose League from Peace to Wartime Reform, 1900-1918

Conservative women were politically active long before they were granted the franchise. Although unable to vote at the national level, Conservative women in the Victorian period participated in a range of extra-parliamentary auxiliary organizations including the Primrose League. Founded in 1883, the League helped the Conservative Party get around the

restrictions of the Corrupt Practices Act. With a hierarchical and vaguely medieval structure, the League peaked at two million members (most of them female). It was well known for its political propaganda and electoral canvassing. It also promoted social integrative functions through large-scale entertainments, garden fetes and whist drives. The League played an important role in Victorian Conservative politics through operating in the “social sphere” in which politics could be mixed with conviviality in a non-confrontational setting and absorbed almost unconsciously. This chapter will examine how the Primrose League reacted to a shifting political landscape from 1900-1918. Initially founded when female suffrage was a distant dream, the League soldiered on as new avenues for the politicization of women emerged. From 1900-1918, the League had to contend with an active Women’s Tariff Reform movement, the rise of both constitutional suffragists and militant suffragettes, passionate Conservative commitment to Ulster and eventually the first installment of female enfranchisement through the Representation of the People Act of 1918. This chapter will argue that the League struggled to maintain its relevancy during this period but avoided extinction by continuing its traditional social activities, remaining non-committal on the women’s suffrage issue and playing up philanthropic and social welfare activities linked to both the Ulster struggle and later the First World War. In the aftermath of the Representation of the People Act, the League also maintained its structural autonomy and avoided outright absorption from the emerging postwar network of Women’s Unionist associations. In particular, it recast itself as a vehicle for anti-socialist political education for new voters, especially women. The chapter will conclude by arguing that by 1918, though it was no longer the crucial body of female auxiliaries to the Conservative Party it had been in the past, the League had avoided the fate of becoming a body of superfluous women. It will show how the adaptability of the Conservative Party and its related organizations was a key to the long term success of Conservatism. Sources will include the Primrose League papers at the Bodleian Library, Oxford, the Conservative Party Archive and the *Primrose League Gazette*.

Julie Gottlieb (University of Sheffield)

Conservatism, Feminism and Models of Women’s Leadership in Inter-war Britain

Women came into their own in the Conservative Party in the aftermath of suffrage as party workers, as MPs, as local and national leaders, and as part of a notional women’s bloc of voters that Conservatives felt they could rely on at election time. The valuable work performed by Conservative women at grass roots has been acknowledged in the scholarship, as have the strategies developed by the party to mobilise women as both party workers and voters, while much less attention has been conferred on those Conservative women who became virtual national celebrities. By the late 1930s the two women Conservative MPs to achieve this celebrity and notoriety were Lady Nancy Astor, the first woman MP to take her seat, a committed feminist, and hostess of the so-called Cliveden Set, and the Duchess of Atholl, the first woman MP from Scotland, an avowed anti-(non) feminist, and the Chamberlain scourge at the height of appeasement. Both defied stereotypes of Tory femininity with their own personal styles, by taking an abiding interest in international affairs when most Conservative women were expected to be focused on the local and parochial, and by engaging with women across party lines to advance their favoured policies. This chapter will examine the women who achieved public-facing leadership positions in the Conservative

Party by becoming MPs during the inter-war period, with special attention paid to Lady Nancy Astor and the Duchess of Atholl as (unacknowledged) role models for and forerunners of Thatcher's construction of female leadership. It will probe the complex relationship between feminism and Conservatism; explore the institutional and cultural obstacles faced by Conservative women to emerge as power-brokers and policy-makers; resituate women in the male-centric narrative of appeasement; and consider why despite a long line of spirited and formidable women Conservative leaders, Thatcher's rise as party leader and PM has too often been seen as unprecedented.

Clarisse Berthezène (University of Paris VII)

Women's Voluntarism, Conservative politics and representations of womanhood

Recent work on interwar Conservatism has stressed the success of the Conservative Party's politics towards women and the stability of the female vote in this period. This chapter will focus on the contribution Conservative women made to the formulation of Conservative principles. It will examine their claim that they were 'practical', 'commonsense' women, as opposed to what they saw as their cerebral, theoretically minded Labour and Liberal counterparts. The deliberate cultivation of the identity of 'the middlebrow' was an important means to embrace democracy and speak to all social classes, which led them to develop a particular view of 'responsible womanhood' and citizenship, notions which they felt had been inappropriately annexed by the Left. It was also a response to the emergence of a new culture of non-partisan organisations which provided an important challenge to the position of political parties in interwar Britain. Women's voluntary associations were particularly instrumental in educating in citizenship and provided a female sphere of political activity that was removed from the rough-and-tumble of party politics. This chapter will focus on the links between the Women's Voluntary Service and Conservative party politics during the Second World War and the importance of specific representations of womanhood to the Conservative identity.

Richard Toye (Exeter University)

Winston Churchill, Women and the Conservative Party

This chapter investigates how Churchill related to women at the political level, and how women voters in turn related to him. Although there are some honourable exceptions, such as Martin Francis's article on the 'emotional economy' of Churchill and other prime ministers, and Paul Addison's short essay on Churchill and women, this is a theme that has been insufficiently explored. Churchill, of course, had a blurred Conservative-Liberal identity, and this affected his approach to 'the woman question'. Hostile to female enfranchisement at the start of his career, he became a reluctant convert during his Edwardian Liberal phase, provided that it could be done in such a way as to benefit his own party electorally. As a renegade Tory during the 1930s he drew on the services of a range of female anti-appeasers such as Shiela Grant Duff (as Julie Gottlieb shows in her forthcoming book). During World War II, however, he controversially opposed equal pay for women teachers. The resentment this caused, though, was as much driven by his 'dictatorial' behaviour in insisting that the Commons reverse its decision as by his substantive attitude. It is well-established that in the post-war years, the Conservative Party benefitted from its gendered approach to rationing and

austerity, but women voters' reactions to Churchill himself have not been explored. While the evidence has its limitations, Mass-Observation reports and diaries can be very helpful here. Other sources used in this chapter will include private archives, newspapers, and newsreels.

Adrian Bingham (University of Sheffield)

Conservatism, gender and the politics of everyday life, 1950s-1980s

By the 1950s, Conservative Party politicians, strategists and activists had developed a range of appeals to female voters which centred on the relevance of politics to everyday life, and which celebrated women's domestic roles as chief consumer, guardian of the family purse, and prime defender of the household. Party propaganda warned that under the Labour party, the state and the unions would encroach and intervene into the private sphere and reduce individual and family freedoms. The party gradually developed and refined these appeals as more women moved into work, calls for gender equality increased, and affluence and permissiveness raised new political and social issues: nevertheless, many of the key underlying message about the politics of everyday life remained in place. Yet while some historians have traced the formulation and articulation of these gendered appeals, they have been far less attentive to the ways in which the resonated with ordinary women and their understandings of the politics of everyday life. This chapter will draw upon opinion polls, social surveys, diaries, memoirs and media sources to seek to address this important gap, examining the ways in which different groups of women perceived the Conservative party and their various ideological appeals from the 1950s to the 1980s. It will situate this in a broader discussion of public perceptions of politics, political institutions and parties, underlining the difficulties that all politicians had in engaging ordinary voters and persuading them of the relevance of the rhetorical battles in Westminster.

Krista Cowman (University of Lincoln)

Margaret Thatcher before Thatcherism

Margaret Thatcher is usually represented as having no time for feminism or the feminist movement. Throughout her tenure as leader of the Conservative Party she has been characterised as derisive of the contemporary women's movement, cutting local authorities' funding for women's groups and committees and being slow to promote women within the ranks of her own government. This chapter suggests that the reality may have been more complicated than this. Although recent portrayals (such as Abi Morgan's film script) have focussed on Thatcher as a 'woman alone' in a man's world, other sources suggest that she may have had a more fruitful working relationship with other political women, especially in her early political career as a backbencher. The autobiographical writings of Labour women MPs who served with her in the 1950s and 1960s are surprisingly affectionate in their descriptions of Thatcher's solidarity towards other women in the House of Commons. She participated in a number of committees designed to address what were seen as 'women's issues' in politics, such as a campaign for improved play provision for children in high rise flats. At the same time she connected - albeit briefly - with extra-parliamentary political organisations such as the Six Point Group, using her gender to build common ground. And while her autobiographical writing was largely concerned with a self-presentation that concentrated on her public political work and relationships with powerful men, she sometimes acknowledges

specific problems faced by her gender. Exploring Thatcher's early work for women's issues and with women's groups as well as her early relations with other women MPs reveals her to be a less one-dimensional political figure than critics of her later political career have suggested, and may help unpick further the complexity of her appeal to women.

Laura Beers (American University, Washington, DC and the University of Birmingham)

Feminist Responses to Thatcher and Thatcherism

Thatcher never identified herself as a feminist. In fact, she remained derisive of the “dungarees only, no skirts allowed” unfeminine pose of the “strident” feminists who so vehemently opposed her administration. Thatcher did not understand feminists, and they in turn were slow to appreciate her appeal to a substantial sector of British women. (While the gender gap narrowed during Thatcher’s term in office, she always attracted more female support than her Labour opponents.) Feminists’ analysis of female supporters of Thatcher strongly echoes a recurrent strand of leftwing critique of working-class Tories. In the early twentieth-century, and then again in the 1970s, critics on the hard left were quick to dismiss working-class Tories as “deviants” suffering from “false consciousness”. The trick to winning over these voters was not to understand how they genuinely benefited from Conservative government, but to expose the ways in which Labour’s opponents had “duped” the working-class into voting against their true self-interest. Those recalcitrant workers who, faced with hard evidence of Conservative perfidy, refused to abandon the party, were scorned and dismissed as beyond redemption. So too with much of the contemporary feminist critique of female Thatcherites. Women who supported Thatcher were either dupes, or hang ’em and flog ’em old biddies, the blue-rinse foot soldiers of the Conservative army.

Such an approach was pioneered by Beatrix Campbell, in her 1987 polemic *Iron Ladies: Why do Women Vote Tory?* The tract, which has remained widely used in discussions of women and Thatcherism, was in fact only partially about why women voted Tory. (The first half of the text focused on how the Labour party could attract women voters.) The discussion of women’s attraction to Thatcherism in the second half of the volume begins by stating that Conservative women can “of course” be feminists, but then goes on to say that “Conservative women’s feminism is rooted in liberalism and, in the British context, it therefore tends to end where contemporary feminism starts: with investigating and organizing against the *social system* of sexual oppression, and mapping the connections between class and sex.” In Campbell’s view, Conservative feminists were “first-wave” feminists who viewed the fight as won when women were granted equal legal rights with men. They were not concerned with the social system of sexual oppression – the glass ceiling, the perpetuation of unequal pay, social welfare policies that penalized women’s full-time participation in the work place, social and cultural conventions that kept women imprisoned in the home. This is probably true (as least as a broad generalization), but it is also true that many Labour women would have considered themselves liberal feminists, and were more concerned with what the government could offer them as homemakers and mothers than how it could help them escape domesticity. Feminists’ failure to appreciate the limits of most women’s engagement with the second-wave agenda helped blind them to the genuine appeal of Thatcherism to many women voters, particularly on issues of education and economics.

Sarah Childs (University of Bristol)

The (Feminised) Contemporary Conservative Party

The UK Conservative party at the general election of 2010 was undoubtedly a more feminized institution: it was to more than double the number of its women MPs returned to Westminster; had established new women's forums for policy debate amongst its women members; and had fought on a much more competitive women's agenda, reflecting the interventions of key women party and parliamentary actors. It was almost immediate that feminist criticism surfaced: suggestions that anonymity would be given to men accused of rape were met with the accusation that the Coalition was being sealed over women's bodies; economic austerity was soon revealed to have a female face, as state benefits and welfare were cut, disproportionately and negatively impacting women. The charge was clear: Cameron's commitment to feminization had been mere electoral opportunism masking both a neo-liberalism that fails to see how gender structures society, and a social conservatism that valorizes the traditional gendered division of labour. Feminization – the integration of women and women's issues in politics (Lovenduski 2005) – is best understood as a process rather than an end point. The 2015 general election is an obvious moment to hold the party to account. To establish whether its commitment to the greater participation and descriptive representation has been maintained; and to explore the nature of its representational claim for women, and to investigate the relationship of these to the party's wider political programme. In sum, to subject the contemporary Conservative party to a gendered audit.

John Black (University of Bristol)

The Enigmatic Duchess

Katharine Marjory Stewart Murray (nee Ramsay), Duchess of Atholl, (1874-1960) was a public servant and Conservative politician. She was an anti-suffragist and opposed equal pay in the civil service. Katharine also believed that children should leave school before 14 years of age for the world of work. But there is something of an enigma associated with the character of Katharine. She became the first woman to achieve office or awards in Britain. For example, Katharine became the first Scottish woman member of parliament, and became the first woman to be honoured with the award of an honorary DCL from Oxford University. In 1942 Katharine was the first woman to be appointed honorary colonel in the British Army, becoming honorary colonel of the Scottish Horse, in succession to her husband who had died the same year. Katharine was the first woman to be appointed an honorary colonel in the British Army. During the 1930s Katharine was involved with the refugee crisis from Abyssinia and Spain. She was willing to be associated with Eleanor Rathbone and Ellen Wilkinson and visit Spain during the civil war. The focus of this paper explores Katharine's tenure as Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education from 1924 to 1929. Baldwin, the Prime Minister, a close friend of Katharine, may have appointed her to 'oversee' the President of the Board of Education, Lord Eustace Percy and deflect some of his more irrational plans for English and Welsh elementary and secondary education.

Gary Love (Norwegian University of Science and Technology)

'Bringing the Conservative Party to heel: Dorothy Crisp's journalism and the limits of right-wing women's political participation, c. 1927-1945'

The journalist, author, and political activist Dorothy Crisp is best known for her role as the militant chairman of the British Housewives League from 1947. But what is not well known is that Crisp's post war activities were the culmination of twenty years of work in which she tried to pressure the Conservative Party into restoring a 'genuine' Conservatism that she believed had been corrupted by Stanley Baldwin between the wars. Crisp's writings for the periodical press and the Sunday newspapers, along with her books, played the most important role in her campaign to renew Conservatism, but her roles in political movements also provided her with important outlets for her politics. Nevertheless, Crisp's frustration at the failure of all of her political activities served to deepen her desire to lead a popular conservative movement, which briefly succeeded after 1945. This paper introduces Crisp's interwar politics, but its main focus is on her use of journalism as a political strategy to pressure the Conservative Party into changing its policy. It reflects on the relationship between her Conservatism and her feminism. In particular, it discusses both the opportunities and obstacles that Crisp experienced as a young, independent Conservative women-journalist in this period. Crisp's careers in journalism and publishing were relatively successful considering how difficult it was for women-journalists to be given the opportunity to write serious political commentary in this period. Crisp managed to build an impressive network of political and literary acquaintances, she published in a range of periodicals and newspapers, appeared on the BBC in wartime, and set up her own publishing company. But Crisp did not come close to fulfilling her dream of becoming Britain's first women Prime Minister; in fact, she failed twice to become an MP. The paper reflects on why this might have been the case.

Jacqui Turner (University of Reading)

Nancy Astor and the question of a right wing female space

The paper is an exploration of the metaphysical space within which early female right wing politicians operated and an acknowledgement of cross party, gender co-operation. It draws conclusions about feminist versus party ideology and how right wing or party political early female MPs were in practice. It questions whether this was a matter of political conviction or a limitation in the opportunities open to women in the Commons; it therefore assesses whether early Conservative MPs could be considered right wing or party political. It also explores how far the right provided a space in which women operated, as much of the policy in which they were involved was arguably, inherently liberal in character and dictated by their gender. It questions how far women were forced into a political space by their identity, an assumed femininity and in particular their marital status.

To support the hypothesis the paper extensively utilizes the Nancy and Waldorf Astor Papers but in addition draws upon the recently acquired and previously unseen private letters of Nancy Astor. It provides an insight into the changing nature of the Astors marriage and reveals an ideological power struggle between the two; both in relation to the policies that she worked on and how she approached the Commons.

Sam Blaxland (Swansea University)

Welsh women in the organisation and rhetoric of the Conservative Party, 1945-1987.

For many, the image of the politicised woman in Wales is the miner's wife from 1984/85 standing loyally on the picket line engaging with the radical politics of labour relations. As

Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski have identified, however, since the Second World War, women have voted for and supported the Conservative Party throughout Britain in greater numbers than men. This paper will discuss the activities and the role of women involved with the Conservative Party in Wales. It will highlight their importance to grass-roots organisations and local Associations, demonstrating how women provided the emotional, financial, and social support to keep Conservatism alive in many areas of a country that was relatively hostile to it. It will also emphasise the tactics Conservatives in Wales used to attract and maintain female support, as well as the significance and backgrounds of the few women who stood as Conservative parliamentary candidates in post-War Wales. The paper will suggest, however, that studying Welsh women and the Conservative Party simply through a gendered lens is too simplistic. The narrative is interwoven with a story of class, aspiration politics which particularly targeted women, a changing society, and the complex notions of a Welsh and British national identity.

Jessica Rowan (University of Sheffield)

"This Woman is Not Our Sister": A Case Study of Margaret Thatcher and the Women's Movement in Sheffield

Margaret Thatcher was, and is, often characterised as the antithesis of the women's movement in the 1980s; indeed she explicitly distanced herself from 'strident' feminists on many occasions. Feminist analysis of the period exacerbates this conflict; often situating Thatcher within a construction of right-wing female identity that is the antithesis of feminist identity. In reality, the iconography of Margaret Thatcher, the first British female Prime Minister, was a complex phenomenon that the women's movement had to assess and analyse. This paper will use feminist media publications, specifically feminist magazines, in order to trace how the women's movement reacted to, represented and constructed Thatcher. Using Sheffield as a case study, this paper will explore how Thatcher forced the women's movement to examine its own discourses because of her complex gender iconicity. She simultaneously empowered, inspired, confused and betrayed feminists of the 1980s, shown by the multiplicity of opinions within feminist media. Margaret Thatcher was incorporated into the discourses of feminism whilst simultaneously forcing feminists to reconfigure their own understandings of gender and power. Feminist media publications are thus constructed as a site of dialogue, in which individuals of the movement could explore these issues and in which a diversity of representations of Margaret Thatcher represented the diversity of the movement itself. As such, this paper suggests that we can view Thatcher as a prism; a prism in which to view the feminist movement, to explore how it changed throughout the 1980s and how it responded to non-feminist gender identities.

Jessica Prestidge (Durham University)

Thatcher as housewife: an image of the ordinary woman?

Margaret Thatcher's presentation as a housewife by of Gordon Reece is widely recognised, but underexplored. The housewife image, a symbol of feminine practicality, sturdy virtue and homespun wisdom, has been a staple of female directed political communication since the interwar years, and whilst the Conservative party may have been more successful in

mobilising 'the housewife vote' than its Labour counterparts, the housewife image was not the preserve of Conservative politicians alone.

As such, my paper will contextualise the housewife image that came to define the 1979 'shopping basket election' by exploring the late twentieth century 'meaning' of domesticity, both within the Labour party and beyond party politics. The completeness with which 'the Tory lady in a hat' became a housewife, to use Wendy Webster's phraseology, combined with the character of Thatcherism, can encourage a flattening of the image's cultural depth, and the neglect of its history. Understanding the housewife image as simply, and specifically, a Thatcherite device ignores the fact that politicians such as Shirley Williams were cast – if less enthusiastically – in a similar role. Beyond the party, Mary Whitehouse became a caricature of the housewife 'having a go'. Alongside intense hostility and ridicule, however, she generated enthusiastic support. Exploring who these supporters were is one way of providing a context for the assurances of domestic capability that dominated the Conservative general election campaign of 1979. Only by probing contemporary examples of housewife imagery across the political spectrum can Thatcher's drastic, domestic transformation be properly understood.

Neil Fleming (University of Worcester)

Women and Lancashire Conservatism between the Wars

Conservative success in Lancashire between the wars is attributed often to the predominance of women in the cotton mills and the resilience of denominationalism. This paper argues that it was aided also by the responsiveness of the male-dominated Lancashire Conservative Association to the democratising forces of labour and women. Initial moves to treat women as integral members were uneven. Their participation was hailed as a success for Tory democracy, but accompanied by concerns about the 'feminization' of politics. This changed dramatically from the mid-1920s, and soon women emerged as prominent figures. Moreover, the increased participation of women led to efforts to re-shape the procedures and practices of the divisional association and related organisations. The 'Women's Advisory Committee' provided a forum specifically for women. It discussed major political issues of the day, actively participated in meetings of the divisional association, and took a particular interest in the education of party activists and the female electorate; putting into practice the imagery on party propaganda of older worldly women addressing the 'alarming ignorance' of their younger counterparts. As such, Lancashire Conservatives did not merely adapt passively to meet female political interests, they attempted also to shape the identity of women in their own image. This paper utilises hitherto overlooked archival material to reveal the vital place of women in Lancashire Conservatism. It not only examines how the party responded to their increased participation and claims on leadership roles, but also the contributions of local women to highly controversial party debates on the fiscal question, India, foreign policy and coalition government.

Akanksha Mehta (SOAS)

"The Reflexivity of Discomfort"- Ethics, Methodological Approaches, and 'Difficult' Narratives in Feminist Research

Right-Wing movements see significant participation by women, who not only espouse their exclusionary and violent politics, but also simultaneously contest their patriarchal cultural nationalism. However, dominant approaches in political science and IR classify these women as ‘deviant,’ labeling them as pawns and subjects of patriarchy with partial or no agency. Gender theory has also had problematic interactions with right-wing women often seeing them as a ‘threat’ to the ‘feminist project.’ In this paper, based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted with women in two right-wing movements (the Hindu Nationalist project in India and the ‘liberal’ Zionist project in Israel-Palestine), I examine feminist ethnographic narrative approaches and methodologies as means of effectively capturing the complex ‘everyday’ politics, violence, and sites of agency of right-wing women and their projects of nationalism. While I argue that narrative approaches are crucial to feminist political science, anthropology, and IR, I argue that numerous ethical and methodological challenges arise when researching ‘difficult’ gendered narratives. Drawing from my field experiences as a feminist researcher whose political views vastly differ from those of the researched, I problematize the researcher/researched relationship and power equations implicit in it. I also raise ethical questions on research on political violence- on safety, anonymity, and disclosure- and how each of these impacts ethnographic narrative methodologies in feminist politics. As a researcher who remains an ‘insider’ in India and an ‘outsider’ in Israel-Palestine, I explore the construction of the ‘Insider/Outsider’ dichotomy in my comparative study and its larger impact on feminist methodology and narrative approaches to right-wing women. Lastly, I argue that approaches to feminist political science questions involving ‘difficult’ narratives require intensive spaces for what Hamdan (2009) calls the “reflexivity of discomfort.”

Madge Dresser (University of the West of England)

Lady Apsley Revisited

Born Viola Emily Meeking, Lady Apsley served as Bristol’s first woman M.P. between 1943—1945. She won Bristol Central for the Conservatives after her husband who had previously held the seat had been killed in an air crash in Malta. Given the brevity of her parliamentary career and the circumstances attending it, it is tempting to dismiss her as a political lightweight of little significance who had no distinctive views of her own. Certainly her enthusiasm for hunting and participation in various women’s Conservative Associations would have been typical of many Tory wives. But, as I shall argue, Lady Apsley was no mere political consort but a more intrepid and accomplished figure whose experiences as a VAD nurse during the first war, a qualified pilot, an undercover investigator in the Australian outback, and, after a hunting accident, a permanently disabled wheelchair user, broadened and shaped her political vision. My research is in its preliminary stages, and the paper will reflect on Lady Apsley’s parliamentary interventions to consider what they reveal about her particular brand of Conservatism, and her attitudes to social equality, welfare and the environment.

Stéphane Porion (Université François Rabelais de Tours)

Diana Spearman’s great role and influence within the post-war Conservative Party

Diana Spearman, who was married to Alexander Spearman (a Conservative MP from 1941 to 1966), was a Conservative thinker. After writing a book on the ideas of ‘democracy’ and

'dictatorship' in the very late 1930s, she spent some time working at the Conservative Research Department (CRD) from 1949 to 1965, drafting memos for Conservative MPs. Even though Rab Butler was trying to revamp the ideas of the Conservative Party and promote 'New Conservatism' when it was in opposition (from 1945 to 1951), she was more interested in free market ideas, being influenced by Hayek's writings. She exerted a tremendous influence on shaping young Enoch Powell's and Richard Law's ideas in the late 1940s, as the latter published *Return from Utopia* in 1950 – a digest of Spearman and Hayek's ideas. As an original member of the Mont Pèlerin Society, she was among the very few women who were associated with liberal international intellectuals and economists. Although she also contested two general elections in safe Labour seat constituencies, she never managed to make her way up to the House of Commons. She decided to remain a 'backroom woman' within the CRD, playing a great role in the battle of ideas behind the scene. Diana Spearman was not so much concerned by women's issues as her new book on 'democracy' published in 1957 showed. Instead, she set out formulating a coherent Conservative philosophy of the free market. She then founded the Longbow Group to spread Hayek's political philosophy in 1965. According to Richard Cockett, "the group's manifesto anticipated much of the Conservative Party's policy in the 1980s". Finally, she published papers in the *Swinton Journal* and became a regular contributor to the *Salisbury Review* in the 1980s, defending Conservative thinking. As Diana Spearman was connected to different networks of Conservative politicians who were going to become significant figures in the Party, she is a key figure to study if one is interested in analysing the role and influence of a Conservative woman in post-war Britain (apart from Margaret Thatcher). For some reason, no studies have been carried out to analyse her role and influence within the post-war Conservative Party. In addition, her name only appears very few times in the secondary literature on the Conservative Party. This paper aims to assess Diana Spearman's Conservative ideas and shows that what she did behind the scene was paramount in preparing the advent of Thatcherism in the 1980s. She took part in the battle of ideas, trying to fight against collectivist ones in the Conservative Party and revive its liberal branch. By using primary sources from the Bodleian Library and the LSE one and Diana Spearman's various writings, this paper will show that she was "an outstanding and tireless philosopher of conservatism, upholding rigorously the economic and social implications of High Tory beliefs and principles", in Powell's words.

Matthew Francis (University of Birmingham)

Stepping Stones and 'Sari Parties': The Conservative Party and BAME Women, 1976-86

The Conservative Party does not have a track record of success with BAME voters. Even today the Conservatives struggle to win the support of more than a fraction of black and Asian voters, hamstrung by the legacies of the Party's attitude to immigration and its opposition to race equality legislation. Yet since the mid-1970s the Conservatives have been actively courting these electors. After the twin election defeats of 1974 the Party's new Community Affairs Department [CAD] began to explore ways of securing the support of BAME voters, and in 1976 launched the Anglo Asian [AACS] and National Anglo West Indian Conservative Societies [NAWICS]. These organisations were intended to break down the perception of the Conservative Party as 'the identikit bastion of white society', and to serve as a 'temporary

bridge' between constituency associations and BAME voters. Winning the support of BAME women was a key part of this strategy. Those responsible for running the societies had identified developing social contacts with black and Asian women as a particularly effective way of building enduring relationships, and distributed guidance to constituencies which envisaged a future in which recipe swaps and sari parties would become commonplace. Yet, as these suggestions illustrated, this was a vision in which women played only a peripheral and largely social role, marginalized from the campaigning activities of the AACS and NAWICS. This paper will briefly outline the origins and objectives of the two organisations, before considering the role which BAME women played in the activities of the societies across their ten-year lifespan.

Orlanda Ward (University College London)

Framing Conservative BAME Women at the 2010 General Election

The 2010 general election was arguably a breakthrough for BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) women in the Conservative Party. Prior to that year, only three BAME women had ever been elected to the House of Commons, all from the Labour Party. In 2010 the number rose significantly as a further eight joined their ranks, including Conservatives Helen Grant and Priti Patel. This paper considers how media coverage of the campaign represented Grant and Patel as likely 'firsts' among Conservative women. Were they framed as optimistic symbols of progress toward a more 'diverse' political sphere, or was their presence interpreted as the result of politically correct tokenism or cynical self interest by their party? And did coverage present their intersectional identity as conflicting or congruent with their partisan affiliation? Similarly, as Conservatives, were they expected to, or seen as capable of, symbolically and substantively representing specific racial and gendered communities? Studies from the UK and elsewhere have identified various overt 'racial' and 'gendered' frames in campaign news coverage. Few though, have considered the intersection of racial and gendered references in frames applied to BAME women in this context, as well as the interaction between candidate identity and partisan affiliation. This study utilizes an intersectional theoretical framework and employs open-ended, qualitative content analysis of national and local newspaper coverage UK 2010 General Election campaign.

Matthew Stibbe (Sheffield Hallam University)

Peace at any Price? Conservative Women in Britain in the late 1930s and the Anglo-German Fellowship

For the women's movement in Britain, including its Conservative variant, the years 1935-36 marked a watershed in attitudes towards peace activism. In the aftermath of the Abyssinian conflict and the crisis over western non-intervention in Spain, some turned to anti-fascism and no longer prioritised peace above all else. Other Conservative women remained loyal supporters of the Chamberlain government's policy of appeasement, but from 1938 found themselves increasingly out-flanked or at least overshadowed by a newly-emerging 'peace movement' on the extreme right, involving women from anti-Semitic organisations such as the BUF and the Link.

A less well-known group was the 'Ladies Committee' of the Anglo-German Fellowship, a pro-Conservative and elitist but not overtly pro-Nazi body set up in early 1935 to promote

better relations with Germany through organising dinners and discussion evenings, often with invited German guests. This paper will examine the evolving attitudes of the AGF and its 'Ladies Committee' to the question of peace, and the discourses it deployed to justify its efforts to bring about a better understanding between the two countries. It will also pay attention to the attitude of the 'Ladies Committee' during the crisis that occurred in the AGF at the end of 1938, when its chairman, former Conservative Transport Minister Lord Temple, and around half its membership, resigned in protest at the *Kristallnacht* pogrom in Germany. Those members who remained were forced to tread a difficult path between continued support for the Prime Minister and a stance which advocated peace at almost any price. In March 1939, when German troops marched into the remaining Czech lands and thereby tore up the Munich agreement of the preceding autumn, the game was all but up and the AGF began to fall apart completely, at least as far as its relationship to the Conservative Party was concerned. Before this happened, however, it made one last attempt to position itself as a mediator between British and German public opinion. It did so by inviting Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, the leader of the Nazi women's league, to address one of its formal dinners in London. The paper will examine some of the reasons for the failure of this visit, and what it can tell us more generally about Conservative women's activism on the eve of the Second World War.

Judith Szapor (McGill University)

"Right-wing women and the politics of gender in Hungary, in the aftermath of WWI and after 1989"

Twenty five years after the fall of state Socialism in Hungary observers are at a loss to explain the drastically reduced (the lowest in the European Union) ratios of women's representation in Parliament and political life. Calls to Hungarian women and families to assure the nation's survival through reproduction are regularly issued by the governing right-wing and Christian parties. Sexism is rampant in political life and the press, and deeply traditional views on gender roles, reminiscent of the conservative interwar period, are shared by large segments of the population, including Hungarian women.

In this paper I turn to the immediate aftermath of WWI in Hungary and the emerging anti-liberal, nationalistic ideology of the victorious counter-revolution, to explore the roots of this recent development. In particular, I wish to highlight the contribution of right-wing women activists who, I argue, succeeded in making this ideology palatable to Hungarian women. Rejecting the liberal model of women's emancipation, they advocated traditional notions of family and motherhood and, crucially, tied the regeneration of the nation to that of the Hungarian family. In their rhetoric, an ethnically pure, Christian Hungarian nation and the Hungarian family were represented as interchangeable, and the latter, a bulwark against the perceived liberal-Bolshevik-Jewish threat, essential to the nation's very survival after the trauma of Trianon. During the decades of Stalinism and state Socialism such anti-liberal, conservative views were forced underground but survived within the family, the locus of resistance against a political order whose values of social equality, secularism, and women's equality were forced onto, rather than internalized by a reluctant Hungarian society. Following the regime change of 1989-90 these anti-liberal gender values, along with anti-Semitism and right-wing extremism, would return into the open, and the family would be,

once again, called into service to fend off the spectre of Liberalism threatening the Hungarian nation.

Elena Musiani (University of Bologna)

Conservative women in Italian society and policy 1880s-1980s

This paper will discuss the history of conservative women in Italy from a comparative and long-term perspective. From a methodological point of view it will be interesting to highlight primarily the differences between the political party systems in Italy and Great Britain. In Italy, at least until after World War II, there was no conservative party to speak of in the modern sense. This was due in particular to the “late” creation of the Italian nation (1861) and the difficulty for the liberal ruling class to organize itself into a single political group. Such a difficulty arose, firstly, because of persistent regional differences and demands, which for years had divided the élites of North and South Italy. Then, Italian society of the late nineteenth, early twentieth century, was affected by the development of an industrial society, which highlighted the growing difficulties of the masses and workers. No wonder then that the first parties to be formed along modern lines were the Socialist Party on the one hand and the Catholics on the other.

Italian women, too, had their difficulties, which is evident when analysing the history of women's associations. After a brief period of "emancipation" during the Risorgimento, when women for the first time took part in the national struggle, their role was reduced again to the private sphere following unification. The Italian woman, therefore, had to be a “woman of the home” and her only recognized duty was that of seeing to her domestic role. Against this background, Italian women began to carve out a role in associations aimed at obtaining a progressive social and political emancipation.

As for women with links to the Socialist Party, this story has already been extensively studied, while historiographical study into women's conservative links is still for the most part lacking. This paper will attempt to show how even within the conservative groups (for the most part tied to the Catholic world) women began to fight for emancipation through different kinds of organisations: at the beginning in salons (according to the nineteenth-century models), then friendly societies and finally associations. This approach will highlight the difference in methods and aims between the socialists and the conservative women's association: for the latter, the idea was to fight for emancipation without changing society.

It will also be interesting to demonstrate how this model emerged in the late nineteenth century, and was interrupted during the Fascist period. It would then resume after World War II when five women were included in the Committee of 75 formed to draw up the Constitution of the Italian Republic. One of the five was a member of the Christian Democrats, and this distinction is still present today in Italy.

Rosie Campbell (Birkbeck, University of London)

Whatever happened to Worcester woman? Conservative women voters 1945-2015

I will trace the patterns of gender and party support from 1945 to 2015; demonstrating that the Conservative party had an advantage among women voters for most of the post-war period. In fact some argued that without women voters the country would have seen continuous Labour Governments from 1945 to 1997 ([Eagle and Lovenduski 1998](#)). This ‘traditional’ gender gap gradually diminished to negligible levels. I argue that from 1945 to 1992 the Labour party made little sustained effort to target women voters and that this benefited the Conservative party. However, in the 1980s and the 1990s women within the

party gradually convinced the party leadership that ignoring women voters was poor electoral strategy. As a result New Labour campaigns targeted traditionally Conservative women voters, with young children, in marginal constituencies; in marketing terms these women were labelled 'Worcester women'. And under New Labour the gender gap reversed among cohorts born after the Second World War. I will address the extent to which the battle to secure the votes of Worcester Woman was successful, whether it has continued and whether there is evidence that women voters remain more likely to be Conservative supporters than men.