

## **Newsfilm Online.**

### **Interim Report on Project, 'British Society: Women and War 1914-1945'**

J.J. Smyth  
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The original purpose of this project was to use material from the archive to illustrate a lecture on women's work during the two world wars and to provide an alternative type of 'document' as the basis of tutorial discussion on this topic. It was hoped that film, and particularly newsreels, would provide a useful means of engaging student interest in, as well as furthering their knowledge of, women's contribution to the war effort. The target audience is first year students taking the core semester two History module, 'Empire to Europe: Britain 1914-1990' (code HIS922).

This module is taught thematically rather than chronologically with each theme being covered by two lectures; the first dealing with the broad subject over the whole period, and the latter focussing on a more specific aspect. In this case the broad theme and first lecture is, 'The Two World Wars and British Society', while the more focussed lecture, in which the Newsfilm material is used, is 'Women and War 1914-1945'.

The intention firstly was to identify and use film clips in the specific lecture in the spring semester 2008, and I am pleased to report that this was achieved successfully. The second stage is to make film clips available to students for use as a source document to be used by them for discussion in tutorials and in essays. As with my Department's other core modules in semesters one to three, the module in question uses set documents to illustrate weekly tutorial topics. Historical documents, therefore, are used extensively in the BA History programme at Stirling, starting at the very beginning of first year.

This systematic early use of documents was decided by the Department some years ago and has proven to be very popular with our students. The documents chosen to illustrate each theme or topic are mostly textual with some of a more illustrative nature, such as a cartoon or a graph. They can all, however, be easily reproduced on paper and distributed as part of the student module pack, as well as being made available electronically.

My own interest in using film was further stimulated by a conference held jointly by the Department of History and the Subject Centre in July 2007 on the transition from school to first year at University. The school teachers at the conference spoke of the easy familiarity their students had with film, while I was conscious that my colleagues and I were perhaps overly reliant upon traditional, written source material. Using the

film archive for lectures was a new departure for me, and making the material available to students is more problematic than simply providing a photocopy. Our IT staff has, however, been very helpful on both matters.

Having used the archive successfully in lectures, I am currently working on making the film clips available to students to watch and work on in their own time. This phase will be completed during the autumn semester 2008 so that the material is ready and available when the module is next offered in spring 2009. At the same time I will be working on the GLO but, as someone who is not particularly au fait with technology, I envisage this being the most difficult and challenging part of the project.

As regards results so far I have been disappointed with the lack of Scottish material relevant to the subject of women and war. It had been my intention to illustrate the topic exclusively by film shot in Scotland, particularly given the significance of Scotland's heavy industries to the production of armaments and war material. Unfortunately this has proved to be impossible.

More positively, and I would stress much more positively, has been the extent and quality of the archive generally. So much has this been the case that as well as film to illustrate 'women and war', I have been able to use clips from the archive in other lectures as well. The module in question is team taught, rather than delivered by a single lecturer so the use of the archive has been limited to just those topics for which I am responsible. Currently these are three, which means six lectures in total:

1. The two world wars and British society
2. Women and War 1914-1945
3. Living Standards, wealth and inequality, 1914-1990
4. The creation of the National Health Service and the Welfare State
5. Political consensus and ideology, 1914-1990
6. The rise of Labour 1914-1924

In four of these lectures (2,4,5 & 6) I was able to use material from the archive and I think it likely that I can find suitable clips for the other two. The films used so far range from silent footage of the first Labour Government in 1924 to Mrs Thatcher leaving Downing St for the last time in 1990 (co-incidentally the end-date of the module). The other films are a newsreels on the general election campaign of 1945, and a war-time Gaumont British news item, 'Women oil the Wheels for Industry'. This last film, or similar, will be used as the source document for the tutorial on 'Women and War'.

Compared to other projects this is a relatively modest and self-contained undertaking. Given the number of lecturers involved in the relevant module it is unlikely that film will ever be used in every lecture or tutorial. Nevertheless, the project can be regarded as a success already. Feedback was sought via the course tutors eliciting responses from each tutorial group in the ultimate meeting of the semester. Student reaction has been universally favourable with the groups commenting that the films made the lectures more interesting and also helped the class identify topics in a visual way which helped when they were considering essay questions. Even if the project was to end here, I would regard this as a worthwhile achievement. The second stage

will be more difficult, but ultimately it should prove just as interesting and useful to our students. In addition I can add that there have already been expressions of interest from some of my colleagues to use the archive in other modules at different levels.