



Call for Papers: Rethinking Right-Wing Women

Gender, Women and the Conservative Party, 1880s to the Present

Bodleian's New Weston Library Oxford, 29-30 June, 2015

In the media frenzy and the re-enactment of the visceral political divisions of the 1980s that greeted the death of Thatcher in April, 2013, it soon became clear that Britain's first (or "last" as the BBC reporter said) woman Prime Minister was being portrayed as an aberrant figure who had emerged from a party of men and, in any case, was herself a 'man' in well-tailored women's clothing. It appeared that the media and the public had not been well enough served by academics in making sense of and contextualizing the Thatcher phenomenon and, more broadly, the paradoxical sexual politics of the Right. Despite the able mobilization of women by the Conservative party, women's rise to leadership positions, and the gendered appeal of Tory policies, the scholarly study of Conservative women has been relatively neglected, while comparative study has been even more limited and geared towards the extreme.

This two-day conference, taking place at the Bodleian's New Weston Library Oxford, 29-30 June, 2015, explores the relationship between women and conservatism since the late 19th century.



In many respects-- from the foundation of the Primrose League in 1883 all the way to the 2010 so-called 'Mumsnet' election, which featured the young party leader, David Cameron, a self-styled 'new man', explicitly courting the women's vote-- the success of British Conservatives to organise and mobilize women has been placed on a pedestal as 'exceptional'. We will assess whether the British Conservative Party was path-breaking. Our discussions will also be timely in the weeks after the General Election, and we will be able to share our historically-informed reflections on present and future developments in the relationship between women and the party.

A volume of essays on this same theme is currently being planned, co-edited by Clarisse Berthezene (University of Paris-Diderot) and Julie Gottlieb (University of Sheffield). Contributors to the book will present their work-in-progress in plenary sessions, including Matthew Hendley, Diane Urquart, David Thackery, June Purvis, Julie Gottlieb, Clarisse Berthezene, Richard Toye, Adrian Bingham, Krista Cowman, Laura Beers, Sara Childs, and Jeremy McIlwaine. Further, there will be roundtables on "Conserving Conservative Women: The Politics of the Archive", "Conservative Women in Comparative Perspective," and pump-priming for collaborative grant schemes. A series of blogs on "Rethinking Conservative Women" for *History Matters* www.historymatters.group.shef.ac.uk will also be linked to the event. We are grateful for financial assistance for the organisation of this conference from the Conservative Party Archive, the C&C of the PSA, the University of Sheffield, and the Maison Française d'Oxford.

We welcome proposals for papers on any aspect of the relationship between women, gender issues, and the Conservative Party. Postgraduates and post-doctoral researchers are strongly encouraged to apply. We are especially interested in contributions that speak to our core research questions:

- How have women been organised by the Conservative party, and what do these sex-segregated structures reveal about political strategy and party ideology?
- How have women been mobilized by the Conservative party, and how has the party built on regional, local and family power networks?
- How have Conservative candidates sought to target women voters and bifurcate policy and political interests along sex lines?
- Have Conservative women been as absent from international and transnational structures as has been assumed from their primary fixation on the local and national?
- What opportunities have there been for Conservative women to occupy leadership positions at party, voluntary, local, national and international levels?
- How have Conservative and feminist politics interacted, and has the relationship between the two, on ideological and institutional levels, been as antagonistic and unworkable as it is often portrayed (see Dworkin, Campbell, and Jackson's comments in the House of Commons upon Thatcher's death)?
- How have Conservative women contributed to shaping Conservative rhetoric and ideology?
- How have specific representations of womanhood become crucial to Conservative identity?
- What interest has the Conservative Party taken in the preservation of its women's history, and what strategies need to be adopted to improve the situation for the future?
- A follow-on event on 'Rewriting Right-Wing Women: Comparative Perspectives' is being planned for 2016 in Paris, and we would also welcome papers that offer comparative analysis.

Please submit proposals for 20-minute papers by **15 April, 2015**, and send a title and a 250 word abstract to julie.gottlieb@sheffield.ac.uk and clarisse.berthezene@gmail.com. We also invite expressions of interest from those wishing to attend and join in the roundtable discussions, for which limited are spaces available.

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