

## British Girls' and Women's Magazines at the University of Waterloo

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I am a European historian, specializing in British girls' magazines, but I do my research in Canada. How can this be? Like many, my path in academia has not been a straight one. I completed the bulk of my BA with one daughter; my second daughter was born the summer before I began my fourth year. It was around the same time that I decided to change my original plan of becoming a high school social studies teacher, opting instead for graduate school. Entering my MA with two children – one six, the other one – I had to carefully balance studying, researching, working as a TA, and family. I was grateful to stumble upon a microfilm collection of the first two years of *The Girls' Best Friend*, a British girls' publication, at the University of BC, facilitating my first foray into girls' magazines and permitting me to more easily balance the various parts of my life. Entering the PhD program at Simon Fraser University, however, I thought that I would need to travel to England to continue my work on girls' magazines. I was concerned: how would I fund this travel? How would I secure sufficient time to do my research? What about my family? For personal reasons, packing everyone up and relocating to England to allow sufficient time to go through my sources was simply not possible; going alone would mean frequent, short trips to minimize the impact of my time away. Each of these options, though, resulted in a significant amount of stress.

It was at this time that Professor John Stubbs at Simon Fraser University encouraged me to look closer to home. He advised me that the University of Waterloo housed an extensive collection of British women's magazines. Contacting the library, I was sent a complete list of the multiple titles held. The collection includes titles from the late-nineteenth through the twentieth century, covering publications for all classes and ages of women in Britain. There are schoolgirl papers, such as *June*, papers with significant content for business girls, such as *The Girls' Friend*, and family papers, such as *The Home Circle* and *The Home Companion*; fashion and beauty magazines, fiction magazines, and advice magazines round out the collection. Major publishers are represented, including George Newnes, C.A. Pearson, IPC Magazines, and Fleetway Publications. The majority of the magazines, however, are from the Harmsworths, particularly the Amalgamated Press magazines for girls and women. For my own purposes, the Doris Lewis Rare Book Room in the Dana Porter Library carries the complete publisher's runs of *The Girls' Best Friend*, *The Girls' Friend*, *The Girls' Home*, *The Girls' Reader*, and *Our Girls* – the very Amalgamated Press publications I was seeking to work on. A complete list of titles is available by contacting the head of special collections at the library: Susan Mavor. You can reach her at (519)888-4567, extension 33122.

My decision to travel to Ontario instead of England was initially made in response to the various challenges I faced in going to England to do my research; the environment at the University of

Waterloo, however, is enough to make anyone – regardless of limitations – choose to research there. I could not have asked for a better experience. Notifying staff at the Doris Lewis Rare Book Room before I arrived each time, they were welcoming and very accommodating. Susan Seabrook, at the front desk, would often pull resources for me ahead of time, allowing me to start my work as soon as I arrived. Each night she would roll the trolley with my sources back into storage for the night, wheeling them out again in the morning. If I needed something different, I only needed to write out my needs on a piece of paper and Susan would quickly acquire additional sources. The research room, housed in the basement of the University of Waterloo library, is well lit and quiet. The Doris Lewis room does have shorter hours, though, than the rest of the library. They are open weekdays from 8:30-4:00 and they close for an hour at lunch. I simply coordinated my trips to ensure I was there during the week. In addition, they were very good about allowing me back in early at lunchtime, knowing that I only had a limited time on campus. You are also able to make arrangements for other times by contacting the head of the collection, Susan Mavor. In short, my experience was entirely positive, allowing me to maximize my research time on each trip.

The sources are also in impeccable condition. When I contacted the libraries in England that housed the same sources, I was told that many of the magazines were disintegrating. Photocopying was out of the question and even turning the pages would be difficult. I was also told that the paper quality was so poor in some cases that you could see through the pages. While I was also informed that I would not be able to photocopy resources at the University of Waterloo, the condition of the sources was beyond my expectations. All of the editions come from the original publishers, bound in hardcover usually by year. There are certainly volumes that exhibit poor paper quality, but the bulk of the sources are in pristine condition.

I have been very fortunate to engage with such an accommodating and helpful group of people in an environment ideal for research. On my very first visit, I was welcomed into the back and allowed to peruse the extensive resources housed in the collection. A relationship emerged at that time; a copy of my Master's thesis now accompanies the collection so that students at the university seeking to make use of the magazines have some context to understand the sources. I returned to this collection numerous times throughout my time as a graduate student and will continue to do so now that I have completed my dissertation and am working on my first book.