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Knitting and Crochet in *My Weekly*, *Woman's Weekly*, and *Woman's Own*, 1914–1918: Patriotism, Productive Leisure, and Profit

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Abstract

During the First World War, women in Britain were encouraged to demonstrate their patriotism through knitting and crocheting woollen comforts for servicemen. Scholarship has acknowledged the contribution made by popular domestic magazines to knitting and crochet campaigns, by urging readers to participate and supplying them with patterns. The role of knitting and crochet in magazines has not, however, been examined. This article explores knitting and crochet in three British domestic magazines, *My Weekly*, *Woman's Weekly*, and *Woman's Own*, during the First World War. It demonstrates that, while these publications urged their readers to knit and crochet for servicemen, of greater priority was the production of items unrelated to combat. These supported readers' ongoing domestic responsibilities and, crucially, helped to safeguard the mental health of those who were experiencing anxiety and trauma. Finally, it will make the point that the magazines' interest in knitting and crochet was motivated by commercial considerations: the need to boost the profits of publishers, advertisers, and the manufacturers of knitting and crochet products. In doing so, they participate in a distinctively modern culture of consumerism that was emerging at the time.

Keywords: crafts—crochet—domesticity—First World War—knitting—magazines

Described as the first modern total war, the First World War (1914–1918) demanded the active participation of civilians besides combatants. Although female conscription was never introduced in Britain, as it was in Germany, the nation came to rely upon its female citizens' contributions. These were varied—waged and unwaged work within and outside the home, and, for some nurses and ambulance drivers, close to the front lines.[1] My focus here is women's contribution to Britain's war effort through knitting and crochet, specifically as it was shaped by three popular domestic magazines: *My Weekly*, *Woman's Weekly*, and *Woman's Own* (*MW*, *WW*, *WO*). Surveying knitting and crochet features from these publications throughout the war, I will show how "knitting for Britain" extended beyond making woollens for servicemen and the careful management of scarce resources—for knitting also enabled the magazines' target readers to maintain their peacetime domestic responsibilities and practise self-care. In doing so, they participated in an emerging modern, mass-produced consumerism.

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Scholarly contexts

This article contributes to a body of craft history scholarship exploring the role and status of knitting and crochet during the First World War. Offering perspectives from Australia as well as Britain, this scholarship prioritizes the production of knitwear for men on active service and refugees.[2] It focuses primarily on how this form of voluntary war work enabled women to demonstrate their patriotism and participate in the conflict, while upholding existing gender and class expectations. Central to these discussions are associations between the production of knitwear and the provision of feminine care. For instance, Lucinda Gosling and Bruce Scates show how, by keeping servicemen warm in wet and cold conditions, woolens expressed their makers' love and support.[3] Forming what, according to Jane Tynan, were "significant" links between the home and the battlefield,[4] these items were known as comforts. Maggie Andrews comments on how, although some forms of war work created new opportunities for women, others were more conservative.[5] Knitting and crochet belonged to the latter category, for in making comforts for men at the front, women maintained their "domestic caring role" at a distance and in doing so, kept alive the "idea, and the ideal" of home for which they were supposed to be fighting.[6] Service knitwear production has also been examined as part of the "breathtaking" upsurge in voluntarism that took place during the First World War, alongside running troop canteens, sending packages to the front lines, and charity fundraising.[7] Besides making comforts for their own menfolk, women responded to local and national appeals. Existing histories of charitable knitting (and crochet) have focused primarily on women from the middle and upper classes, who coordinated the production and distribution of knitwear within their own communities: Sarah Pedersen, Paul Ward, and Janet Watson view this work as an extension of the philanthropic activity they undertook before the conflict.[8] In summary, the scholarship outlined here demonstrates how the production of service knitwear during the First World War equated to the redeployment of existing feminine skills and roles in service to Britain.

There has, however, so far been little discussion of the specific contribution made by popular domestic magazines to understandings of knitting and crochet during the First World War. Exceptions are Lucinda Gosling's 2014 book *Knitting for Tommy*, which highlights "the advice and encouragement" offered by titles including *WO*,[9] and Barbara Smith's blog *Knitting Now and Then*.[10] By exploring knitting and crochet discourses in *MW*, *WW*, and *WO*, therefore, I will illuminate a corpus that has yet to receive detailed scrutiny within this area of craft history. In doing so, I will make two key points. First, I will suggest that charitable knitting and crochet were forms of voluntary war work believed accessible and attractive to women from lower-income backgrounds, as well as women from the middle and upper classes. Second, I will show that the uses and meanings of both handicrafts extended beyond demonstrations of patriotic femininity. Providing for servicemen was just one function of the magazines' knitting and crochet pages; both handicrafts were also presented as means of carrying out ongoing domestic responsibilities, and preserving readers' own mental well-being. Furthermore, providing advertising income and purchasing incentives, knitting and crochet were central to the emerging culture of domestic consumerism of which domestic magazines were architects.

In discussing knitting and crochet's uses and meanings in *MW*, *WW*, and *WO* during the First World War, I contribute to scholarly conversations surrounding the role and status of popular domestic magazines themselves. Echoing craft history scholarship, these conversations have so far focused primarily on the ways in which these publications disseminated propaganda: discourses aiming to shape their readers' behavior and values along

conservative lines, at a time when notions of femininity were being transformed by suffrage activism and women's public contributions to the war effort. For instance, Nicoletta Gullace, Sharon Ouditt, and Carol Acton all demonstrate how advice columns and fiction urged magazine readers to enable fighting-age men to perform their own patriotic service by sending sons and sweethearts to the front,[11] remaining faithful in their absence,[12] and accepting their sacrifice if they were wounded or killed.[13] These discourses, Acton suggests, held the conservative ideological line by acknowledging readers' desire to feel included in the war while ensuring that their participation took place on an "emotional and domestic" level.[14] Focusing on the practical content of domestic magazines, Celia M. Kingsbury[15] and Chris Mourant and Natasha Periyan[16] examine how, faced with shortages and rationing, they urged their readers to serve Britain through careful home management. To Ouditt, these discourses, which included knitting patterns alongside recipes and cleaning tips, served to keep readers focused on their "proper" domestic roles and identities.[17] They were, moreover, given a moral dimension, by spiritual guidance positioning the wife within her home and making her the repository of its values.[18] Bringing together the patriotic wife, mother, and domestic manager, the "Dickensian" ideal identified by Ouditt embodies the conservative models of womanhood illuminated by the scholarship outlined here.

Articulating feminist perspectives, the studies cited here belong to a body of criticism that highlights how domestic magazines worked to limit their readers' personal, social, and professional horizons at moments when these were expanding.[19] But although these perspectives are justified by the magazines' contents and contexts, critical conversations have moved on, acknowledging, for instance, that the publications can be sources of pleasure,[20] empowerment,[21] and affirmation.[22] I will, therefore, argue that, although First World War knitting and crochet features in *MW*, *WW*, and *WO* were certainly geared toward encouraging the magazines' readers to carry out their patriotic duty within a conservative ideological framework, they also responded to the practical and psychological needs of these women during a uniquely stressful time. This interpretation draws on Eleanor Reed's exploration of knitting in *WW* during and after the Second World War. It is divided into three sections. The first approaches knitting and crochet as acts of patriotism. Throughout the First World War, patterns in all three magazines presented both handicrafts as national service, demonstrating, in doing so, the publications' own commitment to supporting official policy. The second focuses on the numerous knitting and crochet patterns that were unrelated to the war. It argues that, by enabling aspects of "normal" life to continue, the handicrafts performed a therapeutic function, offering "stress relief" and escapism from the distressing aspects of wartime life.[23] To this extent, they were forms of productive leisure, a notion drawing on nineteenth-century understandings of knitting as a means by which the housewife could remain "usefully and beneficially busy during breaks from housework." Housewives knit to stave off boredom and tend to their own happiness; since it is their "duty to provide happy homes for their families, and since they cannot do this if they are unhappy themselves, by knitting they produce domestic wellbeing" as well as useful items.[24] The final section spotlights the consumerist agenda of knitting and crochet in *MW*, *WW*, and *WO*. Glaringly obvious, even during a time of hardship, this agenda is a distinctive facet of their modern identities.

Modern magazines

Launched in 1910, 1911, and 1913, *MW*, *WW*, and *WO* entered the women's magazine market in or around the year that, according to knitter and writer Virginia Woolf, marked

the onset of modernity.[25] The congruence of these dates is no coincidence, for domestic magazines from this period were a distinctively modern genre. The 1890s saw an explosion in popular women's magazine publishing, motivated by technological innovation, rising advertising revenue, and the expansion of Britain's reading public that followed the 1870 Education Acts.[26] Increasing the popular press's reach and influence, domestic magazines were key drivers of mass culture, itself a modern phenomenon. Significantly, the 1890s also saw the emergence of a women's magazine publishing empire that would, by the interwar decades, come to dominate the market: the Amalgamated Press, owned by brothers Alfred and Harold Harmsworth.[27] *WW* and *WO*—not related to the magazine of the same title that was launched by George Newnes in 1937 and is still in print today—were produced by the Amalgamated Press, and were, therefore, primary agents of popular feminine modernity. *MW* was produced by DC Thomson, a "significant" publishing firm based in Dundee, Scotland.[28] At this moment in its history, the women's press comprised diverse periodicals written by or for women, including "feminist and suffrage" papers, newspapers, reviews, special interest journals, and little magazines; collectively, these presented female readerships with a "kaleidoscopic modernity" involving feminism, modernism, popular culture, shifts in religion and politics, and debates about national identity, empire, and conflict.[29] With their focus on the home, *MW*, *WW*, and *WO* gave modern womanhood a domestic dimension, of which knitting and crochet were key facets.

MW, *WW*, and *WO* occupied the same niche within the women's magazine marketplace. Each was issued weekly; costing just a penny, they targeted housewives and single working women on limited incomes. Each offered advice on housework, cookery, childcare, health, fashion, beauty, and personal and relationship conduct; each featured a children's page and an agony column, and for its readers' leisure, provided knitting, crochet, and embroidery patterns, competitions, and romantic fiction, complete and serialized. In and around this content were adverts for cheap health, beauty, and cleaning products, foodstuffs, clothing, dressmaking and craft supplies, infant feeding supplements, and jewelry. Collectively, these features put all three titles within the genre of "commercial" magazines: publications that emerged during the 1890s and were defined to a large extent by the prominence within their pages of adverts, which helped to keep their cover prices low.[30] Offering practical guidance and entertainment to women who could not afford domestic help, they were forerunners of the domestic publications that boomed during the 1920s and 1930s.[31] Remaining in print throughout these decades—indeed, still published today—*MW* and *WW* were flagships of this genre. Owing to paper shortages, however, *WO* did not survive the First World War, merging with *Horner's Penny Stories*, also published by the Amalgamated Press, in June 1917.

Modern handicrafts

Methods of producing fabric by looping yarn over and around itself using two needles or a hook, knitting and crochet are technically distinct handicrafts. Nevertheless, the items they produce are similar in terms of shape and texture, and equivalences between their uses and meanings in *MW*, *WW*, and *WO* during the First World War make it logical to discuss them together. Throughout the conflict, knitting and crochet features in all three magazines comprise patterns, tutorials, advice columns, competitions, and advertisements. Composed of written text and images, patterns provide instructions for making knitted and crocheted items. Tutorials support technical development; like patterns, they consist of written and visual instructions. Advice columns make suggestions as to the

uses and care of knitwear and crochet, and competitions invite readers to win prizes and recognition for their work. Finally, adverts promote yarns and pattern booklets. Collectively, these features address and work to generate mass readerships of skilled and enthusiastic knitters and crocheters. Promoted on the front covers of *MW*, *WW*, and *WO*, they were key selling points of all three magazines throughout the conflict, and as such, placed knitting and crochet at the heart of the modern brands of womanhood they sold (Figure 1).

Yet despite their complicity in the magazines' commercial agenda, knitting and crochet features express ambivalence toward consumerism. On the one hand, patterns and adverts are overtly consumerist, promoting the wools, threads, needles, hooks, and pattern booklets required to make knitted and crocheted items. As such, they contribute to the "commercial culture of homemaking" to which their host publications belong.[32] At the same time, however, knitting and crochet speak to thrift: the practical need to produce, adapt, repair, and reuse clothing and homeware, in order to economize. As Fiona Hackney observes of interwar domestic magazines, cheaper titles "prioritized cleaning tips, renovation and economic transformation over consumption" on their handicraft pages;[33] as we shall see, advice columns in *MW*, *WW*, and *WO* perform this role during the First World War. Furthermore, the act of crafting itself resists consumerism. Paul Atkinson suggests that, by allowing makers to engage with design and its processes, handicrafts enable the expression of an "individual aesthetic unbounded by the strictures of mass-production and passive consumption"—a perspective expressed overtly by patterns in *MW*, *WW*, and *WO*.[34] Vike Martina Plock observes that the process of producing handmade items gives these an "emotive" value that complicates their relationship with capital-driven production—another perspective that is strongly evident in the publications discussed here.[35] Exploring the commercial function of knitting and crochet in *MW*, *WW*, and *WO* during the First World War, the final section of this article will apply this framework of meanings to all three titles. It will conclude by suggesting that knitting and crochet express ambivalence not just to consumerism, but to the war itself.

Patriotism

The responses of Britain's diverse population to the outbreak of the First World War in the summer of 1914 were complex, far from the "monolithic" expressions of "war enthusiasm" that dominated histories of the conflict from the 1920s onwards.[36] Nevertheless, many citizens were eager to participate by demonstrating solidarity with those directly involved.[37] *MW*, *WW*, and *WO* supported these demonstrations by printing knitting and crochet patterns for service woolens, including socks, mittens, wristlets, gloves, kneecaps, mufflers, body belts and binders, cardigans, sweaters, nightcaps, waistcoats, balaclavas, and a versatile four-in-one item combining scarf, body belt, helmet and scarf, and cap. The editorial statements introducing these patterns frame the production of comforts as an important national service. "Helmets, made with ear-slits, are badly needed. Will YOU make one?" asks *MW*, echoing recruitment propaganda aimed at men in its appeal to the individual.[38] "We are all so anxious to help in some way" states *WW*, presenting a pattern for "necessary" cholera belts as the means to fulfil a collective urge.[39] "To help the soldiers is woman's most useful task, and this cannot be done better than by making necessaries for them in the way of clothing" declares *WO*, of patterns for four "really useful and serviceable" crocheted mufflers.[40] Speaking to practically minded wives and mothers, who recognize the value of quickly made woolens that will meet their wearers' needs and last, the adjectives describing these patterns

Figure 1 A "GRAND FREE CROCHET SUPPLEMENT" headlines this wartime issue of *My Weekly*. *My Weekly* 26 September 1914, front cover. Image out of copyright; reproduced by permission of D C Thomson & Co Ltd.

allude strongly to the ongoing provision of domestic care for men at the front, along with readers' expertise in this area (Figure 2).

During the war's opening months, all three magazines supported Red Cross appeals to generate comforts. *MW* took these especially seriously, listing items most needed and thanking donors by name—a strategy that "served not only to acknowledge those who did contribute but also to prick the conscience of those who did not."[41] Offering to collect and send on the comforts produced by its reader-community, *MW* assumed the organizing role of the middle- and upper-class women who coordinated charity appeals within their own communities, extending the philanthropic activity they undertook before the war.[42] Pedersen notes that charity organizers who were in contact with officers passed on requests for items that were most needed, via letters printed in newspapers;[43] *MW*

16 MY WEEKLY.

From Margaret's Workbasket.

Try these Designs. They are Exceedingly Sweet and Dainty.

INSERTION FOR CHILDREN'S PINAFORES

Isn't it pretty?

Coats' crochet cotton No. 24.

Commence with 10 ch, 2 tr into 3rd ch from needle, 1 ch, 2 tr in same place, 2 ch, miss 2 ch, 4 tr in next 4 ch, 2 ch, miss 2 ch, 4 tr on next 4 ch, 2 ch, miss 2 ch, 2 tr into last ch, 1 ch, 2 tr into same place, 3 ch, turn.

2nd row—2 tr, 1 ch, 2 tr in same place, 2 ch, 1 tr on top of 1st tr of 4 tr, 2 ch, 4 tr in space, 2 ch, 1 tr on top of last tr of 4 tr, 2 ch (2 tr, 1 ch, 2 tr) in same place, 3 ch, turn.

3rd row—Same as 1st; 3 ch, turn.

4th row—Same as 2nd.

To finish the sides—4 ch, 2 dc into each loop.

—Jessie C. Peters.

MARGARET BORDER.

This pattern is worked lengthways.

1st row—1 dc in point of braid, 4 ch, repeat for the lengths required at each corner, 1 dc in 3 points, no ch between.

2nd row—On the opposite points of the braid *, 3 tr in point, 3 ch between, 1 tr, 3 ch, 1 tr in next point, *, repeat. For each corner, *, 2 tr, 2 dtr, 2 tr in first point of the corner, 3 ch, 2 tr, 2 dtr, 2 tr in next point, *.

3rd row—3 tr on tr, 3 ch, 1 tr, 3 ch, 1 tr, 3 ch, 1 tr, 3 ch, 1 tr in loop of 3 ch, 3 ch, repeat except at corners, *, 1 dtr, 3 ch, 1 dtr, * till you have 5 spaces in the corner.

4th row—Same as 2nd row, except the corners—1 tr, 3 ch, 1 tr in first space, 3 ch between, 3 tr in next space, 3 ch, 1 tr, 3 ch, 1 tr in next space, 3 ch, 1 tr, 3 ch, 1 tr in last of the 5 corner spaces.

5th row—Same as 3rd row, except the corners—3 tr in first space, 3 ch, 1 tr, 3 ch, 1 tr in next, repeat in each space of the corner.

6th row—Same as 2nd row, except corners—*, 3 tr on 3 tr, 3 ch, miss 3 ch, 1 tr, 3 ch, 1 tr in loop of 3 ch, 3 ch, miss 3 ch, 3 tr on 3 tr, *.

7th row—Same as 3rd row, except corners—*, 3 tr on 3 tr, 3 ch, 1 tr, 3 ch, 1 tr, 3 ch, 1 tr, 3 ch, 1 tr in loop of 3 ch, 3 ch, 3 tr, *.

Would look well on a Tray-cloth.

8th row—Same as 2nd row, the corners same as 6th row.

9th row—Same as 3rd row, the corners same as last row.

10th row—3 tr on 3 tr, 3 ch, 1 dtr, 3 ch, 1 dtr, 3 ch, 1 dtr, 3 ch, 1 dtr in centre loop of last row, 3 ch, 3 tr on 3 tr, repeat, except for corners—*, 1 dtr, 3 ch, 1 dtr in 1st loop, 1 dtr, 3 ch, 1 dtr, 3 ch, 1 dtr, 3 ch, 1 dtr in 2nd loop, 1 dtr, 3 ch, 1 dtr in 3rd loop in centre of corner, 3 tr on 3 tr, *, fasten off cotton.

This pattern is worked with a length of Vandyke braid, and crochet cotton No. 18, hook No. 4. Suitable for a bedspread. A finer cotton and hook should be used if a fine lace is required.—M. Luckham.

THE MOROCCO EDGING.

This is a sweet little edging, and is very dainty on lingerie.

Make 12 ch.

1st row—2 tr, 2 ch, 2 tr into sixth ch from needle, 2 ch, miss 2, 1 dc, 2 ch, miss 2, 1 tr, 3 ch, 1 tr, 3 ch, turn.

2nd row—1 tr, 3 ch, 1 tr, 5 ch, 2 tr, 2 ch, 2 tr, 3 ch, turn.

Repeat these 2 rows for length required.

Edging.—1st row—2 lt, 2 ch, 2 lt in 3 ch at bottom part of lace; repeat all along row.

2nd row—7 tr, with 1 ch between, into 2 ch of last row, 2 ch, 1 dc in next 2 ch, 2 ch, repeat from beginning of row.

3rd row—5 ch, turn, *, 1 dc in 1 ch, 5 ch, repeat from * four times, 2 ch, 1 dc on dc, 2 ch, repeat.

BABY EDGING.

Make a ch the length required.

1st row—3 dc on first 3 ch, 5 ch, miss 3, repeat from beginning of row, 5 ch, turn.

2nd row—1 dc in first h, 10 ch, 1 dc in next, repeat from beginning of row.

3rd row—3 dc, 3 ch, 3 dc in small sp, 2 dc, 2 tr, 4 lt, 7 ch, a picot into fifth ch, 2 ch, 4 lt, 2 tr, 2 dc, all in large space.—J. Dow.

Socks for the Soldiers.

— HOW TO MAKE THEM —

(Plain with Ribbed Top.)

A good strong sock may be made with 4 or 5-ply Greenock or Greenock super fingering, super wheeling, or double knitting. A good-sized sock will require 4-ply Greenock fingering or super fingering, 4 oz.; 5-ply Greenock fingering or super fingering, 5 oz.; Greenock super wheeling or double knitting, 7 oz.

Use steel needles, No. 13 or 14, for either 4 or 5-ply yarn; No. 12 or 13 for either wheeling or double knitting.

On two needles cast on 28 stitches, and 24 on the third—80 stitches in all for 4 or 5-ply yarn, and 72 for double knitting or wheeling. Knit about 40 rounds in 4 plain and 1 purl. Then with a piece of coloured wool or cotton, mark the centre stitch of the first needle; this will continue the seam stitch of the sock, and should be purled in every round. Knit 20 rounds of plain knitting, then begin the decrease; to do this, knit to 3 stitches before the seam stitch, slip 1, knit 1, pass the slipped stich over, knit 1, purl the seam stitch, knit 1, knit 2 together, knit to the end of the round. Knit six rounds without decrease, then repeat the decrease. Make this decrease seven times, with 6 rounds between each. The sock will now be 66 stitches round the ankle, being a decrease of 14 stitches. About 45 or 50 rounds may be knitted for the ankle, without further decrease.

For the Heel:

Divide the stitches, leaving 16 on the heel needle on each side of the seam stitch, and 33 on the other two needles, to be left for the instep. Knit along the heel needle, purling the seam stitch, turn; slip the first stitch, knit 2, purl 15, knit 1, purl 15, knit 3. Repeat these two rows alternately, until there are 36 rows done.

To Turn the Heel.

Slip 1, knit 2, purl 14; this includes the seam stitch, which is now discontinued; purl 2 together, purl 1, turn; slip the first stitch, knit 2, knit 2 togeher, knit 1, turn; slip 1, purl 3, purl 2 together, purl 1, turn; slip the first stitch, knit 4, knit 2 together, knit 1, turn; slip 1, purl 5, purl 2 together, purl 1, turn; and continue thus, taking from each side two stitches each time, until all are knitted in. Pick up 18 loops along the side of the flap, knitting each loop as picked up, continue and knit on another needle all the instep stitches, with another needle pick up and knit 18 stitches along the opposite side of the flap, and on the same needle knit off the half of the stitches from the top of the heel, and slip the other half on the needle with which the loops of the first flap were lifted. The stitches are now arranged upon 3 needles again, now knit along to the end of the instep needle.

For the Gusset:

Begin on the next needle, which we will call the first foot needle—2 slip 1, knit 1, pass the slipped stitch over, knit plain till within two stitches of the end of the second foot needle, knit 2 together, then knit along the instep needle, knit 1 plain round. Repeat from * till reduced to the 64 stitches in the round. Proceed on these stitches till the foot is the length required. Leave off at the end of the second foot needle, and arrange the stitches with 24 stitches on the first two needles and 16 on the third.

For the Toe:

Knit 2 together, knit 6, repeat this all round; then knit 6 plain rounds. Knit 2 together, knit 5, repeat all round, knit 5 plain rounds. Knit 2 together, knit 4; repeat all round; knit plain rounds. Knit 2 together, knit 3, repeat all round; knit 3 plain rounds. Knit 2 together, knit 2, repeat all round; knit 2 plain rounds. Knit 2 together, knit 1, repeat all round; knit 1 round. Knit 2 together all round, and cast off the remaining stitches by slipping 1 stitch off the first foot needle on to the instep needle, and the remaining two on to the second foot needle. All the stitches are now on the two needles; place them parallel with each other, and cast off by knitting a stitch from each needle.

To strengthen socks and stockings the heels and toes may be worked with double wool; that is from two balls instead of one; a finer wool may be used for the second ball.

Did You Know?

That 60 drops of liquid make 1 teaspoonful.

That 2 teaspoonfuls make 1 dessertspoonful.

That 2 dessertspoonfuls make 1 tablespoonful.

That 4 tablespoonfuls make 1 wineglassful or 2 oz.

That 8 tablespoonfuls make 1 gill.

That 1 breakfastcupful makes ½ a pint.

That 1 full tablespoonful of flour makes ½ an ounce.

That 1 tablespoonful of butter is equal to 1 oz.

Figure 2 A pattern for soldiers' socks. The lack of image—not uncommon in magazine patterns of this era—is a space-saving measure that also speaks to readers' expertise (they are assumed capable of shaping the sock without visual reference). *My Weekly* 12 September 1914, 16. Image out of copyright; reproduced by permission of D C Thomson & Co Ltd.

employs the same strategy, quoting from a letter purportedly written by a sailor asking for more gloves. Describing "iron rails" so intensely cold that they "burn" the skin off sailors' hands, the letter reminds readers of the freezing conditions in which men are serving, and consequently of their need for woolens. Invoking empathy for the recipients of knitwear, it works to increase the likelihood that they will respond to "his" personal request.[44] Red Cross appeals in *MW* also encourage readers to knit and crochet for refugees from Belgium,[45] and the wives and children of servicemen,[46] many of whom were experiencing dire need owing to delays in the payment of separation allowances.[47] Highlighting the "distress" experienced by the "wives and children" of "our brave men" with winter's onset, one appeal in particular works to invoke empathy for the beneficiaries of readers' productivity, employing the same rhetorical strategy as that used in the sailor's appeal.[48] A reminder that, by clothing servicemen's families, readers are fulfilling the wishes of servicemen themselves, reinforces their status as housewives to the nation. Notably, the low cost of *MW* puts the magazine's target audience within this very

demographic; they would likely have known families who were experiencing hardship or would themselves have been struggling. Collectively, these features—patterns and charity appeals—contribute to the wartime propaganda function of *MW*, *WW*, and *WO*. By redeploying "feminine" skills, associated with domestic productivity, including the provision of care, in the service of servicemen and non-combatants directly affected by the war, they frame knitting and crochet as suitably feminine forms of national service. In providing a sense of lower-class women's contribution to voluntary war work, notably by helping families whose circumstances were probably similar to their own, they emphasize that the notion of domestic care as national service extended beyond servicemen to others affected by the war.

Gosling notes that women's magazines printed "a constant stream of advice and encouragement" in relation to knitting for the services,[49] but this is not the case with *MW*, *WW*, and *WO*. Rather, these titles engaged with this activity to differing extents that varied over the war's duration. *WW* was the least engaged: throughout the conflict, this magazine printed just seven knitting and crochet patterns for service woolens. *MW* was slightly more enthusiastic, also printing just seven service patterns but supplementing these with the Red Cross appeals. Five of the patterns and all of the appeals appeared between August 29, 1914 and 26 December of the same year. The service patterns in *WW* are more spread out, appearing between October 10, 1914, and December 2, 1916. Unsurprisingly, all but one, for a regimental tie, appear during the colder months. These timings are significant, for they point to more general trends in the popularity of knitting and crochet as war service. In her memoir of the conflict, Constance Peel indicates that enthusiasm for knitting for the services peaked relatively early in the war, before privations on the home front, not least the rising cost of wool, began to set in.[50] Although the belief that the war was generally popular at the beginning and that enthusiasm waned as casualty lists rose has been discredited,[51] the absence of patterns for service woolens from *MW* from the start of 1915, and from *WW* from the start of 1917, does suggest that enthusiasm for this form of national service did not last. This suggestion is complicated, however, by the number and frequency of patterns in *WO*. This publication was markedly more committed to producing comforts, printing 87 patterns for service items between September 5, 1914, and February 10, 1917. Although, again, most of these appear during the colder months, readers are urged to remain productive throughout the year, on the basis that nights are cold and woolens wear out.[52] Calls to produce comforts are renewed in earnest during October 1915, with the onset of winter; *WO* 30 October contains a supplement of 14 service patterns.[53] While logic dictates that readers would be urged to increase their productivity during the winter, these calls may well speak to underlying concerns that women's enthusiasm for service knitting and crochet could be waning. Such concerns, perhaps, motivated the launch of four "Patriotic" knitting competitions from the start of January 1916, which promised to reward *WO* readers' productivity with cash prizes. Launched in the issue dated 8 January, the first of these competitions invited readers to knit socks and mufflers from patterns supplied by the magazine. The second was launched on July 26, 1916; the third, for mittens, was launched on December 2, 1916, and the fourth, for socks, on January 27, 1917. Although we cannot know how many readers took part in these competitions, the fact that there were four suggests that they proved effective at generating interest in service woolens.

One explanation for the paucity of knitting and crochet patterns for service items in *MW* and *WW* is editors' awareness of the anxieties and pressures their wartime readerships were experiencing. A 1915 poem by Jessie Pope shows how the act of knitting for a man on the front lines could prompt thoughts as to his whereabouts and safety;[54] patterns for service knitwear might, therefore, provoke renewed anxiety for a son missing in

action, or grief for a husband confirmed dead. Besides, knitting for the troops increased women's "emotional and practical workload."[55] Both publications, therefore, offer their readers alternative ways of expressing their patriotism, via crochet patterns less directly related to combat. *WW* prints patterns for a handbag in regimental colors,[56] bedspread squares featuring the floral emblems of Britain and some of its colonies,[57] and, inspired by the tree representing Britain's navy, an "Oak-Leaf Crochet Series" comprising lace edgings and insertions for table linen, with a matching lampshade and tea cosy.[58] A bedspread made from the floral emblems edged with the oak-leaf lace would, it is suggested, represent Britain and its colonies surrounded by the navy.[59] In *MW*, the flags of Britain and its allies are worked into tablecloth lace and a tea cosy,[60] and household linen edgings are named after the Victoria Cross military award,[61] Blighty, soldiers' slang for Britain,[62] and naval commander Admiral John Jellicoe.[63] *MW* also ran a needlework competition inviting readers to work small silk-finish portraits of Britain's military commanders, given away free with the magazine, into designs of their own choosing[64]: tea cosies, cushions, table centers, mats, cloths for sideboards or pianos, chair backs,[65] all of which could be trimmed with decorative crochet. Destined for sale in aid of the National War Relief Fund,[66] participants' entries enabled them to support Britain without having to engage too closely with the war's more distressing aspects. They thus represent an ideological compromise: they allow the magazine to deliver an appropriately patriotic message, while recognizing its readers' need not to be reminded too closely of the war's horrors. As what follows will show, acknowledgment of female civilians' psychological needs was unusual, as these were sidelined in favor of those of men (Figure 3).

Productive leisure

Beyond enabling readers to perform national service as carers, knitting and crochet in *MW*, *WW*, and *WO* support their own needs and responsibilities. Throughout the war, most patterns in all three publications were unconnected to the conflict. Instead, enabling the production of tablemats, doilies, bedspreads, tea-cosies, and garments for women, children, and babies, they speak to concerns with fashion, interior design, mothering, and thrift. A *WW* crochet pattern for "The Floral Camisole Top" uses "only two balls" of thread[67]; "the latest economy stunt" in *MW* "is very narrow" crochet edgings, which use less thread[68]; *WO*'s "Editress" promises that a knitting supplement "will help considerably the task of economizing this winter."[69] Of paramount importance is that these items will last. To this end, advice columns in all three magazines share methods of mending, laundering, and storage that will prolong the lifespan of knitting and crochet, along with uses for worn-out items. Worn daily, stockings feature prominently. Beyond wearing, they can be turned into polishing cloths,[70] or children's hats or knickers,[71] or their wool, unraveled, can be reused for darning or stuffing cushions.[72] Certainly, the magazines' readers' need to economize was exacerbated by the war. As mentioned earlier, the delayed payment of separation allowances early on resulted in hardship for low-income families; during the same period, food costs rose,[73] prompting *WO*'s Editress to observe that "increased expenditure" and "decreased incomes" had produced "an unfortunate state of affairs […] in so many homes." As the conflict progressed, the level of privation experienced by low-income families increased, thanks to "meagre widows' benefits, price rises, food scarcity, and then food queues."[74] Within this context, patterns for low-budget clothing and homeware, and advice on making these items last, speak to the need to economize.

By enabling women on small budgets to maintain the appearance of their families, their homes, and themselves, knitting and crochet features in *MW*, *WW*, and *WO* help them to undertake their homemaking responsibilities during a period of hardship.

Figure 3 Silk-finish portraits of (clockwise, from top) Lord Kitchener, Admiral Sir David Beatty, Admiral Jackson, Sir John French, General Sir Douglas Haig, and Sir John Jellicoe, on a mat or cushion cover with crocheted edging. *My Weekly* 19 June 1915, front cover. Image out of copyright; reproduced by permission of D C Thomson & Co Ltd.

As noted earlier, these features have been interpreted as forms of wartime propaganda: by reminding women of their "proper" role, they disseminated notions of gendered patriotism, here, national service through careful home management. This interpretation seems reductive, however, for although domestic economy was certainly important for Britain's war economy, and housewives, as domestic managers, were on the front line in this respect, the need for the magazines' target readers to practice thrift was not new. Patterns and advice connecting knitting and crochet to domestic economy were staples of all three before the war. "These Jerseys will Reduce Your Children's Clothing Bill by more than half" boasted *WO* in 1913[75]; when "woollen vests are too old for darning […] make into bed-socks" advised *MW*, in 1912[76]; the

launch issue of *WW* shared instructions for mending knitwear.[77] In making and mending knitted and crocheted items for their families, their homes, and themselves, the women targeted by *MW*, *WW*, and *WO* are not just serving Britain. Rather, they are performing tasks that are also fundamental to housekeeping on a budget during peacetime. In *WW* during the Second World War, the continuing presence of familiar pre-war content offered a comforting sense of normality continuing under stressful circumstances[78]; the same applies to these knitting and crochet features. Enabling readers to carry out their normal everyday duties, they offer soothing links to peacetime life.

Besides providing magazine readers with a sense of normal life continuing, the acts of knitting or crocheting could themselves support their psychological wellbeing. Nowadays, it is acknowledged that knitting can benefit mental health, its "rhythmic and sensory nature" offering a "calming" means of coping with emotional stress,[79] and that crochet offers similar benefits.[80] *WW*'s "Needlework Expert" Mrs Alice Arnold was clearly aware of this, noting, in 1915, that the "even and practically mechanical movement of the hands in knitting is conducive to a reposeful state of mind."[81] The predominance of patterns for items unrelated to combat in *MW*, *WW*, and *WO* presents, therefore, knitting and crochet as self-care, to readers experiencing what was then referred to as nerves—psychological stress or trauma, caused by continual worry about loved ones on the front lines, food shortages, air raids, and bereavement. *MW* makes this explicit in a "Little Sermon" published on November 7, 1914. Its speaker, the magazine's pseudonymous domestic advice columnist Polly, emphasizes the importance of looking after one's mental wellbeing during a period of extreme stress and the contribution knitting and crochet can make to this. She begins by describing how, at a working party to knit and crochet garments for soldiers, her fellow workers talked "of nothing but war and the horrors of war"— a conversation that made her feel "out of sorts for days afterwards." As an antidote, she and a friend resolved to spend time each week engaged in "some fascinating needlework, such as making dainty scent sachets"—projects unconnected to combat that will allow them to "forget all about the war."[82] Her points are echoed in *WW* and *WO*. "In times of trouble, it is very often comforting to have a piece of work to distract our thoughts," states a pattern for a baby's bib in the former[83]; a pattern for a "Good Fortune Triangle" in the latter associates crochet with creating a positive outlook.[84]

By thus presenting knitting and crochet as self-care, *MW*, *WW*, and *WO* acknowledge the war's psychological impact on female civilians. That this was unusual is emphasized by Bridget E. Keown, who explores the case notes of women who, following bereavement and air raids, were admitted to asylums with symptoms of what nowadays would be recognized as stress, anxiety, and trauma. Keown highlights that, whereas the war's psychological impact on men—shellshock—was taken seriously by contemporary medical authorities, its effect on female civilians received scant attention. Women were admitted to asylums when their symptoms became "unmanageable" and were pronounced "cured" when they complied with expected codes of behavior. At stake was morale. Women's experiences of war-related psychological trauma did not fit the narratives of gendered patriotism constructed by the propaganda underpinning Britain's war effort. The figure of the bereaved mother grieving for her son undermined the ideal of the brave mother willingly sacrificing her son for her country, and accounts of air raids were downplayed in the press, lest they should damage servicemen's morale. Women were, therefore, expected to face the traumas of war on the home front with the stoicism expected of soldiers.[85]

Yet the probable motives driving *MW*, *WW*, and *WO*'s provision of self-care through knitting and crochet are complicated. On the one hand, the magazines' recognition that their readers may be experiencing psychological distress seems radical, and at odds with its patriotic messaging. On the other hand, however, self-care is framed as a way of

preserving one's ability to contribute to the war effort. Spending one evening a week making scent sachets rather than socks is "not selfish or heartless," explains Polly:

> we're only keeping ourselves cheerful, and so fit in mind and body, and I'm sure by doing that we're doing far more good than those others who will take no enjoyment from life at all […] the very best way you can help your country just now is to – Be Cheerful!

Presenting knitting and crochet as means of boosting readers' morale and, thereby, the morale of those around them, Polly sets out the expectation that they face the "war's alarms" with stoicism. To not do so, she implies, would hurt Britain. By thus making knitters and crocheters responsible for the morale of Britons more widely, Polly gestures toward the function of knitting and crochet as productive leisure. As outlined above, knitting and crochet are enjoyable leisure activities that, nevertheless, are geared toward providing for the family. Spending their leisure time producing useful items, including homeware and garments for themselves and their children, the women shaped by these discourses also produce domestic wellbeing, by tending to their own happiness—itself essential to the business of maintaining a happy home.[86] In this context, Polly's "Sermon" works the magazines' provision of self-care through knitting and crochet into the handicrafts' wider program of making their readers "housewives to their nation." Through the production of woolen comforts, they perform the duty of care expected of wives and mothers. By knitting and crocheting items for themselves, their children, and their homes, they practice domestic thrift during a period of shortage. Crucially, by making items that are unconnected to combat, using handicrafts that are acknowledged to be therapeutic, they prioritize their own mental health—and by doing so, they promote the wellbeing of Britain, exercising a morale-boosting cheerfulness that is essential to its war effort.

Profit

In helping *MW*, *WW*, and *WO* readers to perform their patriotic duty and maintain their ongoing responsibilities, knitting and crochet support the magazines' consumerist agenda. Both handicrafts have an ambivalent relationship with consumption. First, they are strongly associated with domestic thrift, providing readers on limited incomes with cost-effective means of producing garments and homeware. Handmade, these items express the "individual aesthetic" that undercuts "strictures of mass production and passive consumption"—a "touch of embroidery on crochet […] adds just the touch of originality necessary to attract attention" declares *WO*, of a tablecloth edging that will make its producer stand out from the crowd.[87] "If the wearers of some garments could only read the unuttered prayers, or follow the visions woven in that wool, they would not toss the garments aside lightly" remarks *WW*'s Alice Arnold of handmade service woolens.[88] Given, thus, an "emotive value" that adds to their material worth, these items also resist capital-driven production.[89] Yet despite these expressions of resistance towards the mass marketplace, knitting and crochet discourses in *MW*, *WW*, and *WO* during the First World War are strongly consumerist, functioning, in all three magazines, to increase sales of the magazines and also, in *WW* and *WO*, to drive up their advertising revenue.

Promoted on front covers, in editorials, and by captions anticipating future issues' content, knitting and crochet are presented as strong incentives for both first-time and repeat buying of *MW*, *WW*, and *WO*. Key buy-again strategies include the crochet serial, in which instructions for making a single item, or a set of items, are printed over two or more issues, and reader engagement: all three magazines print patterns submitted by readers, in-house experts address individual queries, and *MW* and *WO* share readers'

own expertise, via tips submitted to advice columns. The most explicit drivers of reader loyalty are, however, knitting and crochet competitions. Although competitions featured in all three magazines, those in *WO* are worthy of the closest attention, for they make explicit the commercial value of knitting and crochet.

I have already noted that *WO* ran four patriotic knitting and crochet competitions, encouraging readers to express their support for Britain by producing comforts for servicemen. Each is heavily promoted prior to its launch by notices that, besides reminding readers of servicemen's urgent need for woolens, emphasize the necessity of securing the relevant issue and list the prizes on offer. Eye-catching front cover headlines ("£5 in Money Prizes for Knitting") attract new readers, and inside, captions urge existing readers to involve their friends. Each competition is launched by a full-page feature supplying entry details and patterns beneath a bold headline. Equally attention-grabbing, silhouettes of infantrymen, onto whose blank forms readers can project their own menfolk, march around the text; the prizes are listed in bold. On the basis that all items received will be sent to the front, readers are encouraged to submit multiple entries. Each must be accompanied by a separate entry form; however, these, printed singly, incentivize the purchase of multiple issues. The closing date for the first competition is announced in its launch feature. The closing date for the second, however, is withheld for several weeks, meaning that entrants must keep buying the magazine to find out when it is,[90] and the third introduces an extra prize for whoever sends in the greatest number of entries (buys the most magazines).[91] Whereas patterns for the first and second competitions appear in multiple issues, the pattern for the third appears in just one, meaning that entrants who missed this must purchase back copies to access it.[92] Finally, entrants to all four competitions must buy the magazine each week until the winners are announced. "If you can knit, you can do your country a service at the present time, for there is a constant appeal for warm comforts from the men in the trenches and the sailors on board our ships," states the first competition's launch feature.[93] Appealing to and boosting the patriotism of *WO*'s readers, these competitions demonstrate the magazine's own commitment to serving Britain. At the same time, they elucidate a clear understanding of the commercial possibilities presented by making comforts for "our" servicemen, along with a keen desire to exploit them for profit.

As noted earlier, *MW*, *WW*, and *WO* belong to the genre of "commercial" magazines that emerged toward the end of the nineteenth century and are flagships of the domestic publications that boomed during the interwar decades. As we have seen, a key distinction of both genres is advertisements. Placed in and around editorial content and fiction, these generate revenue that, in helping to keep cover prices low, ensures that their host publications are accessible to mass audiences. So far, I have approached knitting and crochet features in *MW*, *WW*, and *WO* in terms of their similarities: content, uses, and meanings that are characteristic of all three. In relation to advertising, however, they diverge, for whereas *WW* and *WO* promote knitting and crochet yarns and pattern booklets throughout the conflict, *MW* does not. Indeed, only one advert for a knitting or crochet-related product appears in *MW* during the First World War: an advert for a pattern booklet published by yarn manufacturer J & J Baldwin, *Knitted Comforts for Men on Land and Sea*, which, placed right at the start of the war, aimed to capitalize on readers' early desire to support troops.[94] Furthermore, *MW* contains far fewer patterns specifying the yarn with which they should be made—a form of product placement signaling commercial agreements between magazines and yarn manufacturers. Whereas almost half of the patterns in *WO* and about 40 per cent of those in *WW* specify yarns, this is the case with just 10 of the 267 patterns printed in *MW*. The absence from *MW* of adverts for knitting and crochet products, and patterns specifying yarns, is an indication of the lower commercial potential of its target readers. The pattern, cited earlier, for "economical" crochet

edgings, whose narrowness will make the thread go further, offers a clue to their circumstances: women who must ration their crochet thread, a relatively inexpensive commodity, are unlikely to be a profitable audience for yarn manufacturers. Although *MW* certainly used knitting and crochet to boost its circulation during the First World War, the advertising revenue it used to keep itself affordable came from other sources.

Conclusion

My discussion of knitting and crochet in *MW*, *WW*, and *WO* during the First World War has highlighted various uses and meanings of both handicrafts, in relation to the distinctively modern lifestyles and identities they produced. First, they framed their readers as "housewives to Britain" by urging them to produce woolen comforts for servicemen, refugees, and servicemen's families, and to support Britain's war economy by practicing domestic thrift. At the same time, knitting and crochet features enabled readers to keep up their existing domestic responsibilities during a time of hardship and stress. They acknowledged and offered to alleviate the war's traumatic impact on civilian women's mental health, although underpinning this was the need to boost the nation's morale. Finally, knitting and crochet features in all three magazines encouraged their readers to participate in an ongoing culture of consumerism.

Characterized by the practice of thrift and pressure to consume knitting and crochet materials, the clash of attitudes towards consumerism in *MW*, *WW*, and *WO* is entirely congruous with the ideological heterogeneity characteristic of domestic magazines as a genre. As numerous scholars have shown, contradiction and conflict are inevitable outcomes of their formal heterogeneity.[95] Yet the notion of knitting and crochet as receptivity and resistance to mass culture has special resonance when applied within the context of the First World War: itself a distinctively modern conflict, characterized by technological innovation and the mass production of weapons and, consequently, casualties. By encouraging their readers to perform their patriotic duty by using their knitting and crochet skills to support Britain's war effort, *MW*, *WO*, and *WW* make them complicit in the war's mass destruction of human lives. At the same time, however, by practicing handknitting, they are expressing resistance to modern technology and mass production—and arguably, by extension, to the war itself.

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