

GENERAL EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

What's in a name? A historian might answer 'a very great deal'. Names of organisations can be extraordinary signifiers of period, place, performance and personalities. The 'Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire' speaks volumes in its four principal words. It is redolent of an era, symbolising as it does not just a complete ideology but also a notable iconography. Cartoonists in the nineteenth century rejoiced in depicting Britannia as the imperial mother surrounded by her colonial daughters. The founders of the IODE (as it later became in an apparent acknowledgement of significant changes in resonance) must have been well aware of this as they chose to flag their patriotism through a title which has a formidable ring of defiance about it.

Patriotism and defiance were both characteristics of the age in which the IODE was founded, namely the era of the Anglo-Boer War, 1899–1902. It was also a time when women became more self-conscious and active politically. The suffragist movement was in full swing, though it divided women's movements and societies as much as it united them. Although in the past women had been deeply involved in pressure groups like the Anti-Slavery Society, in philanthropic activities, and in some scholarly/political organisations like the provincial geographical societies of the 1880s, they were now placing themselves in a much more central position in relation to the war. Many, like Mary Kingsley, became nurses and died of fevers along with the men. Others provided comforts and indulged in fundraising. But figures like Flora Shaw, Emily Hobhouse and Millicent Fawcett, in their very different ways, played key instrumental roles. It was in this atmosphere that the IODE was founded in Canada just as, shortly afterwards, the Victoria League appeared in London.

Although the IODE was primarily a Canadian organisation, it offers insights far beyond the confines of that dominion. Its history reflects important issues of national identity in respect of the all-too-adjacent United States, of Britain, and other dominions and imperial territories. It also illustrates the efforts of middle-class British women to dominate dominion developments and the manner in which Canadian women (as well as their counterparts in Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere) resisted the somewhat patronising and snobbish approaches that they encountered. But above all, the history of the IODE carries important messages not just for women's history at the so-called imperial periphery, but also for wider

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gender relations. Its importance in illuminating a whole range of diplomatic, social, cultural and political issues is clear.

This is the first full-length study of the IODE. It covers a broad period in the twentieth century. It illuminates the manifold web of significance that was spun by this women's organisation. It demonstrates the many issues and methods that the IODE adopted to achieve its goals and promote aspects of the imperial relationship. And above all it sets its findings into the context of the rich modern historiography of gender, identities, patriotism and imperial organisations. What emerges is that the members of the IODE were, in the end, wholly unsatisfied with the notion of Britannia's daughters. They sought to escape from the familial patterns and establish an autonomy that would ultimately transcend that slightly glib nineteenth-century iconography. Although many of its members saw the shift towards initials as anodyne, that move was actually initiated by many new and complex emotions. Katie Pickles succeeds in exploring all these multiple layers and inter-relationships in considerable depth. She also brings both a sympathetic understanding and a highly developed critical awareness to bear upon a women's society which has a significance far beyond the very considerable boundaries of Canada.

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