

Patricia Malcolmson, Robert Malcolmson, eds. *A Shop Assistant in Wartime: The Dewsbury Diary of Kathleen Hey, 1941-1945*. Suffolk, United Kingdom: Yorkshire Archaeological and Historical Society, 2018. 224 pp. \$90.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-9932383-8-3.

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Kathleen Hey started writing her wartime diary in July 1941, after the Battle of Britain and the fall of France and before the entry of the United States into the war. The diary in this volume ends on August 31, 1945, although Hey continued to write diary entries less frequently until 1946. Hey worked in a grocery shop in working-class Dewsbury, an industrial town outside Leeds in Yorkshire. Hey interacted daily with customers, neighbors, friends, and family and her diary is full of everyday minutiae, snippets of conversations, and personal thoughts. There is no indication of why Hey decided to write as a diarist for the social research organization Mass Observation. Nevertheless, her diary is a significant record of daily life and attitudes in wartime Dewsbury.

There are several key themes in the diary including food, the government, the progress of the war, attitudes to allies and enemy nations, anti-Semitism, and voluntary war work. The diary thus presents an image of a British public struggling to deal with government bureaucracy as well as wartime propaganda. The complexity of the rationing and points system is revealed in Hey's frustration with both customers who expect the grocer to complete their paperwork for them and the government that requires it. The amount of paperwork grocers were expected to understand seems

preposterous to Hey as she lists the number of leaflets for each food item (pp. 54-55). The diarist also complains about customers who demand foodstuffs but is also cognizant of the poverty of the area. When Lord Woolton advises Britons to make use of the newly established communal eating facilities, British Restaurants, to make rations go further, Hey writes that the nearest restaurant is a 2D bus ride away. The price of even these low-cost meals is simply out of reach for Hey's neighbors. Yet the diarist also reveals the cultural prejudice against eating outside of the home, something that Lord Woolton would not understand. The proud Yorkshire housewife would not deign to feed her family in this way (p. 29). Thus, the reader gets a glimpse of resistance to government policies, even those that could benefit families.

Other resistance is evident in the response of neighbors and customers to evacuees and the horror of being expected to house strangers. Much has been written about the evacuee experience and the difference between urban and rural lifestyles in wartime Britain. In this diary, Hey reveals the deep-seated "fear and dread" of housing refugees, even among town-dwellers (p. 37). One customer claimed her mother would "go to prison for refusing" rather than take in another evacuee (p. 31).

The diary contains some interesting and prescient assessments of allies. Hey seems critical of the government's about-face on Russia, once a foe, now an ally, and wonders what the attitude will be after the war (p. 38). She also appears to understand that aid from the United States is about the American businessman who send foodstuffs like Corn Flakes rather than food Britons would like to eat (p. 38). Hey is also highly critical of the government's lack of transparency and blames this for the lackluster response of the people to new hardships. "Perhaps if we were told the *whole* truth occasionally ... we might get the War deeper 'under our skins'," Hey writes (p. 83). Indeed, the diarist becomes more critical of the government and her neighbors as the war news is of constant defeat in Libya. The war news generates interesting discussions, including respect for German general Erwin Rommel as the son of a bricklayer, and frustration with America for not helping. The British government is blamed for placing middle-class men in charge who don't know how to fight a bricklayer's son (p. 84). Discussions also take place about the British Empire, particularly India and Malaya, and how the colonies have always been treated badly. Hey writes, "why should they [Malays] fight to protect our rubber plantations?" By June 24, Hey feels depressed and wonders if the war is worth fighting after all (p. 85).

The diarist and those she comes into conversation with appear to feel deeply for the suffering in Russia, have a degree of respect for the Germans as they continually beat the British and other European nations, and feel ambiguous about France although are supportive of Charles de Gaulle. Attitudes to the United States are also conflicted. Conversations express relief that the Americans finally joined the conflict in December 1941, but frustration that now the US wanted to dictate the way the war in Europe was fought. Everyone rejoiced at the final defeat of Rommel at the Battle of El Alamein in 1943. The defeat of the Germans at Stalingrad was also seen as the pivotal moment when Britons believed that the war could now be won.

This Mass Observation diary is significant for many reasons. It reveals some of the daily struggles encountered by a working-class community as well as attitudes to the war itself.

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