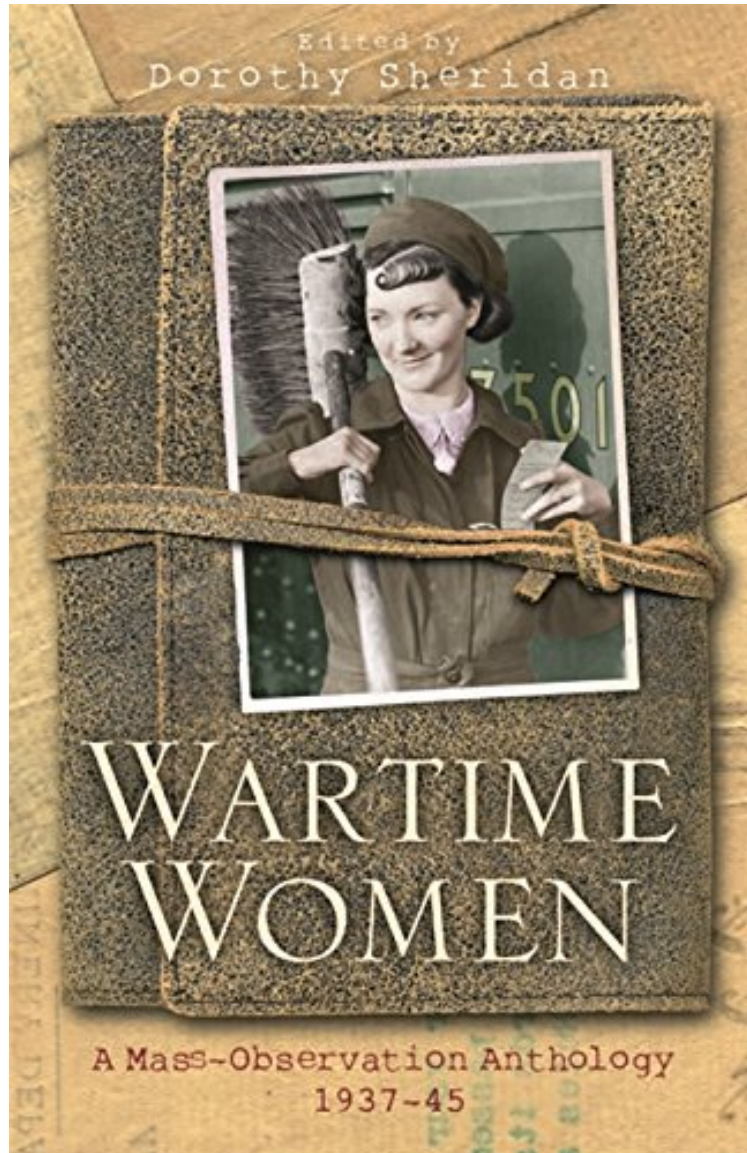


[Free] Wartime Women: A Mass-Observation Anthology

## Wartime Women: A Mass-Observation Anthology

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**From Brand: Phoenix : Wartime Women: A Mass-Observation Anthology** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Wartime Women: A Mass-Observation Anthology:

5 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Dull, but informative book By Anne Lancaster This book is dry reading. Of course it is an anthology, but still, just as I was getting into one person's posting, it would never quote the person again. I loved Nella Last's books that were written for the Mass Observation Project. Look them up and read them first before reading this one. 14 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Wartime Women By Chapati I

first learned about the book *Wartime Women* and the Mass Observation Project on a friend's blog and I was immediately fascinated. The Mass Observation Project is just such a good idea. According to the website, it "was founded in 1937 by three young men, who aimed to create an 'anthropology of ourselves'. They recruited a team of observers and a panel of volunteer writers to study the everyday lives of ordinary people in Britain." Many Britons throughout World War II would answer open-ended questionnaires or keep diaries and send them in to the organization, detailing everyday thoughts and feelings and reactions to issues great and small. This particular book focuses on women's responses to specific issues before and during the war, with specific emphasis on employment, family life and morale. My interest was completely engaged. I was already sold on the premise- I love the idea of people in an extended crisis taking the time to answer targeted questions or write in a diary about their activities and emotions. I thought maybe that the respondents would hold back or not be completely honest- but when you are writing to a faceless organization, I guess it's easy to hold nothing back, and the depth and breadth of information provided was amazing. Please indulge me as I think this review will be full of quotes. I enjoyed learning more about life in Britain (mostly England) during the war, but what truly captivated me about this book were the personalities that jumped off the page. I didn't love every woman I "met," but for those that I was with for more than a page or two, I felt instantly that I knew their personalities and might even recognize their speaking style if I were to hear them on the street. It was eye-opening to see so many different types of women responding to the call for information and doing so with such a refreshing (and sometimes appalling) lack of political correctness. For example, one woman heard that a young unmarried co-worker was pregnant. Her reaction? "I can't understand it at all. She's such a slovenly messy looking girl. If it had been one that used lipstick and dyed her hair it would be different, but this girl, she's most unattractive." And she is not the only one to speak that way. Many of the respondents are so casual in their prejudices that I am shocked at how far the world has come in just a few generations. There were comments about the Irish, about the Germans, about the Americans and about the Jews. Even more than the racism, though, was an inherent and all-permeating sense of classism. "I think it should be made easier for a woman to have a job and a family at the same time. Otherwise the offspring of some of the best women, who when faced with the choice, choose their careers, are lost to the country and we are not in a position to be able to dispense with the breeding of the better types," one woman says. But there were also many women who delighted me with their dry wit and ability to see the humor in a bad or terrifying situation. "The special treat was five minutes in the gas chamber, followed by tea and biscuits." My favorite observer was Mrs. Trowbridge, whose entire section had me laughing with her fabulous descriptions of people. She had a simile that compared a working girl taking orders from an officer as "a kitchenmaid being interviewed by an ill-bred duchess." In a way, that was the most interesting aspect of the book for me- seeing how conflicted women were about their roles, and the way those expectations changed from the beginning of the war to the end. But when I say "most interesting," it is a very relative term because all of this book was interesting to me. I loved, loved, loved having so many first-hand accounts of life in Britain during the period. I wish I could have read so many more. I could go on and on, but I will contain myself. I truly enjoyed reading this book, and I look forward to learning more about Mass Observation and the effects of World War II on the home front (of the other involved countries as well, not just the UK). The next book on the topic I hope to get my hands on? *Demobbed: Coming Home After World War II*. It sounds just as fascinating.

These fascinating essays provide unique and unrivaled insight into women's minds and experiences during World War Two. Set up in 1937, the Mass-Observation organization aimed to record everyday life in Britain during that difficult period. From its astonishingly rich archives comes an anthology that asks whether the war actually liberated women and provided the opportunity that many expected. The extracts include research reports, letters, diaries, and detailed questionnaires, and come from an enormous range of contributors, from a fish-and-chip shop employee in Birmingham to a 17-year-old schoolgirl. Irresistible reading. *Sunday Times* A list of treasures here presented could continue almost indefinitely...a wonderful book...*Times Literary Supplement*

.com Too few Americans know about the fascinating Mass-Observation project initiated in England in 1937 (and coming to an end in the late 1940s) with the aim of documenting, without bias, the lives of ordinary people, typically through diary installments by volunteer contributors, and also through directives or questionnaires. Regular contributors included a Miss Pringle, aged 24, a teacher from Liverpool who had been responsible for helping to fit the schoolchildren with gas masks during the Munich crisis of 1938: "In the girls' department there were more cases of fright but the staff in both departments said how well-behaved and plucky the children had been. They also said how difficult it was to keep saying the same cheerful inanities and yet be fitting the children with equipment such as that. Some children thought that the gas was in the defense valve and said they could smell it. Actually it was the Izal used for disinfectant." The Mass-Observation Archives are housed at the University of Sussex, and from these, editor Dorothy Sheridan has skillfully culled an engrossing selection of excerpts touching on women's attitudes and experiences during the war, including the class snobbery and racism that they unconsciously revealed. Although the project foundered after the war, giving way to commercially driven market research, the hundreds of thousands of

pages of information (much still unread) generated by Mass-Observation are a priceless historical resource, as engaging as a stranger's diary or a letter left on the seat of a bus. --Regina Marler  
About the Author Dorothy Sheridan has been at the Mass-Observation Archive since 1974.