

Helen Simonson

*The Hazelbourne
Ladies Motorcycle
and Flying Club*

BOOK CLUB KIT



Discussion Questions

1. Which character's journey resonated with you the most? Why?
2. "It was all very well and patriotic when we were freeing up men for the services," Iris says of women working. "But now we are just behaving oddly and diminishing our chances of snatching up one of the few available husbands." Discuss the situation in which the novel's working women find themselves: Having to give up their wartime jobs or accept lower pay when the men return. How do you think you would have reacted?
3. How are people of other nationalities, like Captain Pendra and Klaus the waiter; socioeconomic classes, like Constance and Jock; and races, like the de Champneys and Pendra, treated by other characters in the book?
4. How does author Helen Simonson characterize the members of the British elite? Are there differences amongst characters of that echelon? Contrast Lady Mercer's behavior, for instance, against that of Mrs. Wirral.
5. What freedoms does the Hazelbourne Ladies Motorcycle (and later, Flying) club offer its members? In what ways are the women still limited?
6. How do characters treat Harris differently due to his disability? How did this make you think about how disabled people are treated today? Do you think much has changed?
7. How do Poppy and her Motorcycle Club help break Constance out of her shell?
8. What other themes are present in the book?
9. How does Simonson show the lesser-seen casualties of war?
10. What did you think about the end of the novel? Did your favorite characters get what they wished for? Did your least favorite characters get their comeuppance?



Recipe: Tilly's Famous Bacon Sandwich

Ingredients:

- Sliced white or sourdough bread*
- Thick-sliced bacon (at least 2 rashers per)
- Canadian bacon (1 per sandwich)**
- Thin-sliced onion rings***
- Butter
- Coleman's mustard****

Notes from Helen Simonson:

*British white bread has more “tooth” and structure than U.S. white bread, so a crusty bakery white loaf or sourdough will be the closest relative.

**Bacon: British bacon has a higher meat-to-fat ratio, so adding a round of Canadian bacon to each sandwich makes for a more authentic experience.

***Tilly's onions are her own innovation and, fried in bacon fat, would have helped fill the bread when bacon itself was in minimal supply. She would have used whatever onions were available. So yellow onions are fine, or try red or even shallots. But we are British, so we are frying not caramelizing!

****Coleman's mustard is widely available. Warning, it's almost as hot as wasabi.

Directions from Helen Simonson:

1. Fry or stovetop griddle the bacon until crispy. Set aside and keep warm.
2. Fry the onions at medium-high heat 5–8 minutes. Set aside.
3. If frying the bread (one or both sides), make sure the bacon fat is very hot in the pan. Lightly fry the bread (turn on vent hood and/or open window. The air may turn blue!).¹
4. If not frying the bread, butter plain or toasted bread generously.²
5. A very light smear of Coleman's on one side of the bread will add flavor and clear sinuses.
6. Load bread with bacon.
7. Top with onion.³
8. Press sandwich lightly and cut in desired portions.
9. Supply lots of napkins.
10. Ladies, be sure to remove your gloves before eating!

¹ Bread can be plain or toasted. Fried bread is a uniquely British delight that requires the fat be smoking hot in order to crisp the bread without it soaking up the fat. In the absence of butter, it would have been a shame to waste the pan “dripping.”

² Butter would have been rationed in the war and still today is optional in bacon butties because of the bacon fat already present. But more is more! I grew up with salted butter and still think of unsalted as a bit continental.

³ It is entirely un-British to let anything vegetable touch one's bacon sandwich. But feel free to add tomato and green things as you wish. Likewise ketchup and HP brown sauce might not make everybody shudder. But do not add mayonnaise—the Anglo-French Entente Cordiale does not stretch this far!

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Meet the Members of the Hazelbourne Ladies Motorcycle and Flying Club

Poppy Wirrall

Founder and proprietress of the club. A cheerful, adventurous, and outspoken young woman from a family of means, who is passionate about motorcycles, flying, and independence.

Constance Haverhill

Our heroine: sensible, hardworking, and loyal—but also curious, sharp, and hungry for adventure. The daughter of a farmer and a well-educated mother from an ecclesiastical family, Constance managed the Mercer estate during the war. Currently in service of lady Mercer's mother, Mrs. Fog, Constance has no prospects and no idea what to do with her life. Until she meets Poppy and the rest of the club.

Iris Brenner

The amateur ladies hill-climb champion of the south east—and a speed champion in search of a sponsor.

Tilly Mulford

The club's part-time quartermaster and mechanic: a whiz at logistics and supplies (probably because she's also a librarian) who also repairs and maintains the group's motorcycles. If only Poppy could afford to pay her a full-time salary.

Jenny

A rider who also works as a skilled seamstress and dressmaker.

The twins:

Evangeline Morris

Once engaged to Harris Wirrall, Evangline is a wealthy young woman looking for more suitable prospects.

Gwinny Morris

Evangeline's slightly kinder twin sister, who lost her fiancé in the war.



Fact Sheet: British Women in WWI

- The first women police officers served during the First World War. One of the main responsibilities of the Women's Patrols was to maintain discipline and monitor women's behavior around factories or hostels.¹
- Over 100,000 women joined Britain's armed forces during the war. ¹
- Munitions work was relatively well paid—especially for women previously employed in domestic service. But it was often unpleasant, dangerous, and involved working long hours.¹
- Women in large shell-filling factories worked with TNT. This poisonous explosive could cause a potentially fatal condition called toxic jaundice, indicated by the skin turning yellow.¹
- The wartime contributions of women in Britain led to increased respect for their abilities and ultimately played a significant role in gaining women the right to vote.²
- Women working on railways rose from 9,000 in 1914 to over 50,000 by the end of the war. They did almost every job from carriage cleaners to porters and from guards to signal workers.³
- Many munitions factories developed their own ladies' football teams. Sport was encouraged amongst female workers as it was thought to be good for their health and general moral wellbeing.¹
- Women did not wear trousers before the First World War. But during the war, munitions workers wore overall trousers to enable them to carry out their work. They found them liberating and wore them with pride. No one dared complain: these girls were “doing their bit” and women's fashion changed forever.³



¹ iwm.org.uk/history/12-things-you-didnt-know-about-women-in-the-first-world-war

² historyhit.com/what-was-the-role-of-women-in-world-war-one/

³ edp24.co.uk/lifestyle/20821331.10-fascinating-facts-women-first-world-war/