

## “Norman Haire and the Study of Sex” by Dr. Diana Wyndham

...or...

“If historians find that truth gets in the way of a good story, are they justified in replacing fact with fiction?”

by Mark Sutherland, Curator, [hallidaysutherland.com](http://hallidaysutherland.com)

In *Norman Haire and the Study of Sex*, Dr. Diana Wyndham wrote:

“The Catholic convert Dr Halliday Sutherland was a founder and extremely active member [of the League of National Life] who continued to hold Nazi views in 1944 and advocated the death penalty for contraceptive manufacturers.<sup>23</sup>” (Wyndham, 2012 Page 120).

In this article, I will be examining whether these assertions are justified, namely that:

First, Sutherland “continued to hold Nazi views in 1944” and

Second, Sutherland “advocated the death penalty for contraceptive manufacturers.”

Footnote 23 cites the source for Wyndham’s statements: Madeline Simms’ 1975 Marie Stopes Memorial Lecture: *The Compulsory Pregnancy Lobby—Then and Now*. It read:

“Simms (1975, 713) quoted Sutherland (1944) who commended the 1936 Nazi Penal Code for making ‘public ridicule of marriage or maternity, and all propaganda in favour of birth control and abortion’ criminal offences.” (Wyndham, 2012 Page 120).

Simms’ lecture was published in *The Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners* in October 1975. (Simms, 1975). Here is the part in which Simms quoted Sutherland:

“[Sutherland] commended the Nazi Penal Code of November, 1936 which made “public ridicule of marriage or of maternity, and all propaganda in favour of birth control and abortion” into criminal offences. Even after the war he is still to be found advocating the death penalty for contraceptive manufacturers: “If saboteurs deserve hanging, so also do they” (Sutherland, 1947).” (Simms, 1975 Page 713)

Simms cites “Sutherland, 1947”. Under “References” the source is given:

“Sutherland, H. (1947). *Control of Life*. London: Burns & Oates.”

The date reveals a discrepancy: *Control of Life* was published in 1944 and, to my knowledge, there was only one edition. Wyndham appears to have seen the error as well. Working on the basis that there was one edition of *Control of Life*, I have used the 1944 edition in writing this article.

Simms does not specify the page on which the quote appears and cites an entire book as the source. One would have expected a better standard of work from a “Research Fellow” of the Eugenics Society. (Simms, 1975 Page 709).

Control of Life is a 276-page book that reflects the austerity of wartime Britain in the quality of the paper and the tightly-packed text. Chapter I begins:

*“HOW NATIONS DIE*

“The trend of the birth-rate in Britain is towards national eclipse—in the form of a dwindling population in which, for the first time on our history, old men and old women will outnumber boys and girls.” (Sutherland, 1944 Page 7)

As this introduction suggests, the book concerns the consequences of the falling birth rate in Britain and other countries.

In Chapter XII of *Control of Life* Sutherland is discussing the measures used by various different countries—including Australia, Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Jewish Palestine, Sweden and Wales—to increase their declining birth-rates. (Sutherland, 1944 Pages 162-172) Sutherland wrote about German, Italian and Swedish marriage loans. The German marriage loans were legislated by the National Socialist (Nazi) government in its first year of office. (Sutherland, 1944 Page 163)

In a section in which Sutherland is analysing the direct and indirect impact of German marriage loans on the birth rate, he wrote:

“These marriage loans were an indirect help in suppressing the practice of abortion, which had become so common that in the year 1929 in Berlin the proportion of abortions to live births was 103.4 to 100. Moreover, by the German Penal Code of 5th November 1936, public ridicule of marriage or of maternity and all propaganda in favour of birth control and of abortion were made criminal offences. In April, 1935, the proportion of abortion to live births had fallen to 14.3 per 100.” (Sutherland, 1944 Page 164).

Sutherland’s statement is clearly analytical and there is nothing in his statement to suggest he “commended the 1936 Nazi Penal Code” as Simms asserted. As a basis for asserting that Sutherland “continued to hold Nazi views in 1944”, it is a non-starter.

I will now turn to the second assertion, that Sutherland “advocated the death penalty for contraceptive manufacturers”. As mentioned above, Wyndham based her assertion on Simms’ lecture. Simms said: “Even after the war [Sutherland] is still to be found advocating the death penalty for contraceptive manufacturers: “If saboteurs deserve hanging, so also do they” (Sutherland, 1947).” (Simms, 1975 Page 713).

In *Control of Life* Sutherland criticised the huge profits being made on contraceptive goods, and of their frequently inferior quality. He wrote:

“And who are the ladies and gentlemen whose wealth is derived from the sale of contraceptives and the destruction of the British people? Let us have their names; for if saboteurs deserve hanging, so also do they.” (Sutherland, 1944 Page 60)

In her book, Wyndham conflates Sutherland’s alleged Nazi-views and his calling for the death penalty for contraceptive manufacturers. It is not hard to believe that a man with Nazi views would call for such an extreme measure. Yet the evidence for Sutherland’s alleged Nazi views fell over, and

on the basis of this quote, we are to be persuaded that he wants changes in the laws making the manufacture of contraceptives a capital offence.

An alternative and, in my opinion, better view is that Sutherland used a rhetorical argument for dramatic effect, constructed as follows:

1. The work of saboteurs is detrimental to the British people.
2. Saboteurs are hanged because of their work.
3. The availability of contraceptives is detrimental to the British people (in Sutherland's opinion, it is "How Nations Die").
4. Those who manufacture contraceptives are not hanged for their work.
5. Both groups are detrimental to the British people. While the former are hanged, the latter are not.
6. If saboteurs deserve hanging, so also do contraceptive manufacturers.

You might not agree with Sutherland's viewpoint, but that is not the point. The point is whether he is advocating the death penalty for contraceptive manufacturers as a political goal, or is he using a rhetorical device for dramatic effect? In my opinion, it is the latter.

Even a cursory reading of Simms' lecture reveals it is polemic.<sup>1</sup> Relying on the lecture as evidence, without any qualification whatsoever, is to rely on Simms' intellectually weak polemic. The result is that Wyndham's assertions about Dr Halliday Sutherland on page 120 of "Norman Haire and the Study of Sex" are without basis in fact.

Given that Wyndham applied a low threshold as to what constitutes "Nazi" views, I was intrigued to read this in her book:

"The Sun also reported Haire's statement that there was a growing realisation of the need for "sterilisation of the unfit in the interests of the race" and that soon "all but the very lowest would practice birth control" and, when this happened, citizens would turn on the reckless breeders and insist on compulsory sterilisation." (Wyndham, 2012 Page 104)

A newspaper report...was it true? I searched for primary sources and found the 1928 book: *Some More Views on Medical Birth Control*. Haire edited this book and wrote the first article, in which he said:

"*Compulsory* sterilisation of the racially unfit is not legal in England, though it is permitted, or even prescribed, by law in certain other countries. In my opinion, it is a measure desirable in the interest of racial health, and I have little doubt that its adoption in this country is only a matter of time." (Norman Haire, 1928 Page 49) [emphasis in original]

"*Compulsory* sterilization of the unfit" ... "in the interest of racial health". I wondered if Professor Wyndham might notice the overlap between Haire's views and those of the Nazis. And, if she did, was she going to call it?

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<sup>1</sup> Following the publication of Simms' lecture, the next two editions of *The Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners* contained letters complaining about its polemic nature. One, from Julia Cotter, said that the lecture was "as the title suggested, nothing short of an undefended attack on those who did not share the views of the speaker." (Cotter, 1976)

To be clear, Haire's advocacy of contraception did not accord with Nazi views. The Nazis saw contraceptives as an obstacle to growing the German population for war and for the empire that was sure to follow. On the other hand though, the Nazis shared Haire's enthusiasm for "racial health" and the weeding out of the "racially unfit".

But Wyndham doesn't call Haire's views, and instead, she excuses them:

"This seems horrifying now, but before genetics was understood this view was widely held, and Haire, Stopes and Sanger used eugenic arguments to justify the use of contraception."  
(Norman Haire, 1928 Page 49)

I have three observations to make in respect of this sentence:

Firstly, stating that this view "seems horrifying now" seems to suggest that it was not as horrifying in 1928. Yet it was horrifying then. Among those horrified was Dr. Halliday Sutherland, and that's why he publicly opposed the eugenic agenda, from 1912 onwards. (Sutherland, 1912)

Secondly, the statement: "this view was widely held". This relates to whether a person's view is easy or difficult to hold, not on the whether the view is morally or ethically defensible.

Thirdly, the statement "but before genetics was understood this view was widely held, and Haire, Stopes and Sanger used eugenic arguments to justify the use of contraception."

Modern eugenics was a new science in the first part of the Twentieth Century. The scientific knowledge of any era is merely knowledge. Science has no moral agency—people do.

I suspect that the names of Stopes and Sanger are brought in to make Haire's views more acceptable to the reader.

Stopes and Sanger used eugenic arguments because they were eugenists. All three went beyond merely justifying contraception: they advocated compulsory sterilisation for the unfit. The decision would be based on a eugenic assessment of a person's genetic worth (i.e. the value of their genes to the "race"), rather than on the person's individual qualities or abilities.

And even if you were to accept, as Wyndham seems to suggest, that Haire, Stopes and Sanger were blindsided by science, how do you explain the language used by Stopes and Sanger when talking about the "undesirables"? Their language could hardly be described as "scientific".

For instance, Stopes advocated compulsory sterilisation for:

- "hopelessly bad cases, bad through inherent disease, or drunkenness or character" (National Birth-Rate Commission 1918-20, 1920 Page 133)
- "wastrels, the diseased...the miserable [and] the criminal" (Voluntary Parenthood League, 1921 Page 9)
- the "degenerate, feeble minded and unbalanced" and "parasites" (Stopes, 1920 Chapter XX)

In her "Plan for Peace", Sanger proposed "giving certain dysgenic groups in our population their choice of segregation or sterilization." These dysgenic groups included: "illiterates, paupers, unemployables, criminals, prostitutes, and dope-fiends." (Sanger, 1932)

The language reflects a visceral hatred of those less fortunate members of society, and encourages this hatred in others. It was the sort of language to encourage “citizens [to] turn on the reckless breeders”. (Wyndham, 2012 Page 104)

All biographers face the challenge of becoming close to their subject, and of allowing their biases to taint their work. The competent biographer has the process, the discipline or other technique to overcome these factors. It allows them to argue, authoritatively and persuasively, that their account is accurate.

Dr. Diana Wyndham’s statement that Halliday Sutherland “continued to hold Nazi views in 1944” is false, because it is built on the sand of Simms’ false polemic. Relying on the lecture without qualification is, in my opinion, poor scholarship indeed. She would have done better to have paid attention to the view of Dr. Haire who wrote:

“Dr. Sutherland is a medical man of high repute, kind, conscientious, and capable.” (Norman Haire, 1928 Page 18)

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